



# ICT to surmount disability

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In our country, there are thousands of predicaments for a disabled 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 abled 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 10 per 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

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.

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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 endeavours 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.

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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.

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 disabled 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

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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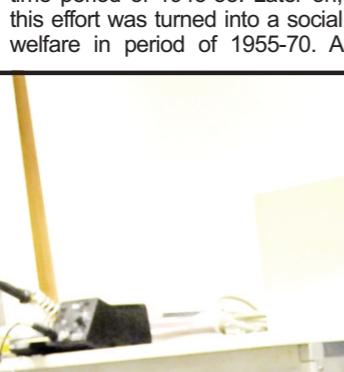
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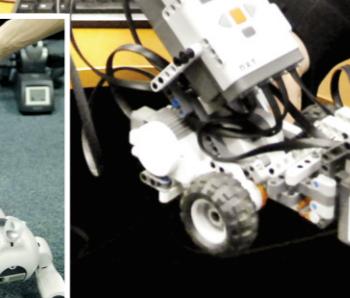
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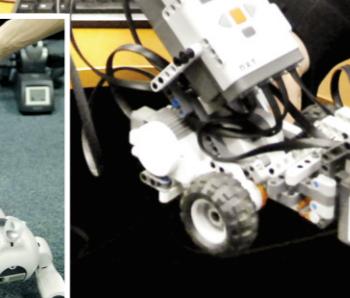
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Some images of the robots being controlled by the disabled people:



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PHOTOTECH

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