

DAEWOO
ELECTRONICS

Automatic Washing Machine with Air Bubble Washing, Spin Rinse System & 3 Dimensional Water Flow

TRINCO LIMITED—Authorized Distributor of DAEWOO Electronics
Dhaka: 8115307-10 CTG: 716353, 723578 Khulna: 720304 Bogra: 6215

The Daily Star

BUSINESS

DHAKA, SUNDAY, AUGUST 20, 2000

National Housing Finance & Investments Ltd.
Home Mortgage Loans available for:

- Construction of houses
- Purchase of houses or apartments
- Renovation or extensions to existing properties
- Purchase of housing plots in approved land developments

Telephone inquiries are welcome
Chamber Building (6th Fl.), 122-124 Motijheel, Dhaka-1000
Telephone 955 9311-2, 955 3387, 955 3254 Fax 956 8987

Cell phone Internet holds out promises for software sector

Huge demand for developers to convert HTML into WML

By Inam Ahmed

In Bangladesh, set to miss the next big thing in the software market? More importantly, what now promises to be the most prospective domain in the IT field after the Y2K conversion mania?

To start from the bottom, it is now buzzing with WAP or the Wireless Application Protocol—a technology that enables the linking of mobile phones to the Internet. But how does it open up the window of opportunities for Bangladesh software market?

The answer is pretty simple. The world is now going crazy about M-commerce or mobile commerce and 90 per cent of the e-commerce executives plan to launch sites to be accessible with mobile phones. By 2003, the M-commerce market will be worth US\$22 billion per year.

Now here's the catch mark. The web pages, now usually written in HTML (HyperText Markup Language), have to be converted into Wireless Markup Language (WML), which will be accessible through mobile phones. And here comes the big business.

"The market is tremendously big," says Farid Bakht, Managing Director of First Bangladesh Consulting Ltd., which has already started exporting software for converting HTML sites into WML. "There are now one billion web pages on the Internet which can be converted into WAP."

In about 12 months' time, all new Nokia or Motorola mobile sets will be WAP phones. With such a vast wave of M-commerce activities, the demand for software developers to rewrite the existing web-sites will be colossal.

"Indians are already there. As far as information technology is concerned, they have a good reputation and they are winning a considerable portion of the world orders. And if Bangladesh wants a bite of the global market pie, it should immediately join the league. Unfortunately, none of the IT training centres here are fittingly training their students to write the new language," says Bakht.

According to estimates, about one billion people will use mobile phones rather than PCs to access the Internet and this creates a huge demand for WAP sites. There are already some 1,000 WAP sites in the world.

"Our company is developing such sites. But it does not make us happy, because businesses will not come to Bangladesh unless the country makes its mark as a reliable source of WML development. And if we get late in catching the bus, then two or three years down the line, we will have to be satisfied with low-end WAP jobs."

Now comes the question: Is WML a complex thing to learn? "Not at all. In the UK, they teach the language to an HTML developer in just a single day. In our organisation, we have taught our own developers only with the help of a book. But Bangladesh needs market exposures, and for that the government should develop some sort of programmes for the local companies to participate in international fairs in a bigger way. One-stall appearance won't do the job any more, as hundreds of Indian companies through such fairs in the international arena. We need more voice there."



Hamidul Huq, Managing Director (Current Charge) of United Commercial Bank Ltd, and M Aminul Islam, Managing Director of IDLC, sign a Tk 20 crore credit line agreement on behalf of their respective sides at a function held at the boardroom of UCBL recently. UCBL photo

BTTB's unfinished confession

By Abu Saeed Khan

They have finally confessed. Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) has officially pleaded guilty of cheating the subscribers through call piracy. Its recently-published official announcement admitted that "some misguided people along with some dishonest T&T employees are engaged in misusing ISD and NWD lines against which a few subscribers have lodged complaints of excess bill."

BTTB requested the subscribers to activate a code from respective telephone sets to restrict NWD and ISD calling facilities. The Board also mentioned that the method of activating and deactivating the code is stated overleaf the monthly bill. So nice of them BTTB, however, did not mention what action it has taken against "some misguided people" and "some dishonest T&T employees for misusing ISD and NWD lines". These identified criminals have been extorting the subscribers as well as robbing the national treasury.

According to its recently-published 1997-98 Annual Report, BTTB earned Tk. 1245 crore against the target of Tk. 1475 crore during this fiscal year. "Some dishonest employees of T&T must have siphoned an unknown amount from the Tk. 230 crore shortfall during 1997-98. What could be the exact figure of this admitted robbery? Have the employees alone grabbed the entire amount? Why are their superiors mum on this issue? Any wild guess?

Governments may come and governments may go, but it has been business as usual with these "dishonest employees" and their mentors in BTTB. Despite having no allegiance to any political party, these parasites have been surviving and prospering under every regime in the name of trade unionism. They are highly sensitive to any probe and are equally insentive to the law of the land. They are also shielded from disciplinary measures, regardless of the magnitude of offence. Even the highest authority cannot apply them.

Zulfiqar Islam, an Assistant Divisional Engineer, was in charge of BTTB's Motijheel exchange in 1997. Being the country's largest commercial hub, Motijheel assumes a deserted look after sunset. Zulfiqar discovered a group of BTTB employees minting money namely through fax-phone shops by connecting them with someone else's telephone line after dusk. He conveyed this matter to the authorities but no action was taken. Finally, this stubborn public servant declared a crusade on his own. He devoted himself to developing a programme on Microsoft Excel for monitoring the call progress of each telephone in Motijheel. He spent countless extra hours, of course starving and getting tired after each working day. Entering the data of 20,000 telephone numbers of the Motijheel exchange was no joke.

Finally, he made it. Technology empowered Zulfiqar in monitoring the entire telephone network of Motijheel from his office. His surveillance software detected two groups of subscribers. The first group's call gets suspiciously low while the second group's call rises proportionately, which is abnormal when it comes to both the group's calling habit. Zulfiqar started checking if the second group of subscribers really made those calls. He found that all those numbers were rather 'out of order' when the abnormally-high calls were made. He started connecting the first group's phones and forced them into paying the bills they pirated from others. Zulfiqar also identified the real culprits, the BTTB employees, instrumental behind this fraud. Telephone pirates in Motijheel got alert and they started refusing the illegal services from BTTB employees. Eventually, all the telephones in Motijheel Exchange started functioning without any pilferage. BTTB's revenue in Motijheel hit all-time high and so did the anger of some BTTB employees against Zulfiqar.

One day, Zulfiqar found that the bill of the telephone bearing the number 9551319 remained unpaid for ten months. He immediately disconnected that line and it led to an 'explosion'. This telephone line was connected to BTTB's trade union office. The audacity of a petty government officer was unbearable for the union chief. He asked Zulfiqar to restore the connection, of course without paying the dues. On May 15, 1997, the outraged union boss sent six men from his squad and they attacked Zulfiqar inside the exchange room. Zulfiqar was sitting on the floor of the exchange room and repairing a device. An officer, appointed by the President of the republic who simply wanted to do his job, bathed in the pool of his own blood while on duty. Ignoring indiscriminate beating, the bleeding Zulfiqar could barely plead to his attackers to be careful about the fragile and invaluable equipment in the exchange room. Every BTTB telephone exchange is a key point installation (KPI) and guarded with armed police, but neither law nor its enforcers could protect Zulfiqar.

The case remains pending with the lower court and all the accused are on bail followed by their reinstatement in the service. Such gross violation of the service rule was noticed by the Prime Minister's office. Press secretary of the prime minister inquired about the affair from Secretary of the Ministry of Post and Telecom (MOPT) on 18 March 1998. He requested the Secretary to address four specific issues. First, probing the attack on Zulfiqar and informing the Prime Minister in detail. Second, apprising the Prime Minister of the reasons behind reinstatement of the attackers. Third, conducting a study on the software, which Zulfiqar developed to detect the call piracy. The fourth issue was rewarding the honest and dutiful officers like Zulfiqar. There is yet no indication of complying with these directives. The government, however, rewarded Zulfiqar by transferring him to Chittagong in a less significant position. The case he filed on May 15, 1997 is nearly ineffective due to his absence from Dhaka. Pressure is rather mounting on Zulfiqar to withdraw the case.

Patriots are to be excited and innocent subscribers are to be victims of BTTB. That is the message BTTB inserted between the lines of its recent announcement on call piracy. Its anti-piracy preventative campaign among the captive subscribers is a mockery while the bandits are poised to ambush anytime. Locking or unlocking one's telephone line is entirely the prerogative of the subscriber, and it, under no circumstances, is BTTB's business. BTTB's deliberate reluctance to safeguard its own dedicated workforce is equally reflected in its unwillingness to protect the subscribers. The government must take punitive action against these anti-state elements of BTTB, as admitted in its highly-publicised confessional statement. The ball is very much in the government's court.

The writer is a Research Analyst with EMC World Cellular Database in London.

Internet Banking
Thursday, 17 August 2000

Standard Chartered

Aftab Ul Islam, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, opens Standard Chartered Bank's first Internet banking service in the city on Thursday. Mamun Rashid, acting Chief Executive-Bangladesh of the bank, is also seen in the picture. — StanChart photo

StanChart starts Internet banking

Standard Chartered Bank has launched the first Internet Banking service in Bangladesh. The service was inaugurated by Aftab-ul-Islam, President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on Thursday.

Mamun Rashid, Acting Chief Executive, Bangladesh and Head of Corporate Banking of Standard Chartered Bank, and Nafees Khundker, Business Development Manager of Cash Management, also spoke on the occasion, says a press release.

In his address, DCCI President said that Internet would play a central role in the future of business across the world and congratulated the bank on being the first in Bangladesh to introduce Internet banking, showing once again its pioneering role in the banking industry.

Internet banking is the latest Cash Management offering from Standard Chartered Bank for its corporate and institutional banking customers, who can get comprehensive product information and a range of on-line services including account balance from bank's website www.standardchartered.com/ci.

Internet Banking customers will be given specific user IDs and confidential passwords to access the website.

Early closure of Sony Exhibition

Rang's Electronics Ltd has regretted the early closure of "Sony Exhibition 2000" due to unavoidable circumstances on Saturday, says a press release of the company.

The company expressed sympathies to its visitors and well-wishers and regretted the inconvenience caused due to early closure of the exhibition.

4th ONE Bank branch opens in Chittagong

ONE Bank Limited opened its fourth branch at Khatunganj in Chittagong on Thursday, says a press release of the bank.

It is the bank's second branch in Chittagong. The bank's Chairman Hefazatur Rahman inaugurated the branch at a ceremony held at the branch premises, which was attended by members of the Board of Directors, prominent business personalities and elite of the commercial capital.

Central Insurance declares 15pc dividend

Central Insurance Company (CIC) has declared a dividend of 15 per cent at its twelfth Annual General Meeting (AGM) at Sonargaon Hotel in the city Wednesday, says a press release.

Mir Rahmat Ali, chairman of the board of directors of the company, presided over the meeting, which adopted the directors' report, auditors' report and accounts for the year ending on 31 December, 1999.

During the year under review, the company earned a gross premium of Tk 105.68 million and settled gross claims of Tk 2.07 million. The pre-tax profit rose to Tk 16.03 million from Tk 15.41 million of 1998, while total assets of the company stood at Tk 393.57 million.

At the meeting, Mohammed Musa, Shahida Naznin, Md Yousuf Chowdhury, Md Shahjahan, Md Abu Taher Chowdhury, Md Nurul Islam, Shah Alam Chowdhury and AKM Azizur Rahman were re-elected directors from Group-A shareholders, while Umme Habiba Khanam, Nurun Nahar, Navila Chowdhury, Sarita Rahman were elected directors from Group-B shareholders.

IMF wants tough restrictions on its watchdog's functions

WASHINGTON, Aug 19: A watchdog office for the much-criticised International Monetary Fund should be up and running by next April, but the fund wants tough restrictions on what the new evaluation agency will be allowed to do, reports Reuters.

IMF documents released on Friday said the new Independent Evaluation Office should not investigate active IMF lending programmes to member states or look at policies under active discussion by the IMF board.

"There is broad agreement that the EVO must avoid interfering with ongoing operational activities, or micro-managing responsibilities in the institution," said a statement from IMF Managing Director Horst Koehler, who chaired on Aug 3 board meeting reviewing the watchdog proposal.

"Policies and procedures under active discussion in the Fund and current Fund programmes would not therefore be appropriate areas for EVO evaluation... The issue will be reviewed again before final decisions on the EVO are made."

The IMF, set up to rebuild the world financial system after World War II, came in for fierce criticism during the world financial crisis of 1997-99, accused of recommending inappropriate policies to countries teetering on the edge of financial disaster.

It says it changed task promptly to respond to those complaints and points to a remarkable turnaround in most of the countries swept into the crisis as proof that policies worked.

Checks and balances

An independent watchdog, part of a drive to increase transparency at the global lender, could provide a new set of checks and balances on IMF activities. But its strength will depend on the scope of its investigations and recommendations.

The World Bank, the IMF's sister organisation, already has an independent assessment unit, which earlier this year accused the bank of ignoring its own guidelines when it approved a controversial resettlement loan to China.

China refused to accept new conditions and announced it would fund the project without World Bank help.

If an IMF watchdog could not investigate "current fund programmes," it would not be able to look into sensitive projects until after a lending programme was complete.

Weekly ReadyCash Prize Winners

The latest draw of the fortunate prize winners took place yesterday at the Dhanmondi office of ReadyCash. M Mozahidul Islam, Vice President of American International Bangladesh Ltd (ReadyCash), announced the names of the lucky prize winners.

Prizes	Winners	Card No
Proshika Net connection and 10 hours browsing	Md Manjurul Hassan	4615
FedEx free shipment	M Mostafizur Rahman	4624
Lunch at Hotel La-Vinci	Israt Mahmud	4620
Stop 'N' Shop Gift box	Probin Dominic Costa	4609

ReadyCash encourages its cardholders to read The Daily Star every Sunday for a new listing of prizes.

CIC TWELFTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
সেন্ট্রাল ইন্স্যুরেন্স কোম্পানী লিমিটেড
CENTRAL INSURANCE COMPANY LTD
16 AUGUST, 2000 AT 3-30 P.M. AT PAN PACIFIC SONARGAON HOTEL, DHAKA

Mir Rahmat Ali, Chairman of Central Insurance Company Ltd (CIC), addresses the 12th AGM of the company. M A Malek, Md Abdul Maleque, Shah Alam Chowdhury, directors and ex-chairmen, Md Shahjahan, Director, and Md Ezhar Hossain, Managing Director (Current Charge), are also seen. — CIC photo



Hefazatur Rahman, Chairman of ONE Bank Limited, inaugurates the 4th branch of the bank at Khatunganj in Chittagong on Thursday. Also seen in the picture are Zahur Ullah, Vice Chairman (4th from left), Nurul Azim Chowdhury, Managing Director (2nd from right), and Directors Farzana Chowdhury, Mirza Ejaz Ahmed, Shafique Uddin, Saieed Bakht Mozumder and Md Idris. — ONE Bank photo

OPEC won't mull supply raise until Sept meet

Oil prices edge higher on low inventories

LONDON, Aug 18: Buoyant oil prices moved higher again yesterday, supported by widespread concern over oil stock levels and a conviction that OPEC will not consider raising supplies again until a September ministerial meeting, reports Reuters.

London Brent futures by the close were 29 cents higher at \$30.45 a barrel. US light added one cent to \$31.95.

Prices have risen sharply again in the past weeks because inventories, particularly in the giant US market, remain low.

US crude oil stocks, which fell to 24-year lows in early August, built modestly last week but remain nearly 33 million barrels, 10 per cent, below levels at the same time last year.

Distillate inventories, which include home heating oil, are 25 million barrels, or 18 per cent, below last year's levels.

OPEC President Ali Rodriguez of Venezuela said on Thursday any decision to lift output would be taken at the oil cartel's scheduled meeting on September 10.

On Friday, he reaffirmed the cartel's commitment to a price band mechanism by which an oil price over \$28 a barrel for 20 consecutive working days triggers an automatic increase of 500,000 barrels per day of cartel output.

Meanwhile, soaring oil prices helped push the US trade deficit to a record \$30.62 billion in June, dampening the benefit from stronger exports, as gaps with China and Canada swelled to record sizes.

The June shortfall between exports and imports grew by 1 per cent from a revised \$30.31 billion deficit in May, the Commerce Department said yesterday. The May figure was originally reported as a \$31.04-billion gap.

Analysts said the US economy, more vibrant than those of its key trade partners, was sucking in a growing volume of imports and that was unlikely to change until there was a convincing cooling in the pace of expansion.

TDLC to receive Tk 20cr term loan from UCBL

United Commercial Bank Ltd has signed an agreement with Industrial Development Leasing Company of Bangladesh Ltd, under which IDLC will receive Tk 20 crore term loan for lease financing in different sectors, says a press release.

Hamidul Huq, Managing Director (Current Charge) of United Commercial Bank Ltd, and M Aminul Islam, Managing Director of IDLC, signed the agreement on behalf of their respective financial institutions at UCBL board room recently. Senior executives and officials of both the organisations were present on the occasion.

The credit line will be utilised in the fields of leasing of plant and machinery, transport, professional equipment etc.

Speaking on the occasion, Hamidul Huq said as a leading private sector bank in the country, UCBL will continue to expand its investment portfolio to cater to the need of the entrepreneurs in various sectors for the country's socio-economic development.

Al Baraka Bank launches student savings scheme

Al Baraka Bank Bangladesh Limited has introduced student savings scheme for Bangladesh Bank Colony High School in Chittagong.

Dr Md Farashudin, Governor of Bangladesh Bank, inaugurated the scheme at a function in the port city on Wednesday, says a press release.

Kh Ibrahim Khaled, Deputy Governor, Bangladesh Bank, Anwar Ahmed, Executive President, Imamul Haque, Senior Executive vice president of Al Baraka Bank, students and guardians of the school attended the function.

The scheme is the first of its kind introduced by any bank in Bangladesh.

The main motive of the scheme is to help develop habit of small savings among school students.