

A perpetual guiding light

Four-year-old 'Dishari' continues to spread the IT-spell among rural populace



SAAD HAMMADI,
back from Golaria, Manikganj

Regular StarTech readers may recall the story of 'Dishari', published in October 2002, when British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB)'s free basic ICT education centre was exposed for the very first time in Chechua, Kushtia. 'Dishari', which started off as a part of BATB's corporate social responsibility (CSR), is running on its fourth year at present and guess what? - This free of cost IT education centre, providing elementary knowledge on computing and a couple of Microsoft Office applications had already witnessed 378 students passing out from the four Dishari centres, located in different rural parts of the country, in just about three years.

BATB introduced Dishari to provide education on the basics of computing at the rural areas, where people cannot afford to pay for it. What makes their CSR more worthy to the students is, at the end of each academic year, the best student at every centre is given the opportunity to study his chosen course at an IT institution such as, Aptech, NIIT and New Horizons at the expense of BATB.

Dishari also provides internship for two months to three of their best students over the year at Dishari's training centres, who also earn Four Thousand Taka during each period of their internship.

Akkas, a second year student of Debendra College in

Manikganj, majoring in Accounting has excelled with 82 percent success in Dishari's fourth batch at Manikganj and now he wishes to work on Graphics.

While visiting this centre along with some fellow journalists, we spoke to Pankaj Kumar Shah, a student from the present batch. Pankaj, seemed very gratified to Dishari. 'Dishari has shown us such a path, which was neither available before nor expected. Here at Dishari, I have been facilitated with computers and applications that I am able to learn and practice even after the training hours.'



Sixth batch of 'Dishari' Manikganj

Dishari has always been successful in finding 12 students per batch, which is the capacity for every session, without any awareness programme or promotional activities regarding this matter, which may have been able to find them a greater demand and publicity. The course offered by Dishari provides the basic idea of computer knowledge and can assist the students in finding a job when accumulated with their academic studies.

Most of the people learning at the centre are still students and young. Dishari's instructor took the pride of informing StarTech, that from particular institution, one student has become successful in getting a job at the Mercantile Co-operative Bank as a computer operator.

Having its sixth batch onboard, so far 60 students have successfully passed from Dishari at Manikganj and the sixth one will end this month. The Manikganj centre happens to be the third Dishari centre to be in operation alongside their initial ones at Chechua, Kushtia and Moulvibazar, Sylhet and the most recent one, located at Chokoria, Cox's Bazar.

TECHPHOTO



RE-STACKING

The US space shuttle Discovery is moved in the Vehicle Assembly Building on June 2, after being removed from its external tank and solid rocket boosters (SRB). The Discovery will be placed on its transporter for a short move down the transfer aisle for re-stacking on a recently modified external tank and a different set of SRB's. NASA has scheduled Discovery for launch in July.

TECHNEWS

BASIS Recommendation for National Budget 2005-2006

STARTECH DESK

BANGLADESH Association of Software and Information Services (Basis), the national trade association of software and ITES industry of Bangladesh, has submitted a proposal to National Board of Revenue (NBR) for National Budget 2005-2006, says a press release. Basis, in a meeting held between Basis Board and NBR on April 17, presented specific recommendations and requested NBR to consider the proposal for continuing the development process of Bangladesh ICT industry. Basis has also submitted the above recommendations to The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FBCCI). These recommendations have been incorporated in the FBCCI Budget Proposal and forwarded to Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh.

The recommendations of BASIS for National Budget 2005-2006 are as follows:

1. Extension of currently enjoyed Income Tax Exemption Facility for software business till 2010 (The current tax exemption facility will expire on June 30, 2005).
2. Provide the similar tax exemption benefits to IT-enabled Services (ITES) business as enjoyed by the software business.
3. Allow Accelerated Depreciation for procurement of Computer Hardware & Software by any business enterprise in the country.
4. Allocation 2% of ADP (Annual Development Program) budget in ICT procurement/investment by Government.

PHOTO: AFP

TECHPROJECT

Secret of success for SMEs lies in ICT strategy

Dissemination and training programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Technical Assistance Project held

RIDWAN KABIR

ACCORDING to the European Union (EU), Bangladesh currently stands out among the top twenty outsourcing countries of the world, and there are successful reasons behind this achievement," said Pankaj Jain, programme director of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Technical Assistance Project, which organised a dissemination and training programme of the project titled 'Development of small business ICT strategies in Bangladesh' that took place on May 28 at the BRAC Centre Inn.

Jain also informed that small and cottage industries of the country well-exceeded a total count of half a million, while there are only a count of less than seven hundred ICT related SMEs in the country. Jain also specified development of an appropriate operating framework for the SME sector.

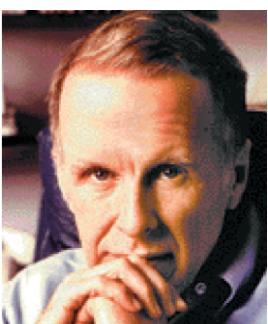
The project, which has mainly focused on the development tracks of ICT business strategies within the 'small and medium enterprise' (SME) sector of the nation, has had the project members work in ornamenting a report on the current evaluation on local ICT industry and how the SME sector plays a vital role in exhibiting a very optimised solution towards the building of a tech-oriented nation. Recommendations for this project include fostering a supportive operating environment through a series of policy and infrastructure development interventions', 'building capabilities through training and development' and 'reaching out through the socio-economic development of ICT'.

The report also included the current relevant gaps in the ICT industry that need to be aided, along with presenting a roadmap. While training and capacity building activities amongst the SMEs in the ICT sectors stand as the target area for the project, the report strictly cites how it is now time to start working with individuals.

"It has therefore become necessary to look at the subject in an integrated manner by analysing training requirements of all the principle stakeholders of the industry," stated Jain. Current stakeholders of the nation would include both the

John Backus (born December 3, 1924)

As project leader with IBM John Backus, an American computer scientist, notable as the inventor of the first high-level programming language (FORTRAN) developed in the early 1950's with his team: Fortran - Formula Translator. The first high level programming language. This language is most widely used in physics and engineering. He was also responsible for the Backus-Naur Form (or BNF), a standard notation which can be used to describe the syntax of a computer language in a formal and unambiguous way and the concept of Function-level programming. He received the 1977 ACM Turing Award for these seminal achievements.



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employers and the employees, and the bankers and their customers.

In his welcome speech, SM Iqbal, president, Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS), specified on the loose notions that play major negative impacts on the future of the ICT industry and its associated growth due in time. "The ICT minister has agreed that it is easier to motivate the common people on ICT terms and procurements than the policy-makers," Quoting Science and ICT Minister, Moyer Khan, who could not be present as chief guest at the event because of some ties up at the Prime Minister's office, has personally channelled in to provide this project at hand a go through deploying positive association and involvement from the Commonwealth Secretariat,

related company differs in beneficial terms from a similar count of labour-workers at a garment. He pointed out the challenges Bangladesh faces in defining terms and their coalition.

"You may have a cheaper labour available from Bangladesh now, but tomorrow there may as well be another country with even cheaper labour," Venuprasad said, citing how the benefits of such labour is never enough unless quality manpower and strategic successful ideas are deployed in policy-making.

Later at the event, Jain presented the audience with a media-presentation in which he mentioned all nominations of keyholes in the current ICT industry policy-making and how these may be mended. "Though the roles of SMEs are the

Low PC penetrations, failure of pioneering sites, unreliable electricity, limitations in e-governance, non-existence of ICT-internship programmes for the students, and other issues such as inadequate net bandwidth were mentioned by Jain in his presentation, according to whom all these sum into the low ICT exports done from local grounds, which reflects these internal issues requiring to be successfully met with priority.

"Bangladesh needs to learn to manage the geo-political risk that exists while meeting with export-import issues and successfully run the comprises of these," Jain said. He also mentioned how for the smaller countries it is possible to build an entire industry only on a single idea, while such ventures may not always bring success in case of the larger borders. "Essentially a local and international competitiveness should be built, which is more than just the application of new technology," he stated, emphasizing on addressing the non-technical terms and prospects that exist, such as building a skilled human resource, which will be followed by the technical schemes accordingly in due times.

Akhtaruzzaman Manju, president, Internet Service Provider Association of Bangladesh (Ispab), pointed out how the report missed on mentioning that both the ministry of telecommunication and the ICT ministry should come under one roof. "Both these ministries deal with technical terms, so they should be together," Manju emphasised, stating how such deviation is not exhibited by any other countries' associated public sectors.

The project has offered several training modules to the stakeholders of the country, including improvisations on packages titled 'human resources', 'marketing' and 'practice standardisation for enterprises', commencing with a module on 'building appraisal skills' on May 31. An 'ICT access center' from the Commonwealth Secretariat at Narshindi was successfully inaugurated by Moyer Khan on the same date.



Pankaj Jain, program director of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Technical Assistance Project makes a presentation.

Iqbal said that all the three ministries, post and telecommunication, education, and the Science and ICT ministry should attain equal and optimised attention from the policy-makers in diversifying their associated sectors and at the same time allowing these three ministries to converge together towards a common goal of developing an ICT-oriented nation in the coming years.

"The target SMEs are where a single or two entrepreneurs play key policy-making roles for the companies," stated Ram Venuprasad, adviser to special advisory services division of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Technical Assistance Project. He stated how a hundred collections of workers at a ICT-



VAIO WITH A 'D'

Japanese electronics giant Sony unveils its new high-end model desktop computer, the "Vaio type R", equipped with Intel's new dual-core processor Pentium D processor, two computing engines on a single chip, in Tokyo on May 30. Sony will put it on the market next month with an estimated price of 350,000 yen (3,270 USD). US semiconductor giant Intel has forecast shipments of multi-core processors, including the Pentium D unit, making up 70 percent of all the processors it supplies for desk-top computers by the end of 2006.

PHOTO: AFP