Tech Event

SANOG V, an expectation fulfilled

Eight day-long network gala comes to an end

RIDWAN A KABIR

HOSTED by the Internet Service Provider Association of Bangladesh (Ispab) and conducted by the South Asian Network Operators Group (SANOG), the exclusive SANOG V programme came to a successful end with the certificate distribution ceremony at a city hotel on February 13. Minister for Science and ICT, Moin Khan, handed out the awards as chief guest.

"It can now be claimed that the event was a success," said Sumon Ahmed Sabir, convener of SANOG V, citing that the number of participation at the workshops and tutorials reached around two hundred in total. Previously, network professionals from outside the host-country mostly attended SANOG programmes. According to Sumon, in case of SANOG V it was just the reverse.

It should be mentioned that SANOG V programme included a five-day long channel of workshops offered on topics like 'Cisco ISP Routing and BGP Multi-homing', 'APNIC DNS' and 'IP/NSP Security'. A two-day long tutorial session on 'routing', 'VOIP basics and SIP deployment' and 'IPv6' followed by a conference on 'infrastructure and security', 'emerging technologies' and regional updates was also in SANOG V's schedule.

Akhtaruzzaman Monju, president, ISPAB and director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), holds high hopes on the follow-up activities of the trained population. "We may expect very well that they will get hundred others trained and this process will grow internally," Monju said. He also mentioned about the digital divide that exists within the infrastructure of the nation. "There is a sheer difference in attitude between a local graduate from Dhaka and a graduate from any other location of the country," he says, claiming that this is the consequence of lack of knowledge-sharing as well as missing the right exposure, and the 'right exposure' may as well be the internet, which is the globally considered infinite encyclopaedia of knowledge. "What answer do we have for the rural graduate, who may have had the right but untapped talent we needed, when he asks us who was responsible for not providing all the facilities that were available here in Dhaka?" he puts forth, while referring that it is high time to make internet available in every corner of the country.

The president also mentioned how software development, which attains most of the interests of local experts these days, is not the only thing that should be in focus towards the development of an ICT-driven nation. "Knowledge sharing is the key-factor in developing an entire nation, and without right accessibility to the net, this will remain a volatile idea as it has always been," Monju further added, emphasising on how more efforts should be made on building better grounds for data-security, sharing, and optimised networking, which in turn will also contribute towards the economical growth. Monju also mentioned the help from the foreign ministry for arranging visas for two of the trainers.

"If such seminars are held three to four times a year, and if each one allows at least 5 percent knowledgebase update, then we may be looking at 20 percent technical knowledgebase growth per annum," he said.

"Though equipped with almost only the basic level of routing knowledge, they have responded well enough to take it to the higher grounds," says Ananth Nagrajan, programme chair, SANOG V, mentioning how in due time these trained network professionals may effectively bring in more experts towards the telecommunication community. Nagrajan also mentions that the trainee population had lacked exposure to the emerging technologies needed to build a stable infrastructure. He hopes that with such hands-on training from the experts occurring more often in Bangladesh and with the idea of having its own fiber-optic submarine cable backbone, the country will not take long before it joins the race of emerging as a new cyber nation.

"Free flow of interests among the trainees is rare in modern times," said David Meyer, director of the University of Oregon's Advanced Network Technology Centre, and the keynote speaker at the opening planery of the conference. He was referring to how the trainees interacted with each other's problems while the tutorials were being held. "This scenario is much like the United States fifteen years back," Meyer states, while reassuring that it will not take Bangladesh too long to overcome the lag. "The task is to give Bangladeshi network professionals and technologists the right exposure by the right hands and you have yourself an IT-oriented nation."

The organisers hope that the Government will step in more effectively to arrange such seminars and not entirely leave the arrangements on the private sector. SANOG V was entirely sponsored by local and international organisations, with no financial support from the local government.

"Either we need to have better trainers from abroad, like this time, or we need them to take us abroad through scholarship programmes, so that we may update our technology knowledgebase and apply it back home," said one of the trainees, Naushad Ahmed, director, System Administration, Bijoy Online, who also holds 7 years of local experience in networking. Once the ICT ministry steps in to sending IT professionals for international training, the cost of such attempts is also expected to lower effectively.

One of the more important topics held at the tutorials was on 'dynamic routing' which is expected to increase connectivity on all internal routing and hence claim an increase in internet exchange. "Till now we were using static routing techniques, but now we learned about dynamic routing, which can improve the scenario, once implemented" said Mainul Islam, system manager, Alcatel (Bangladesh), another trainee at SANOG V. Like many other from the group attending the tutorials, Islam also hopes on developing a stronger internal networking system followed by establishments of servers from international domains such as Yahoo or Hotmail. "If we become successful on assuring a secured and faster network, that day will not be too far," he added.

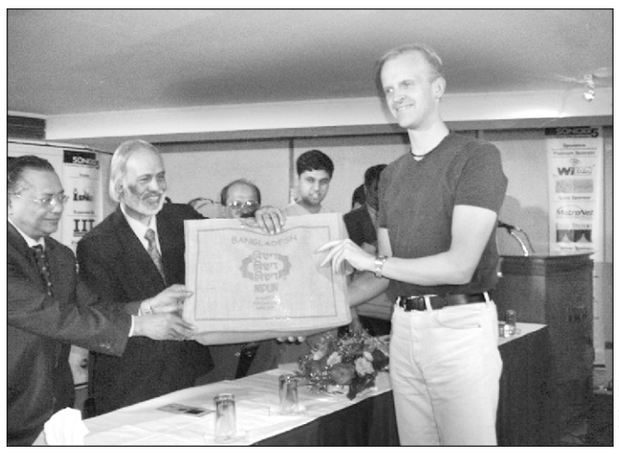
"We have had very well-responding groups of people who attended the workshops," states Gaurav Raj Upadhaya, Nepal Internet Exchange, one of the trainers for SANOG V. He also mentioned how the trainees updated themselves with their acquired knowledge from the tutorials when they went home. "They really did their homework before they came in the next day," Gaurav says, and this meant the trainees put in efforts to learn what they were offered.

Despite the limitations of time and technical specifications available, Cisco Systems provided instrumentations worth USD 25,000 for the SANOG V programme.

Certificates, declaring successful completion of 'Cisco ISP Routing and BCD Multi-homing Workshop', were distributed among the network professionals, who attended the training sessions, under the assembly of SANOG and ISPAB. SANOG VI is the next SANOG programme in line after this. It will be hosted by Bhutan Telecom and will be held at Thimphu in July.

A tutorial in progress

PHOTO: STAR



Philip Smith, senior executiver engineer, CISCO Systems, receiving a souvenir from Moin Khan at the concluding conference.

PHOTO: STAR

Tech News

A promising web portal

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

THE popularisation of web portals are encouraging web developers of the nation to live up to standards of the growing demands from various sectors. The developers of one such portal, edubangladesh.com, claim it to be the first education based portal of the nation. Aimed towards providing accurate data on the functionality, lists, and ranking of academic institutions the portal also includes news, job vacancies, useful links to other education-based sites and portals.

As most companies and individuals of the business sector are trying to make an impression on the foreign and local market through glamorous and informative web sites and portal, edubangladesh.com proves that institutions and individuals involved in the education sector are almost at par with them.

"The portal was developed primarily for informative purposes," said Zahidul Alam, Managing Director and Webmaster of edubangladesh .com. "We also plan to generate some revenue as well through sections like Tutor solutions and Advertisements in the near future," he added.

The navigation for the portal is fairly simple with the interesting options like *Chat*, *Forum*, *E-book*, *library* & *Classifieds*. Even though the chat option may seem redundant for a portal to most browsers but the other options like *forum, E-book, Library* and *classified* will be quite helpful to the browsers interested to learn. These options will become more helpful if the developers and administrators of the portal maintain and update the portal on a regular basis.

The usual options, which a browser is likely to find at an education-based site, are all present in the portal. There are lists of local and foreign universities, schools and colleges and includes links to their home sites. Ranking of institutions may be quite useful to students seeking admission to a good university, or parents looking for a good school to admit their children to.

The *Information Desk* is a informative part of the portal consisting of useful statistical data, database and links to Geographic Information System (GIS) and enrollment of students in particular institutions.

Other interesting items of the portal are the *voting section*, *News Headlines, Online Tutor Solutions, Education based job news* and *Open Column.*

The portal still needs a lot of 'brushing up'. Most links do not work properly.

As the portal is centered towards education, its users will mostly be students, parents and teachers. The amount of syntax and spelling mistakes the portal currently has may act as 'a thorn' as far as the portal being accepted by these groups of people are concerned.

With improvement in the said areas, and the initiation of other sections, like *University Features, Books Update* and *Business Universities* the portal can become a promising tool.

"The forthcoming features will be added soon along with the rectification of the mistakes," said Zahid while asked.

Tech News

Inventor Kurzweil aiming to live forever

AP, *Wellesley*

RAY Kurzweil doesn't tailgate. A man who plans to live forever doesn't take chances with his health on the highway, or anywhere else.

As part of his daily routine, Kurzweil ingests 250 supplements, eight to 10 glasses of alkaline water and 10 cups of green tea. He also periodically tracks 40 to 50 fitness indicators, down to his "tactile sensitivity." Adjustments are made as needed.

"I do actually fine-tune my programming," he said.

The famed inventor and computer scientist is serious about his health because if it fails him he might not live long enough to see humanity achieve immortality, a seismic development he predicts in his new book is no more than 20 years away.

It's a blink of an eye in history, but long enough for the 56-year-old Kurzweil to pay close heed to his fitness. He urges others to do the same in "Fantastic Voyage: Live Long Enough to Live Forever."

The book is partly a health guide so people can live to benefit from a coming explosion in technology he predicts will make infinite life spans possible.

Kurzweil writes of millions of blood cell-sized robots, which he calls "nanobots," that will keep us forever young by swarming through the body, repairing bones, muscles, arteries and brain cells. Improvements to our genetic coding will be downloaded via the Internet. We won't even need a heart.

The claims are fantastic, but Kurzweil is no crank. He's a recipient of the $500,000 Lemelson-MIT prize, which is billed as a sort of Academy Award for inventors, and he won the 1999 National Medal of Technology Award. He has written on the emergence of intelligent machines in publications ranging from Wired to Time magazine. The Christian Science Monitor has called him a "modern Edison." He was inducted into the Inventors Hall of Fame in 2002. Perhaps the MIT graduate's most famous inventions is the first reading machine for the blind that could read any typeface.

During a recent interview in his company offices, Kurzweil sipped green tea and spoke of humanity's coming immortality as if it's as good as done. He sees human intelligence not only conquering its biological limits, including death, but completely mastering the natural world.

"In my view, we are not another animal, subject to nature's whim," he said.

Critics say Kurzweil's predictions of immortality are wild fantasies based on unjustifiable leaps from current technology.

Kurzweil says his critics often fail to appreciate the exponential nature of technological advance, with knowledge doubling year by year so that amazing progress eventually occurs in short periods.

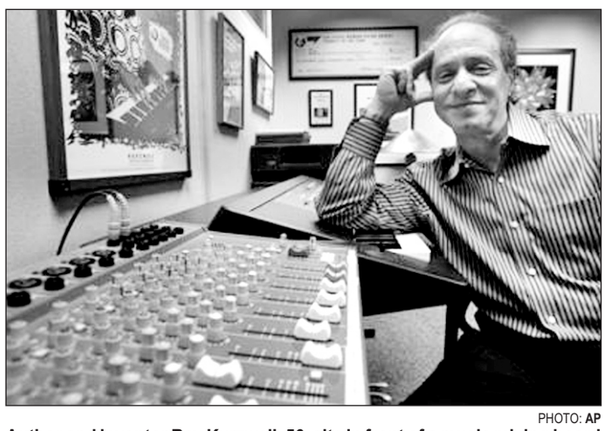


PHOTO: AP

Author and inventor Ray Kurzweil, 56, sits in front of a music mixing board in his office, in Wellesley, Mass., on January 12.

His predictions, Kurzweil said, are based on carefully constructed scientific models that have proven accurate. For instance, in his 1990 book, "The Age of Intelligent Machines," Kurzweil predicted the development of a worldwide computer network and of a computer that could beat a chess champion.

"It's not just guesses," he said. "There's a methodology to this."

Kurzweil's been thinking big ever since he was little. At age 8, he developed a miniature theater in which a robotic device moved the scenery. By 16, the Queens, N.Y., native built his own computer and programmed it to compose original melodies.

His interest in health developed out of concern about his own future. Kurzweil's grandfather and father suffered from heart disease, his father dying when Kurzweil was 22. Kurzweil was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in his mid-30s.

After insulin treatments were ineffective, Kurzweil devised his own solution, including a drastic cut in fat consumption, allowing him to control his diabetes without insulin.

His rigorous health regimen is not excessive, just effective, he says, adding that his worst sickness in the last several years has been mild nasal congestion.

In the past decade, Kurzweil's interests in technology and health sciences have merged as scientists have discovered similarities.

"All the genes we have, the 20,000 to 30,000 genes, are little software programs," Kurzweil said.

In his latest book, Kurzweil defines what he calls his three bridges to immortality. The "First Bridge" is the health regimen he describes with co-author Dr. Terry Grossman to keep people fit enough to cross the "Second Bridge," a biotechnological revolution.

Kurzweil writes that humanity is on the verge of controlling how genes express themselves and ultimately changing the genes. With such technology, humanity could block disease-causing genes and introduce new ones that would slow or stop the aging process.The "Third Bridge" is the nanotechnology and artificial intelligence revolution, which Kurzweil predicts will deliver the nanobots that work like repaving crews in our bloodstreams and brains. These intelligent machines will destroy disease, rebuild organs and obliterate known limits on human intelligence, he believes.

Immortality would leave little standing in current society, in which the inevitability of death is foundational to everything from religion to retirement planning. The planet's natural resources would be greatly stressed, and the social order shaken.

Kurzweil says he believes new technology will emerge to meet increasing human needs. And he said society will be able to control the advances he predicts as long as it makes decisions openly and democratically, without excessive government interference.

But there are no guarantees, he adds.

Meanwhile, Kurzweil refuses to concede the inevitably of his own death, even if science doesn't advance as quickly as he predicts.

"Death is a tragedy," a process of suffering that rids the world of its most tested, experienced members people whose contributions to science and the arts could only multiply with agelessness, he said.

Kurzweil said he's no "cheerleader" for unlimited scientific progress and added he knows science can't answer questions about why eternal lives are worth living. That's left for philosophers and theologians, he said.

Saturn's Moons

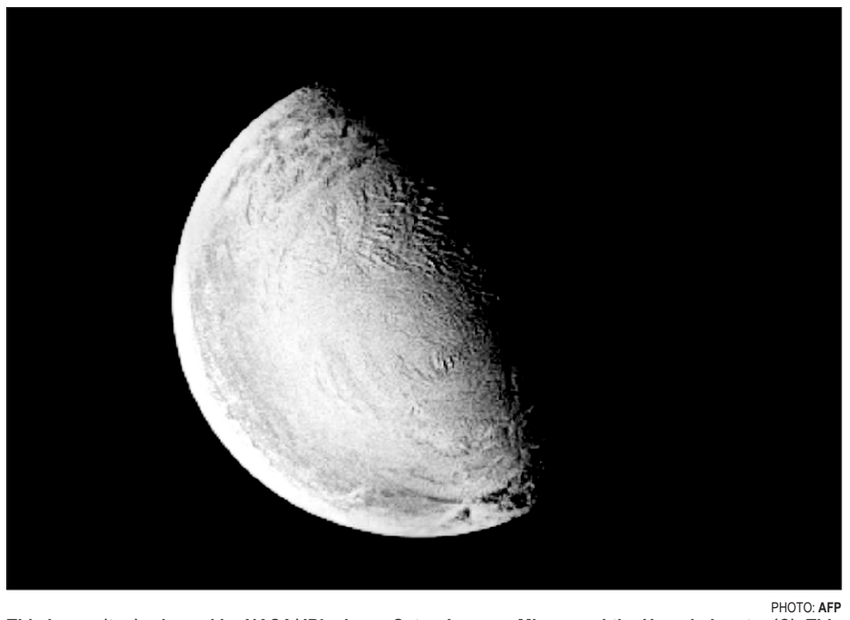


PHOTO: AFP

This image (top) released by NASA/JPL shows Saturn's moon Mimas and the Herschel crater (C). This large crater 130 kilometers wide (80 miles) has a prominent central peak, seen here almost exactly on the terminator. This image was taken with the Cassini spacecraft narrow angle camera on January 16 and another Cassini image (bottom) of Saturn's moon Enceladus released on February 9, shows a region containing bizarre, wrinkled terrain. Enceladus is covered with bright water ice. The part of its surface visible here appears to be largely free of craters - indicating that it is geologically young.