

TECHCONTEST

ACM ICPC Dhaka Regional 2007

Where coders battled

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If you ask a primary-school student what they loathe most, the answer is probably exam! You may well expect the same answer from a graduate student.

Examinations are all about proving the competency of a learner. But it does not always mirror the inner qualities of a student. Our traditional education system also develops a mindset which makes the students focus more on the exams than on life as it really is.

Students then lack practical know-how that the industries mostly expect from them. In order to overcome this setback, some co-curricular activities are playing a significant role in bridging the gap between academia and industry.

Programming contest is such a thing, which opens a new horizon for the youngsters to exhibit their creativity and potential. It is a talent competition.

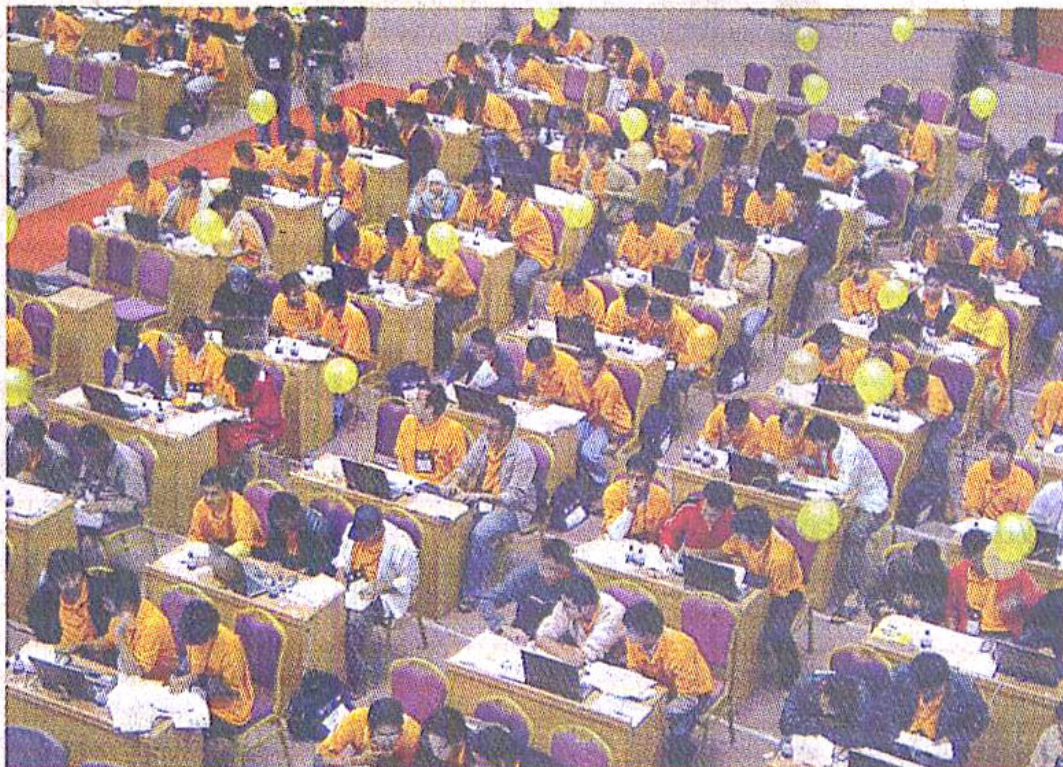
This year East West University (EWU) organised a prestigious programming contest, "ACM ICPC Dhaka Regional 2007", on December 8 at Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre (BCFCC).

The ACM ICPC (International Collegiate Programming Contest) is an IBM-sponsored global initiative to find the best coders. Bangladesh is a regular participant in this event and has an impressive track record as well.

The ICPC authorities have set some guidelines for both the contest and the contestants. A university team must come through the regional contest to qualify for the world final. Many universities arrange local contests in order to pick up contestants for the regional level.

Only university students are eligible to join this battle of coders. Each team comprises three members and needs to solve 10 given problems within five hours. Programmers can use programming languages such as C, C++ or Java to solve the problems. PC Square software is used to analyse the result. As soon as a team solves a problem, a balloon is attached to their desk.

This year EWU organised the contest after the fashion of the world final that attracted talent and showcased the nation's



A bird's eye view of a portion of coders at the ACM ICPC Dhaka Regional 2007 contest, top, programmers of Fudan University of China engrossed in solving their problems, they secured the second position, bottom-left, and coders at the inaugural session.



capability to organise such a hi-tech international event.

Chief guest of the inaugural ceremony and former chief adviser Mohammad Habibur Rahman stressed the need for information technology in order to foster the growth of modern business activities. He also put emphasis on inventing new-age technology that in effect will enlighten the nation.

Jalaluddin Ahmed, president of board of directors of EWU, urged the young learners to work rigorously so that they can become expert and transform

the nation into a true knowledge-based society.

Eighty-three teams from 31 local and one Chinese universities participated in this competition. EWU also opened the door to college-level contestants and four teams from different colleges added special attraction to the talent contest. Chief judge Prof Zafar Iqbal of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) coordinated a team of 11 judges.

'Buet Sprinter' team ranked top, followed by Fudan University of China and EWU. The Buet

team solved seven problems out of 10, Fudan University solved six and EWU five.

Prof Zafar Iqbal announced the names of the winning teams. The problem set was analysed by Shahriar Manzoor, judging director of this contest. Top 18 teams were awarded prizes at the contest.

Prof Nazrul Islam, chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC), was chief guest at the award-giving ceremony and Prof Mohammad Sharif, vice chancellor of EWU, presided over the entire session. Dali Islam of IBM was present as special guest at

the ceremony.

Programming contest first began here in 1992 and gained momentum in 1996. ACM ICPC Dhaka site kicked off in 1997 with the initiative of Prof AL Haque of North South University. 18 teams from 11 institutions participated in the contest that was held on November 18, 1997. Buet team 'Bengal Tigers' dominated the contest. Buet students participated in the world final in Atlanta in the US on February 28 the following year.

Buet's success increased the programming contest craze and at the same time added a new dimension to computer science education. Prof M Kaykobad of Buet was selected as one of the best coaches in the world final in 2001. Another renowned name in the country's programming contest history is Shahriar Manzoor. From 2003 on, he has been a judge in the world final.

North South University (NSU) and Buet successfully organised the previous nine ACM ICPC Dhaka site contests. NSU hosted six contests and Buet three. EWU got the nod from ACM ICPC authorities to host the next three contests from 2007 to 2009.

Apart from regular programming contests, our programmers also do better in online programming contest. The virtual display of Bangladesh flag on Valladolid University's ACM chapter web page is a witness to our global emergence.

Until recently, all programming contests in Bangladesh were held in the closed environment of the host universities. But this year EWU broke this trend by organising the programming contest on the huge floor of BCFCC. It gave the programmers mental comfort and flexibility.

In addition, this event also showcased state-of-the-art technology supported by Global Brand to handle such mission-critical activity. Contribution of print and electronic media also helped the organisers disseminate the essence of this contest.

It's time Bangladesh shed dependence on unskilled labour. In this regard, we need to focus on software industry. We get many bright programmers through each ACM ICPC contest and it is high time we utilised their talent to ensure our strength in the global IT domain.

Curta Calculator

The Curta was a small, hand-cranked mechanical calculator introduced in 1948. It had an extremely compact design, a small cylinder that fit in the palm of the hand. It could be used to perform addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and, with more difficulty, square roots and other operations. The Curta's design is a variant of Gottfried Leibniz's Arithmometer, accumulating values on cogs, which are added or complemented by a stepped drum mechanism. The Curta was invented by Curt Herzstark while he was a prisoner in the Buchenwald concentration camp. They were widely considered the best portable calculators available, until they were displaced by electronic calculators in the 1970s.



TECHNEWS

In-flight internet too tempting for some

AP, New York

WARREN Adelman's colleagues know him as "Thumbs". Like many executives, he is adept at checking e-mail on his BlackBerry and does it almost constantly.

Unable to do so during flights, Adelman welcomes business trips as "an opportunity to decompress a little bit from the constant flow of e-mail, perhaps catch up on a book."

"It's one of the few downtime environments you get in this day and age," said Adelman, president and chief operating officer of GoDaddy.com Inc., a registration company for internet domain names.

An invasion of his sanctuary is imminent, though, as airlines around the world would make available in-flight internet services.

On Tuesday, JetBlue Airways Corp. began offering e-mail and instant messaging on one aircraft. Broader high-speed services, including Web surfing, are to come next year on some flights of AMR Corp.'s American Airlines, Virgin America and Alaska Air Group Inc.'s Alaska Airlines.

And in-flight entertainment



Brad Garlinghouse, senior vice president of Yahoo, demonstrates the capabilities of a laptop during a media preview

provider Panasonic Avionics Corp., a unit of Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., has been testing Internet offerings with Australia's Qantas Airways Ltd. Other airlines are to join next year.

Airlines see airborne Internet access, which typically uses Wi-Fi technology deemed safe for flights, as producing both revenue and a competitive edge against one another and over trains, buses and automobiles.

Frequent fliers said the temptation to go online would be overwhelming, though they were divided over whether they

would rejoice.

Jay Pease, a regional marketing director for Exstream Software LLC, said he needs to rest during trans-Atlantic flights for morning meetings in Europe. But he often has trouble sleeping, and he worried that "the temptation would be there to say, 'I'll just log on and surf the Internet for a while.'"

Jon Carson, chief executive with online fundraising company cMarket Inc., said that between kids, meetings and electronic interruptions on the ground, "I get some of my best work done on the plane."

TECHNEWS

Sony unveils hand-powered digital camera

AFP, Tokyo

SONY on Thursday unveiled a prototype digital camera shaped like a pizza cutter with a wheel that can be turned to generate enough power to take pictures.

The "Twirl N' Take" camera generates enough electricity for one snap if the wheel is moved for some 15 seconds, according to a Sony official.

A digital camera similar to those used in mobile phones is installed in a handle attached to the wheel, which is equipped with a power-generating device, she said.

Moving the wheel and taking pictures would appeal to children but the company has no immediate plan to commercialise it, she said.

As the camera has no screen monitor, users must connect



the device to a computer to see their pictures.

The camera is the latest addition to Sony's "odo" line of hand-powered prototypes aimed at raising environmental awareness.

Other products include a "Crank N' Capture" video camera, which is charged by cranking a lever, and a "Spin N' Snap" camera, which has a hole to enable users to spin it with their finger.

TECHNEWS

Never miss a beat with P535 PDA

STARTECH DESK

A SUSTEK Computer Inc. (Bangladesh) recently launched the P535 tri-band PDA phone that incorporates full wireless functionality, GPS and high quality autofocus camera in a compact form factor, offering a comprehensive spread of business and lifestyle applications in an exceedingly handy platform.

The P535 helps the business executives stay connected while on the move, offering push email, internet access, off-site synchronisation of calendar and contact information over wireless (802.11b/g) or mobile phone GPRS networks, says a press release.

Coupled with the ability to view and edit Office documents, the P535's many features include, the Windows Mobile 5.0 operating system, full suite of multimedia playback functionality, and reliance on flash memory: data stored in the P535 remains stored, even if the P535 has lost all power. The PDA has a price-tag of Taka 32,000/-



'Avatars' offer virtual participation at climate summit

AFP, Nusa Dua

MORE than 10,000 people are in Bali thrashing out action on global warming, but those who couldn't make it in person are here virtually -- some in the form of dragons and action heroes.

Hoping to widen the debate and cut down on carbon emissions from air travel, Oneworld.net, a left-leaning



A virtual image of Nusa Dua, Bali

website, has taken the UN conference here on climate change to the online virtual world Second Life.

The website has brought together everyone from a US congressman, who travelled virtually as a 3-D animation, to anonymous participants hailing from Japan to Turkmenistan and

Romania. Second Life, which has drawn millions of users since it was created in 2003 by San Francisco-based Linden Labs, is a fantasy land in which users mingle under assumed identities as "avatars."

While most delegates in Bali opt for formal attire, users of the site, www.oneclimate.net, pick the virtual likeness of their choice -- ranging from purple

Danny Nelson, 64, a former British journalist who conducts the interviews for the webcast.

"But then I saw the results. This has the potential to bring in all sorts of people who never would have come to Bali unless they're millionaires or in NGOs," he said.

One person who used the website to get through to Bali was US Representative Edward Markey, a leading critic of President George W. Bush's energy policies which he accused of worsening global warming.

"I have teleported here over the Internet, as you can see, as an avatar," Markey said as he introduced his virtual persona -- a comparatively staid animation in which he appeared in suit and tie.

"I believe that I am the first member of the United States Congress to be introduced by someone with a blue dragon on her shoulder," the Massachusetts Democrat noted.

Markey said he had to stay in Washington to spearhead a clean energy bill in the Democratic-controlled Congress, but wanted to get his message out in Bali where talks have deadlocked.

Jeffrey Allen, part of the team of two running the virtual space from Bali, admitted technology has not yet been perfected to the point that major international conferences could be conducted purely in cyberspace.

hair to outfits befitting action heroes.

The mostly anonymous avatars type in questions and comments at a virtual arena in a daily webcast featuring real-world officials and experts.

"I admit I was a bit of a cynic at first about these avatars. I just found it totally bizarre," said



BALL TECH

German sporting goods giant Adidas displays a cut model of a football during a press conference in Yokohama, Kanagawa prefecture, on December 13. The ball has a device with goal-line technology, using a magnetic field to provide real-time feedback to a central computer which tracks the ball on the field and sends the data to the referee, allowing them to know whether a ball has crossed the goal line during play.

PHOTO: AFP