

Life in Dhaka

Popular PC Show for the Family

by A Husnain



The BCS is to be commended for coming out of the shell. Now they have to come out with an official quarterly magazine to put the official stamp of approval on the buzzing computer industry in Bangladesh.

I am just back from the BCS International Computer Show 1998, and am recording my first hand impressions after three hours of tiring footwork. I could not finish even half of the stalls, as the crowd started flowing as if coming into a family mela, judging from the number of families present — the age group extending from six to sixty. The happy faces confirmed that this show gave the inkling of standard modern exhibition seen anywhere. The 'bugs' would surely be removed at the next Show — bigger, brighter, and more crowded!

What the school-going youngsters were doing there in the world of hi-tech (wall screens were showing movies or TV shows via the computers)? It was the right place to get the feel of the computer world and be mentally ready after a few years, to treat computers as part of the furnishing in a middle class home. The awareness factor has to be driven home early. Exposure to the computer culture is the 'in' thing in this IT age. It is the culture which makes the mind tick.

The government's patronization of the PC and software industry gave a kick start to the PC show — the show of this winter, judging by the large influx of non-professional visitors. About 60,000 attended the show in one day according to news reports. There is no doubt that computer awareness has made a debut with a big bang. Now we need 20,000 programmers a year by 2005, starting with 2000 by 2000 AD.

Take off the garments of the mind, and export programmes and programmes. Do not be surprised if some PC assembly plants start relocating in Bangladesh soon. We have the manpower, woman-power, young-power, and PC-power, soft or hard. Just waiting to be tapped. But we must remember one joke I heard years ago: "The Bengalees are like a bottle of soda water. Open the cap, the gas escapes, and only water remains". Are we really that

harmless and innocent?

No, judging from the infectious enthusiasm. Even some illiterate *tokai* boys were collecting literature and pamphlets! The 4-floor IDB building site is splendid for exhibitions, a bit away from the maddening crowd and the traffic jams. I felt for a moment I was in Singapore or Bangkok. I looked for a place to sit down for a while to rest the tiring body and the feet but there was no 'free' space. The toilet sections have to be expanded to handle the huge show crowds, and include bigger wash rooms. The smokers were furtively seeking spots for a puff, as there were no reserved smoking corners.

The Dhakaites are learning to collect Fair literature, and this time the service provided by the stalls were much better than on previous occasions. The crowd was too thick to ask questions and see demos, hence

literature and leaflets have to be studied at leisure at home. It is good PR — reminders in writing for post-show enquiries.

The prices of colour monitors have come down quite a bit, in fact halved. One 14" Korean brand was available for below Tk 6,000. The mighty IBM has reduced the price for entry-level PC, suitable for SOHO (small office, home office) clients. It is competing with original Compaq. One locally assembled MM PC was offered at Tk 28,000 only. This company is also manufacturing AVRs for as low as Tk 1500/5000, with transient and surge protection. In Japan during the mid-1990s, thousands supplied parts and components from the cottage industry sector. We have millions of hands for low-tech assembly and fabrication (compare our handicraft, toy and other products).

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The next BCS International Computer Fair would be a gate crasher as more foreign companies would be represented, and lucky prizes would be galore, judging from the crowd response at this Show. Well done, PC Bangladesh!

Multi-media and CDs (compact discs) have caught the imagination of the young owners of computers, as hi-fi music and movies are available, and Internet communication is becoming cheaper day by day. The speed of the CDs have been going up at a dizzying pace; while the prices are dropping equally fast, specially after the reduction by the government of import duty and other levies. As more and more computer classes open in the secondary schools (starting with the Govt schools), the computer culture will spread to the district towns; and a flourishing second-hand market will encourage penetration of computer hobby to more families.

In Dhaka several computer super stores or department stores have opened. These will pick up business as this computer show has provided good input to thousands of potential customers. One feature at the IDB tower was the presence of a large number of female visitors to the Show; as also a very high percentage of behind-the-counter assistants were young ladies manning the stalls and booths. It was good clean atmosphere, and the spirit was infectious.

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Irishman Seamus, who won

Prized for Peace: The Nobel Laureates

by A S M Nurunnabi

It's a prize for democracy and a prize in which all the people in Northern Ireland can feel immense pride and credit.



John Hume

David Trimble

The real key to the peace talks in Northern Ireland was their structure — the three-strand approach designed by Hume and sold by him to the participants. Hume was convinced that Northern Ireland had to be viewed in three dimensions: as a political entity that merited the right of self-determination (and therefore a legislature of its own) that was still part of the United Kingdom and that shared an island and a history with the Republic of Ireland.

If it was Hume's vision enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement, it was Trimble who muscled the accord into existence and sold it to Northern Ireland's Unionist majority. The man who accomplished that seemed to have crossed a vast political territory in a short time. His mastery of the hard line was confirmed in 1966. His tough stand in the matter of defying an order of Royal Ulster Constabulary not to march along the traditional route by thousands of angry Orange Order demonstrators earned him the Unionist Party leadership a couple of years ago.

Hume traces his pragmatism and his reluctance to get hung up on sterile patriotism to his father. He attended a seminary but decided he wasn't cut out for the priesthood. He went back to his old school as a French teacher. For 19 years he has been one of three members of the European Parliament from Northern Ireland. In 1970 Hume was a founding member of the SDLP, which is the largest party in Northern Ireland. He quickly emerged as the party's chief policy-maker, and became its leader in 1979.

Since his earliest days as politician, his stamp was on every major political initiative in Northern Ireland. But it was in 1988 that he embarked on a political mission that would change the course of history and, over time, turn Hume into one of the most powerful political figures in the world.

In Japan, Sumitomo Company has developed a chemical sprayed over rice fields to destroy the stamen. It makes male flower sterile and quickens the cross-pollination. The time and volume of spraying are the major limitations in the application of sterilant chemical.

Labour Requirement

Labour requirement in hybrid rice production is much higher than in conventional rice production. IRRI (International Rice Research Institute) study in China suggests that per hectare labour requirement for male-sterile seed production ranges from 300 to 425. It is 240 to 370 for hybrid seed production. The labour requirement for hybrid rice production is more than 250 per hectare. The IRRI study also suggests that seed producers can receive more than 50 per cent profit from male-sterile seed production. The profit is also the same for hybrid seed production. This indicates that hybrid rice production in Bangladesh can provide opportunity for large number of labour employment with the increase in food production.

The hybrid seed fields are isolated from the other pollen sources in flowering rice fields to ensure cross-pollination with the desired male parent. This can be attained by the adjustment of plantation time. In this method rice in hybrid seed fields flowers when the rice in adjacent fields is not flowering. Some hybrid seed producers in China also practise physical isolation method. In this method, male-sterile seeds are produced in a field 50 metres apart from other rice fields. The farmers plant the male parent around the seed fields. Some producers erect 3-4 metre high wall around the seed fields. Sometimes the seed are produced on the fields that are 50-60 m higher than the nearest rice fields. Some producers also rely on natural isolation by hills or river around the fields.

The writer is an agronomist.

Hybrid Rice Production in Bangladesh

by Dr Q R Islam

HYBRID rice technology is an important achievement of agricultural research. The technology was first developed by Chinese agriculturists. The hybrid rice yields more than conventional rice. The farmers in China produce eight to 10 ton per hectare.

Commercial production of hybrid rice started in China from mid 1970s. The rice is introduced in Bangladesh recently by some private seed agencies. At present, Indian hybrid rice seeds are used. About a dozen of varieties have been introduced. However, information on the adaptability of these varieties in Bangladesh is not available. Reports published in local papers on the performance are not satisfactory. This suggests that the varieties have been introduced without trial, and presumably without recommendation of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI). This institute has not provided any information on the cultivation technique, on-farm management practices and yield potential of these varieties. This makes farmers suspicious about hybrid technology.

What is Hybrid Technology?

Hybrid seed is the product of cross between generally unlike parents. This method is known as hybridisation or cross-pollination. For example, we have two rice varieties: A and B. The A variety can develop 10 panicles per plant but each panicle produces 50 grains only. On the other hand, B variety develops

two panicles per plant but each panicle can produce 100 grains. According to Mendel's principle if these two varieties can be crossed they will produce a hybrid plant with a capacity of producing 10 panicles per plant and 100 grains per panicle. However, even though the hybrid plant has the visible trait (phenotype) of producing more panicles and grains they differ in gene contents (genotype). Accordingly, the seeds from hybrid plants will not produce the same number of panicles and grain. Therefore, new seeds are required for every hybrid rice production. In conventional rice production the seeds are produced by several crosses and back crosses. Thus, farmers can produce seeds from the new seeds.

Since rice is self-pollinating plant the production of hybrid seeds requires a cytoplasmic male sterile line. The line is maintained by crossing male sterile plants with a maintainer male parent, called a restorer, which produces a fertile seed. Producing male-sterile or hybrid seed thus requires cross-pollination of self-pollinating plants. The difficulty in achieving cross-pollination largely

A Rice by Another Name

by Sumita Dasgupta

THAILAND is all set to drag the US government to the dispute settlement panel of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for lettering Rice Tec, the Texas-based seed company, use the name 'jasmati' as a trademark for selling a variety of rice. The US company perhaps wants to mislead consumers into believing that the product is similar to Thailand's famous Jasmine rice.

Jasmine rice is Thailand's prime export commodity. More than five million farmers earn their bread by cultivating it. Rice Tec has no business encroaching on their territories, say the authorities in Bangkok. They want to settle the issue at the WTO to gain long term relief. And they are hoping to woo India and Pakistan to join ranks with them to build up a strong front against the marketing of seed sharks.

Both India and Pakistan are already struggling separately to build up cases against Rice Tec

ever since the company was granted patent on 'new lines and grains' of basmati by the US patent office. Exporters in both the countries were equally apprehensive about Rice Tec pushing itself into a market which, they felt, should belong exclusively to traders from the subcontinent.

Early this year there was talk of India and Pakistan jointly applying for revocation of the basmati patent at the US patent office. But then bureaucrats in Delhi and Islamabad found it impossible to work together, even on a trade issue. The Pakistanis were heard grumbling about the Indians being 'reluctant' to cooperate with them for diplomatic reasons.

The Indian officials excused themselves by saying that they would begin discussions with the Pakistanis only after they

affected nations lodged a joint complaint with the WTO.

The ban was not in conformity with the multi-lateral trade pact, they protested. The WTO upheld their stand in its preliminary report and the US was instructed to drop the ban.

The US later challenged the decision and the battle is still on. But the shrimp-exporting nations have won the first round. So if Rice Tec and the US government are to be thwarted, Thailand has undoubtedly hit on the most effective strategy — joint action.

It has also chosen the right forum as the WTO has specific provisions for dealing with such cases. The existing intellectual property rights regime under the WTO acknowledges the claim of a region over products that are associated in a 'special and specific' way only with that region.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

The Month of Self-purification

by Kazi Aulad Hossan

Not only during the holy month of Ramadan, but also during the period of next eleven months of the year a Muslim is required to learn self-restraint. It is a continuous process and Ramadan is a training too, which enables a Muslim to be an ideal/good citizen of the society.

THE lunar month of Shaban had already given us the glad tidings of the coming of the holy month of Ramadan. Now it has come and we hail it with all our heart. We are really fortunate that benign Allah has graciously been pleased to provide us once again with the opportunity to observe the holy month of Ramadan carefully and meticulously. Not only the Muslims of the world's second most populous country — Bangladesh — Muslims all over the world have also preparing themselves to hail and observe this month in a befitting manner as ordained by Almighty Allah in the Holy Quran.

Ramadan, it may be stated here, is the month of months, rather it is the most important month for it makes a striking difference with all other months of the lunar year. 'Ram' means heat, so, Ramadan means month of heat. And since Ramadan is a lunar month it formally begins with the appearance of the moon and in that case the time of beginning of Ramadan differs from country to country since Ramadan moon is not sighted ev-

erywhere on the same day.

Ramadan means monthly fasting from dawn to dusk and extra night prayer ('Terabih') in congregation at community mosques or at homes/private places besides offering compulsory prayers ('Salat') five times every day. Ramadan means distribution of Zakat (the poor's due) at a prescribed rate and giving of 'Sadaq' (charity) by the rich to the poor and needy. Ramadan also means Iftar (breaking the fast) and Sehri (pre-dawn meal) which are important rituals observed each day during the month by the 'Rozadar' (the fasting individual). Now let us see what Lord Creator says in Ayat 183 of Sura Baqara of the Holy Quran vis-a-vis observance of Siam (fasting) during the month of holy Ramadan. He declares:

"O ye who believe, Fasting is prescribed to you As it was prescribed To those before you. That you may learn self-restraint."

Ramadan, it may be further mentioned here, is the month in which benign Allah has sent down the Holy Quran as a guide to mankind and also "Clear

(signs) for guidance and judgement between right and wrong" (Ayat 185 Sura Baqara).

Now the question is why this month-long fasting from day-break to dusk? It may be said in this connection that a Muslim's abstinence from food and drink is not simply self-denial or self-torture. It is something else, it is something noble, something meaningful.

In this context we may now see what Almighty Allah says in the last line of the Ayat referred to above. As ordained in this Ayat Muslims are required to learn self-restraint. The last line of the Ayat is highly significant and meaningful. According to this Quranic injunction, Muslims are required to restrain themselves not only from taking food and drink, they are also required to restrain simultaneously from all kinds of evil deeds including lying, theft, dacoity, murder, arson, loot, terrorism, back biting etc.

'Siam' (fasting) is one of the five pillars of the grand edifice of Islam and to observe it (fasting) is incumbent (Farz) on the part of every able-bodied Muslim, according to the dictates of the Holy Quran. So

when a tycoon or a millionaire fasts he can easily realise the suffering and hardship of a poor man when he feels the sharp pinch of hunger. And as such he (the millionaire) is required to discharge his bounden duty to help rehabilitate the poor hungry people of the society. Islam teaches the haves to be conscious of their duties towards the have-nots through the great institution of Siam.

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But, he is quick to add, "a bedroom shouldn't be in a home's northeast. Otherwise you end up like the people in the first row of a movie hall." By

— India Abroad News Service

believers in this ancient building science which has witnessed a remarkable resurgence in urban India in recent years.

'Vastu' means the dwelling of humans and gods and 'Vastu Shastra', or the science of Vastu, is essentially the art of correct setting so that one can harness the five elements of space, air, fire, water and earth for harmonious living. According to Vastu science, proper use of these elements, creates a perfectly balanced environment which ensures good health, wealth, prosperity and peace. The traditional practitioners of Vastu believed that if she did not, someone in her family would die of leukaemia. Neurologist Amitabh Verma underwent much inconvenience to relocate his kitchen to the front of his two-storey home where his daughter's bedroom originally was. The move, to the southeast, was carried out according to the principles of 'Vastu', the ancient Indian science of architecture and design.

Film star Sanjay Dutt, who spent two difficult years in jail, reportedly effected structural changes in his home just before his release from prison in October 1995 to improve his fortunes. More and more people, be it professionals, industrialists, film stars, businessmen or politicians have become firm

Garfield ©



by Jim Davis

