

ICT to surmount disability

FAROOQUE HOSSAIN KAMRUL

IN our country, there are thousands of predicaments for a disable person. There is no such constitutional opportunity for the Person with Disability (PWD) so that they will not fall victim to discrimination. No hope to lead a meaningful life for them. No seat reservation system for them in public transport services. No opportunity of easy access to public offices.

The disabled require special accommodation, bathroom, and lavatory, the concept which is totally absent in our country. In Dhaka or other major cities there's no arrangement for the physically challenged to move freely in wheel chair. No governmental arrangement to take care of them and no pragmatic measure has been taken yet to make them differently able or empowered.

Young disable children are like a burden to their parents. If the parents are poor their plights know no bounds. Disable women in our country means leading their whole life hopelessly at her parents' family.

Despite of these, it is true that 10 per cent of the total population in our country is disabled. As per a partial survey by National Disable Welfare Foundation, the number of the PWDs in eight districts of Dhaka division is 28,000 and that of three districts under Rajshahi division is 18,000. Again, the figure in one district of Sylhet division is 4,000 and that of Chittagong division is 1,000.

In Bangladesh, it's not the physical limitation that is a big issue for the disabled; rather it is the illogical thoughts, misconception and superstition that are the challenging issues in aspects of leading their normal lives. Like many other poor countries, common people here in Bangladesh have no necessary awareness of disability. Indeed, they have little or no awareness of the reason for being disabled and the consequence of it.

Besides, there are also misconceptions among many villagers regarding disability. Thus, some think it the curse of the Creator while others consider the disable children the aftermath of their parents' evil-deeds. On the whole, the disable community of Bangladesh is not well at all.

Many of our policy makers, perhaps, do not know that the disabled can surmount all hurdles of their life with proper implementation of ICT. What is more, they don't even apprise that ICT is the optimum way for them (the disabled) to become a successful person by removing all difficulties of life.

At first, we should realize that being disabled is not a tragedy any way; rather it is said that it's just a bar in the way to life. Like our country, there are also 10per cent of the

world population that is disabled. According to that count, the number of disable people across the globe is 60 crore.

These people are disabled in some way or other, that is, some are visually challenged, some hearing impaired, some dumb, some physically handicapped or



some are mentally retarded. The rate of disability differs according to countries. In developed states, the number of the disabled is low, whereas, the figure is high in developing countries. Another thing is, nearly 80 per cent disable live in developing countries.

Referring to the precarious situation of the PWDs, international organisations have stressed to take necessary steps in this regard. In 1948, UN Security Council declared universal human rights resolution. In its 25th section, it has been said that every person has the right to get assurance of leading normal lives even if s/he is being unable to do so due to the lack of employment, ailments, disability, widowhood, old-age or any other reason.

The UN initiated to keep this promise with helping the wounded during World War II. In 1950, a convention was held by the concerted effort of UN secretariat, ILO, WHO, UNESCO, and International Refugee organisation. The meeting of these specialised organisations of UN discussed how to take combined endeavors in rehabilitating the disabled. It took the decision that education, treatment, and training for the disabled have to be reached international standard. Special emphasis would be given on the visually challenged people of the least developed states.

Primarily, the UN launched a welfare effort for the PWDs in the time period of 1945-55. Later on, this effort was turned into a social welfare in period of 1955-70. A

declaration, which preservation of right of the disabled firmly was referred to, was introduced in the seventeenth decade and accepted in the general council of the UN on December 9, 1975. On December 16, 1976, the general council of the UN announced the year 1981 the International Disable year aiming at

understood that ICT is the superb key to empowerment of the disabled. But, like our country, in many developing countries, the issue of creating ICT opportunity for the PWDs is still a challenge. Besides, the lack of proper realisation of our policy maker in this regard is also a major problem.

full participation of the PWDs in the society with proper dignity. In 1982, disability related 'World Program of Actions' restructured the disability concerned policy into three issues such as: Prevention, Rehabilitation and Equalization of Opportunities. Simply, it was meant for prevention and rehabilitation of disability, rehabilitation of the disabled and creation of equal opportunities for them. In the same year "The UN Disable Decade" was declared aiming at searching new source of fund, improving the quality of education, creating employment opportunity and increasing participation in their respective countries and societies for the PWDs. On December 19, 1992, the UN General Council called for the governments to observe the December 3 as the "International Disability Day" every year.

To materialize the activities of disability related "World Program of Actions" in Asia-Pacific region, Asia-Pacific Regional Disability Decade (from 1993 to 2001) was announced. On December 20, 1993, a 'Standard Rule' on equal opportunity for the PWDs was approved in the UN General Council. In that council, emphasis was given to make the PWDs educated in electronic and ICT education to enrich them easily and appropriately. Regarding that very issue, 'e-accessibility' was made the theme of "International Disability Day" in 2006.

Many countries have passed laws to create equal opportunity for the disabled. Regrettably, many of those laws have not been come into force yet. In developed states, these rules have been amended for increasing access to the ICT opportunity of the PWDs.

The reason for these amendments to the rules is to create more access to ICT for the disabled. Because, people now have clearly

For the last three decades, ICT has flourished unimaginably world wide. However, unlike developed countries, developing ones could not exploit this technology extensively. According to a known statistics, only 3.1 per cent people of Africa are getting to use internet while 63 per cent of the USA have the opportunity. Again, 7 per cent people of developing countries and 53 per cent of developed states are enjoying the facility of surfing net.

Presently, due to tremendous access to information technology of the society, a new way of empowerment has also been created for the PWDs. Especially ICT has created employment and the opportunity of independent living for the disable people. Now, the task is to exploit this chance by taking proper conscious steps. In particular, 'assistive computer' and other 'assistive communication technology' have opened the new vista for the disabled to access to ICT opportunity. With these they have got the chance of easy use of technology.

But, we don't know whether our government has taken any measure to reach the benefit to the PWDs yet. In addition, developing countries including Bangladesh are facing various complications to enter the ICT world. There is hardly any arrangement here for proper training of using information technology. As a result, it's still a challenge for the disabled of our country to exploit the benefit of ICT holistically.

Assistive or adaptive technology has come for the physically challenged. Today, information and communication technologists have developed these border and barrier free technologies for the PWDs.

These technologies can be disseminated among the disabled. Though various organizations have developed many disability-friendly

information and communication technology, a myriad of disable person cannot access to these advantages due to socio-economic and cultural reasons.

In 2003, 'Information and Solution Group' of World Bank conducted a survey. They tried to show the access-situation of the physically and visually challenged in various fields of ICT. The fields of ICT on which the survey were conducted were Website and Internet presence, Operating and Software systems, Telecommunication system, Video and Multimedia Items, Office equipment and employee accommodation practice etc. The survey revealed that the disable have not entirely access to web application, software, Telecommunication and office equipments. Undue hindrances and overall working environment did not allow them to enter these fields.

In recent years, different countries and organisations have come forward with various efforts, which are being coined as assistive or adaptive technology items for the PWDs. Using these technology items, persons with disability can easily scale up their working ability.

The Bangladesh government and the authority concerned can take serious steps in this connection. And in this very way, it is very easy to include our disable community in society and national activities. Our nearest neighbor the India's government has already taken such some ICT-measures of which the prime goal is to spread the use of ICT over disable community to create the opportunity of improved lives.

The amazing advancement of ICT has created the digital divide not only between the developed and developing countries but among population of rural and urban areas and various social communities too. And our disable community bears the brunt of this division. They have been far behind in respect of getting the benefit of using technology.

Even many common people who are not disabled, cannot keep pace with the fast expanding technology-trend for the want of necessary opportunity. And in the case of the disabled their predicaments are boundless in this aspect. However, everybody should realize that disability is not a curse, but a challenge and no challenge is insurmountable. So, if we want to make the disabled face the challenge of self-reliant and improved lives, then we have to reach the magic lamp named ICT to them expeditiously.

The author is a Computer Science & Engineering graduate from IU, Kushtia.

Macintosh Portable

The Macintosh Portable was Apple Computer's first attempt at making a portable Macintosh personal computer that held the power of a desktop Macintosh and included the capabilities of a professional business Macintosh such as the Macintosh IIfx. The idea for this such creation was by one of Apple's CEOs, Tim Duch. Released in 1989, it was received with excitement from most critics but with very poor sales to consumers. It featured a black and white active-matrix LCD screen in a hinged cover that covered the keyboard when the machine was not in use. The mouse function was handled by a built-in trackball on the right hand side of the keyboard.



startech@thedailystar.n

TECHNEWS

Microsoft, D.Net to create skilled manpower

EDWARD APURBA SINGHA

MICROSOFT Bangladesh and Development Research Network (D.Net) have started their venture to produce knowledge-based manpower by initiating Click (Community for Learning Information, Communication and Knowledge) programme.

Click will produce IT skilled manpower and its target is unprivileged young potentials in rural areas. Click is also a part of 'Microsoft Unlimited Potential' scheme and under this programme thirteen village information centres will be established in different parts of Bangladesh.

Through these centres village people will be able to participate in courses such as desktop publishing, web development, database programming, telecentre and many more. This programme will continue up to 2008. Teachers, students, NGO workers, journalists and businesspersons will be eligible to join the Click program.

Precedence will be given to disabled people (except visually impaired persons), women entrepreneur and financially insolvent people. After the course completion only successful candidates will acquire certificates from Microsoft.

After graduation from this program, D.Net will facilitate employment to them in their telecenters and affiliated organisations. Consequently, trained people can launch their own operations with proper assistance from D.Net.

Apart from these, from the village information centres rural people will enjoy IT services such

changes in present socio-economic activities. Developing countries like Bangladesh largely depends on unskilled or semi-skilled human resources to keep moving its economic cycle.

But it is quite difficult or in many circumstances impractical for us to consider this man-



D.Net organised training for the instructors of the Click program

as computer compose, print, soil and water test, fill up DV form and surf the internet etc. In addition, with the help of multimedia and mobile technology people can access their essential information.

In the near future it is evident that knowledge based manpower will bring dramatic

power to build up future tech developed Bangladesh. As a result, it is of paramount importance for us to ensure uninterrupted supply of IT skilled manpower to face the challenge of the hi-tech age.

TECHNEWS

Nokia unveils trio of feature rich phones

STARTECH DESK

NOKIA unveiled three new high end models for the Bangladesh market that show how the boundaries are blurring between the internet world, mobility and the consumer electronics industry, says a press release. The launching of Nokia N95, Nokia 5700 XpressMusic and Nokia 8800

large 2.6" QVGA 16 million color display, impressive 3D graphics, built-in stereo speakers offering a 3D stereo effect, standard 3.5mm audio jack, support for compatible microSD cards and mini USB for convenient data transfer. Browsing the Internet on the Nokia N95 is a pleasure using the Nokia Web Browser with

with their own favorite headphones via 3.5 mm headset jack adaptor.

The Nokia 5700 XpressMusic also brings videos to life on an up to 16 million color screen that offers excellent video playback. The phone costs Taka 24,500.

Nokia 8800 Sirocco Gold
A highly desirable handset dressed in 18-carat gold plating. Inspi



Sirocco Gold took place at a city hotel on April 22.

Nokia N95
The Nokia N95 is an all-in-one multimedia computer with a pioneering 2-way slide concept, integrated GPS functionality, a 5 megapixel camera and support for high-speed mobile networks, making it easier to watch and record videos, listen to songs, take high-quality photos, browse the internet, or catch up on email while on the move.

"The Nokia N95 brings a range of multimedia features together, such as a fantastic display, outstanding photo and video capability and high-speed connectivity, making it an excellent multimedia computer," said Prem Chand, general manager, Emerging Asia, Nokia.

"This single device -- which fits easily in your pocket -- can replace stand-alone devices that you no longer need to carry individually, whether it's your music player, your digital camera and PDA or navigation device. Most importantly, the Nokia N95 is with you and connected when you want to use it."

With the Carl Zeiss optics on the 5 megapixel camera, you can capture print quality photos and DVD-like quality video clips. Photos and video clips can be enjoyed on a compatible television thanks to the device's TV out feature and support for universal plug and play (UPnP) technology.

The Nokia N95 also offers a first class entertainment experience with the combination of a

Mini Map, with new features such as a floating toolbar, password manager and auto complete, as well as web feeds with support for Atom and auto update.

The phone has a pricetag of Taka 55,000.

Nokia 5700 XpressMusic
The Nokia 5700 XpressMusic features an iconic twist design that switches between four modes-music player, 2 Megapixel camera, video call and smartphone. It combines the benefits of a music-oriented, multipurpose device with 3G dataspeeds.

"Like its name suggests, the Nokia 5700 XpressMusic is a music-first mobile device, augmented by a dedicated audio chip for enhanced music performance. The Nokia 5700 XpressMusic supports up to 1500 tracks on a 2 GB microSD card-up to 86 hours worth of music. In addition the built-in stereo loudspeakers let people share their tunes with friends turning the Nokia 5700 XpressMusic into an acoustic crowd-pleaser. An optimized music player supports album art, playlists, plus a 5-band equalizer and audio visualizations," said Prem.

Loading songs onto the Nokia 5700 XpressMusic is fast and easy as consumers can choose from a broad range of supported digital formats. Moreover, the Nokia 5700 XpressMusic lets consumers enjoy their tracks with Bluetooth stereo headphones, such as the BH-501 or

ed by nature, and one of its most beautiful elements, gold, the Nokia 8800 Sirocco Gold -- a bold and prestigious new style statement for the Bangladesh market.

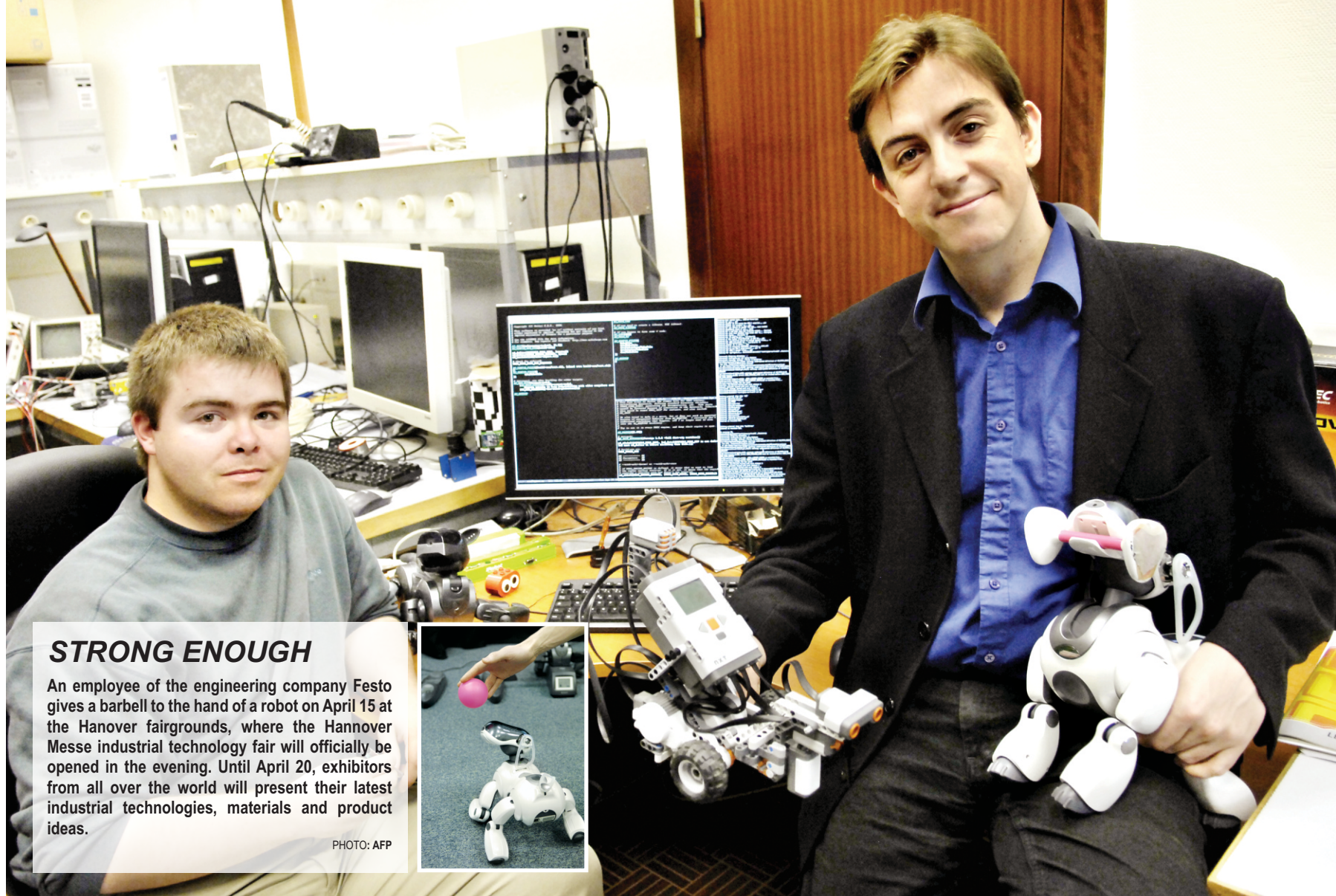
Encased in a luxurious 18-carat gold plating, the precisely crafted from techniques mastered over hundreds of years by watchmakers and jewelers, Nokia 8800 Sirocco Gold combines timeless design with a contemporary flair, resulting in an exclusive display of personal style and elegance.

"The Nokia 8800 Sirocco Gold is set to continue Nokia's strong legacy in exclusive and highly desirable style accessories," explained Prem. "The Nokia 8800 Sirocco Gold remains true to the "form follows function" mantra of Nokia designers and engineers -- a tradition built upon decades of experience in mobility."

Combining its heritage of highly desired communication devices with organic designs inspired by surfaces found in nature, the Nokia 8800 Sirocco Gold pays artful attention to the smallest details and selection of materials. A stunning achievement of craftsmanship, fine white gold accents enhance the 18-carat gold plating while the sapphire-coated, scratch-resistant glass display helps to ensure that the beauty of the Nokia 8800 Sirocco Gold endures.

The elegance of the Nokia 8800 Sirocco Gold is also complemented by a coordinating desk stand and color-matching Bluetooth headset. The phone has a pricetag of Taka 80,000.

PHOTOTECH



STRONG ENOUGH

An employee of the engineering company Festo gives a barbell to the hand of a robot on April 15 at the Hanover fairgrounds, where the Hannover Messe industrial technology fair will officially be opened in the evening. Until April 20, exhibitors from all over the world will present their latest industrial technologies, materials and product ideas.

PHOTO: AFP