



Education Secretary Kazi Jalal Uddin Ahmed formally inaugurating the Distance Education Course organised by Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education at the Shilpakala Academy on Monday. — Photo PID.

# Distance education programme launched

**Dr. K. M. Sirajul Islam**  
The first ever extensive course under distance education programme was launched in the country on July 1. Under it 3000 secondary school teachers are going through the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) course.

The concept of distance education in Bangladesh, however was not developed in a day.

In the year 1956, the Government of East Pakistan received some wet battery operated radio sets as gift from Japan. Of these 200 radio receivers and 400 car batteries were allotted to the Education Directorate to distribute those among the educational institutions of the province. Accordingly, a cell consisting of an Audio-Visual officer, one technician and two supporting staffs was created under the Education Directorate. The main objectives were to look after the distribution and maintenance of the radio sets and to support the graphical presentation of the education achievement in the country.

Subsequently in the year 1962, production of one 8 mm film and a set of silk screen printed educational charts led to the establishment of the East Pakistan Audio-Visual Education Centre (AVEC) with broader objectives of printing and distribution of educational wall charts, development of 16 mm educational film and 35 mm filmstrip library, loan service and regular training of school teachers for the preparation and use of low cost audiovisual educational materials. Subsequently some locally procured transistor radio receivers were distributed among the schools and some arrangement was made with the then Radio Pakistan, Dhaka for educational broadcasting. The centre was located in one of the wings of Dhaka Teachers' Training College. Upto the late sixties, the films and filmstrips were borrowed by different educational institutions. They would borrow both the film projectors and filmstrip projectors (operated with kerosene lamp) from the local United States Information Service (USIS). A

### SBP

In 1978, President Ziaur Rahman visited Japan and received a gift of 1100 sophisticated Audio-Control Console Sets and 10 mobile Audio-Visual vans. In November 1980 the School Broadcasting Programme (SBP) was approved by the National Evaluation Committee (NEC) as a project under the Education Directorate but independent of the Audio-Visual Education Centre. The formal programme of regular school broadcasting was inaugurated on first January 1981 by the President.

The project was for the distribution and installation of the complicated console sets in more than one thousand Secondary Schools of the country and to organise regular educational broadcasting. The mobile units were fitted with video cassette recorders (VCR) and monitor but no production equipment were provided. Under a separate agreement with Worldview International Foundation (WIF), SBP borrowed the production equipment of this organisation and started the production of educational video programmes. Thus the operational area of SBP was restricted only in educational broadcasting and educational video shows and was working in parallel with AVEC.

### DISTANCE EDUCATION

Simultaneously along with the starting of S.B.P. Mr. Q.F. Rahman, the then Secretary, Ministry of Education sent a proposal to the Planning Com-

mission to consider establishing an interministerial educational institution based on mass media. In September 1980, a top Level interministerial meeting was held to consider the proposal. Dr. Fasihuddin Mahtab, the then Minister for Planning presided over the session and Mr. Shamsul Huda Chowdhury, the then Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Mr. M. A. Baen the then State Minister for Education along with some top officials of the three Ministries took active part in the discussion. The proposal gained ground when a British team from the Open University and British Council was invited to visit Bangladesh in November 1980, to discuss the feasibility of introducing the Distance Education (DE) Programme in Bangladesh.

Mr. A. B. Edington of the British Council submitted a report based in the exploratory report visit and recommended the use of Mass Media in Education. Following the discussion with the British Team, a high level Bangladeshi Team visited the U.K. Open University, B.B.C., London University and UNESCO headquarters, Paris to study D.E. system with a view to make use of it in Bangladesh. Having study the concept in context of Bangladesh it was agreed by the delegation that the D.E. system would be introduced in Bangladesh and the same has been included in the Second Five Year Plan (1981-85).

In April 1981, UNESCO consultant Dr. Marcel M. Herr conducted a feasibility study on the introduction of D.E. in Bangladesh and a report was submitted by him. The report recommended the setting up the Distance Education Institute with departments for programme, media, projects, evaluation, research and training. This was followed by another visit by four member British Team. The team prepared a draft scheme on D.E. for Primary Teachers' Training and Training of the Mass Education Squads. The scheme appeared to be too much ambitious.

Several top level interministerial meetings were held in this regard. The main controversy was over the control of video production. The another drawback of the plan was the complete exclusion of the two allied project of the Ministry of Education, the School Broadcasting Programme (SBP) and Audio-Visual Education Centre (AVEC). A developing country like Bangladesh cannot afford three media based projects with similar objectives. Consequently in April 1983, the SBP and AVEC were merged together forming a National Institute of Educational Media and Technology (NIEMT).

Seeing the complex situation of establishing interministerial media based educational institute, the Ministry of Education dropped the ambitious plan and revised the plan for establishing Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIDE) and passed through the meeting of Project Evaluation Committee (PEC). The main objective of the project is to help the 10 Teachers Training Colleges through media support for supplementing on going conventional Teachers Training Programmes and to continue the usual job of Educational Broadcasting, repair

and maintenance of distributed 1062 Audio Control sets, distribution of educational charts, training of teachers for the use of A.V. aids, showing educational video programme through Mobile Units etc.

It was felt that since the operation of BIDE was for supplementing the ongoing formal educational programmes, its operation was optional rather than compulsory. The facilities developed were not optionally utilised.

In the meanwhile the local committee appointed by the Education Ministry for the feasibility study of establishing Bangladesh Open University submitted its report indicating the potentiality of starting Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) through D.E. as the first experimental phase of Open University. Being encouraged by the recommendation and seeing the technical potentiality of NIEMT, under the Ministry of Education, Mr. Q. J. Ahmed, Secretary Ministry of Education gave financial support and encouraged NIEMT to start the experimental B. Ed. course through D.E. Being encouraged by this decision Dr. Sirajul Islam, Director, NIEMT and Prof. M.A. Rakib, V.C. Rajshahi University started to work jointly for the experimental programme of B.Ed. through Distance Education.

In the beginning of 1985 NIEMT was renamed as Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIDE) and started functioning as a PEC approved project waiting for the final approval of National Evaluation Committee (NEC) Within BIDE no formal degree awarding course based on D.E. was included. Except the change in nomenclature, the field of operation of BIDE remained same as it was in NIEMT.

It was noticed that all the basic components needed for

starting B.Ed through D.E. including the most wanted Educational Technology has already been developed on a modest scale in BIDE. So, it was decided that putting some additional facilities and modest fund, the experimental programme of B. Ed. through D.E. can be started by BIDE under the academic protection of Rajshahi University. Several national level workshops were held to find out the ways and means for starting B.Ed. through D.E. All the 10 Teachers' Training Colleges National Institute of Educational Administration Extension and Research (NIEAR) Institute of Education and Research (IER) of Dhaka University and Rajshahi University joined hand with BIDE to start the experimental programme of B.Ed. through D.E. In the 239th meeting of the syndicate of Rajshahi University held on 28, October 1984, the decision was taken enabling the starting of B.Ed. through D.E. by NIEMT (now BIDE) through the academic blessing of Faculty of Education Rajshahi University.

The Ministry of Education decided to start the experimental programme within its own resources. The decision further gained its ground when Hon'ble President Lt. General Hussain Muhammed Ershad, approved the operation of the pilot programme by BIDE under Ministry of Education within the Academic Umbrella of Rajshahi University. It was decided that BIDE will operate the whole programme and 10 Teachers' Training Colleges will be used as regional centres and their facilities will be utilised during vacation and off time for tutorial service, summer School and centralised terminal examinations. Applications were invited for the admission of inservice secondary school teachers. The response was enormous. More than 12,000 applications were received against 3000 seats.