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Inventor of Bangla computer keyboard wins legal battle

A key step in protection of local intellectual property rights

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

The inventor of the most popular Bangla computer keyboard has won a long legal battle to protect his design and software, with the government to stop pirated Bangla language keyboards from entering the country.

The move is being seen as a key step in the protection of local intellectual property rights in a country where inventors and software designers struggle to gain an income for their ideas.

The first edition of the Bengali typing software popularly known as 'Bijoy' and Bangla keyboard known as the 'Bijoy Keyboard' was invented and patented by Mostafa Jabbar in 1988.

Although several other Bangla software programmes and keyboards have been designed since, Bijoy remains the most popular, especially among professional users. Mostafa Jabbar claims that even in West Bengal his invention is the market leader.

However for the past two decades Mostafa Jabbar has struggled to defend his patent against pirated keyboard and software copies produced and imported mainly from China without his permission.

Last month the National Board of Revenue (NBR) moved to protect Mostafa Jabbar's rights, issuing a circular asking the customs department to put bar on the import of pirated Bijoy software and Bijoy keyboards.

"It is really a big win for me and my company Ananda Computer as I have been fighting for the last 15 years to establish my rights in international business," Mostafa Jabbar said.

The circular reads "following assessment of the application it is

found that Ananda Computers owns the patent rights of the Bangla printed keyboard."

"This is a joyous message for me as through this text the government acknowledged my invention," Mostafa Jabbar said.

"The NBR has directed the customs department to take action under the section 15 of The Customs Act, 1969," the circular signed by Abul Bashir Md. Shafiqur Rahman said.

If the customs restricts imports of pirated keyboards and software there will be huge vacuum of Bangla keyboard, Mostafa Jabbar said, a vacuum that he hopes to fill through legal imports.

Recently Jabbar signed a contract with a Chinese company to supply keyboard to the Bangladeshi market paying him a royalty on each one sold.

"I hope that if I can continue my success the example will encourage many local software developers to get patent rights and earn royalty from their products," Jabbar added.

Last week a high official of the customs said the customs will not allow any pirated keyboard upon receiving the circular.

"We must uphold the spirit of the law as well as encourage local entrepreneurs to protect their interest," the customs official added.

In a separate dispute Mostafa Jabbar alleges that the Election Commission is violating his patents by using the Bijoy Software and Key Board in its 10,000 laptops without his permission.

"I don't seek any royalty from the election commission. I just want to get official acknowledgment from the government," Jabbar added.



A computer keyboard, which is compatible to Bangla typing. Inventor of Bangla computer keyboard known as 'Bijoy Keyboard' has won a long legal battle to protect his design and software.

- Bangla emerged as a new Indo-Aryan language by 900-1000 AD through Magadhi apabhrangsha and abahattha, two stages of Magadhi prakrit (600 BC - 600 AD), along with two other Indo-Aryan languages, Oriya and Assamese.
- The first printed book to use Bangla type was Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's A Grammar of Bengal Language, which refined and standardised Bangla letters.
- The Bangla alphabet consists of both vowels and consonants. There are eleven vowels and 39 consonants, making a total of 50 letters.
- Bangla speakers number about 230 million today, making Bangla the seventh largest language.

Source: Banglapedia

IFC keen to support agro industries, infrastructure

CEO tells The Daily Star

SAJJADUR RAHMAN

The International Finance Corporation is set to expand its operations in Bangladesh, particularly in infrastructure and agro-processing, Lars H Thunell, its executive vice president and CEO, said yesterday.

The chief executive officer of the lending agency said Bangladesh has achieved a lot of economic developments over the last few years, but he believes the country still has more to do in the infrastructure and agriculture areas.

Thunell however emphasised building a public-private partnership to carry out these properly.

"Bangladesh needs to focus on agriculture and agro-processed industries following continued increase in food prices in the international market," he told The Daily Star in an interview at Radisson Hotel.

Development of agriculture has had three times higher impacts on the poor than the regular manufacturing sector, he said, quoting a World Bank study.

A senior IFC official who asked not to be named told The Daily Star that Finance Adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam at a meeting on Monday with Thunell asked him to extend IFC support to build the Padma Bridge and to raise the value addition of farm output through providing logistic support.

"The IFC is discussing with the Pran Group and Kazi Farm, two major agri-farms in the country, to help them expand their business," he added.

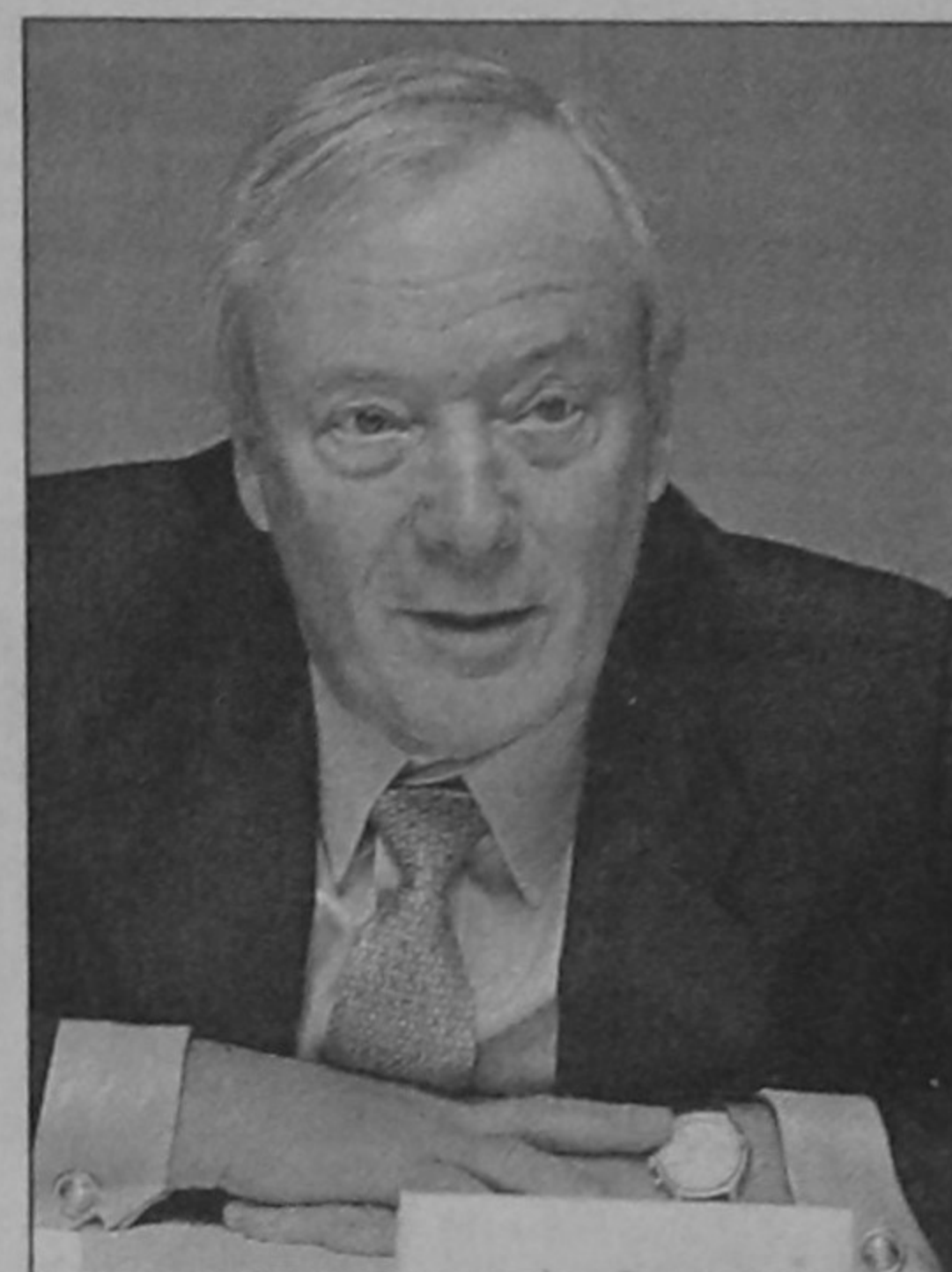
The finance adviser also asked the IFC to invest in the private sector on an equity basis instead of direct loans. This would help create a vibrant capital market, the official said.

On infrastructure, Thunell the IFC could be helpful for the government.

Thunell, a Swedish national, also focused on IFC's global operations. IFC has been increasing the amount it lends as a proportion of the World Bank's International Development Association lending, a vehicle used for soft loans to poor countries.

He said IFC's committed portfolio in Bangladesh stands at US\$167 million in 13 projects, ranging from financial institutions to general manufacturing, telecommunications and infrastructure.

"Investments in our pipeline include a partial credit guarantee to BRAC that provides micro-finance and an investment package to the Bangladesh National School," said the IFC CEO, who was visiting Bangladesh for the first time.



Lars H Thunell

He said, "We're also working on other investments in health care, infrastructure, financial markets and telecommunications."

IFC is also helping Bangladesh to promote small and medium enterprises (SMEs), he added.

Replying to a query on the proposed power plant at Bibiana for which IFC has prepared the bid documents, Thunell said implementation of the plant depends on the sponsor's capacity.

IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, is also looking to expand its Global Trade Finance Programme in Bangladesh to help local banks grow their trade finance operations.

The programme provides access to a network of over 115 confirming banks, which allow local importers to reach other export markets.

IFC Country Manager Per Kjellerhaug was present among others.

SEC seeks 'internal guideline' on merchant bank lending

DSE turnover hits Tk 343cr

SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

The stock market regulator has asked merchant banks to prepare 'internal guideline' on sanctioning loans to investors for purchasing shares.

This guideline will set a criterion for the amount and ratio of such lending, according to sources in the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

The merchant banks, however, cannot cross the loan ratio set by the commission. It re-fixed Sunday the ratio at 1:1 for merchant banks' lending. This ratio comes into effect from February 10.

The directive on the guideline came at a meeting between the regulator and merchant bankers in Dhaka yesterday.

The merchant banks are also required to submit statements on margin loans with the ratio every month to the SEC.

The merchant banks' loan activities will also be brought under SEC monitoring.

"The decisions were taken to bring transparency and accountability in merchant banking," said an SEC high official.

Meanwhile, huge trading of shares in heavyweight like energy and power, mutual funds and

banking on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) pushed the turnover to its highest level at Tk 343 crore yesterday, surpassing the previous highest of Tk 316.83 crore on August 21 last year.

Share trading of 10 companies alone reached around Tk 185 crore, an amount that accounts for more than 50 percent of the total turnover, on the premier bourse.

State-run Jamuna Oil Company topped the day's turnover list with Tk 66.64 crore followed by Grameen Mutual Fund One with Tk 18.88 crore, AIMS First Mutual Fund with Tk 17.23 crore, Meghna Petroleum Company with Tk 15.23 crore and AB Bank with Tk 13.39 crore.

The five other turnover leader were Brac Bank with Tk 12.44 crore, Summit Power with Tk 12.17 crore, LankaBangla Finance with Tk 10.99 crore, IFIC Bank with Tk 9.05 crore and National Bank with Tk 8.15 crore.

Market experts said investors were in a positive mood following the regulator's declaration that it would raise the ratio of merchant banks' loans.

Investors now get encouraged at re-fixation of such lending ratio and restoration of netting facilities, they said.

Yawer Sayeed, managing director and chief executive officer of AIMS Bangladesh, said: "The investors are in a fresh mood with re-managing their portfolios. However, the market behaviour is normal."

All the indices also rose yesterday with the gainers outnumbering the losers.

The DSE General Index increased by 49.67 points, or 1.71 percent, closing at 2939.92 points, while the DSE All Share Index rose by 40.09 points, or 1.64 percent, finishing at 2476.92 points.

A total of 344,788,155 shares worth Tk 343.77 crore changed hands on the bourse. Of the issues traded, 159 advanced and 64 declined with 13 unchanged.

Like DSE, price indices on the Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) also rose.

The CSE Selective Categories Index increased by 66.35 points, or 1.39 percent, to close at 4810.56 points, while the CSE All Share Price Index rose by 98.89 points, or 1.33 percent, to finish at 7485.82 points.

A total of 765,191 shares worth Tk 63.12 crore changed hands on the port city bourse. Of the issues traded, 102 advanced and 24 declined with eight unchanged.

5 mobile operators told to improve

Telcos blame lack of frequency

MD HASAN

Five of the country's mobile operators must improve the quality of their services and deal with problems such as dropped calls and poor sound quality, the telecom regulator has warned in a letter to operators.

In a recent letter to Grameenphone, Banglalink, AKTEL, Citycell and state-run Teletalk, the telecom watchdog said, "Mobile phone operators must improve their networks, as well as, services. Otherwise, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) will take action against them for providing poor services."

However, mobile phone industry insiders said the mobile companies have already invested heavily on their networks and the main reason behind deteriorating services has been the lack of adequate frequency allocation.

No letter has been sent to Warid Telecom as the company started operation only one year ago.

The letter from BTRC mentioned five problem areas for improvement: the congested network, call dropping, one way connections, echo, other distortion, and poorly targeted automated messaging.

BTRC sources said the telecom regulatory body is seriously considering the issue of ensuring better services.

"If the operators fail to ensure better services, how can they provide the latest technology such as Wimax and 3G (Third generation

technology)," said a high official of BTRC.

Terming the existing services as poor, the BTRC letter threatened to go for action against the operators, if they fail to improve services in selected five areas.

Talking to The Daily Star, an official of a mobile phone company said, "Having adequate frequency is one of the important preconditions for good services, otherwise mobile services will not be improved even after massive network expansion."

"If you issue 10,000 car licences for a route, having capacity for only 5000 cars, congestion will be the ultimate consequence," he said.

Mobile companies have been setting up hundreds of base stations over the last few years, but at the same time the frequency allocation by the BTRC has not been enough to run the expanded networks, he added.

"Firstly BTRC should set up its parameters measuring the standard of operators services," said a high official of another mobile phone operator, adding that in India and Pakistan regulators already have their own mechanism to assess operators services.

BTRC officials said they are conducting a drive to recover unused frequencies that had already been allocated. After completing the drive the regulator will allocate necessary frequencies, based on mobile phone operators valid demands.

The total number of mobile subscribers reached 34.37 million by the end of 2007.

Pvt container depot resumes conditional operation from today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

After three months' suspension due to noise pollution the operational activities of Port Link Logistics Limited, a private inland container depot (ICD), resumes heretoday.

The ICD located at Faujderhat near Bangladesh Military Academy (BMA) got permission for conditional resumption of operation after making an agreement on reduction in sound pollution to a tolerable limit within three months.

During the given time, Port Link will remain operational on condition of keeping operation suspended from 10pm to 6am every day, sources said.

The permission on conditional operation came at a meeting held between Port Link and Chittagong Customs authority in presence of members of task force, Cantonment Executive Board and BMA officials here yesterday.

Port Link was forced to suspend its all operation since October 23 last year.

Cotton council to award 2 local spinning mills

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Cotton Council International (CCI), USA, will award two Bangladeshi spinning mills today for their excellent performance in yarn production, said sources in the CCI, USA yesterday.

This year Square Spinning Mills Ltd and Malek Spinning Mills Ltd have been selected for the prestigious award of the council, sources said.

Chargé d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Dhaka Geeta Pasi is scheduled to give away the certificates of the awards to the owners of the two mills at a function in the capital.

Talking to The Daily Star, a senior official of the council said in Bangladesh Square Spinning Mills has been receiving this award every year since 2002 and Malek Spinning Mills since 2005 for producing high quality yarn by using US cotton.

Give big loans to SMEs

BB governor urges banks, NBFIs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank (BB) governor yesterday called on the commercial banks and non-banking financial institutions (NBFIs) to change their traditional attitudes towards small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and provide them with loans in big volume.

Dr Salehuddin Ahmed said although the government in its industrial policy has prioritised the SME sector, the commercial banks and the NBFIs are reluctant to lend the entrepreneurs.

The central bank chief was speaking at the inaugural session of a workshop on 'Finance for Enterprise Development and Employment Creation (FEDEC)' at the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) seminar room as chief guest.

Managing Director of PKSF Quazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed, among others, was present at the inaugural session.

"The banks and financial institutions should change their attitudes towards SMEs," the governor said, adding that the big enterprises need loans from the perspective of their growth and productivity, but SMEs also need credit support on the

basis of their employment and equity considerations.

People who have a little access to microcredit, need collateral-free loans on regular basis through a range of innovative and dynamic organisations and services, he said.

The governor also called for strengthening the activities of some selective banks and financial institutions that are working for the development of SMEs and finding ways and means to minimise their costs for the management of SME financing.

He attributed the reluctance of banking sector to finance the SMEs to the slow growth of the sector, and said banks do not consider SME lending attractive and profitable as they think SMEs are high-risk borrowers.

The PKSF will implement a six-year long FEDEC project with a cost of US\$57.8 million to alleviate poverty through employment generation by lending to the small entrepreneurs.

Of the total amount, International Fund for Agricultural Development will arrange \$35 million, PKSF \$22 million, and the rest \$0.8 million will come from associated organisations of PKSF and beneficiaries of the project.



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John Quelch
Senior Dean
Harvard Business School

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