

SoftExpo: a platform for the promising?

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GIVEN the current Awami League government's pipe dream to create a Digital Bangladesh by 2021, it is no surprise then that the state has invested heavily on the information and communication technology (ICT) sector.

So it was understandable that the government would want to earn \$5 billion from the industry's exports by 2023.

But the current state of ICT development suggests the country and the government will have to wait a little longer to realise both the goals.

The Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) says key progress has been made in four areas: infrastructure, software and outsourcing, augmented reality and virtual reality, the internet of things (IoT) and big data.

Several ICT-related laws have been passed and a tech park constructed. The information technology enabled sector (ITES) accounts for more than 4,500 registered IT/ITES service providers employing over 750,000 ICT professionals. Its revenue generation in fiscal 2017-18 reached approximately \$800 million, half of it coming from exports, including those of freelance outsourcing segment. Software industry contributes more than 1 per cent in GDP.

Bangladeshi IT/ITES companies are increasingly using AR/VR

technologies in their projects to provide an immersive experience or environment that can be controlled without traditional physical button-pressing techniques.

Moreover the IoT and big data have been embraced by the companies, helping the country efficiently maintain key infrastructure, manage traffic properly and boost economic growth, according to BASIS.

As a result, budding entrepreneurs are now coming forward with numerous ideas and innovations.

And the BASIS SoftExpo, which is currently being held at the capital's International Convention City Bashundhara (ICCB), appears to be the perfect platform for the young innovators to strut their stuff.

BASIS organised the four-day event, where over 300 local ICT software and hardware developers presented their products.

There were a number of interesting products on display at the various zones of the exposition.

For example, Nexdecade Technology offered a microcontroller-based digital GSM and portable attendance system. The system can provide advanced security for offices, schools or shops through face recognition and remote monitoring.

Besides, Nexdecade also intends to tackle streaming megaliths such as Netflix through their streaming app, Nexdecade OTT.

Another promising development is that a number of stalls were



Budding innovators visit one of the many stalls dotted around the ongoing BASIS SoftExpo at the capital's International Convention City Bashundhara. The photo was taken last Thursday.

showcasing software for mobile financial services. Currently, there is no singular platform for individuals to complete inter-bank transactions.

There were also numerous seminars and discussions, while business-to-business (B2B) matchmaking sessions presented a

unique opportunity for local and foreign companies to exchange views and expand their businesses.

To inspire the youth, an ICT career camp was held with upwards of 2,000 students from more than 45 universities showcasing their own projects.

More intriguingly though, the exposition witnessed a largely young turnout. Students from all over the capital flocked to the event for various reasons, ranging from a simple interest in the industry to scoping out competition.

"I came here to see what other

people have developed so that I may better understand what I should do to remain unique in my product design," said Asif, a student of North South University.

With a growing number of young innovators in the country, more attention should be paid to the start-ups so that they may thrive, said BASIS President Almas Kabir yesterday during a roundtable styled 'the current state of Bangladeshi start-ups'.

Since start-ups usually do not have enough capital to cover expenses such as office space, BASIS tries to provide promising companies with such amenities through a high-tech park authority.

For the last two years, BASIS has been trying to create the perfect ecosystem for start-ups to grow. To do this, the ICT sector's apex trade body organises workshops and helps member companies to expand their market size, secure trade licences and complete VAT registration.

"I spoke with two government officials the other day and told them that they no longer need to look abroad for IT solutions seeing as we have it all available here," Kabir said.

The ICT sector has huge potential in Bangladesh, which is like a green field, ready to help young innovators cultivate their ideas, he said, adding that BASIS offers free legal counselling to member companies.

With the SoftExpo set to conclude today, the promise displayed by the exhibitors so far can only tell of better things to come.

HANDLOOMS ON THE WANE

The number of handlooms operating in Bangladesh fell by more than quarter in the last 15 years, leading to less jobs in the market. This is largely due to the sector's shift towards mechanisation and dearth of labour. In 2003, there were 183,512 handlooms but the number fell 36.79 per cent to 116,006 in 2018, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Handloom Census 2018. The previous two censuses were in 1990 and 2003. The photos were taken at Sholokbahar, Panchlaish of Chattogram recently.

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