

Tech Fair

A gala of innovations

5th Softfair 2004

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

THE three-day '5th Softfair 2004' started on March 25 at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel to give exposure to innovative projects including robotics, specialised software, animation and many more.

Organised by North South University Computer Club (NSUCC), the fair ushered in a hail of compliments and encouragement for the aspiring computer science students.

For the first time in five years, NSUCC ventured into ensuring the participation of corporate IT firms in the fair, along with the usual participation of students from the educational institutions. The fair's motto "Download the future tech" became quite appropriate as most stalls were exhibiting futuristic software -- their innovations in robotics, 3D games, application software and so on.

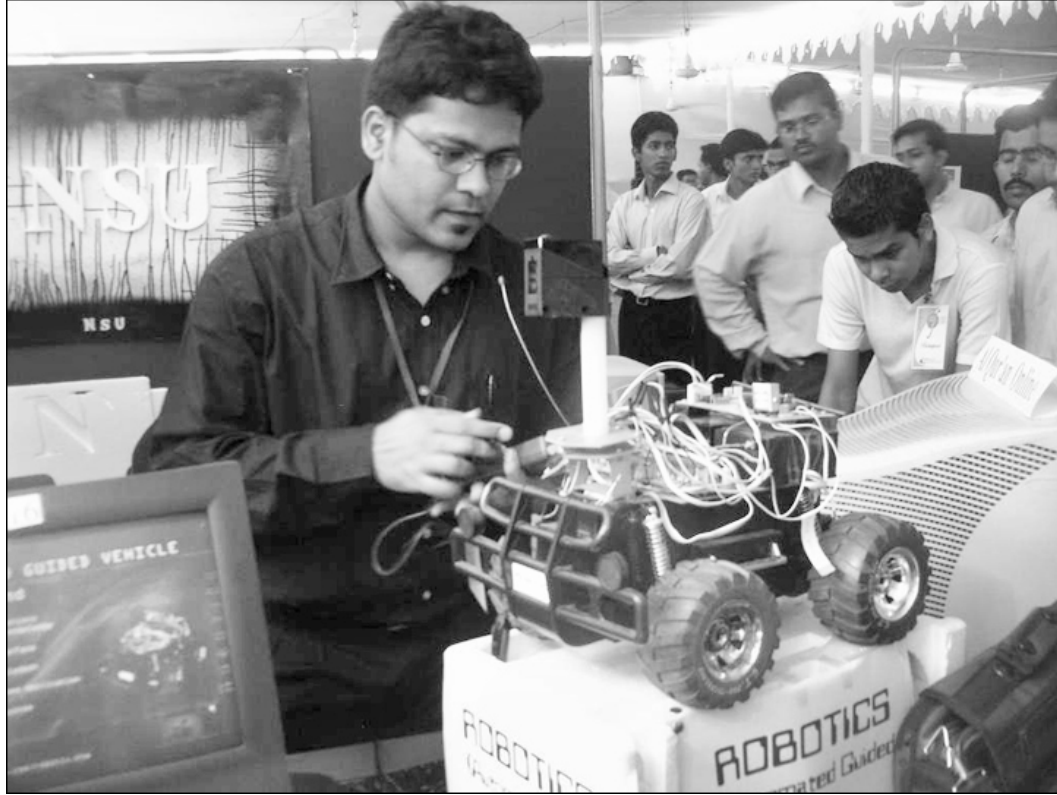
Dr M Asaduzzaman, chairman of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, inaugurated the fair. The fair sported a list of more than 40 participants that included various public and private universities, software and game developers, IT training institutes and pro-

fessional IT companies. The participants were competing in two different levels -- universities and corporate level, each consisting of three prizes.

The stalls, received huge response throughout the fair. One of the popular stall was the North South University's robotics project -- 'Automated Guided Vehicle' --. This contraption is the brainchild of Shofiul Alam, a CSE student. A car that moves automatically and can change its directions, when it senses obstacles. The group from the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), with their project 'Online Automated Digital Telescope' received similar response.

The fair, also had its share of demos and full version 3D games such as 'Ronn' -- developed by NSU CSC department students, 'Mritupuri' by Department of Computer Science, University of Dhaka and 'Arunodoyer Agnishikha' by Shom Computers Ltd. Various multimedia software and tutorials were also being sold at some of the stalls.

The audience appreciated the cyber café management software -- 'Cyber Café Manager' de-



NSU student Shofiul Alam with his award winning project -- 'Automated Guided Vehicle'

veloped by the students of Shahjalal University of Science & Technology. This software is capable of solving most of the everyday problems faced by cyber café owners to manage their customers and cash flow.

The fair also had everyday seminars. The award giving and closing ceremony was held on March 27. Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan, minister, Ministry of Science and Information & Communication Technology handed over the awards as chief guest. The minister complimented the efforts and projects of the students. He stressed on the point

that the information and communication technology sector of Bangladesh is still not in tune with the business sector of the nation.

"We have to market our solutions and ideas before they become extinct in the global IT scene," said Khan. "Hopefully with the cooperation with the business sector, the IT sector of Bangladesh would finally be seeing better days," he added. The minister also promised the aid of concerned authorities for the next '6th Softfair 2005', which is expected to be held at an international level.

Seminars@Softfair

SAAD BIN FAZLE HAMMADI

Journalism in the 21st century and ICT

Technology makes media what it is; it has helped journalism break the distance barriers and opened a portal of unlimited information. To throw some light on the two indisputable aspects key to information flow, Bangladesh ICT Journalist Forum (BIJF) organised a seminar on 'Journalism in 21st Century and ICT' on the first day of the '5th Softfair 2004' organised by North South University (NSU) on March 25 at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

Abeer Hasan, assistant editor, Daily Janakantha, BIJF President Ahmedul Islam Babu, its General Secretary MA Haq Anu and Golap Munir, editor-in-charge, The Monthly Computer Jagat spoke.

"To give journalism the benefits of technology, internet service has to be improved. Bangladesh railway has a 1,800-kilometre fiber optic network throughout the country, which GrameenPhone and Bangladesh Railway use. But this internal high-speed network is of no use without the gateway connection. The delayed decision of getting connected to the fiber optic channel is making us suffer with low speed internet service," said Abeer Hasan.

On March 27, Bangladesh signed a contract with 15 other foreign telecom operators to hook up to submarine cable. The service is expected to be available by mid-2005. This installation will provide us with about 10-gigabytes/second data transfer

rate, which would be 68 times the current speed.

Mobility is one of the key factors in journalism that has to be ensured. The seminar focused on such important factors in modern journalism.

WSIS Consultation: Roadmap to Tunisia

A seminar on World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) consultation and roadmap to Tunisia was on Softfair 2004's second-day agenda. Syed Marghub Morshed, chairman, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), chaired the seminar while Abdullah H Kafi, member, World IT and Services Alliance (WITSA) public policy committee, Reza Selim, member secretary of Bangladesh working group on WSIS and Professor Faruk Ahmed of computer science and engineering department, North South University were present as special guests.

The seminar focused on the initiatives that the country should take for developing the ICT sector and the roadmap to the next WSIS at Tunisia in 2005.

The first phase of the summit at Geneva pointed a declaration of principles and a plan of action. "We must take every step for developing the ICT sector and prepare ourselves with more skilled workforce for the next journey to Tunisia for WSIS," said Morshed.

He added media is one of the most important role-players to push the ICT sector. "We have to be proactive. We must remove the digital divide as soon as possible."

Global Opportunity for Youths in ICT

A seminar on 'Global opportunity for youth in ICT' was held on the third and closing day of the fair. It focused on the youth rights and opportunities that could be a high point in forming a nation treasured with education and knowledge-based society.

Syed Jagul Pasha, secretary, Bangladesh National Commission for Unesco, was present as the chief guest at the seminar along with special guests Prof. Fayyaz Khan, head of CSE department, University of Asia Pacific, SM Iqbal, president, Bangladesh Computer Samity, and Akhter-uz-Zaman, president, Bangladesh Youth Forum (BYF).

"Poverty is the denial of basic human rights. Education has become a global product. It is possible to access global education through ICT," said Pasha.

"The youth can make the most positive contribution to the society. Computer education should be made compulsory from the preliminary stage of education. It is our duty to motivate youths in ICT education," said Fayyaz.

Iqbal suggested developing an online and personal discussion group where youths could share their views with senior and professional experts.

The seminars made the three-day Softfair 2004 an eye-opener. It tried to shed light on some important issues and the present status of the ICT sector.

Inside X-43A

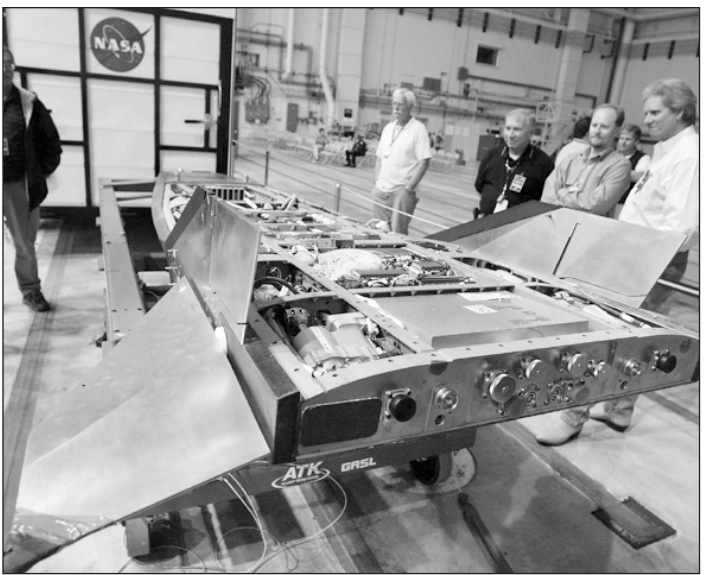


PHOTO: AFP

Visitors examine the third supersonic X-43A research vehicle (without its booster rocket) at its hangar at NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base in California's Mojave Desert on March 27, after the successful launch and test flight of the second X-43A research vehicle.

Best 10 Websites

- MusicMatch**
Many songs - site in six languages.
URL: <http://www.musicmatch.com/>
- Real**
450,000+ Artists - WMA & AAC.
URL: <http://www.real.com/>
- iTunes**
Apple's excellent music download collection in AAC format for the iPod music player.
URL: <http://www.apple.com/itunes/>
- Find Sounds**
Search the web for sound effects & musical instrument samples.
URL: <http://www.findsounds.com/>
- SoundsOnline**
Source for royalty-free sounds.
URL: <http://www.soundsonline.com/>
- SoundShopper**
Popular source of royalty free music.
URL: <http://www.soundshopper.com/>
- BigFishAudio.com**
Sample libraries & loops.
URL: <http://www.bigfishaudio.com/>
- Free Music Downloads**
From Sony Music.
URL: <http://www.sonymusic.com>
- Sony Music**
- iMusic**
Free music downloads, MP3's, music chat & more.
URL: <http://www.imusic.com/>
- Sound Library**
Links to more free sound sample libraries & sound utilities.
URL: <http://www.midworld.com/>

Tech Fair

'CeBIT Germany' window on options that many

Local software firms catch a glimpse of EU market

MIR MONAZ HAQUE, Berlin

'CeBIT Germany', the world's largest information technology trade fair, opened its doors to an expected 680,000 visitors from more than 110 countries. Nearly 6,500 exhibitors came to the trade fair city Hanover to meet the IT experts and users from across the world.

Bangladesh participated in the fair for the fourth time. Eight Bangladeshi companies, under the tutelage of Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), displayed their software and gave an idea of where Bangladesh's ICT sector stands at the moment.

Digital technology, an important area of information technology, is making a major impact on everyday lives. Wireless product information displays on shopping trolleys; mobile phones, which transmit a patient's heart data in real time to his cardiac specialist; smart phones with a complete array of multimedia functions; travel information and bookings via the Internet -- the list seems never-ending.

CeBIT Hannover 2004 (March

1824) gave the glimpse of how ground-breaking IT-enabled technologies will change the way we live, forever. The slogan -- 'Tomorrow we'll buy differently, sell differently, live differently and work differently' couldn't be more right-sounding.

Over a sprawling 334,168 square metre-area, as many as 6,411 exhibitors from 64 countries presented a complete spectrum of products and systems.

This time CeBIT focus fell on the distributive trades and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The new SME Forum in CeBIT 2004 is a magnet for small and medium-sized enterprises with a goal to foster contacts with exhibitors whose products and services are targeted specifically at SMEs.

CeBIT 2004 has showcased state-of-the-art products and services for e-business, e-governance, e-banking and data security. In addition, the extensive programme of lectures, symposia, group presentations and special displays at CeBIT 2004 gave a unique insight into what's available on the world market and into the ground-



breaking technologies that are just around the corner.

IT Market in Germany and Europe

Highest percentage of technology-orientated investment has been done in the most western European countries and is the

gateway to the growing markets of the economic region South-East Asia, especially to Bangladesh.

Expansion of EU also provides new opportunities for software vendors in the not-so-distant future. There are some spots of visible demand in certain areas of the global market

like integration software and security related technologies

The Bangladeshi companies that participated at CeBIT and presented a wide variety of enterprise software products are Anupam Infotek Ltd., BCom Online Ltd., Leadsoft Bangladesh Ltd., Southtech Limited,

TechnoHaven and SIPPO. Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) was also there at CeBIT Germany.

The Ministry of Commerce has a plan to open an ICT business centre in Germany to promote Bangladesh software exports to Europe. This would be the second ICT business centre after the Silicon Valley Centre, which opened last year at Santa Clara.

An ICT business centre in Germany will provide information and guidance to Bangladeshi companies and offer a shared office and amenities such as meeting room and broadband access in Germany in order to provide a physical presence in major German and European market.

Economic and commercial relations between Bangladesh and Germany have widely expanded especially since the 90s. Yet a large unexplored scope exists in the area of software development and IT for further expansion and strengthening.

The author is a freelance journalist.

Photo Tech

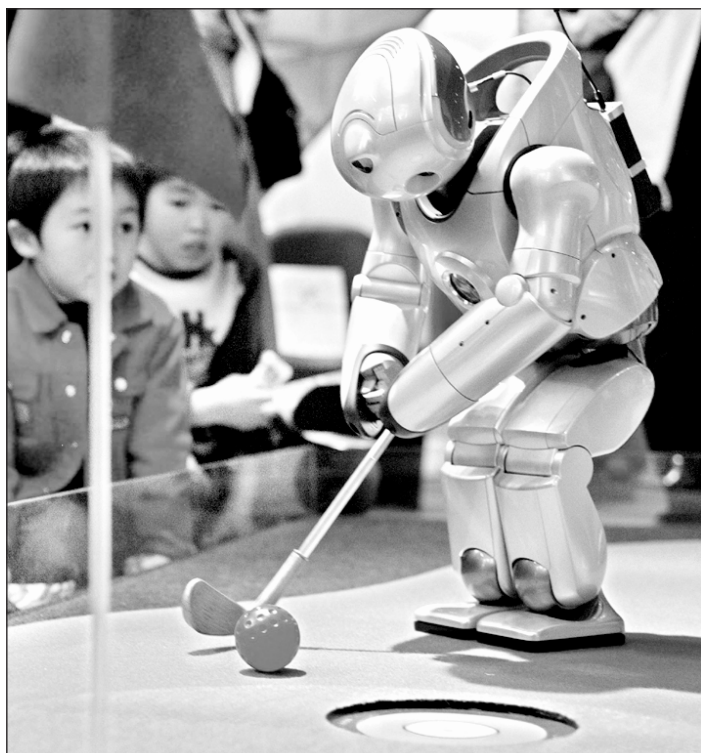


PHOTO: AFP

The two-legged humanoid robot Qrio (R) from Japan's Sony Corporation puts the ball during a demonstration at the company showroom in Tokyo on March 28. Qrio plays golf and soccer as a main attraction for weekend visitors to the showroom.

Tech News

Simputer for poor goes on sale

BBC ONLINE

A cheap handheld computer designed by Indian scientists has been launched after a delay of nearly three years.

The team first came up with the idea for the Simputer in 2001 to help India's poor join the internet age.

But development of the computer was hampered by lack of investment and by little interest in the idea from computer manufacturers.

The Simputer was officially launched on Friday and the basic model costs around \$240.

Cheap and accessible

The Simputer is the first computer to be designed and manu-

factured in India.

It was developed by scientists and engineers at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore who were looking for a way of taking the internet revolution to India's rural masses.

Only nine in every 1,000 Indians own a computer, mainly because the machines are simply too expensive. The Simputer was designed to provide cheap and accessible computing on the go.

But it had a troubled time moving out of the development labs and into commercial production.

In the end, the government-owned Bharat Electronics agreed to manufacture the handheld.

The device goes on sale in



The company behind the device hopes to sell 50,000 in a year

April and the backers of the project hope to sell 50,000 in the first year.

Branded as the Amida Simputer, the handheld comes in three versions. The basic model has a monochrome screen, a 206MHz processor and 64MB of memory. It also has an internal microphone, speakers and a battery that

lasts for six hours.

People can use the Simputer to surf the net, send e-mails or organise their finances, using a stylus to write on screen. It also comes with software to let users type notes and letters in Hindi and Kannada.

In order to keep costs down, the computer uses the Linux operating system.