

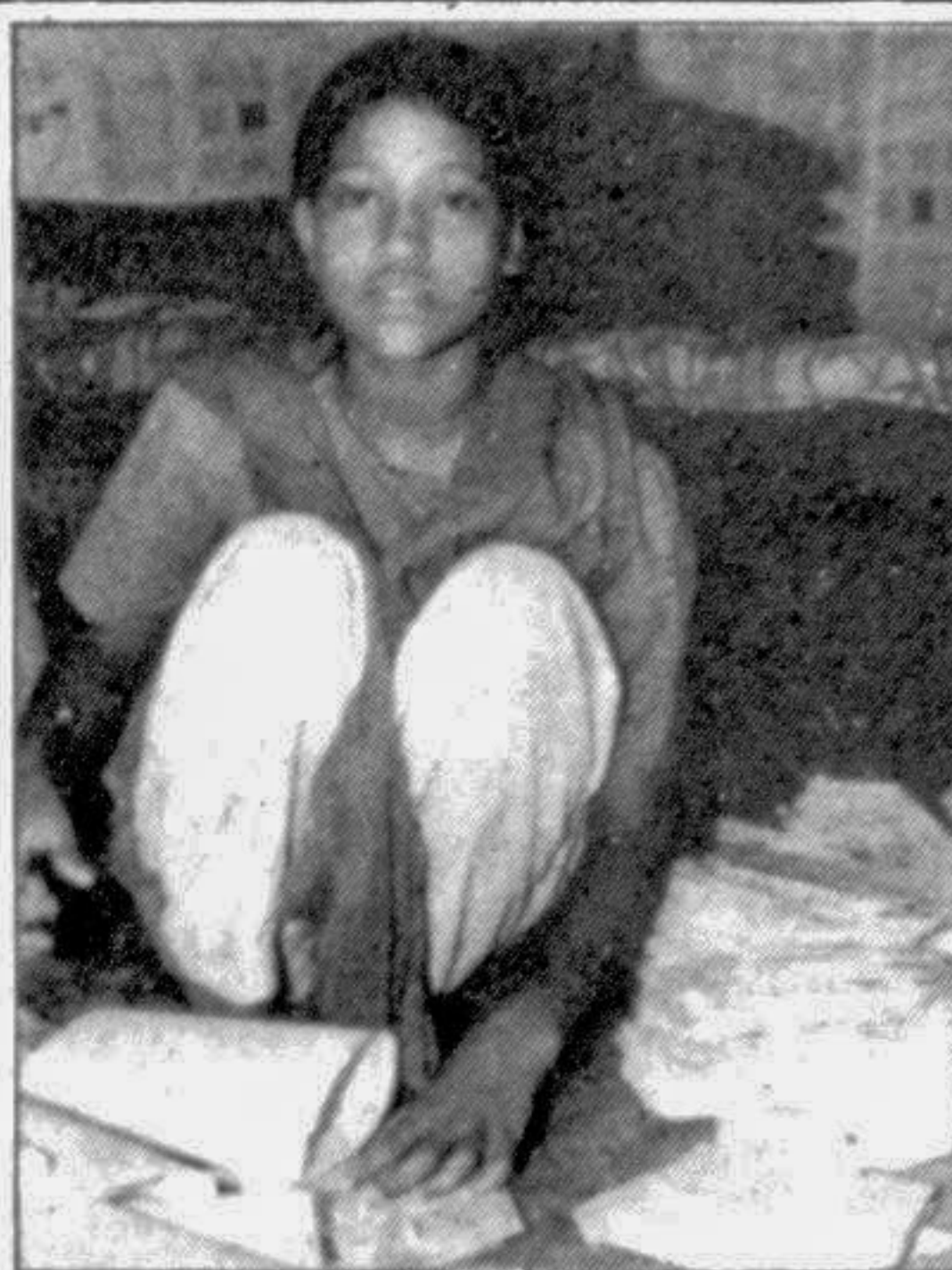
Sponsorship Programme Touches Lives of Thousands of Children

by Nikesh Chandra Das

This feature story is about the sponsorship program of World Vision Bangladesh. The story focuses on the impact of the program taking case studies from Maniknagar slum which lies in the north eastern part of Dhaka



Ali Islam is a student of Class VIII of Maniknagar slum.



Runa Akter of Maniknagar slum is a student of Class VI.

LIFE does not go easy for Runa (12), Ali Islam (14), Akter Hossain (15), and Rani (10). They all live at Maniknagar, located in the south eastern part of Dhaka city, mostly inhabited by ill-paid, poverty stricken people. These kids along with their family members are struggling to come out from the grip of poverty, ill health, malnutrition, and illiteracy.

Besides these adverse elements, all these kids have another coincidental similarity — that none of them have their father with them in their struggle for survival. Either their father left them or died. In Bangladesh where women's literacy and participation in important socio-economic activities is painfully low in comparison to their male counterpart, the survival struggle of these women along with their children do not need any explanation. Two case studies from Maniknagar area will allow you an impression about their life and poverty.

Runa, a student of class VI, lives with her widowed mother Sufia Akter (35), at Maniknagar. Runa's father died when she was a little girl. An original inhabitant of Gozaria thana of Munshigonj district — some 45 km south of Dhaka — they moved to Dhaka for finding out a fortune only after their village home was eroded by the mighty river Padma.

In Dhaka they took shelter in a 15X12 sq feet shack for which they now pay taka 500 (US\$12.5) as rent. They share a latrine and bathroom with three other families. In her first attempt at employment in the city, Sufia Akter started her living as a housemaid. It is an odd but a easily manageable job in the city. After working as a housemaid for several years Sufia Akter switched her

job on to making paper bags for grocery shops. From this job she now earns about Tk 1,000 (US\$25) a month.

Ali Islam (14), a student of class VIII lives at Maniknagar with his widowed mother Alekjan Begum (35). When Ali was only one year old his day-labourer father died. His father's death pushed the family to migrate to Dhaka city from Faridpur which is some 105 km south-west from Dhaka. From then on, Alekjan Begum works as a housemaid. With her meagre income of about Tk. 1,000 (US\$25) they live in a 7x6 sq feet shack. For the

shack, where there is no electricity and running water, they pay Tk. 425 (US\$10.62) a month as rent. As they had no latrine or bathroom facility in this shack they try to avail these facilities wherever possible — sometimes in the place she works or in open space outside her shack.

These are only two typical examples of the slum family and children of Dhaka city. In both the cases the mothers do not have any academic education. As a result they have even no chance to try to have a job to help themselves in their survival race. Learning from

their own life and experiences these mothers are eager to provide education for their children. Sufia Akter the mother of Runa says, "If I had known the value of education earlier, my present days might have been different. I like to get my daughter educated, which is the only positive means for a dignified survival." But most of the women like Sufia cannot do that due to poverty.

This story of Runa and Ali Islam are similar to those of thousands of Bangladeshi children who live under continuous threat of poverty, ill health

and malnutrition. Keeping this grim situation in mind World Vision of Bangladesh, an international development organization, introduced child sponsorship program in rural areas and urban slums. The sponsorship program of World Vision provides full educational costs of the poverty-stricken children.

Runa Akter has been receiving the sponsorship assistance from class I and Ali Islam from class III. There was every possibility of their education being stopped if they did not get this assistance. But they were lucky enough to avail of the sponsorship assistance of World Vision which not only provides educational assistance but also ensures medical and income generating assistance which are important components of its integrated approach to family development. World Vision is currently assisting over 1,50,000 children of whom 65,000 are directly sponsored to get education in the country.

Sufia Akter, the mother of Runa, says, "It is because of World Vision's care and concern I nourish the hope to impart education to my daughter." In fact sponsorship assistance means a lot to most of the poor sponsored families including Runa and Ali Islam because every moment they are struggling hard only to survive, let alone the education.

Maniknagar Family Development Project, has been providing educational assistance to 600 needy, poor slum children including Runa and Ali Islam. Throughout the country World Vision has over 228 projects which have been undertaking development efforts emphasizing health, income generation and family planning with main focus on education.

goes on at this pace. England took 30 years to make education compulsory.

Although, the leaders of the country sound high about making education for all by 2000 a success, they are also in a doubt about it. Former President H M Ershad announced compulsory primary education from 1990 as a step towards education for all. But he had to call the meeting of the National Education Advisory Council in 1990 that it would need to work five times to make education for all a success within the next ten years.

On the other hand, the present Prime Minister Begum

Khaleda Zia claims four per cent increase of literacy rate during her three years of rule. But at the same time, she has sent a letter to her ministers saying that it is difficult to implement the primary education programme. One cannot expect a proper implementation of the programme alone by the Mass Education and Primary Education departments. There can not be any alternatives to a social movement to make it a success. According to statistics, the number of eligible school-going children would stand at two crores.

To meet their demand, it would need to increase social investment on primary education by 15 per cent. At present, the spending in this sector is Taka 1360.42 crores. This stands for half of the total amount for education. Other than this, 2,800 new schools will have to be built each year and 14,250 new teachers will have to be recruited. All these figures today appear to be too Herculean to be met so quickly, especially when there is only seven years left.

The free primary education started in Bangladesh in 1912. But still there are 7.40 crores people uneducated in the country. Every day 5,000 new entries are made to this uneducated class. In the last 30 years, the literacy rate increased by only 7.8 per cent. In the last 10 years, the pace was at 5 per cent.

To steer education out of this alarming situation, the first thing to be done is to keep education policy clear of politicisation. So that the education programmes do not trip every time there is a change in government.

Emphasis has to be laid on poverty elimination and health related programmes. The rich section of the society has to be convinced about the need for child education. Because, a large section of disadvantaged children work in the rich people's houses or offices. If given a chance, these children can become educated. At the same time, efforts have to be given in making people feel the need for educating the girls.

— Development Feature

A School With a Difference

by Raffat Binte Rashid

WHEN a mother goes to work, her prime concern is who will look after her children? This is a major problem, faced by almost all the working women of Bangladesh, irrespective of whether she is an employee in a bank, an institution or whether she is a housemaid.

To solve their problems day care centres are a good enough way out and many mothers are relieved to know that their children are safe and well taken care of until they return. But of course such facility excludes the working women, living in the slums.

It has happened in many areas that a slum mother comes back home, after work only to find her eight-year-old daughter raped or two-year-old son dead, after he fell into the sewerage hole.

These incidents are quite frequent in any slum; sad, unfortunate but these do happen. As an initiative approach Shishu Raksha Samity Day Care Centre was established 42 years ago in 1952 by Raisa Haroon, then a social worker.

This centre simultaneously is a school called Raisa Memorial School. It is situated in Narinda Monir Hossain Lane. "Our area is literally 'lokal free'," explains Professor Salma Chowdhury, the present president of the school and also a teacher of Bangla in

The school is upto class VIII starting from kindergarten level but now proposals are made to expand this up to class X. "Our students regularly appear for the scholarship exams and the good ones are even transferred to high school for further studies," Chowdhury remarks proudly.

School hours are from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon and students are enrolled even at the age of two and half to three. Mostly they make the pre-school group or day care centre children. "These slum children are fed, cleaned, loved here," she continues. "They play, sleep, eat and side by side learn things they usually don't at home, like gardening or drawing."

"Our teachers visit the students house or make the mothers come to school atleast three times in a school year. "Motivating the mothers is our prime objective, after all an educated mother knows what is best for her child," she said thoughtfully.

If her child is not kept safe he or she will end up in bad company and finally end up being wasted, she thinks. "Every year atleast 200 to 250 children graduate from our school and not a single one of them is a drug addict or a thief or a prostitute," Chowdhury

among them five are graduates, three passed their intermediate level and eight passed their SSC level."

Funding of this special school, which is only for the 'lokals', are mostly done by the city's philanthropist and also by World Food Programme (WFP). "We never had to ask for money, there was also someone or the other to give us some and Dr Shaila a Gynecologist is one of our regular donors. Chowdhury says with a grateful smile. "WFP gives us very pure oil, wheat and pulse and with all these we are some how managing to meet ends," she says.

"But its not that we have no problems at all. One of our major threat is the building itself. We have a few unwanted tenants, who won't even give up the area and totally forget that we just gave them shelter not the entire house."

"Talks are going on in the higher quarters to help us. But it takes a long time for anything good to happen. Lately, however we heard that government's Zilla Parishad is making bills to give, such places, which houses such schools and organization, the ownership of the place."

"This is definitely a delightful news and something workers like us are looking forward to. Especially for us this pro-



The students and the teachers.

Eden Girls College. "All the street children more or less attend our school and at present we have approximately 100 plus students," she says. Besides regular school work they also give the students lesson on health, environment, sanitation and sometimes on moral ethics too.

declares quite satisfied with the schools progress.

"It is the teachers' duty as well the mothers' to make the children understand what is good and what is bad for them. "Our teachers are all volunteers and work for free but only recently some sort of honorarium is given to them. We have a total of 16 teachers;

posai is a God's gift and hope it will be implemented," she says and waits with a hopeful smile and an anxious look until then.

"This project — a day care centre for children whose mothers are working women and living in the slum — is as important as any other project working for the slum people," Salma Chowdhury adds.

Illiteracy: Making of the volatile politics

by Anis Rahman

EDUCATED politicians, intellectuals and leaders of the society, bear the same vision in mind — that the nation should become educated. But the gap between their vision and the reality to too wide and nothing can bridge it. Experts now blame the politicians for this disturbing scenario. No change is possible without any political commitments.

The government formulates the policies of the country. But the policies are often deformed because of the narrowed political outlook of the governments which try to influence the policies in their way. For this reason, policies change every time there is a change in the government.

The much emphasised programme for Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) was in fact initiated soon after the liberation in 1971. But in last 20 years it failed to take off because of the political instabilities, change of education policy with the intermittent change of political power, the creeping poverty. There, acting together, in fact inflated the rate of illiteracy in the country.

The first Education Commission in Bangladesh was formed in 1974. Although, this Commission recommended for making education compulsory at all levels, it is now being implemented in 1993, about some 19 years later.

The Commission in 1974 said that primary education should be made compulsory up to class eight. By 1980, education up to class five should be made compulsory. While by 1983, it should be stretched over to class eight. But these recommendations never found any outlet because of the political changes.

The next government in power published its interim education policy in 1978. This also felt the need for making primary education compulsory and free for students up to class five. The deadline for achieving this was set in 1983. But the wheel of power turned again and the policy remained a mere paper work.

In 1988, the second Education Commission Report was published which recommended universal primary education up to class five has to be made tuition free by 1995. By the year 2000, it would be further raised to class eight. The same recommendations was, in fact, made in the 1974 Commission report. The new report said that compulsory education programme should begin from 1991.

But the change in politics occurred again in '90 and the programme could not be started. As a result, the compulsory primary education programme to be started from 1991, began in

1992 in 68 thanas. One year later it started throughout the country.

Other than the political ups and downs, study of Primary Education Directorate has identified fund crisis of the government, lack of government's commitment, curriculum with no practical application, lack of good relationship between teachers and students, school environment not attractive for children, financial crisis of the parents etc. as other reasons which acted in way of making primary education universal.

targets for achieving education for all by 2000. Some of these are: motivation, awareness building, increasing capacity of the schools, ensuring people's participation etc. Three strategies has been chalked out to ensure these: social mobilisation, public policy advocacy, media communication and forming alliances.

A massive social initiative and its sustenance are now the keys to ensuring education for all. Different seminars, workshop and symposiums are being held throughout the country for the coveted social mobilisation pro-

religions leaders, intellectuals and writers are also included in the list.

Steps have also been taken to use the mass media in the motivational programme. Popular actors and actresses are acting in dramas and play which aim at persuading the people.

The newspapers have also come forward in this regard by printing features on education.

Other than these, rallies of parents had been held in the north region schools where the admission and attendance rates of students are very low. A total of 68



A creative educational programme has been initiated by Gono Shahajia Sangstha (GSS), a national developmental NGO. To break the boredom of attending school, the school has undertaken activities which generate immense interest among the students. The school has given different names to three tables. For example: Creative table, Bangla table and Math table. At the creative table the students draw pictures from their imagination, then they write a story based on the pictures. In GSS schools, to determine meritorious students the scores are given on evaluation instead of exams. Thus the students are freed from fear of exams. — Photo: Rafiqur Rahman/Development Features

The currently undertaken primary education programme has addressed these problems and the policy has also been reformed accordingly. Different sub-committees have also been formed to combat the obstacles to education.

The government has set some

gramme. Some key persons and organisations which can play significant role in expediting social mobilisation has also been identified. They include people's representatives, social welfare, women and health department, NGOs, Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs etc. Village leaders,

such rallies in 17 districts were held in 1992 in which 27,600 mothers took part. They were briefed about the importance of education. Interestingly, after the rallies were held the same schools experienced increased flow of students.

To encourage the education institutes, the best primary schools are being identified as model schools. In 1991, 500 schools in Rajshahi and in 1992, 427 schools were given this recognition. Other forms of motivational works include distribution of stickers, carrying slogans for education.

Considering all these, achieving the target of education for all is now only a matter of time. But the gap between the reality and the paper policies is still wide. In this country, a lot planning and policies had never been implemented. Policies alone can not ensure education for all. An official of the Ministry of Education, Dr Muhammad Delwar Hossain has rightly pointed out that it would still take another 40 years to achieve education for all if everything

should receive education. They say, "we have enrolled them in school through hard struggle so that they may enjoy a happier life and may not have to earn their living through manual labour like us". This interest shown by Sujon and Sukhi's parents proves that even destitutes are aware of the importance of education.

Following the example of Sujon and Sukhi, other children of the neighbourhood — have all got enrolled in school.

Despite endless problems, guardians are becoming aware about the need of educating their children and children are also feeling enthusiastic about going to school.

An Example to Follow

SUJON and Sukhi are brother and sister. Sukhi, a six year old and Sujon, five year old are both studying in a school. Last January the two were enrolled in Charkoloni Government Primary School in Barguna, in the deep south coastal region of the country.

Their parents are both working. The father works in the field and the mother works as an attendant in different households. With their hard-earned, meagre income life has been an exhausting struggle all through. For them to enrol their two children in school was a dream that might never come true. Both of them no doubt keenly felt that their children

Educational TV comes to India

by Jagan Nath

THE growing popularity of television as a vehicle for educating people has reached India.

And hopes are high that there will be much use for this medium in a country where the literacy rate is very low. Statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) show that as of 1990, India, the world's second most populous country, had an adult literacy rate of only 48 per cent. As defined by the UN agency, adults are people aged 15 and above.

For the same year, 1990, UNESCO estimated that India had 280,109,000 adult illiterates.

Cable Television (CATV), which is growing at an unusually fast pace, is spear-heading the campaign to use TV in education. It is being used to telecast informative, educational and developmental programmes throughout the country.

The whole concept of using CATV is very simple. The studio is makeshift and does not have the fancy, ultra-modern gadgetry of major TV stations. With a couple of neon tubes, an ordinary TV camera used for home movies, a video cassette recorder (VCR) and cable network, the station is in service.

India's experiment in the use of TV for education began in a small town — Modasa in Sabarkantha district of Gujarat state.

A video cassette library owner and cable network op-

erator in the town of 50,000 people experimented with equipment at his disposal and used study cassettes prepared by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in this city. He telecast lessons on nutrition for housewives and conducted career counselling for the student community.

News of the experiment soon reached the developmental and educational unit of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in Bombay. Scientists in the space agency helped improve the technology to give it a telephonic talkback system. Since then two formal experiments have been conducted with encouraging results: one at Modasa with the help of IGNOU's regional centre and a second in Ahmedabad.

One problem which had to be overcome by the experiments was how to sustain the interest of the heterogeneous audience with diverse activities. The projects explored the use of developments in communication technology to meet the requirements of a distance education system.

ISRO has now developed an experimental cable-based interactive network system, in which educational programmes are transmitted through a local cable network and received at different locations. The students receiving the programmes can interact with the counsellors in the

makeshift studios on an audio channel via a normal public telephone system.

In Modasa, six select groups of students sitting at different receiving ends were provided with telephone talkback facilities.

The 'teacher at your doorstep' system was received enthusiastically not only by students but also housewives who regularly watched the programmes on nutrition.

The housewives are also taught child care, first aid, and how to maintain family peace and social harmony.

The programme is expected to benefit educational institutions as well. From kindergarten to the post-graduate level, graded instruction and lectures may be arranged, according to the requirements of the learners. These may be recorded for easy reproduction and repetition.

With the encouraging results of the experiments so far, ISRO chief U R Rao has called for making education an integral part of television programmes. The programmes can also help promote family planning, art, culture and general hygiene of the people. The experience of China, Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia in similar activities can be useful, he said. Social workers and experts should be integrated in such experiments.

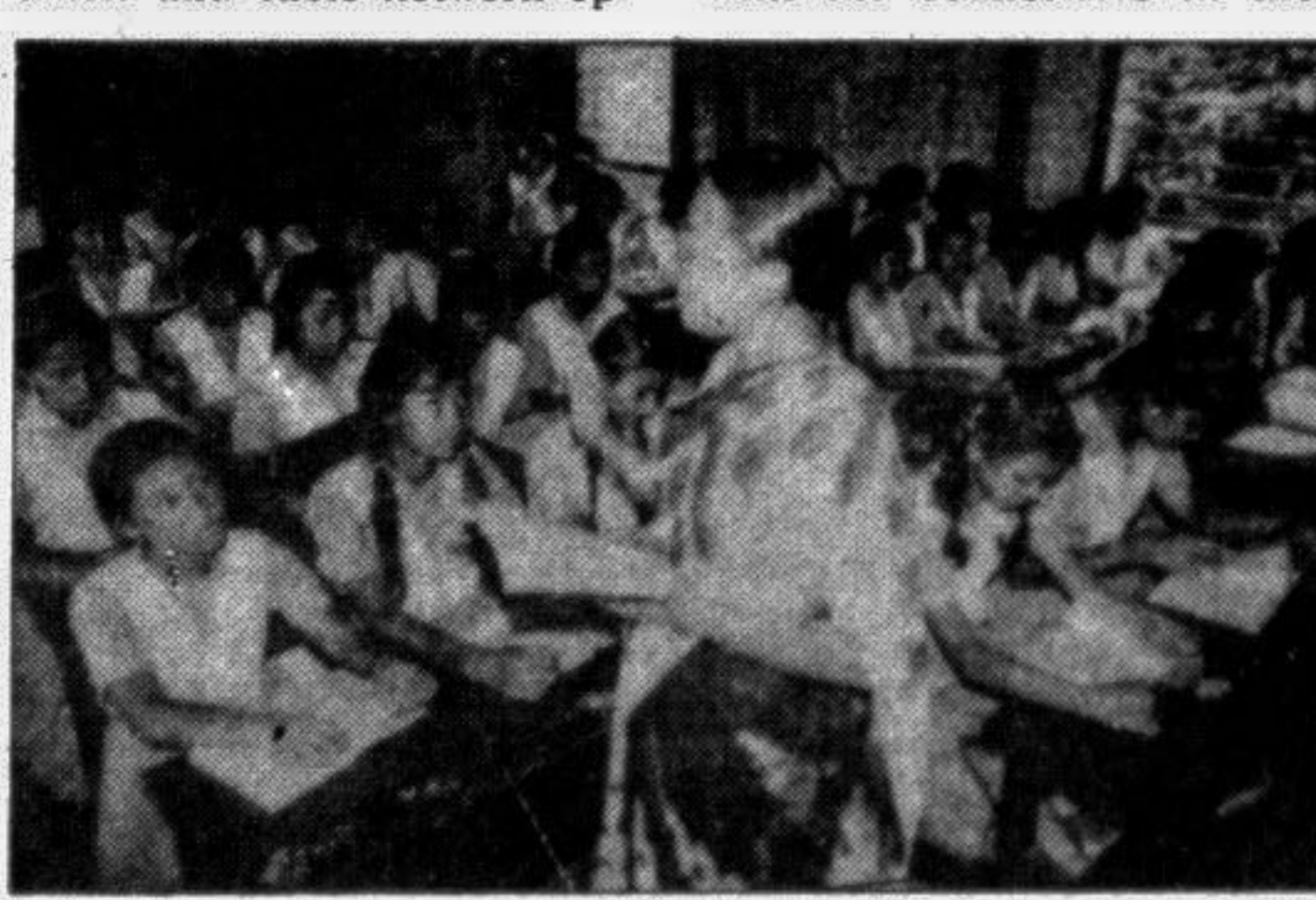
Mr Rao recently inaugurated a ten-day 'distant education through television' experiment at the IGNOU campus here.

He said: 'education has to be provided to every citizen to make strides in the fields of science, industrial development, farming, fisheries, environment, agriculture, hygiene and space technology.'

The university's vice-chancellor, V C Kulandam Swamy, emphasised the increasing need to adopt modern technology like satellite communication for education purposes. He said, 'While the use of technology might be an added facility for conventional education, it is an indispensable need in the case of distance education.'

Even Indian space scientists are monitoring closely the country's use of TV for education.

— Dephnews Asia



A usual class room.