Tech Focus

NCC: Localising global skills

TAHMINA SHAFIQUE

INFORMATION technology (IT) as a subject has become increasingly important to the students of Bangladesh. Today, Bangladeshi students look forward to achieving greater goals. As each day goes by, a career in any field requires IT skills. And careers directly linked with IT are truly challenging.

NCC (National Computing Centre) Education is the world's leading independent IT education exporting, testing and certification body. It has continually brought about new grounds to the IT education in its 35-year history. It has offered a wide range of globally-recognised IT education and training programmes.

Bangladeshi students can now obtain global skills locally, in an affordable price. The local institutions offering these courses are available in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi.

The director of NCC, Michael Haigh, was in Bangladesh in December to explore prospects of looking into the institutes and visiting the qualifications fair in the British Council.

A conversation with him in the British Council premises enabled the writer to have a deeper knowledge of the facilities provided by NCC.

On asking Michael Hagh about the professional development foundation, the reply was quite detailed, as he is the person who developed this curriculum. The unique IT professional foundation includes five courses. The two of the most interesting courses are the IT professional development for teachers and tech master.

Michael Haigh, director, NCC speaks at the 'Qualifications@UK Fair' held at the British Council

The 'IT professional development for teachers' has been designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of existing teachers by developing an understanding of the use of IT in the school environment. Now we can have all those long tiring history and geography classes in a different and interesting way and, of course, an IT way.

The IT professional development tech master consists of a port folio of standalone IT courses which are delivered and tested online. The courses are suitable for those, wishing to embark on a career in IT and IT professional wishing to upgrade their skills with the latest cutting edge technologies. This would definitely help students to brush off with their IT skills and of course obtain popular programming courses such as Java, Linux and XML.

The other courses are International foundation course for students who want to access higher degree, English language framework and International certificate in computer studies which provides a practical approach to basic IT principles and competence.

NCC provides diploma, advanced diploma, BSc Honours degrees in Computing and Information Systems, post graduate diploma in Strategic IT, MSc in Strategic Business IT and many more which are currently available in Bangladesh. The MSc in Strategic Business IT provides access to senior business roles. The post graduate diploma and follow-up on the Masters degree teaches the skills that are needed to become a senior IT business manager. So, all of these qualifications show employers that students are committed to a career in business IT and have the skills and knowledge required in achieving greater goals.

Michal Hagh also spoke about the newly introduced course in Bangladesh, titled 'International Diploma in E-Commerce' (IDEC). According to him E-Commerce is rapidly emerging as a major business requirement in the 21st Century. It is true that employers today are looking to recruit new employees who can exploit this arena of business. This innovative course has been developed to deliver graduates with the E-Commerce skills that are currently in demand. The course includes basic technology skills, web skills, E-Commerce skills and practical implementation.

He also shed light on the unique standard of qualification that is assured for the students acquiring the course locally. The very best of the teachers and staff faculty are recruited and various facilities are provided for the students locally. Furthermore the British Council conducts all of the examinations. The highest level of security and quality of service is ensured for all of these exams. The few institutions providing NCC courses are BIT, Daffodil Institute of IT, IBCS Primax Software, Soft-Ed, Neural etc.

On asking him about any distinction present by standard and degree held by students studying here and abroad the answer was positive. It is truly wonderful to know that now our students who don't have the ability to go abroad and study can actually gain the University degrees of NCC right here. NCC is connected to 60 Universities and Bangladeshi students can hold a degree of these Universities.

I was curious about how exactly NCC is able to look into each of the 45 countries they are operating in. It sounds like an impossible task to be able to give attention to each country. Well, once again Michal Hagh diminished this curiosity. They have someone to look into the operation systems in the institutions in each of these countries.

I also asked him about the facilities and scholarships provided by NCC. In response to my question he said that the candidates who are given scholarships are expected to pass the criteria of their assessment which includes the qualification, curricular activities etc. Every year a handful of students are given this unique scholarship. The competition is really difficult as it is in the International level. Three students from Bangladesh were given this prestigious scholarship.

It was nice to talk to Michael Hagh who along with his co-workers is doing a fantastic job. Their contribution to the country is worth appreciating. Today, we can look forward to more of the upcoming unique courses and we hope that with the increasing number of IT students, the IT world of our country will become even better and we will be able to build a beautiful future for our nation.

Tahmina Shafique works for the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD).

Tech News

HP lets its customers travel the world

FAIZUL A TANIM

TRAVEL the world with HP Grand Lucky Draw 2003' was a much-appreciated theme for HP's 2003 promotional activity. A prize giving ceremony of this mega promotion of the year, was held at a local restaurant in Dhaka on January 08.

The event was organised by Inpace Communications. Ten HP partner organisation representatives and Bob Ang, country sales manager, IPG, HP were present at the occasion. Bob along with other officials of the partner institutions then distributed prizes among the winners.

Kafil Uddin, assistant director, Department of Fisheries won the grand prize, a trip round the world air ticket. Other monthly prizewinners included S Talukder Milon, Mohammed Moniruzzaman and Mohammad Aminul Islam, who won Dhaka-Bangkok-Dhaka air tickets each whilst Mofakharul Islam, Makbul Elahi and Kawkub Ahmed won Dhaka-Kathmandu-Dhaka air tickets each.

While speaking to The Daily Star, Bob revealed that Bangladesh has a higher potential IT market. He was much impressed with the extent at which Technology is used now. On a question about the next step of HP, he referred to the first question and stated that, due to rapid advancement, HP will bring out new products shortly for the growing IT market of this developing nation.

It was known from the event that, in the personal systems category of HP products, handheld and portable PCs are number one while consumer and commercial desktops earned them second rating in the APEJ in IDC survey (IDC, Q103) and the pavilion is the best selling PC brand in the US. The HP desk jet printer in the imaging and printing category won an A+ rating on PC magazine's annual 'printer service and reliability survey' for the last eleven successive years.
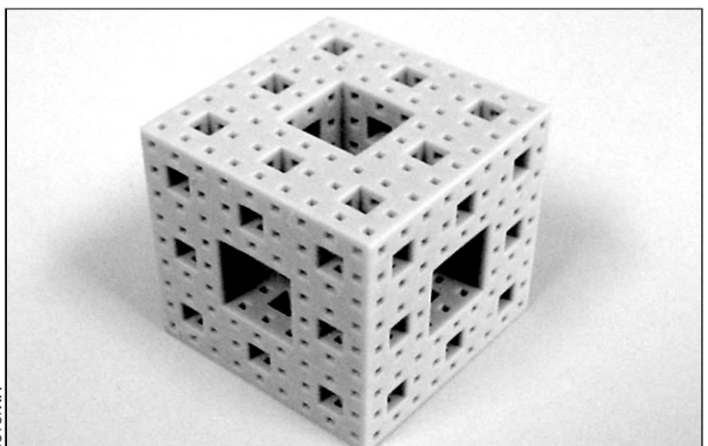
It was also added that HP's all-in-ones boosts of a market leadership position of 60% market share in the Asia pacific region while the monochrome printing market earned a 51% share.

HP is also named to have arranged many stirring events with its free helicopter ride at Fantasy Kingdom to celebrate their mega promotion. This promotion was marked as a continuance from sponsoring a Cricket world cup final ticket to South Africa last year.

Bob Ang, country sales manager, IPG, HP(L) along with the prizewinners and other HP officials at the prize giving ceremony.

Cube Wonder

A research group of Japanese scientists unveiled this 27mm cube with holes, made of epoxyline resin containing titanium oxide on January 07, which enables to trap electromagnetic waves inside the cube. The team, led by Japan's Osaka University, managed to trap electromagnetic waves of a certain frequency inside the cube, called a Menger sponge, for one-ten millionth of a second.

Best 10 Websites   Fun Stuff & Popular Websites - I

Laugh Lab
Get your giggle glands over to the laugh lab where you can submit & rate the world's funniest jokes with your smileometer.
URL: http://www.laughlab.co.uk/

Get Your Name on Mars
NASA will rocket express your ID to Mars for free if Scotty can get the event horizon plasma sail engine booted up.
URL: http://spacekids.hq.nasa.gov/2003/

Disney
Lots of top entertainment & online fun.
URL: http://www.disney.com/

GeoCaching
Popular GPS treasure hunt - WAP enabled.
URL: http://www.geocaching.com/

Rememory
Share your memories & become a part of history.
URL: http://www.rememory.com/

Cybertown
Good collection of virtual games.
URL: http://www.cybertown.com/

BrainPOP
Animated educational resources, clever multimedia, good fun & excellent quizzes.
URL: http://www.brainpop.com/

Shockwave.com
Interactive amusement park from Macromedia - fun stuff.
URL: http://www.shockwave.com/

Questacon
Great fun zones.
URL: http://www.questacon.edu.au/

MediaTrip
Fun animation, comedy & movies on demand.
URL: http://www.mediatrip.com/

Tech Fair

The final curtain@CityIT 2003

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

THE CityiT fair 2003 was crowded with enthusiastic visitors and customers during the last week. The stalls were filled with people from all ages, who did not want to miss the final opportunity to buy their favourite products considering the glamorous discounts that each stall had to offer.

A discussion titled 'Medical Science and Computers' was held on January 5 having Dr Arup Ratan Chowdhury as the main speaker. "Computers have aided medical science with better medicine processing and manufacture techniques," said Dr Chowdhury. "Furthermore, having computers, the risks of performing operations during certain dangerous situations have been reduced and the efficiency of medical treatments has increased," he added.

"I am excited about the pen-drive that I have just bought," said Zulfikar Ali, a 20 year old tech-freak who studies at Notredame College. "I cannot believe that the price was actually 3,100 taka for a 128 megabyte pen-drive," he cried out in excitement.

The discussion for the following day was on 'Religion & Computer' having Dr Shamsher Ali as the main speaker. "As computer is the embedded instrument of our daily life, it could be efficiently used toward the study of religion and other spiritual aspects of life," said Dr Ali.

A debate on 'Computer Techonology has enriched our culture' was held on the 9th day of the fair between the students of Government Laboratory School and Badda Alatunnessa School & College. A discussion on 'Media and Computers' was also held at the same day.

More than 17,000 people crowded the venue on January 8. Their main focus was on computers, which were being sold at a price as low as 20,000 taka.

Another debate on 'The role of the government is most important in the development of the IT sector' was held between the students of BCIC college, Mirpur and Dhaka Polytechnic Institute.

A drawing competition was held on the second last day of the fair having the topic 'The fair that I have visited' participated by physically challenged children aging between seven to twelve years.

More than 25,000 visitors attended the fair on the last day. The fair continued till 9:30p.m. A raffle draw was held at around 10 PM. Each winners of the draw won vouchers worth Tk. 2000.

The organisers informed that tickets worth taka four lac were sold at the fair. More than 5 thousand units of computers were sold from different stalls at the fair. The fair netted a business of around Taka 15 crore. The sales and business were the same like last years, but the enthusiastic response and participation by the visitors at the fair and different events, were the special aspects of this year's fair.

Sleek and flat Philips LCD monitors attracted a huge crowd at the fair

Tech News

Strong global demand for Oracle HRMS

STAR TECH DESK

ON January 12, Oracle Corporation announced that companies across the world, such as 7-Eleven, Inc., KPMG in Belgium, and Oregon Health and Science University, selected Oracle® Human Resources Management System (HRMS) to help improve workforce efficiencies, reduce operating costs and provide web-based self-service capabilities for employees and management, says a press release.

"As companies strive to squeeze costs and inefficiencies out of day-to-day operations, HR departments are increasingly being tasked to streamline HR processes," said Jim Holincheck, research director at Gartner. "Software applications that span the entire HR organisation, and integrate with the numerous departments affecting HR, are helping companies automate processes and make more informed decisions for true workforce optimisation."

7-Eleven, Inc. is using Oracle Human Resources and Oracle Payroll to eliminate hundreds of mainframe applications and significantly reduce customization by relying on standard HR business processes. Leveraging Oracle HRMS, the $33 billion convenience store pioneer anticipates improving HR processing speed and employee productivity.

"We believe that using the Oracle HR Payroll management system is a 'best-practice' approach to simplifying our US and Canadian HR and payroll administrative processes," said Keith Morrow, chief information officer and vice president of Information Systems for 7-Eleven, Inc. "This system will reduce paperwork, and save time and money. The Oracle HR Payroll management system also improves the accuracy and security aspects of the myriad of tasks involved in adding new people, processing payrolls and maintaining accurate employee information. Instead of spending time handling employee address changes, our HR and payroll staffs can focus on higher value activities, such as training, career development programs and performance management."

Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU), a university dedicated to improving human health, is saving more than $200,000 annually in recruiting costs by automating its hiring cycle with Oracle iRecruitment. OHSU recently expanded its Oracle HRMS footprint with Oracle Self-Service HR, providing OHSU's 11,000 employees with simple web-based access to manage their personal information and activities such as benefits administration, payroll and tax administration, expense reports and competency profiles.

"Oracle HRMS has helped us simplify our daily HR operations," said Anna Sestrich, director of human resources at OHSU. "It has automated several basic administrative human resource tasks and empowered employees to manage their personal information, freeing up time for our HR staff to focus their efforts on more strategic endeavors."

In addition to 7-Eleven, Inc., KPMG in Belgium and Oregon Health & Science University, the following customers have recently selected or implemented Oracle HRMS: British Telecom, California Eastern Laboratories, COSMOTE Mobile Telecommunications, Cyprus Telecommunication Authority, Dresser Industries, Dubai Duty Free, Egyptian Holding Co., L.G.Philips LCD, National Commerce Bank, Qatar Foundation, Sanmina-SCI, and Vimpelcom.

As part of the Oracle E-Business Suite, Oracle HRMS helps companies manage all aspects of the workforce, including payroll and expense management, recruiting and hiring, benefits administration, training, and performance management. While other HR applications provide limited snapshots of the workforce, Oracle HRMS integrates with all business areas to provide a comprehensive view of the workforce and performance in the enterprise. The improved visibility and analysis capabilities help companies make better HR decisions, such as when to hire key skill areas based on predicted future shortfalls and demand, for improved performance and cost savings.

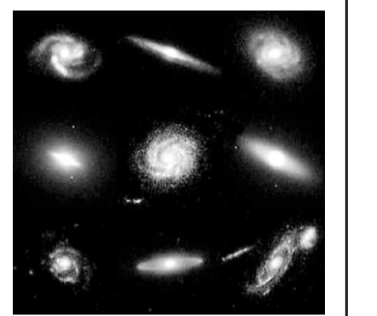## Tech News

Mosaic of 10,000 galaxies

REUTERS, Atlanta

THE newest camera on the Hubble Space Telescope has created an unprecedented image of a huge hunk of the sky, including at least 10,000 galaxies, which could help determine how our own Milky Way evolved, astronomers said on Thursday.

The new mosaic is the largest color image ever made by the orbiting telescope, covering an area of the sky about the apparent size of the full moon. This may not sound big, but it is 150 times the size of images made by an earlier survey of galaxies known as the Hubble Deep Field image.

In this case, the size of the picture is important, because narrow, if deep, images of the cosmos can give a misleading impression of what is out there.

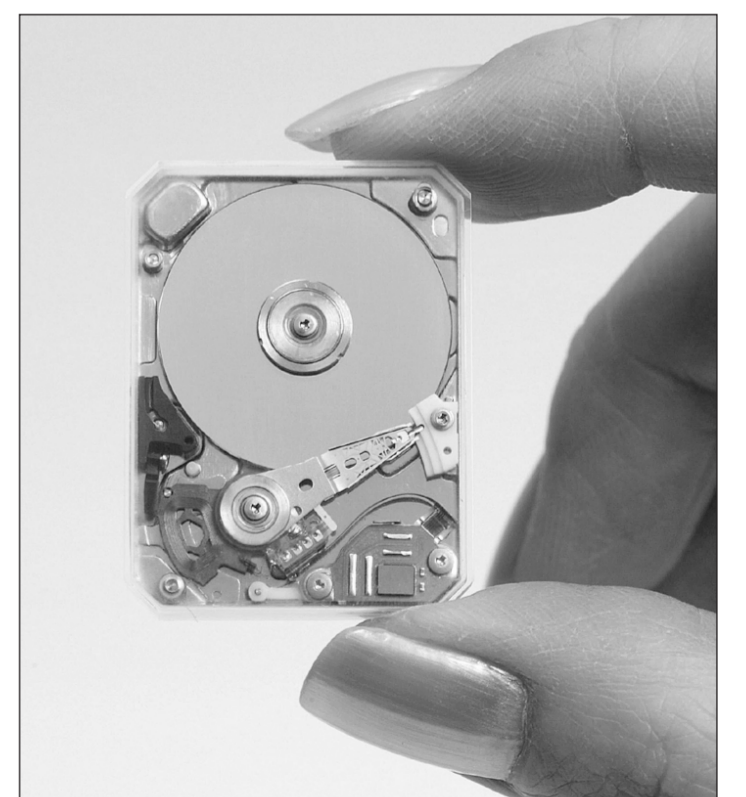The new image, created with Hubble's Advanced Camera for Surveys, is a patchwork of 63 squares

A variety of galaxies are seen in this image made from the larger image

showing the area around the constellation Fornax (The Laboratory Furnace) in the southern hemisphere.

Looking closely with high resolution, scientists found detailed pictures of some 10,000 galaxies, and expect there are thousands of other, fainter galaxies in the same field of view.

Images are available online at http://www.mpia-hd.mpg.de/homes/bell/press_release/press.html

Photo Tech

PHOTO: AFP

Hand-out picture released on January 8, shows a 0.85-inch hard disk drive (HDD), the first hard drive to deliver multi-gigabyte date storage to a sub-one-inch from factor, developed by Japan's Toshiba Corporation. Toshiba expects to start sampling the new drive in the summer of 2004 and to start mass production in autumn 2004.