Star TECH

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Busicom

Busicom (Nippon Calculating Machine Corp changed its name to Business Computer Corporation) was a Japanese company that owned the rights to the first microprocessor but sold them back to Intel. They made electronic calculators and the first using the new Intel 4004 processor was the Busicom 141-PF. Due to a recession in Japan in 1974, Busicom became the first major Japanese company in the calculator industry to fail. The company was one of many international contenders in the nascent electronic calculator business.

TECHFOCUS

Bangla computing

Making technology culture specific

EDWARD APURBA SINGHA

INFANTS primarily respond to their surroundings by their own gesture and then gradually learn the language to develop physical and mental growth. This language is known as mother tongue, which has a great impact on personal, social and national activities.

Developed countries attach great importance to their native language and conduct all activities based on it. In Japan, all citizens use Japanese in their A to Z activities. They even do their overseas communication through it.

Now Japan has become an economic giant and technology leader, which has helped take the language to the peak. People now need to know Japanese to do business with the country.

But things are different in the developing world. People in countries like Bangladesh fight for daily survival; opportunities are hard to find and unemployment is soaring every year, triggering the necessity for more diversified approach. For this reason, switch to global language is quite natural.

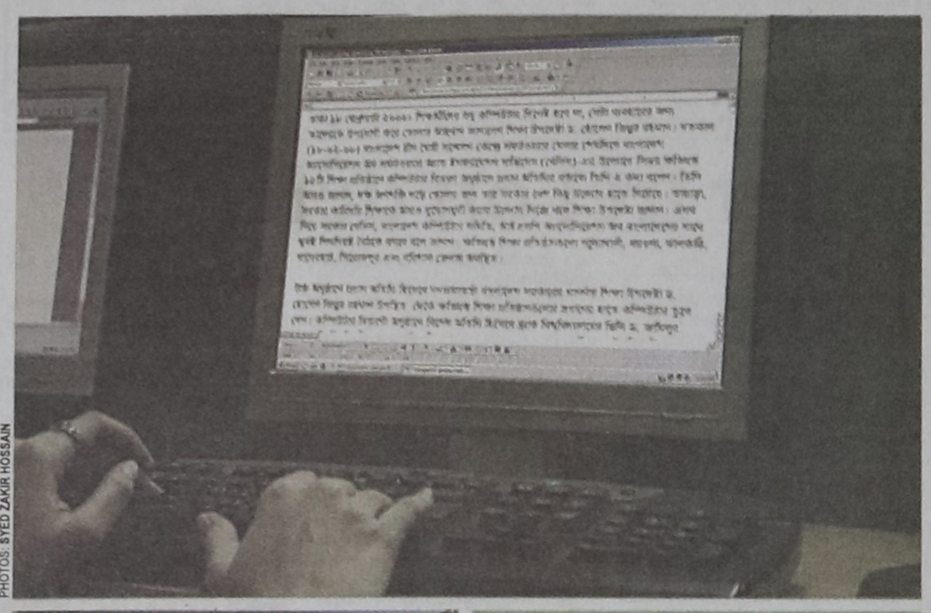
From economic point of view, it is relevant for us to learn foreign language to enrich expertise and then contribute to the country's development. Economic stability could also be achieved by developing capacity through the use of native language. Differences of opinion may exist, but we can think in other ways.

From the perspective of Bangladesh, the use of foreign language in IT is a big problem for the people to enjoy the optimum benefits of modern technology. For instance, English is not intelligible to rural people. But then, nearly all computer applications available in the local market require a basic knowledge of English.

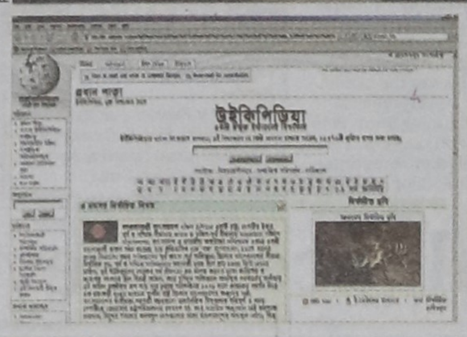
In order to overcome the problem, the concept of Bangla computing has become a reality. The craze for Bangla computing is now gaining momentum day by day. The impact of Bangla computing is not limited to socio-economic aspects only. It also pushes us to obtain a Bangla language identity on the global stage.

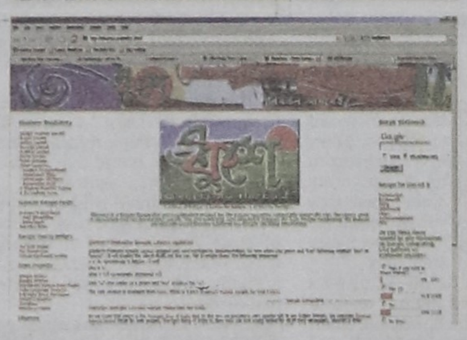
There are two ways to incorporate our native language into the computer system -- the first one is using Bangla in operating system and the second one is using the language in software. Many of us use Bangla font in office applications, which is an instance of the second type.

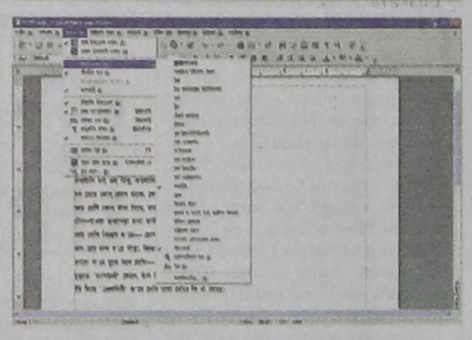
With the advent of Unicode, it is now fairly possible to implement Bangla language in modern computer system. But you may wonder how computer works with the language. Technically speaking, computer actually knows nothing but 0 and 1.



PHOTOS: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN







When you press any character on the keyboard, your PC just converts it into 0 and 1. 0 means low and 1 means high. Before the innovation of Unicode, many encoding systems were utilised to do this task. But they were not capable of incorporating all languages. Unicode has solved the problem.

It was in 1986 when Bangla language first entered the computer system through "Shahid Lipi". It was a breakthrough. The introduction of "Bijoy Bangla Software" also added a new dimension to the Bangla computing initiative.

The main problem at that period was the compatibility issue of Bangla language. Bangla was not usable as a general language on every system as there was no unique way to represent Bangla. Now Unicode has fixed this problem. All modern day software have Unicode compatibility.

In 2005, Ananda Computer released Unicode-compatible Bijoy software. Currently, two different Bangla software solutions such as "Bijoy Ekush' and "Bijoy Bayanno" are available from Ananda Computers.

Avro Keyboard was born on 26 March in 2003, bringing a new era in Bangla computing. It is flexible, gorgeous, feature rich, totally customisable, user friendly and already has a lot of typing automation tools. Ekushey.org is also contributing to the computerisation of Bangla.

Since 2004, the Centre for Research on Bangla Language Processing (CRBLP) at Brac University has been working on the effective use of Bangla on the computer system and the main focus areas are Bangla OCR, spell checker, font converter, Bangla grammar check, speech to text converter, Bangla pronunciation generator, Bangla dictionary, English to Bangla translation and others.

Bangla OCR (Optical Character Recognition) is a nice solution that basically converts scanned text into Word document. This system is capable of generating Unicode-based output. CRBLP has included this software on GPL and for this reason people can enjoy free download opportunity. This software has very intuitive interface and easy-to-use features. .NET Framework Version 2.0 or beyond is required to run this software.

Another landmark in Bangla computing is Microsoft's initiative to develop Bangla Vista and Office 2007.

Chris Atkinson, president for South-East Asia of Microsoft Asia Pacific, said, "Microsoft has been a forerunner in the localisation revolution, extending the reach of IT across a diverse set of multilingual communities in languages they are comfortable with. Worldwide our flagship products will offer language localisation for 100 languages. We have focused R&D teams working round the clock to create new benchmarks on the product localisation front".

Microsoft Bangladesh kicked-started its Local Language Program (LLP) on November 08 in 2006. It is a global initiative of Microsoft that aims at attracting people to IT through their native language.

Microsoft Bangladesh has been partnering with Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) and Brac University (BU) to prepare the Bangla Language Interface Pack under the LLP. The software giant hopes that this solution will be available by 2008.

Apart from this, open source software development has also gained huge popularity in this country. Many teams and individuals are now engaged in this process.

Probably many of us have come across "OpenOffice" office suite. Ankur, a local organisation, is working on open source platform for a long time now. The firm has developed the Bangla version of OpenOffice.org 2.0. This software does not require any licence fee and is open for developer so that they can customise it according to their requirements. It also supports more than 70 languages.

Nowadays Wikipedia is a very popular online encyclopaedia, which contains numerous entries on hosts of issues. Bangladesh Open Source Network (BdOSN) has already published the Bangla version of Wikipedia. Currently, Bangla Wiki has more than 1600 entries and 1700 contributors.

Bangla computing is necessary to bridge the gap between technology and people. We have talented people and they have already proved their competency in several circumstances. But due to the lack of right projection, they have not been able to come in the limelight. It is the government's responsibility to nourish the talents and transform the country into a hi-tech hub.

TECHNEWS

Basis SoftExpo ends with promises

STAR TECH DESK

THE five-day long mega ICT exposition of the country, BASIS SoftExpo 2008, ended on Feb 18 with the view that there is no alternative to ICT.

Several milestones were achieved in this year's SoftExpo. The show successfully drew the government's attention to various key issues and industry barriers.

While inaugurating the fair, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed touched on issues such as second submarine cable and internet pricing and promised that the government will work on such issues.

More than 200 one-to-one matchmaking sessions between local and foreign companies took place in this year's show.

TIM Nurul Kabir, convener of SoftExpo 2008, announced the date for next year's SoftExpo, which will be held from January 27-31, 2009.

This year the fair drew nearly 1,00,000 visitors. They included people from different segments of the ICT industry such as local and multinational ICT companies, mobile application development companies, IT training institutes, public and private universities, IT consultants, foreign delegates, politicians and high-level government officials.

Besides regular exhibition, more than 15 seminars, roundtables and workshops were organised by BASIS and other organisations. Delegates from 39 Danish companies interacted with 120 local software companies on the first three days of SoftExpo. Local firms have already submitted 15 pilot projects to the Danish companies.

This matchmaking opened up a new window of opportunities for 20 Bangladeshi companies to develop their partnership. Delegates from seven Japanese companies also interacted with 41 local companies during the fair in a bid to expand their businesses in Bangladesh.

Seminars became an integral part of the SoftExpo. At a seminar on e-learning, speakers unanimously agreed to build up public-private partnership to start a true e-learning process in the country. Another seminar highlighted the sustainable infrastructure development to flourish the ICT business in the country.

Brig Gen M A Malek (retd), special assistant to chief adviser, said, "If the power of ICT can be harnessed rightly, it can significantly improve the productivity and performance of all the activities we do in every spheres of society".

Manzurul Alam, chairman of BTRC said, "The government is sincere in spreading the ICT infrastructure facilities to rural areas and the government would provide subsidy for the users at rural areas. The government is also thinking of issuing license for call centres at a nominal price to encourage the youth to come to this business".

Hua Du, country director of Asian Development Bank (ADB), urged women entrepreneurship to drive the ICT industry.

Main attractions at SoftExpo 2008 were "Humanoid Robot" by International Islamic University, "Scheme Age Robot" by Khulna University of Engineering and Technology, "Sell to Net" SMS banking software by Upload Yourself System, "Process Light" -- a paperless office related software by International Office Machine (IOM), "Tally 9" by STM Vision Infotech etc. On the last day of the fair, BASIS donated computers to 15 Sidr affected academic institutions.

TECHNEWS

IBM eager to help local ICT industry

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TECHNOLOGY giant IBM (International Business Machines) has showed its keen interest to discover the untapped potential in Bangladesh. Muhammad Hussain, vice president, Global Business Development, IBM Corporation USA revealed IBM's interest at a seminar organised by North South University (NSU) on February 17.

Hussain said "Nowadays every business requires diversified approach in order to gain competitive advantage and ensures sustainability in the long run as well. IBM follows the same strategy and it is the underlying reason to become a global technology leader".

"Since its inception IBM assiduously tried to deliver cutting edge technology solutions to business, government and other entities in order to create a true technology driven universe. Currently, many giant companies around the world are powered by IBM and it is the driving force of IBM innovation", he added.

Hussain apprised that apart from the technology solutions IBM has other schemes to meet the future aspiration. IBM World Development Initiative (WDI) is such a program that is designed to foster global collaboration on innovation opportunities and economic development issues in the developing countries.

"Bangladesh is a land of immense potential. This country needs proper support from the right sources to utilize its available resources. IBM envisages being associate with local development process in Bangladesh. In this regard, we are continuing our discussion with Grameen Solutions and trying to understand the actual socio-economic landscape in order to determine our future steps", Hussain said.

Kazi Islam, chief executive officer, Grameen Solutions said "It is high time to prepare ourselves for the global challenge. Our vision is to create a true knowledge based society and at the same time amplify the growth by implicating technology to mainstream economic process".

Pro-vice chancellor of NSU, Dr SAM Khairul Bashar expressed his gratitude to Hussain for his visit to the university and urged IBM to come forward and support local universities to produce global standard technology proficient human resources. Students of different disciplines also attended the occasion.

PHOTOTECH

NO MORE DRUNK DRIVING

An engineer from Nissan demonstrates a concept car designed to prevent drunk driving and falling asleep at the wheel, which has a facial recognition system to monitor the driver's eyes for detecting signs of drowsiness, during the company's advanced technology seminar in Tokyo on February 21, 2008. The system also has a special gear stick knob with a highly sensitive odor sensor to detect alcohol in the perspiration on a driver's palm.

PHOTO: AFP

TECHNEWS

Asus unveils F3Jr notebook

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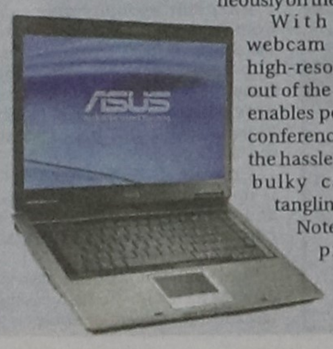
ASUSTEK Computer Inc. (Asus), a leading provider of high-performance notebook computers, recently unveiled the F3J series notebook in the Bangladesh market.

With this latest addition from Asus, one can enjoy revolutionary entertainment on the go - Intel Centrino Duo Mobile Technology in F3Jr enables breakthrough mobile performance, new high-definition capabilities and improved battery life, says a press release.

F3Jr offers outstanding performance to enjoy multimedia management and digital content creation. The notebook also provides enhanced responsiveness to enjoy audio and video, playback and record, gaming, IM, and web browsing simultaneously on the notebook.



With built-in webcam supporting high-resolution right out of the box, the F3Jr enables portable video conferencing without the hassle of bringing a bulky camera and tangling cables. The Notebook has a price-tag of Taka 1,03,000.

HP Science of Brilliant Printing Road show begins

STARTECH DESK

HEWLETT Packard (HP), global leader in printing technology, has started the countrywide 'Science behind Brilliant Printing' campaign.

Under this campaign HP is conducting reseller briefing sessions, customer information services and roadshows in selected cities of Bangladesh, says a press release.

Shabbir Shafiullah, country business development manager, Imaging and Printing Group (IPG) and AK Azad, channel sales manager of HP launched the campaign in Rajshahi along with 50 business partners of Rajshahi division.

In the reseller briefing session Shafiullah said that HP is holding number one position world-wide in Injket printer, All-in-one printers, Scanners, Mono and Color Laser Printers for their superior and innovative technology.

Only HP printers can deliver 1.2 million directly printable colors which is the highest in the printing industry. Moniruzzaman, vice president of Flora Ltd. assured the resellers to provide best support from Flora's 20 branches all over the country to ensure prompt services and supports.

The 'Science behind Brilliant Printing' campaign has already reached Rajshahi, Nawga, Jaipurhat, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Nilfamari, Rangpur, Bogura and Pabna. The campaign will also continue till March reaching Khustia, Jesssore, Khulna, Barisal, Feni, Comilla, Chittagong. HP authorised resellers are offering special promotion gifts to end-users with the purchase of HP printers and original supplies to hype-up this campaign.