



Aggregator

In computing, a feed aggregator, also known as a feed reader, news reader or simply aggregator, is client software or a Web application which aggregates syndicated web content such as news headlines, blogs, podcasts, and vlogs in a single location for easy viewing. Aggregators reduce the time and effort needed to regularly check websites for updates, creating a unique information space or "personal newspaper." Once subscribed to a feed, an aggregator is able to check for new content at user-determined intervals and retrieve the update.



TECHSPOTLIGHT

NewsCred

# Just how credible is your news?

## An international venture by two Bangladeshi men offers credibility-based online news service

NAFID IMRAN AHMED

**H**AVE you ever wondered how credible the news you are reading is? A recent study in the US shows that only 20% readers believe the news they read.

NewsCred, an international start-up by two Bangladeshi men, focuses on helping the readers find the highest quality and most credible news online. Shafqat Islam, 27, who was born in Bangladesh but lives in Geneva, is one of the two founders of the site. He is a former project manager for financial systems at Merrill Lynch and now runs the site with his friend Iraj Islam, 24, a resident of Stockholm.

Shafqat believes all the other news aggregators are just too complicated for most users. He wanted to create something which is easy to use.

"I started NewsCred with my cofounder about a year ago in Dhaka. We both grew up abroad, but were always big news readers, and started NewsCred for two main reasons," said Islam.

"Every single person we talked to told us about their frustrations with the news media today, where they came across news articles or news sources that were not always accurate or were biased. Especially given the abundance of information online, it became increasingly difficult to find high quality news. So this was a problem we wanted to address," he said.

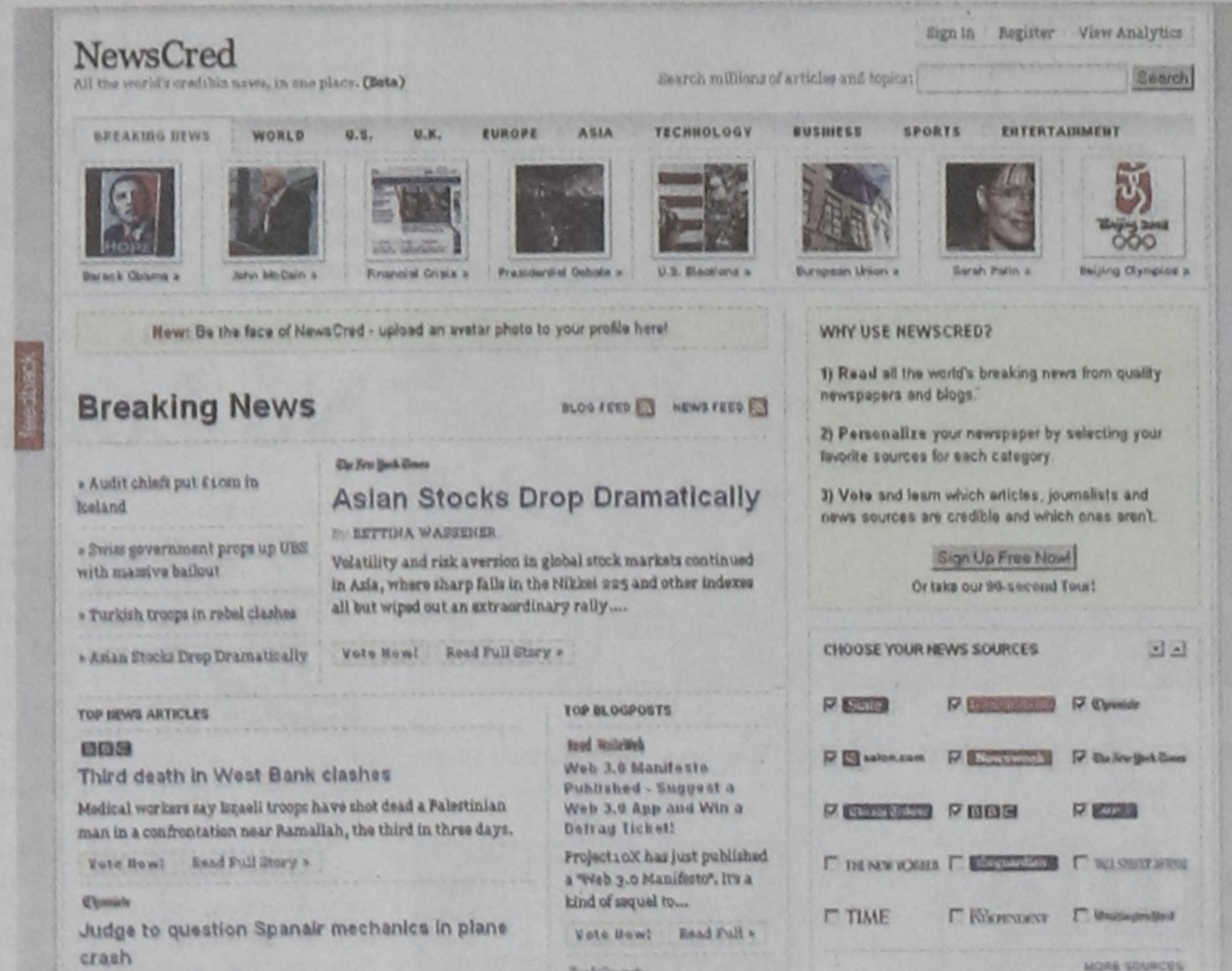
"We also didn't know of any news sites that were easy to customise and personalise, especially for the mainstream news audience like our families or friends. On NewsCred, it's extremely simple to set up a personalised digital newspaper of all your favourite sources. It's as simple as clicking on the logos of your favourite news sources," he mentioned.

NewsCred launched its public beta in August 2008.

NewsCred recently introduced the world's first personalised digital newspaper that gives readers all the world's most credible news, in one place (<http://www.NewsCred.com>). It aggregates news from the world's top newspapers and most established blogs, and then allows readers to vote on the credibility of articles, journalists and news sources.

The NewsCred community then votes on the credibility of articles, journalists and news sources.

When asked about the



NewsCred voting system, Shafqat said their ranking/voting system is very straightforward. Any registered user can vote to either credit or discredit an article. A user can also credit/discredit a news source or author directly.

"Our algorithm also has a bit of intelligence, whereby it propagates a vote on an article and affects the original author of that piece and also the publication where the article appears (we call it a 'waterfall' algorithm). We think it is important that authors and sources are held accountable for the contents they produce, so it's important to tie them all together," Shafqat said.

The binary system was chosen because it's simple and provides the least barriers to entry for the user. "Our goal is to get our readers to think in terms of credibility and quality, and we wanted to give them a very simple platform to voice their opinions. We're thinking about modifying it slightly so that discredits must be accompanied by a short explanation or tag to explain the motivation behind the discredit. This is not simply to keep people honest—we think it will help people think through the process of evaluating an article for credibility," he added.

He said it is of course a challenge to get all users to think about credibility all the time. There is no way we can 'force'

people into voting purely based on quality or credibility. But we've taken steps to help, including the full transparency of their voting and also explaining discredits.

If someone's voting history is simply filled with discredit of all Microsoft articles, it will become evident. "We might put in steps to weight his vote differently, but that does not exist yet. The important part is educating our community. The voting buttons have clear explanations of what

Every single user is not an expert and can not always get it right every time. "But we do believe in the principle of wisdom of crowds: we have confidence that the aggregate knowledge of our community, and the overall results of their voting, will be meaningful and will allow us to draw interesting and valid conclusions," he said.

People have local knowledge, specialised knowledge, and may be better at determining credibility of some articles rather than



The Daily Star's CredRank on NewsCred

they should be looking for (i.e. "if you think this article is biased, or factually inaccurate, please discredit etc"). We will be putting more of those tips and 'user education' throughout the site.

ability to put that aside and determine quality or spin in an article is doing them a disservice. We believe being a newsreader is qualification enough to voice your opinion. As a fun metaphor, I would say you don't need to be a chef or a professional food critic to be able to critique food, right?" Shafqat said.

When asked about their business model, he mentioned that it is two-fold: they plan on having targeted advertising on the NewsCred.com pages. They think, with a large user base and given the traction they are seeing, they can monetise those page views.

The second half of their business model is to take all their in-house technology and build a news platform. "We want to work with publishers to give them compelling contents for their sites via APIs. We realise that we have a lot of great technology and community-powered data, so we want to be able to share this with publishers and news sites," he said.

"NewsCred is very different from Digg and other 'social news sites' because we are a credibility-focused operation. Digg is based on popularity, and NewsCred is driven by quality," Shafqat added.

In addition, in Digg, people submit individual links and often the quality of the links are not great, and are focused on trivial issues only. However, we source our news from a list of the most credible news organisations and blogs, so our quality of content is inherently better and more relevant to the mainstream newsreader.

Shafqat said they are different from Google and Yahoo News because "we focus a lot on community, and give users a platform to voice their opinions. This option does not exist on Google and Yahoo news."

In addition, the site's customisation and personalisation is a lot simpler—users merely click on the logos of their favourite websites and they have a fully customised, digital newspaper. This is not possible on Google and Yahoo news. "We really respect our competition, but we think we can build a compelling solution that is better than the options out there, especially for mainstream newsreaders."

Shafqat believes NewsCred will certainly encourage other Bangladeshis to try their hand at entrepreneurship and shows that Bangladeshis can be successful in the global startup.

TECHVIEWS

# A voice activated mouse!

MAHJIB MAHBOOB

**S**TUDENTS at the University of Washington (USA) have developed a voice activated mouse, according to a report in the Seattle Times. This could mean more accessible computers to people with disabilities.

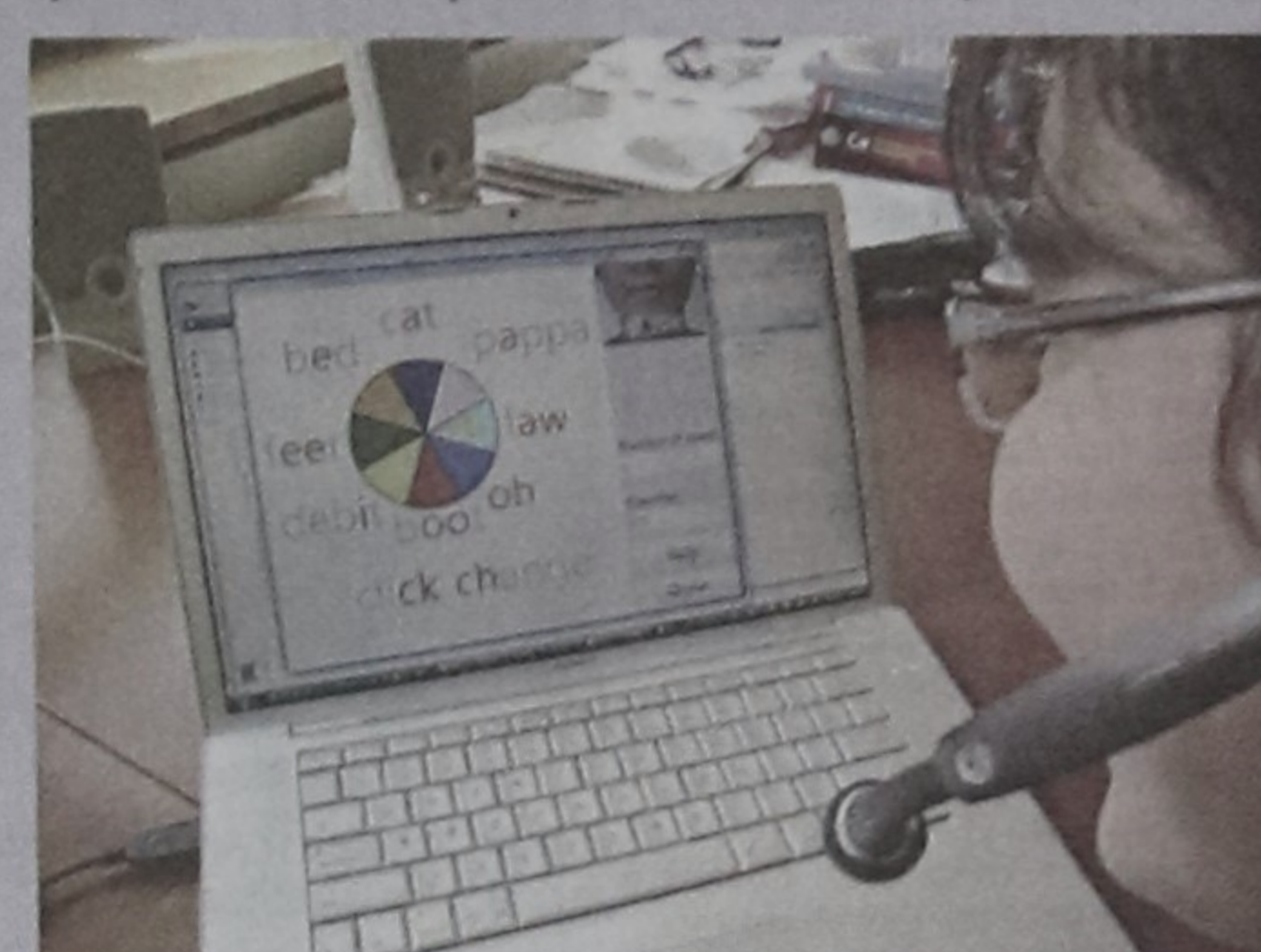
Say "ahh" and the cursor zips toward the northeast corner of the computer screen. "Ooo" sends it shooting straight south. Want it to head southeast? Say "ohh." To make the cursor do a circle or figure 8, let vowel sounds bleed into one another, like eee into ahh into aww and so on. You can make it hurry or slow by regulating the volume of your voice. To open a link, make a soft clicking sound.

So goes the University of Washington's "Vocal Joystick" software, which uses sounds to help people with disabilities use their computers.

Its development has been a multidisciplinary task with faculty and students from several university departments electrical engineering, linguistics, computer science, as well as the Information School blending their expertise. (It is just one of a series of UW-generated assistive-technology projects ranging from enabling the blind to use touch screens to developing an alternative to the point-and-click method of computer navigation).

Researchers at the university have tested the joystick with spinal-cord-injury patients at the UW Medical Center and just finished another round of testing with 10 participants with varying

levels of disabilities. Susumu Harada, a computer-science and engineering graduate student, administered the tests, putting each subject through 12 hours of training. He evaluated how they learned producing the correct vowel sounds, memorized the directional patterns and manipulated cursor speed. Sometimes, moving the mouse by voice seemed frustrating, even a bit tiring. If the operator was out of sync with



his own sounds as recorded by the software, the cursor might speed past a target in one direction and go so slowly in the other that the subject would have to take a break to catch his breath.

Some sounds came easily. Some seemed a bit unnatural and strained. But when a subject caught the rhythm, the task was easy and natural.

There are several options for people who need accommodations in using computers, but the UW software is distin-

guished on several levels. For one, it doesn't use standard voice-recognition technology. Instead, it detects basic sounds at about 100 times a second and harnesses them to generate fluid, adaptive cursor movement.

Vocal-joystick researchers are of the opinion that the system is easier to use because it allows users to exploit a large set of sounds for both continuous and discrete movement and to make visual adjustments on the fly.

The Vocal Joystick requires only a microphone, a computer with a standard sound card and a user who can vocalize. The team behind the study, funded by the National Science Foundation of USA, hopes to make a prototype available online this fall.

If this system is successful commercially as well, it is likely to come as a blessing for people with different types of disabilities who previously had restricted usage of the computer.

TECHNEWS

# BASIS SoftExpo 2009 begins Jan 27

STARTECH DESK

**C**OUNTRY'S largest software and IT enabled services showcase 'BASIS SoftExpo 2009' will be held on January 27-31, 2009, at the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre (BCFCC).

BASIS (Bangladesh Association of Software & Information Services), the apex body of software and IT services, announced this at a press briefing on October 11 at a local hotel.

Following successes in the past years, BASIS SoftExpo has earned the reputation of being the biggest ICT event of the country.

The exposition creates a platform of interaction among different groups including software providers, buyers, IT users, professionals, media,



policy makers, development partners, students as well as a wide range of people across the society.

The theme of SoftExpo 2009

has been set 'Linking Technology with People and Branding Bangladesh as the Country with Immense ICT Potentialities'.

BASIS officials at the press conference said that BASIS SoftExpo 2009 will be an event that will help create a global platform of showcasing the immense potentials, resources and skills available in Bangladesh, increase the share of ICT in Bangladesh's GDP, create job opportunities and placement of skilled ICT professionals locally and internationally, facilitate the matchmaking of local and global clients with Bangladeshi IT companies.

PHOTO



## THE SHOE THAT GENERATES ELECTRICITY

Japan's telecommunications giant NTT unveils a special shoe which generate electricity as the user walk at the company's laboratory in Atsugi in Kanagawa prefecture on October 16. The shoes have a small generator attached to water-filled soles. Each step puts pressure on the soles, causing the water to spin a small turbine and generate power, NTT said. The futuristic shoes currently generate 1.2 watts of electricity, "a level sufficient to run an iPod mobile music player forever, as long as the wearer keeps walking," said spokesman Hideomi Tenma.

PHOTO: AFP

TECHNEWS

# Apple beefs up MacBook laptops, trims prices

AFP, California

**A**PPL has unveiled a revamped line of Macintosh laptop computers made leaner, slicker, faster and a bit more affordable.

Along with showing off new MacBook models heading for store shelves, Apple cut the price of the original version to 999 dollars.

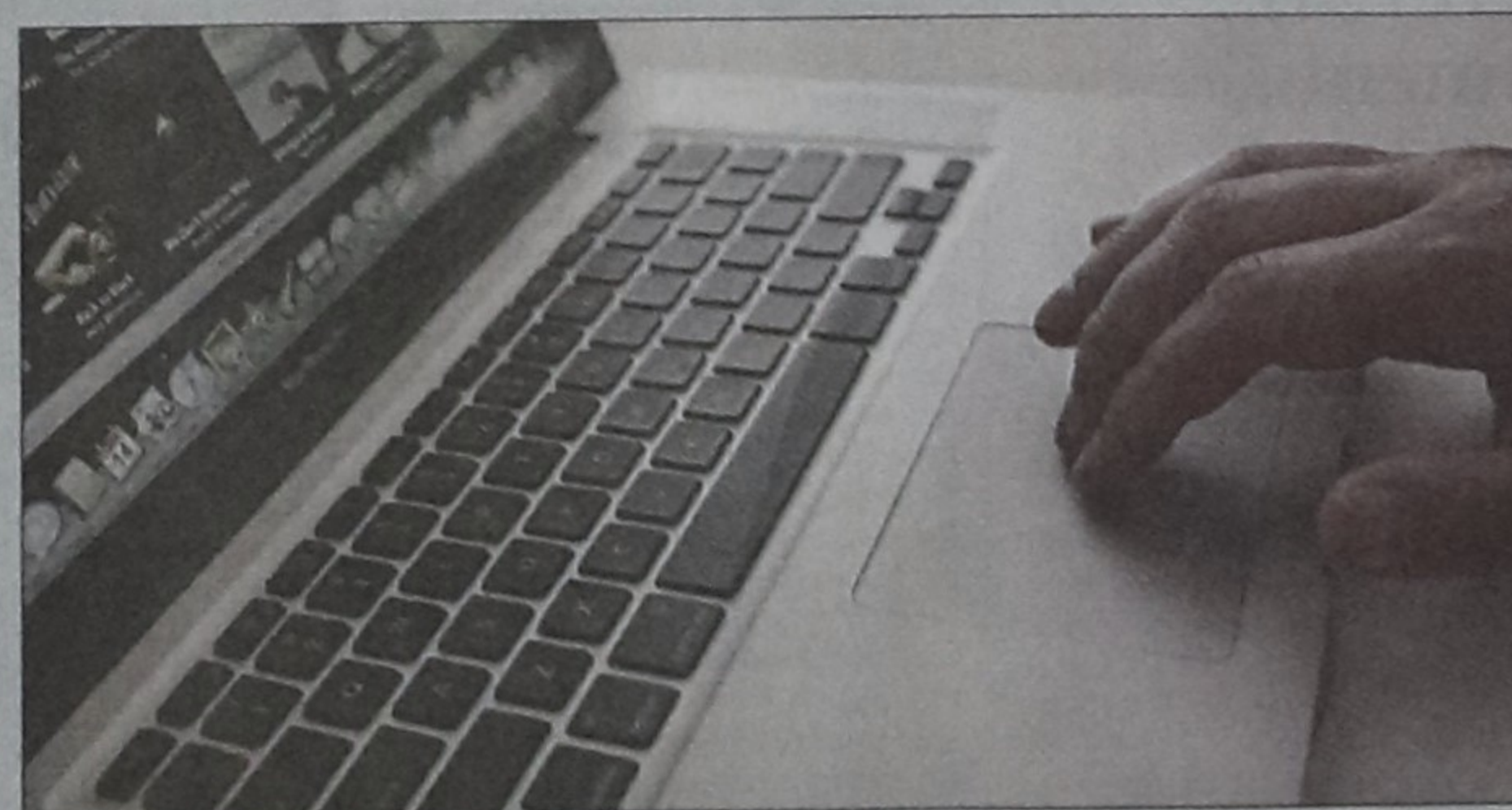
The price drop marked the first time Apple is selling a laptop computer for less than a thousand dollars.

"We sell a ton of these MacBooks and people love it," Apple chief executive Steve Jobs said on Tuesday as he announced that 100 dollars is being trimmed from the model's price tag.

Enhanced MacBook, MacBook Pro and MacBook Air models boasted improved features in Apple's historic price range of 1,200 to 2,500 dollars.

Key upgrades to Macintosh laptop models included custom-designed graphics processors by NVIDIA to enhance computer game play and video viewing, as well as glass touch-pads that allow finger gesture controls.

Before fielding questions from reporters gathered for the event at Apple's headquarters in Cupertino, California, Jobs flashed "110/70" on a screen behind the



stage.

"This is Steve's blood pressure," Jobs said in a joking reference to a bogus blogger report that wrongly claimed he had suffered a heart attack.

"This is all we are going to talk about Steve's health today. If you want to see that number go higher, just ask some more questions."

A gaunt looking Jobs turned portions of the presentation over to other Apple executives in what may have been an effort to show the company's fortunes don't rise or

fall with him alone.

"After the heart attack scare the market is still nervous there is no heir apparent at Apple," Enderle said, adding that he suspects Jobs, who was treated for pancreatic cancer in 2004, is undergoing chemotherapy.

Among the most compelling new offerings is a MacBook built with an aluminum casing, a corner-to-corner glass LED screen, and a glass trackpad with multi-touch control priced at 1,200 dollars.