

Jeeon: Info and knowledge base for rural people

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In our country, serving the needs of the urban population is considered the best practice of information technology. Only until recently, the rural population had mostly been deprived from availing this gift.

Undoubtedly, one of the promising and extremely successful projects focussed on aiding the daily activities of the rural people is the 'Pallitatha' programme. The Development through Access to Network Resources (D.Net), the project implementing body, recently updated it by launching 'Jeeon' - a range of Information and Knowledge Base (IKB) CDs.

The 'Pallitatha' programme itself began at Shelbunia in Mongla, Bagerhat. Under the programme, information of individual villages and districts along with their resources were collected. These were later compiled to create a database, which was maintained by D.Net at its Dhaka headquarters.

The organisation operated their four 'Pallitatha' Kendras (www.pallitatha.org) in Nilphamari, Netrokona, Bagerhat and Noakhali with this huge online database.

"The Jeeon CDs came into reality to compensate the lack of internet connectivity in most villages and districts," explained Dr Ananya Raihan, executive director of D.Net.

The CDs were launched a few weeks back, during the 5th anniversary celebrations of the organisation at Brac Centre Inn in Dhaka.

Subtitled 'Information for Life', the Jeeon CDs have all been developed in Bangla. Each CD responds to daily queries made by villagers concerning what,



where, who and how in the areas of agriculture, healthcare, non-farm economic activities, appropriate technology, healthcare, education, human rights, awareness and disaster management.

"Most of the topics included in each of these CDs were too detailed and could not be accommodated entirely into our online database. So we published them in this format," said Raihan.

Eight thousand entities of data from the database have been included in the CDs.

The 'Jeeon Education' CD contains description of various academic institutions, admission information, information about national and international scholarships regarding education, and

information about libraries, coaching centres etc.

'Jeeon Agriculture' contains information on various agricultural products like species, cultivation techniques, and information on pests and pesticides, fertiliser management, soil management etc.

'Jeeon Addresses' include contact details and other necessary details about agriculture, forestry, fisheries, poultry and wildlife, food preservation, construction materials, transport, education, security and other service providing organisations.

'Jeeon Appropriate Technology' has data on advanced furnace, methods of economic house construction, sanitation

technology, solar power usage, and decontaminating arsenic from water etc.

'Jeeon Non-farm Economic Activities' include data on handicrafts, press business, repairing business, training etc.

'Jeeon Disaster Management' encompasses steps to be taken during disasters like flood, famine, tornado, earthquake, river erosion etc. It also includes measures to be taken during the pre-disaster and post-disaster period and other necessary topics.

'Jeeon Awareness' focuses on general information on popular topics like women and child trafficking, arsenic, drug addiction, leprosy, food and nourishment, citizen rights, polythene usage, rights of the mentally and physically challenged etc.

'Jeeon Law and Human Rights' cover laws centred around land, heritage, women's rights, child rights and various local and international convention.

'Jeeon Health' focuses on details about human anatomy, diseases, symptoms for diseases, first aid treatments etc.

"The overall language of the CDs has been designed and published in a such a way that it will be comprehensive for people from any and every rural part of the country," mentioned Raihan.

The overall cost of compilation, design, editing, publication and other details of the CDs is around Taka 1 crore.

The Research Initiative of Bangladesh, International Development Research Centre and Manusher Jonno provided the funds.

"We have over 25,000 html pages which were converted and published through the CDs," said Raihan.

Despite the impressive con-

tent, the CDs are not for individual or commercial sale.

"We intend to sell the licence of the IKB to Non-government and other organisations who are operating at the grassroots level in the rural areas," said an official of the organisation.

He pointed out that the D.Net wants to publish updates every three months.

"The annual cost of Taka 65 lakh for the updating can be met with the proceeds from the sales of licences," he said.

Besides providing useful information, the D.Net also plans to provide a model using which most of these non-profit organisations can earn some money.

Through D.Net's prescribed model, these organisations can charge information seekers for services like photography, composing, soil testing etc.

"Through this, a certain revenue would be generated which can ensure operations of the organisations," he said.

Besides providing information through their mobile centres and personnel in the rural areas, the D.Net also plans to introduce three-wheeled information centres, which will be able to target rural people in masses during the weekly 'haats' or other occasions in the villages.

The 'Pallitatha' programme started in 2003 and it has been quite successful over the last three years.

The D.Net, itself, is a not-for-profit research and advocacy organisation that has dedicated its efforts by using information and communication technology (ICT) toward poverty alleviation and economic development of Bangladesh.

TECHNEWS

The second beta of Internet Explorer 7 released

Microsoft's widely used browser has been polished a lot, but it still doesn't offer anything alternative browsers like Firefox doesn't have

AHMED ASHIFUL HAQUE

MICROSOFT has released a preview beta version of its upcoming and somewhat hyped version of its popular browser Internet Explorer. The newest version of the browser includes the tabbed browsing, an integrated search box, quick personal data-clearing and RSS support.

Early adopters are pleasantly surprised that the developers didn't try to reinvent anything - tabbed browsing and a lot of the similar popular features were present and the regular Firefox and Safari users felt at home with the browser. But the browser is still leagues behind Firefox, giving the users no immediate reasons for reverting back to Internet Explorer. The product's proper name is Internet Explorer 7.0 for Windows XP SP2 Beta 2 Preview. We'll refer to it simply as IE7 for now.

In the second row there's a button labelled Favours Centre. Clicking on it opens a side window with three tabs, one each for displaying your favour-

ites, RSS feeds and your history.

This beta version of IE7 is targeted only for developers and tech enthusiasts as it's still not polished enough to be a consumer beta yet; and we'd not recommend the readers to try it out just now (Microsoft promises a consumer beta "soon.")

And in fact, for the users accustomed to the minimalist approach of alternative browsers like Firefox and Opera, IE7 might actually feel like a step backward.

While significantly trimmer than the earlier IE6, the IE7 beta is still not the lean, mean, fast, and clean browser that Firefox 1.5 is, and with Firefox 2.0 due out by mid-2006, Microsoft may lose even more ground to the upstart. The core Firefox 1.5 application itself is less than 5MB, while IE7 weighs in at almost 11.5MB. By comparison, IE6 can range anywhere from 11MB to 75MB.

IE7's rendering engine has

been completely rewritten which allows for some improvements over the earlier versions. The new engine isn't perfect though it



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had glitches that hampered browsing abilities in some cases.

Microsoft seems to be more open and sincere about improving security in the new browser. There are automatic Phishing Filters and it asks users to participate in the Customer Experience Improvement Program, for instance, and most Active X controls are disabled by default. The company is also touting a number of other security improvements.

Microsoft certainly has made some progress with its browser. But it has a long way to go before it can be considered to be worthy of all the users it serves. For now, they're heading in the right direction. Microsoft worked with Firefox's developer Mozilla on keeping the basics of browsing consistent between the two browsers. And in the beta preview, Google is the default search engine. That's pretty



heartening: collaborating with the competitors for shaping the way the future will use the internet. It'll be interesting to watch this new browser out of beta and see what all changes they make. The consumers are the real winners here.

Stay tuned for update reviews. In the near term (read months) Microsoft expects to roll out a broad consumer beta of IE7. And look for the final version of IE7 sometime in the second half of 2006. We do like much of the look and feel of the new browser, even if a lot of it seems to be features imported from competing products. Overall, given Microsoft's timeline and presumed budget for the new browser, it's disappointing that this first beta version of IE7

feels more like a catch-up than a truly innovative new product. Firefox users see no reason for reverting back to Microsoft new browser, yet.

TECHNEWS

Where tech blends with fun

STARTECH DESK

THE '4th Techno Fun Fair 2006', organised by North South University Computer Club (NSUCC) was held on February 14 and 16 at the NSU premises, says a press release.

The main focus of the Techno Fun Fair was to have 'fun' with 'technology'. The five segments of the event were - 'Genius Hunt', 'Radio Controlled Toy Car Racing', 'Math Olympiad' and 'Corporate Stalls'.

'Math Olympiad' was this year's new addition but the main attraction was the 'Radio Controlled Toy Car Racing', which took place at the Sher Plaza building.

Vice Chancellor of NSU inaugurated

this event on the first day. Twenty-eight students participated in the racing, where two players played through 'knock-out' rounds. All the cars had the same configuration but their frequencies were different so that one could not control another car with the same remote control.

Saifuddin Sajjad became the champion, while Mohtasem Monir Chowdhury and Khairul Kabir were first and second runner-ups respectively.

'Genius Hunt' was the most important section, where students submitted their projects on the first day. After initial judgment, the projects were sent to the judge's panel, comprised of four faculty members from the Department of Com-

puter Science and Engineering, NSU.

The hunt had two categories, senior and junior group. A total of 50 projects were submitted, which included 'Helicopter', 'Piano', different types of games, management software etc. Moshedur Rahman became the genius hunt senior group champion while Tashfik and Shoikot were the runner-ups while Riyasat Al Jamil became the junior group champion and Saima Iffat, the runner up.

The newest addition, Math Olympiad took place at SPZ 700 room in NSU campus under the guidance of Dr. M. Kaykobad. This was the first ever Math Olympiad to take place in university level in this country. Dr. Kaykobad prepared

the questions and carried the responsibility of being the judge of the program at the same time. A total of 26 students participated in the Olympiad. Shams Mahmud Imam became the Math Olympiad champion while Ibrahim M Jamil and Samee Zahur were the first and second runner-ups.

In the 'Corporate Fair' part, four companies who had their stalls at the SPZ lobby were ISP Sirius Broadband, hardware companies Rishit Computers and Global Brand and software, games and audio CDs provider Plug and Play.

Overall, the fair was a great learning and entertaining event for the students of the university.

PHOTOTECH



3GSM WORLD CONGRESS

A woman with a telephone of the last generation on her head is seen during the second day of the 3GSM World Congress on February 14 in Barcelona. The prospect of high-speed transfers and instant messaging will have consumers rushing to buy into third generation (3G) mobile phone technology this year, companies at the 3GSM World Congress in Barcelona predicted.

PHOTO: AFP