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## Private Initiative In Science Education

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**F**OR a developing country like Bangladesh, raising the skills of its citizenry and developing our human resource through education and training is of paramount importance. Alongside poverty alleviation, human resource development is one of the main planks of government policies for socio-economic uplift of the nation.

The government envisages a major role for the private sector in all fields including education. As a consequence of a market-oriented liberal education policy, private and public educational institutions have sprung up in large numbers at all levels all over the country since 1991. An Open University has been set up to make higher education accessible to all. A National University has taken over the role of an affiliating University for all colleges of the country. A Private Universities Act has also been passed by the parliament facilitating establishment of institutes of higher learning in the private sector.

The Institute of Science and Technology, or IST as it is popularly known, is one such institute which has earned public acclaim because of its innovative approach in imparting science education. Set up in 1993 under the umbrella of Italy-based International Center of Science, Technology, and Environment for the Densely Populated Regions (ICSTED), it was initially named Institute of Technology for Women.

Although the Institute was later converted to its present nomenclature with educational opportunities for both men and women, the emphasis is still on female students.

IST is the brainchild of Dr Shahida Rafique — a veteran social worker, researcher, and Professor of Applied Physics and Electronics at Dhaka University. She is also a co-founder of WISTAR — a scientific organization dedicated to the uplift of the womenfolk. She heads the governing Board of IST. Along with other Board members and the members of the teaching faculty, Dr Shahida is intimately involved with the day to day workings of the Institute. An Advisory Committee comprising of luminaries from various segments of society provides overall guidance and direction for proper functioning of the Institute.

Nobel Laureate Professor Abdus Salam of Pakistan is a patron of the institute which started its academic programme in 1993 with the initial offering for a three-year undergraduate Honours Course in Computer Science. The curriculum of the course has been designed as per that of Oxford University of UK the approval of National University, which is the affiliating university of IST, has also been obtained.

The courses are conducted by both faculty members of the institute as

well as external experts including teachers from Dhaka University and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. Both hardware and software aspects of Computer Science are taught, although the emphasis is on software. The laboratory is well-equipped with Micro-Computers. Each class consists of 65 students and every two students can have exclusive share of one computer.

The first batch of undergraduate students are expected to get their Bachelor Degree in 1996. They will be offered admission to the Masters Course on Computer Science at the Institute, which is scheduled to commence the same year. The Institute has ambitious plans to expand its programmes to other disciplines of Pure and Applied Science. M Phil, and Ph. D courses are also envisioned for the near future.

IST is presently accommodated at a rented compound in Dhanmondi. It, however, owns a plot of land at Agargaon, Dhaka, where construction of a multistoried Academic building and Residential Hostels for students are envisaged.

The Institute is financed by fees paid by the students and contributions from generous individuals and organizations. A moderately high tuition fee is charged, though it is quite low compared to other private

institutes of similar stature.

IST has a principled policy of not accepting foreign donations. It prefers to rely on internal resources and considers tied foreign assistance as often detrimental to local interests. It advocates independence and promotes self-reliance, individual enterprise and creativity.

What visions for the future does the founder of IST hold? In the words of Dr Shahida Rafique herself, "The main objective of IST is to enhance the participation of women in the overall development process and to aid in the socio-economic transformation of the country by promoting professional skills in various fields of science and technology."

"In the global domain of technological advancement and progress, the position of Bangladesh is quite insignificant. Even compared to our immediate neighbours, we are lagging far behind. Keeping this bleak situation in mind, this institute has been set up as a research, development and training institute on appropriate, emerging and modern technologies in all branches of science. Our beginning may have been a modest one, but we are determined to carry forward the message of a technologically rich culture throughout the length and breadth of our country."

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