



Bangladesh scenario

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EVER since the micro-electronics revolution came into being and the World Wide Web (WWW) was in place, E-governance has been a favorite topic almost all over the world. Some developing countries including India and Malaysia have already made significant advances in this respect. In Bangladesh, E-governance has been the talk of the planners and administrators, but without adequate achievement. Before we highlight why we have not been able to achieve a satisfactory level of E-governance, let us focus on the very objectives of E-governance.

There were two prominent goals of E-governance that deserve mentioning. The first is to afford an interface between government and people in the providing of information and services. The other is to share data between various depart-

ments of the government so that when government decisions are taken, they are taken on a sound numerical basis and are not to be changed every now and then, as has been the practice in the past. Why these two broad objectives have not been achieved is indeed a big question that needs to be addressed without further delay.

In addressing this question, we have to identify the status of "our people". There is a geographical distribution of our people. When services and facilities have to be provided to "our people", we have to remember, that not all people live in cities and towns. About 80% of our citizens live in rural areas. Obviously, if we introduce a method of E-governance which is accessible to only 20% rather advantageously placed persons in urban areas, then, no wonder, the digital divide between the urban and rural population will increase manifold. This would be indeed a great irony, especially in view of the fact that ICT (Infor-

mation and Communication) revolution ushered a new era with hopes for reducing the divide between the poor and the rich. Thus, all measures for E-governance should be people-oriented (after all, the governance should cover all people, and not only a few). Now, what are the basic commodities that are needed for ensuring E-governance?

We, of course, need a few things: computers, modems, broadband connections, telephone lines and most importantly, electricity. Apart from the hardware, we need human software also. For quite sometime, the emphasis was to train people in computers for having good jobs outside the country. Very few realized that we needed trained people inside Bangladesh to make the best uses of computers including research and development, which has been a topic of least importance in Bangladesh.

It is not that in Bangladesh the

use of computers has not been on the rise. In fact, computers exist now, in government offices, private offices, banks, educational institutions and even in households. How much are they used, and with what purposes, is the key question. Computers are still used in this country as glorified typewriters. This is indeed shocking because of all the tasks that modern computers can do, typing is only comparatively an insignificant one. There are other uses of computers, namely, telephoning, faxing, printing, e-mailing, browsing the internet, using multimedia etc. These have their values no doubt, but these alone cannot ensure E-governance. What is needed most for E-governance is to ensure that people have access to broadband connections, and that websites are sufficiently loaded with relevant information to be used by the browser. This calls for skilled data-entry operations which are still lacking

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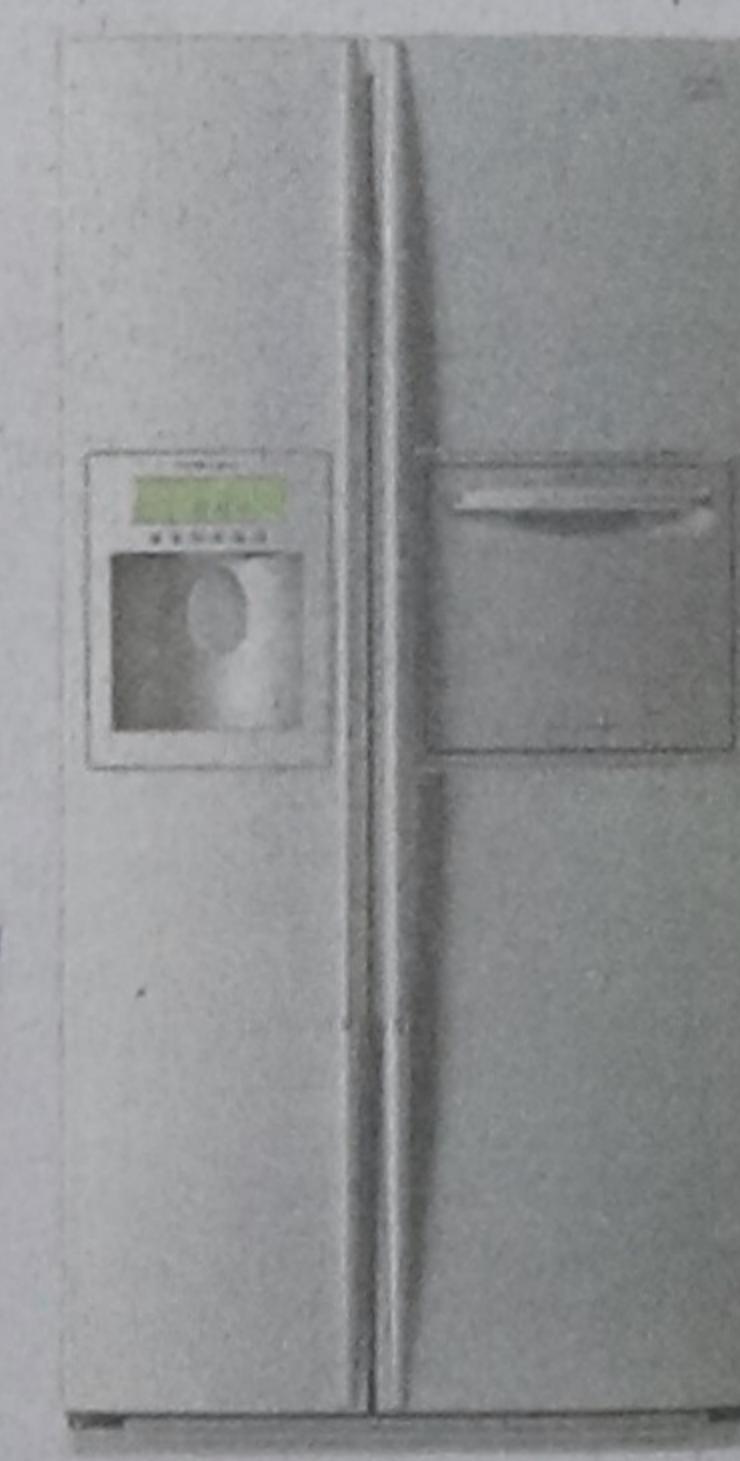
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