



# Mission to empower rural community

EDWARD APURBA SINGHA

PEOPLE in rural Bangladesh work their land from dawn till dusk and women devote themselves to household chores. It is plain lifestyle, away from the daily hubbub of city life. This bucolic simplicity, however, does not exclude the residents from their right to know.

ICT helps villagers access the information they need. Information important to them is disseminated from a place commonly known as telecentre. Several organisations, including GrameenPhone, have already implemented telecentres in some parts of the country.

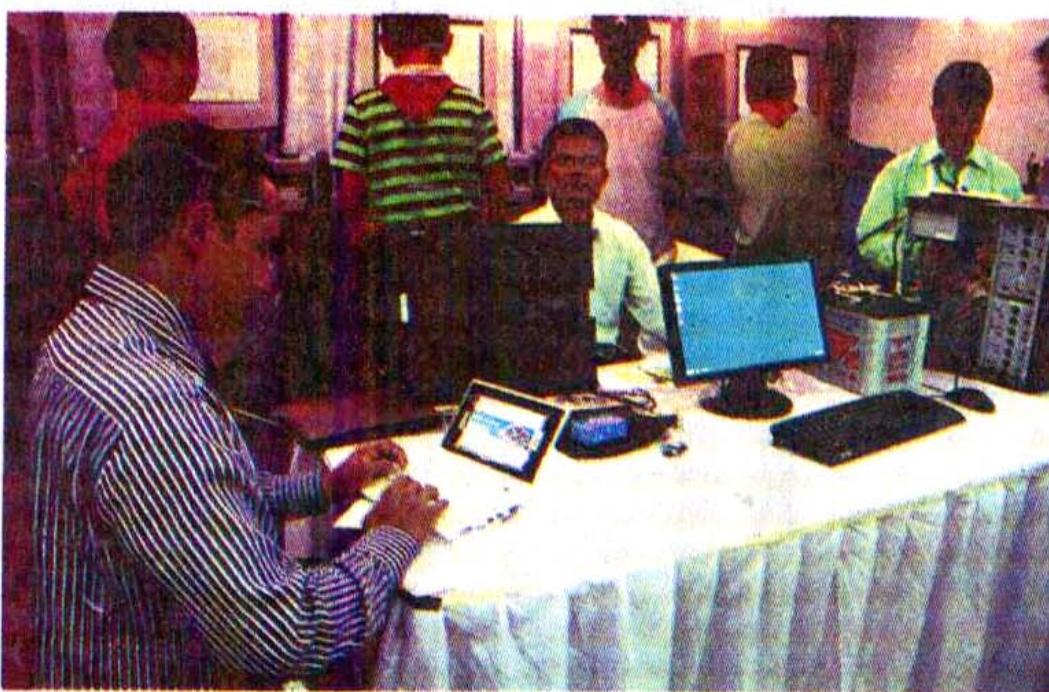
Now all of them are unified under an umbrella organisation called Bangladesh Telecentre Network (BTN) to strengthen their capacity as well as speed up the process to incorporate ICT in rural life.

BTN rolled out its collective initiative, "Mission 2011", through a magnificent inaugural session at Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre on December 6.

The BTN move aims at connecting the rural areas by establishing 40,000 telecentres throughout the country by 2011, the year when the nation celebrates 40 years of independence.

Chief Adviser Fakruddin Ahmed formally inaugurated "Mission 2011". He hoped that the initiative, which introduces new-age technology to rural people, will play an important role in expediting the development process, minimising the gap between the state and the poor and alleviating poverty. He called on BTN to develop relevant content and provide advisory service for the people.

Tapan Chowdhury, adviser of science, information and communication ministry, said ICT is not only an export item, it can also be utilised to address the problems of the underprivileged sections of the society. He unveiled the government's plan to spread ICT services in rural areas. Renata Lok Dassallien, United Nations resident coordinator in Bangladesh, described a network of ICT-based telecentres as a relevant and realistic solution for empowering rural people. Manzurul Alam, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication and Regulatory Commission, pointed out that illiteracy is a setback in familiarising IT services in rural areas. He



A battery run CPU and a low priced miniature laptop by Asus is on display at Intel's stall in the Mission 2011 exhibition, D.Net's stall resembles a 'Pallithya Kendra' (village information centre), bottom-left, and visitors check out another stall of Food Security for Sustainable Household Livelihoods Programme (FoSHoL).



also talked about human machine interfacing and touch screen based solution.

Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, vice chancellor of Brac University, presented the keynote paper. He called on the telecommunication service providers to develop shockproof installation so that services are not disrupted during natural calamities. Brac University is planning to launch a programme in collaboration with D.Net (Development Research Network) to develop IT-skilled manpower, he said.

Prof Arunachalam of MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in India put emphasis on innovative approach to make telecentres more valuable to village residents to meet their requirements.

Dr Basheer Hamad Shadrach, Asian region senior program officer of IDRC/telecentre.org, focused on issues such as con-

nnectivity, content, services and conducive policies to achieve breakthrough in rural development while Abdul Muyeed Chowdhury, chairperson of BTN, talked about the role telecentres can play in helping the Election Commission accomplish voter registration work.

BTN seeks support from the government, NGOs, academia, media and other stakeholders to make "Mission 2011" a success. BTN has set two objectives:

- Building awareness among the stakeholders, including the government, about the importance of building an information and knowledge system for the poor through establishment of a network of ICT-based telecentres.

- Supporting and facilitating functioning of grassroots level telecentres through offering a set of services, which are crucial to ensuring sustainability of the telecentres including sharing of

contents.

BTN has also set up six task forces, for to coordinate and resolve the burning issues. The task forces are telecentre policy task force, human capacity development task force, content and solutions task force, technical and reference support task force, promotion and event management task force and resource mobilisation task force which will be led by SDNE, YPSA, KATALYST, D.Net and DKF respectively.

Grameen Communications first initiated the telecentre trend in Bangladesh in October 1999. It was in Madhupur of Tangail and this centre provided dial-up internet service, computer training and latest pineapple prices in Dhaka.

Today around 1000 telecentres are operational throughout the country.

Telecentres bring profound impact on rural life that include creating social awareness, eradicating poverty, empowering women, opening the door of financial activities and eliminating digital divide.

In order to make a telecentre viable in the long run, there should be a specific business model. If installation and operational costs are not brought down, it will bring adverse effect on telecentre members. Location is another important factor. It should be located at a place where people frequently hang around.

Technology is also an important consideration in running the telecentres smoothly. In remote areas where there is no cable-based communication network, wireless could be a good alternative. If the government opens WiMAX for all, it will create plenty of business opportunities for the telecentres as the technology paves the way for introducing IP telephony service.

Content is another important issue. Most rural people are not familiar with foreign language. This is why contents in local language should be given priority. Keeping in mind climate change, weather-related contents in local language can help people take necessary precautions.

Open-source software could be a good solution to the telecentres. Proprietary software is expensive and it adds to the operational costs. Intel has recently come up with a low-cost PC solution with limited power consumption.

A study shows that 62 percent of the world's telecentres has been built and is maintained by non-profit organisations, 24 percent are profit-oriented projects while 14 percent are government projects. Asia leads the telecentre growth with about 37 percent of the share, followed by Africa, which accounts for approximately 33 percent of the growth.

Right to information has become one of the basic needs of us. Farmers need right information to sell their produce and avoid price manipulation, students require information for their career. If BTN successfully overcomes the hurdles lurking ahead, it will certainly bring a new vista of opportunities for the rural people to enrich their lives as well as create revolutionary changes in the society.

## Mac OS X

Mac OS X is a line of graphical operating systems developed, marketed, and sold by Apple Inc., the latest of which is pre-loaded on all currently shipping Macintosh computers. Mac OS X is the successor to the original Mac OS, which had been Apple's primary operating system since 1984. Unlike its predecessors, Mac OS X is a Unix-based operating system built on technology that had been developed at NeXT through the second half of the 1980s until Apple purchased the company in early 1997. The first version released was Mac OS X Server 1.0 in 1999, and a desktop-oriented version, Mac OS X v10.0 followed in March 2001. Most recently Mac OS X v10.5 referred as "Leopard" was released in October 2007.



startech@thecurrentstar.net

## TECHNEWS

## ACM ICPC Dhaka 2007 kicks off

## STAR TECH DESK

TONDAY the battle of brains takes place once again, as East West University (EWU) hosts the ACM International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) Dhaka Regional 2007 at Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre (BCFCC).

This year 80 teams from 36 different universities all over the country as well as from China and Thailand are going to participate in this competition. Each team comprises three members. The programme starts at 7:30 in the morning and is scheduled to continue till 10:00 p.m.

EWU organised a press conference on November 30 to share the insights of ACM ICPC 2007. Syed Akhter Hossain, regional contest director and chairperson of CSE dept, EWU apprised that, "This year the ACM ICPC Dhaka Regional has been organised in the flavour of the world finals and for such reason BCFCC has been selected as the contest venue".

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In this regard, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the two companies at the Grameen Solutions head office on December 2.

"It is indeed a unique opportunity for us to work with Smart Communications to enrich our knowledge and experience as a whole to explore the Japanese market. I am confident that our new initiative will create a breakthrough in the native IT industry and at the same time produce global standard IT skilled manpower", said Kazi Islam, chief executive officer (CEO) of Grameen Solutions.

"We are also optimistic that



From left: Dr. Kaykobad of BUET, Prof Muhammad Zafar Iqbal of SUST and Syed Akhter Hossain, of EWU at the press conference.

neering and Technology (Buet) told the media. "Our students need proper incentives to nourish their inner power and it is a sacred duty for all to properly address this issue", he stated.

Partners that has offer their support to this contest are Global Brand, Therap, Southeast Bank, Prime bank, Pubali Bank, ETV, Radio Foorti, Computer Jagat, The Daily Star and The Daily Ittefaq.

## TECHNEWS

## GS, Smart Communications tie opens new door to Japan

## STARTECH DESK

GRAMEEN Solutions (GS), an info-tech wing of Grameen Bank, recently teamed up with Japan based Smart Communications Ltd. with a vision to increase nation's contribution in the Japanese hi-tech market.

In this regard, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the two companies at the Grameen Solutions head office on December 2.

"I am impressed on the present advancement of Bangladesh IT industry and it is a high-time for the country to utilise this experience in global domain for a durable success", said Masaki Abe, chief executive officer (CEO) of Smart Communications.

While talking to StarTech,



Due to this agreement Grameen Solutions will now enjoy the opportunity to be associated with large Japanese tech companies, understand

their requirements and organise special training programs to prepare local talents for them. On the other hand, GS will also provide strategic support to Smart Communications to extend its operations in Bangladesh.

"I am impressed on the present advancement of Bangladesh IT industry and it is a high-time for the country to utilise this experience in global domain for a durable success", said Masaki Abe, chief executive officer (CEO) of Smart Communications.

While talking to StarTech, Abe said, "In Japan, Bangladeshis are doing well in academic area but we need more IT skilled people to meet the uprising demand of our hi-tech industry". He also requested media to disseminate relevant information to the people so that they can get a clear view about the existing scopes in Japan.

## TECHNEWS

### Asus unveils SideShow notebook

## STARTECH DESK

A SUSTEK Computer Inc. (Asus), a leading provider of high-performance notebook computers, recently introduced a whole new way to mobile computing with the revolutionary W5Fe series.

The compact 12.1" wide notebook with cutting-edge SideShow, external LCD cover, offers high mobility with quick and easy data access convenience, says a press release.

The W5Fe, based on the award-winning W5 series design, is packed with a wide range of exclusive features including display technologies for enhanced digital entertainment enjoyment as well as high-resolution swivel webcam for wire-free video communication.

Every Asus notebook has a price-tag of Taka 1,50,000.

### Facebook apologises for ad platform 'mistakes'

AFP, San Francisco

FACEBOOK founder Mark Zuckerberg on Wednesday apologised online to members for "mistakes" made implementing a new ad platform and gave them away to switch off.

Last week the hot social networking website changed its nascent "Beacon" advertising platform to an opt-in system to soothe members outraged by what they saw as an assault on their privacy.

On Wednesday, Zuckerberg gave members a way to turn Beacon off.

"We simply did a bad job with this release, and I apologise for it," Zuckerberg wrote in a posting at the Facebook website.

Beacon lets "partners" track Facebook members' visits to their websites and relay messages letting users' friends in the social networking community know what they bought in a tactic referred to as "trusted referral" advertising.

Originally members were fodder for the ad platform if they didn't exert the effort to "opt-out".

Internet civic and political action group Moveon.org said that 55,000 of Facebook's 50 million members electronically signed a petition titled "Facebook: Stop invading my

privacy."

The petition calls for Facebook not to spread word of what members buy to their friends without explicit permission.

The uprising caused Facebook to change the system so that members are asked to click on an "OK" icon if they want stories about their activities at advertisers' websites to be sent to friends via automated news feeds.



If members do nothing with the notices, no stories are sent, according to Facebook, which acts as intermediary between advertisers and members. A privacy tool released Wednesday lets members permanently opt-out of Beacon.

Facebook launched Beacon in early November in a move awaited by analysts wondering

## PHOTOTECH



A woman feeds a leaf to a dinosaur shaped robot pet "Pleo" during a Japanese launching event in Tokyo on December 6. The Pleo, developed by US company Ugobe, has 14 actuators and 38 sensors on its 48-cm long body and which make it increase in size when the owner takes care of it. The robot toy will go on sale across the world this month.

