

Tech Focus

Do we fit in the virtual education plan?

FAIZUL ATANIM

IS e-Learning possible in Bangladesh? Dr Badrul H Khan, associate professor and director of Educational Technology Leadership graduate cohort program at The George Washington University, tried to answer that question talking about 'Enhancing Education and Training through e-Learning in Bangladesh' at Prodigy, a centre for human resource development, on December 20.

The constituent of distributed learning includes education offered using electronic delivery modes such as CD-ROMs, video conferencing, websites and e-mail that can be otherwise termed as computer-assisted learning. Widely used in distance learning programmes, e-Learning refers to using electronic applications and processes to learn.

E-Learning applications and processes include web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV and CD-ROM.

According to Dr. Khan, in an IT society there is a demand for open, flexible and distributed learning (OFDL) environment that should be affordable, efficient, easily accessible, well designed and learner-centred. IT facilitates the flow of information and makes it globally accessible to people at reasonable cost. In addition, he believes that broad understanding of OFDL is a necessity

to create a successful e-Learning system and development of Virtual Education Plan (VEP).

For that reason, he developed a framework to support e-Learning and understanding of OFDL.

All the issues that are obligatory for e-Learning are grouped under a broad heading known as his framework. It falls into eight broad categories -- institutional, pedagogical, technological, interface design, evaluation, management, resource support and ethical.

The 'institutional' dimension is concerned with issues of administrative affairs related to organisational structure, academic relationships related to accreditation of the institution along with faculty and staff support and student services related to e-learning.

The 'pedagogical' dimension of e-learning refers to teaching and learning. This dimension addresses issues concerning content analysis, audience analysis, goal analysis, medium analysis, design approach, organisation and methods and strategies of e-learning environments. It deals with the stability of the course content/curriculum, as they are mostly dynamic course content. These courses need revision frequently to stay up to date with the current syllabus. It becomes rather frustrating for learners if they find obsolete information.

The 'technological' dimension examines issues of technology infrastructure in e-learning environments. This includes infrastructure

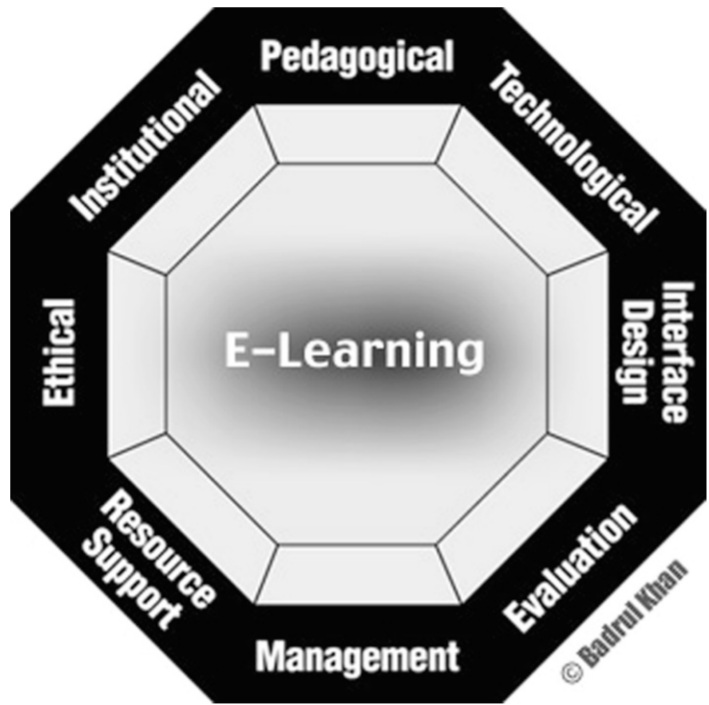
planning, hardware and software.

If the e-Learning institutions create learning by following the international interoperability standard (IEEE), the learning matter can be shared and re-used by other institutions as well. This not only will save money but also promote collaborations among e-learning partner institutions.

The 'interface design' refers to the overall look and feel of e-

misunderstanding, ambiguous elements should be minimised. For example, in Bangladesh, thumbs-up sign means to disregard someone but in other cultures, it means 'excellent or job well done'. These points need to be noted while designing interface.

The 'evaluation' for e-Learning includes both assessment of learners and evaluation of the instruction and learning environment. Are



Learning programs. This dimension encompasses page and site design, content design, navigation, and usability testing.

To improve cross-cultural communication and to avoid the students doing their work properly? Are they properly assessed? The issues of cheating are a major concern and an e-Learning institution should have mechanisms to stop any sort of plagiarism.

Tech News

3Com stretches its web in Bangladesh

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

"BANGLADESH is on 3Com's high priority map, which is reflected through our initiative for the market here," said Upender Jit Singh, regional sales manager of 3Com Corporation, South-East Asian region. 3Com, the world-renowned network appliance company, launched their routers in Bangladesh through a seminar December 15 at IDB Bhaban.

3Com is considered to be the global leader in functionally rich, easy-to-use networking products. Bob Metcalfe, one of the inventors of Ethernet technology on which virtually all local area networks are based, founded 3Com in 1979. Till date, 3Com has been a 'Tier 1' brand for their Internet protocol service platforms, wireless products and so on. At the moment, 3Com is competing with Cisco Systems Inc.

Previously, Bangladeshi resellers of 3Com products faced difficulties communicating with overseas distributors and thus have their message conveyed directly to the manufacturers. 3Com, currently, has two distributors in Bangladesh -- Ingram Micros and Techvalley. The company believes that through these local distributors the communication channel would be open and fair for both sides.

The company has also initiated a program through which they will train and educate resellers all over the region, so as to restore the competitive edge for 3Com products. Twice a year, 3Com University holds 'Partner3'

program, a half-day training event, for the resellers' employees, in different cities throughout the world over a two-to-three month period.

The 'Partner3' program covers information about emerging technologies and helps the resellers to stay updated on 3Com products, services and solutions. "Our training program will ensure that the resellers are ready to face the future market demands," said Upender Jit Singh about the program.

3Com announced launch of its new state-of-the-art Router 3000 family and 5000 family. The 3000 family routers are the entry-



3Com Router 5000

IP multicast and so on, are also available. The routers consist of high-performance 50 Mhz processor, support for up to 2,048 Mbps over serial WAN ports and 64 MB standard operating memory.

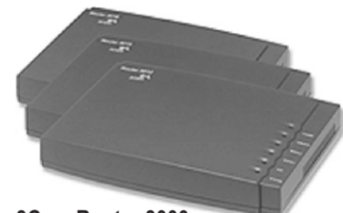
All Router 3000 routers come equipped with maximum operating memory and a complete set of routing, security features and applications set as standard unlike many competitive products.

The 3Com Router 5000 family involves flexible LAN and WAN components Smart Interface Cards (SICs) and Multi-function Interface Modules (MIMs), which provides scalable, efficient, and secure network operation.

Additional facilities include -- built-in support for converged voice, data, and video provides advanced Quality of Service (QoS) and traffic management capabilities, integrate seamlessly with the existing network equipment of the customer.

Compared with competing products, the price of these routers are 13 to 14 per cent lower and the memory provided is twice more than that of the competing products.

"These routers are full featured and high performance routers as compared to our competition" said Singh. "3Com offers the best price performance feature benefits and therefore the routers have been aggressively priced."



3Com Router 3000

level fixed configuration routers for edge deployment, whereas Router 5000 series are 3, 4 and 8 slot chassis routers for core routing deployments.

The 3Com router 3000 family delivers standards-based routing, fully compliant with a range of wide area networking interfaces, routing protocols and standards. These routers also support security features as firewall and Virtual Private Network (VPN). Systems Network Architecture (SNA), Data-Link Switching (DLSW) DHCP, and WAN dial-on-demand backup solutions. A variety of QoS (Quality of Service) features such as VLANs, bridging

Flying for 100 years



K.L. Paape of Asheville, North Carolina, looks at the life-size sculpture of the Wright Brothers First Flight with a bronze Orville Wright on board on December 16, in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. The six day First Flight Centennial Celebration of the Wright Brothers historic flight came to an end yesterday.

Best 10 Websites Category: Market Analysis

- FORRESTER**
Forrester Research
Strategic research & market forecasts.
URL: <http://www.forrester.com/>
- NUA**
NUA Internet Surveys
Excellent statistics & information on Internet trends.
URL: <http://www.nua.ie/surveys/>
- Nielsen/NetRatings**
Nielsen/NetRatings
Internet audience & market analysis.
URL: <http://www.netratings.com/>
- WebCriteria**
WebCriteria
Top site analysis benchmarks.
URL: <http://www.webcriteria.com/>
- Internet & American Life**
Pew Internet Project
Quality research & reports on the growth of the Internet & its social impact.
URL: <http://www.pewinternet.org/>
- KEYNOTE**
KeyNote
E-commerce benchmarks & ratings.
URL: <http://www.keynote.com/>
- BtoB**
BtoB
Ranking the best business-to-business websites, top web advertisers list & resource guide.
URL: <http://www.netb2b.com/>
- NetValue**
NetValue
Internet usage measurements.
URL: <http://www.netvalue.com/corp/news/index.htm>
- Traffick**
Traffick
The guide to portals.
URL: <http://www.traffick.com/>
- Interactive Advertising Bureau**
Internet Advertising Bureau
Devoted to maximising the use & effectiveness of advertising on the Internet - includes ad revenue & web branding research.
URL: <http://www.iab.net/>

Tech News

Life on Mars? A little Beagle may tell us

AFP, Paris

ON Christmas Day, a small round object will streak like a shooting star across the skies of Mars before landing like a beachball, starting a mission that, at last, may reveal whether the stuff of life exists on Earth's beguiling neighbour.

The 400-million-kilometre (250-million-mile) voyage of Beagle 2 culminates Europe's first solo mission to explore other planets, and places the continent in pole position in a race with the United States to answer one of the greatest puzzles in space.

"For 5,000 years, people have looked at Mars and wondered if there is life there, and it falls to this generation to do it," said Beagle 2's lead scientist, Colin Pillinger, a professor at Britain's Open University.

"The question that is uppermost in my mind is, 'Are we alone in the Universe?'"

"Finding that we are not alone in respect of our Solar System

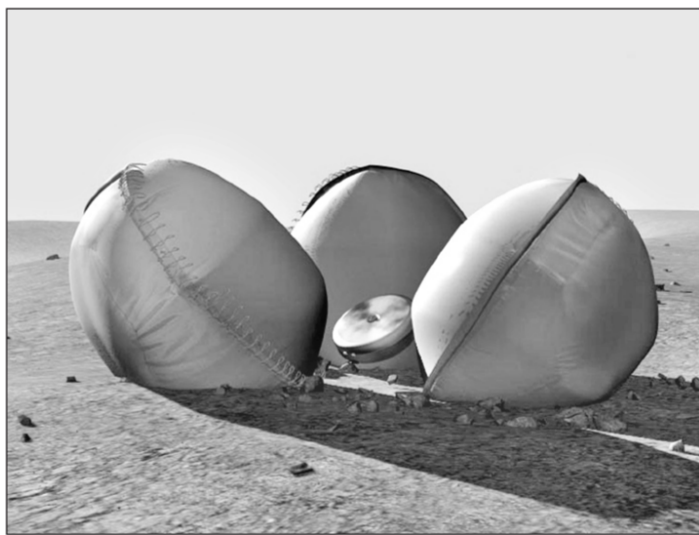
would mean to me that the Universe is teeming with life."

On December 25, six days after it was released like a gently spinning top from its mother ship, Mars Express, Beagle will plunge into the thin martian atmosphere at more than 20,000 kilometers (12,500 miles) per hour, with a conical shield soaking up the initial heat from friction.

Then a parachute should open to slow the descent until, in the final stages, gas bags will inflate around the lander, bringing it to a bouncing halt at 0254 GMT in Isidis Planitia, a flat sedimentary basin near the equator.

If all goes well -- a mighty if, given that the payload (less than 69 kilos, 152 pounds at launch) is highly sophisticated and there are fears that vicious dust storms are brewing on Mars -- Beagle will then open out like a fob watch, and four solar panels will flop out.

At 0630 GMT, the little lander has its first chance to send the



This image shows a simulation of the three airbags separating to release the Beagle 2 lander onto the surface of Mars. Europe's mission to search for life on Mars cleared a vital hurdle on December 19 as its unmanned orbiter ejected a probe that should land on the Red Planet on Christmas Day.

folks back home a sign of life, which should include a radio call sign composed by the British pop band Blur.

Then, after a check to ensure that its systems are OK, Beagle 2 can start to move a robot arm, a triumph of miniaturisation that has seven tiny tools designed mainly to assess whether water exists or has existed on Mars and whether there are the remains of carbon-based lifeforms on its ruddy surface.

In orbit overhead will loop the unmanned Mars Express, stuffed with sensors to closely map the martian surface, analyse its atmosphere and peer beneath the surface dust and rocks with ground-penetrating radar.

The reason for the big uncertainty is that there is a lot of evidence that if Mars is cold and dry today, it was once in its early history, perhaps 3.8 billion years ago, warm and wet.

If liquid water did flow, could life have evolved there? And where is the water now? Images sent back to Earth from US orbiters suggest that there could be abundant underground water, or that there was until recently.

Mars has always cast a spell on Earth, either as a divine body, a fictionalised source of invasion (H.G. Wells' "The War of the Worlds") or as Earth's verdant twin (Ray Bradbury's "The Martian Chronicles").

Dreamers see it as mankind's first colony in space, a stepping stone to a wider conquest of the Solar System and, who knows, the galaxy beyond.

But the history of exploration of this planet is a graveyard of broken dreams.

Of the 32 probes sent to Mars since 1960, only nine have been a success.

Nineteen were outright failures, the latest of which was Japan's probe Nozomi, which was abandoned on December 9 after its electronics were damaged by a solar flare.

Beagle 2 is named in honour of HMS Beagle, the ship that took Charles Darwin, the pioneer of the theory of evolution, on his historic 1831-36 trip around the world.

Tech Snaps

CityIT 2003

BCS Computer City, the largest IT market in Dhaka, has decided to hold its third exposition "CityIT 2003" for computer hardware, peripherals and related products and services, says a press release. This annual exposition is scheduled to start from December 30, 2003 and will continue till January 10, 2004.

This mega event will take place at the own premises of the BCS Computer City. Number of exhibitors this year is expected to be around 200. Leading computer firms of the country, their channel partners, along with a number of internationally reputed Brands with their products and services are expected to participate at the fair. The total number of visitors this year is expected to exceed 450,000.

Many technical events such as seminars, programming competitions, new business ideas, customer mobilisation, customer motivation, customer feedback and many more will take place during the exposition.

The last exposition of the BCS Computer City was held on October 2002. The event was a grand success, from a publicity perspective as well as a business point of view. The 11-day exposition was held at the same premises of BCS Computer City with the participation of 160 firms and was experienced by 250,000 visitors.

Inter School & College Programming Contest 2003

The inter-school and college programming contest organised by Independent University Bangladesh (IUB), Chittagong was held on November 15 at IUB, Chittagong campus, says a press release.

Students from reputed schools and colleges in nineteen teams participated the competition. The participants working in groups of three were assigned to solve seven programming problems each. Ispahani Public School & College-1 was outstanding by solving six of the seven problems and secured the top position followed by Ispahani Public School & College-2 and Little Jewels School Diamond respectively.

This is the first time such contest was held in the port city and it permitted the young and talented school and college students to

demonstrate their skills in programming.

The contest was supported by TK Group. ICC (IUB Computer Club) was the main organiser of the event.

Professor Bazul Mobin Chowdhury, vice chancellor, IUB, Professor Kaikobad of BUET, Professor Anwar, director, School of Communication, IUB and Professor Syed Sufderul Huq, coordinator of IUB, Chittagong were present at the event.

East West University secures 10th position in international programming contest

East West University programming team from Bangladesh secured the tenth position in 2003 ACM Asia programming contest held in Mumbai, India on December 7, says a press release. Sponsored by IBM, the contest was participated by ninety teams from universities of different Asian countries.

Amongst Bangladeshi universities, International Islamic University, Chittagong secured twenty third position while AIUB took the thirtieth place. It is worth mentioning here that several reputed universities from South Korea, China, Singapore (National University) and India (six IIT Teams) contested in the event. The first position went to Shanghai Jiatong University of China.

Daffodil to computerise DCC

On November 22, an agreement was signed between Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and Daffodil Software Ltd. (DSL) for computerisation of various activities of DCC, says a press release. Abdul Qayum, project director, PIU for DCC and Sabur Khan, managing director, Daffodil Software Ltd. signed the agreement. Under this agreement Daffodil Software Ltd. will develop, install and implement an Oracle based integrated customised software under client-server network environment. This software will cover the wide range of activities of DCC which include systems like personnel management and payroll system, market rent and electricity charge billing system, store inventory control system, trade license management system, accounts and budgetary control system and holding tax system.

Photo Tech



Sony's humanoid robot QRIO which introduced as the world's first running robot, shows off a dancing performance using Japanese fans during the company's technology preview in Tokyo on December 18. Sony unveiled the world's first running robot, a fruit of the company's three-year development after creating a two-legged walking robot.