

IT spurs rural uplift

Grameen Digital Centre in Mirzapur links villagers with outside world, draws children, trains youths for jobs



Awed rural school children at the Grameen Digital Center (GDC) in Mirzapur having first hand knowledge about computer.

MIRZA SHAKIL, *Tangail*

Grameen Digital Center (GDC) in Mirzapur, a project of GrameenPhone, has proved how Internet service can quickly change life in rural areas.

It is the first attempt in the country to reach IT (information technology) service at grassroots level. The success has been overwhelming.

Initiated in 2001, the effort has created a great enthusiasm among children, youths, local government and non-government officials and NGOs.

This correspondent during a recent visit saw children from different schools crowding GDC's Kids Training Centre at the upazila

headquarters. It is a wonderful experience for them. Amid fun, they are having first hand knowledge about computer use and information technology, provided for free for two hours a day.

The Internet browsing facility, provided at 0.75 paise per minute, helps local educated youths in searching jobs and maintaining contact outside while staying home.

The IT training facility has helped many youths get jobs, according to beneficiaries.

The training programme includes Computer Fundamentals and Office 2000, Database Development, Using Microsoft Access, Application Development, Using Visual Basic 6.0, Graphics and Designing, Hardware Maintenance

and Troubleshooting, Networking and Internet Operations.

Over 150 youths including females after training at the centre are now employed in different areas of the country or have become self-dependent, sources said.

The Grameen Digital Center (GDC) is a non-profit and service oriented institution. Seeing the tremendous response from and benefit to grassroots level people, the authorities are now thinking to open three more such centres at Zamurki, Mohera and Fotepur in the upazila as soon as possible, its officials told this correspondent.

It is also appreciated by government and non-governmental organisations in the area as they

get hardware supply at cheaper cost.

The GDC has provided internet services to 20 subscribers in Mirzapur, which include Kumudini Hospital and Bharateswari Homes, a reputed educational institution.

GDC's local Programme Officer Alamgir Hossen said, "We are providing 24-hour Internet service at a cost of Tk 00.75 only per minute. We are using Radio Micro Web Link in our network through VSAT from GCconnectivity."

Assistant Programme Officer Shah Alam Talukder said a large number of people are getting benefit from our center. "Our main objective is to expand Internet network in villages. The training programme is the second part of the project".

The centre so far trained 147 people, he added.

One of the two rooms at the centre is used for training and browsing and the other for office. Six computers are used for training and browsing. The lone computer at the office room is used for composing, printing and for official purposes.

Abdul Halim, a resident of Dighulia Gohabari village in Mirzapur, said he is now working at Aromatic Cosmetic Ltd in Dhaka after training at the centre.

Trained at the centre, Saiful Islam of Bazar area and Fatema Akter Chanzu of Baimhati in Mirzapur are now working at an export firm and at Munshiganj Polli Biddut Samity respectively.

Meer Anwar Hossen Tutul, Ittefaq Correspondent in Mirzapur, said now he can send news and photo through Internet at the GDC quickly at a cheaper cost.

The response from people also moved high officials of GrameenPhone who visited the centre recently. They are also thinking to open a Tele-medicine centre in a rural area in Rajshahi so that people in villages can get services of reputed doctors.

Mohila Dal leader held with phensidyl in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested a leader of ruling BNP's women's front, her husband and two other women along with 102 bottles of contraband phensidyl Saturday night from Shimulbagh area in Patuakhali town.

The arrested persons are Shabida Khanam alias Runu, president of Patuakhali town unit of Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal, a wing of ruling BNP; her husband Arifur Rahman, an employee of Janata Bank; and her accomplices Aleya Begum and Tahmina Begum.

Police sources said, members of Rab-8 in a sudden drive sized the phensidyl bottles from the kitchen of Runu's house at about 9pm and arrested them from the house. The arrestees and the phensidyl bottles were handed over to Sadar thana police. The two other women helped Runu is selling phensidyl, police said.

A case (no-06, date 7.1.06) was filed by SI Abdul Motin with the thana in this connection.



Arrested Patuakhali Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal leader and three others along with recovered phensidyl bottles.

PHOTO: STAR

4 more JMB suspects held in Jessore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Jessore Kotwali police arrested three more JMB suspects from three villages in Sarsha upazila early yesterday.

They are Anwarul Hossain, 28, son of Monam Gazi of Sonagati village; Nur Islam, 45, son of Azmir Ali Ansari of Bhaturi and Abdul Haque, 35, son of Golam Mia of Sanatankati village.

Earlier on Saturday, police arrested four JMB (Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, Bangladesh) suspects from Jhikargachha upazila. They are Mostafa Kamal, Solairan Hossain, Mizanur Rahman and Shamsur Rahman.

All the arrested persons are being quizzed by police.

Zia Fertiliser still out of operation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Ashuganj Zia Fertiliser Factory is yet to resume operation till yesterday, sources said.

The factory stopped operation due to technical fault since Wednesday morning.

The fault was detected at the cooling tower of the factory. A leakage was also developed in its synthesis gas pipeline resulting in stoppage of operation.

Source said, a team of engineers arrived from Dhaka. They are engaged in repairing the fault. "Three or more days might be required for repair," according to a factory source.

Now, the factory is incurring a loss of 1,600 metric ton of urea per day.

Farmers fear price hike of urea in the peak season of IRRI-boro cultivation due to closure of the factory.

INDIAN PERMISSION NEEDED

2.5 lakh enclave people yet out of voter list

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

About 2.5 lakh inhabitants of 51 enclaves in the country are yet to be enrolled as voters after expiry of a week since beginning of enumeration on January 1.

This is because of lack of permission of the Indian government to allow voter enrolment officials to visit the enclaves. As a result, the people of the enclaves are likely to be deprived of applying their right to vote in the forthcoming general election next year.

The Indian government has imposed strict rule in movement of people of the enclaves who are isolated from Bangladesh. Thirty-three enclaves having 1.5 lakh population are situated in Lalmonirhat, Kurigram and Panchagarh. The enclaves are surrounded by India on all sides.

There are 11 enclaves in Panchagarh, 18 enclaves in Kurigram and 4 enclaves in Lalmonirhat with an area of 12 square mile.

The people of the enclaves are totally detached from the main land. Although they are citizens of Bangladesh but they are always being deprived of applying their franchise because in previous elec-

tions the Indian government did not permit the voting officials to go to the enclaves to conduct voting mechanism.

Although people of the enclaves are demanding for a long time to be enrolled as voters but due to negative attitude of Indian government and indifference of Bangladesh government their dreams remain unfulfilled.

On receipt of transit pass from the Indian government in 1983, an assistant registration officer including some supervisors and data collectors had an opportunity to visit some enclaves to enroll the inhabitants as voters. But the voters did not get chances to cast votes as the presiding officers, polling agents and law enforcement agency members failed to reach there.

Deputy Election Commissioner Hamidul Alam, also In-Charge of Rangpur Regional Election Office told this correspondent voter enrolment would begin as soon as the Indian government respond to a request of the Foreign Ministry of Bangladesh government made on October 25 last year. The Indian government did not respond to the request till the first week of this year.

Extortionists active in Netrakona ahead of Eid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Extortionists have become active in different offices of the district ahead of Eid-ul-Azha.

Officials of various government and NGO offices alleged that most of the extortionists are Jatiyatabadi Chitra Dal (JCD) leaders and activists. It has been alleged that the extortionists have demanded toll ranging between Tk 2,000 and Tk 5 lakh from them.

In presence of this correspondent, a group of JCD men went to Apara Education Office Thursday noon. They demanded Tk 1,000 from an official. On refusal, they threatened him to take the money by force.

An official of a foreign NGO at Durgapur told this correspondent Wednesday morning that a group of extortionists came to his office and demanded Tk 5 lakh from him. They threatened him to take his motorbike by force if he refused to give them the money.

Similar is the scene in Netrakona town. Extortionists are allegedly demanding toll from the officials and staff of different government, NGO and private chambers here.

A district Roads and Highways Department (RHD) official told this correspondent on condition of anonymity that at least 12 groups of extortionists came to his office for toll every day in the current month. Even a group demanded Tk 5,000 from them, he said.

Road project perils people

Development work in Kishoreganj town not completed in six months after expiry of period

MOKLESUR RAHMAN, Kishoreganj

A drainage and road development project in Kishoreganj town has become a source of trouble for the townspeople as the project has not been completed even six months after end of the project period.

Kishoreganj is virtually a town of dug up roads and piled up construction materials on roadsides, creating sufferings to people ahead of the Eid-ul-Azha.

Work on the Tk 7 crore project was started with the onset of monsoon in May last year and scheduled to be completed by July, sources said. The project is work by the Asian Development Bank under its Urban Development Project.

Some shop owners along the Station Road said they could not run businesses during Eid-ul-Fitr,

Durga Puja and are now sitting idle ahead of the coming Eid-ul-Azha.

Municipal authorities started the drainage and road construction work at a time.

Convener of the Kishoreganj Nagorik Odhikar Committee, Nazrul Islam, said it is highly unethical for the municipal authorities keep the problem lingering. The work was scheduled to be completed six months ago but hardly one fourth of the project has been completed, he said. No body knows when the work will be completed, he said.

When contacted, municipal chairman Abu Taher Miah said, "Progress of work slowed as I went abroad for treatment. I will take steps to complete the remaining work soon", he added.



One of the many dug up roads in Kishoreganj town.

PHOTO: STAR

Organic pest control in CHT

Khagrachhari farmers now use pesticide produced from Nim leaves

JASIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari

A cheap and user friendly pest control method has opened up a new horizon for farmers. Use of organic pesticide produced from Nim leaves increases crop yield without damaging the environment.

The pesticide is produced by crushing Nim leaves in a simple machine. The machine first introduced by British American Tobacco (BAT) company in 200 for use by its contracted tobacco growers in the hills is now widely used by farmers for pest control in rice, wheat, sugarcane and vegetables fields.

The raw material is also found in plenty from Nim trees, available in the hills. Because of its utility, Nim trees are also being planted by farmers, who are becoming environment conscious.

It is almost a household machine for farmers in Bagaihari, Rangamati, Kawkhali, Alikhadam, Lama, Banderban, Matiranga, Mhoalehri, Dighinala, Marung and Khagrachhari.

Over one lakh farmers in 72 villages are being benefited from the innovation in the three hill districts of Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban.

"It is not only cheap and environment friendly. Health of humans and animals is also safe

now", said farmer Abul Zail, a member of Merung Union Parishad in Dighinala while talking to this correspondent during a

recent visit to the area.

The machine costs between Tk 1500 and 1800. Even farmers can make it as spares are available in

local markets, he said. An electric motor, a steel frame box, some iron rods, pipes and crushing blades (knives) are needed to make the machine.

Two kilograms of Nim leaves and 10 kilograms of water are put into the box. When the motor is switched on, the leaves are crushed and mixed with water within five minutes. The green water is kept in a pot for 3-4 days and it is fit for use in field.

It is a wonderful pest control method, said farmer Abdul Hye of Merong village.

"We get good harvest of all crops without any cost for pest control", said Ratan Tripura of the village.

It saves not only money but also time as farmers themselves produce the insecticide, said Mohammed Nasim, Field Supervisor of BAT in Khagrachhari.

Trinamul Unnyan Sonsheshta and Barik NGO jointly organized a press conference at Khagrachhari press club where

Ashok Chakma, president of local NGO Trinamul Unnyan Sonsheshta and researcher Pavel Partha said they welcomed the new method introduced by BAT though they oppose tobacco cultivation by the company.

BAT distributed 50,000 Nim plants among farmers in Khagrachhari during its tree plantation week last year. It also supplied 100 machines.



The simple machine producing organic pesticide by crushing Nim leaves in Khagrachhari.

PHOTO: STAR

Study on tigers of Sundarbans resumes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A project work on 'A Study on Behaviour and Ecology of Tigers in the Sundarbans Reserve Forest of Bangladesh' resumed recently.

Research work on the project will continue till April this year, sources said. Its work was postponed for a temporary period due to rainy season.

Tiger experts James Oldspith and Charles Magdugus are carrying out the research work, according to the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of the eastern wing of the Sundarbans Forest Division, Mizanur Rahman.

According to the Sundarbans Forest Division (SFD) sources, a tigress known as Queen of Jamtala died a natural death. She lived for about 14 years. She moved about 20 square kilometre in the forest in five months after attachment of radio collar to her neck. As part of the project work, the radio collar was attached to her neck. She died due to old age complications. Her carcass was recovered from Chandeshwar area in Swarnkhola Range on October 29 last year. The radio collar was found intact.

After being chosen for research work, the tigress was caught in Kachi Khali area under the eastern wing on April 22 last year, SFD sources said. She was named the 'Queen of Jamtala.'

SFD sources told this correspondent radio collar is the best method to carry out research work on tigers.