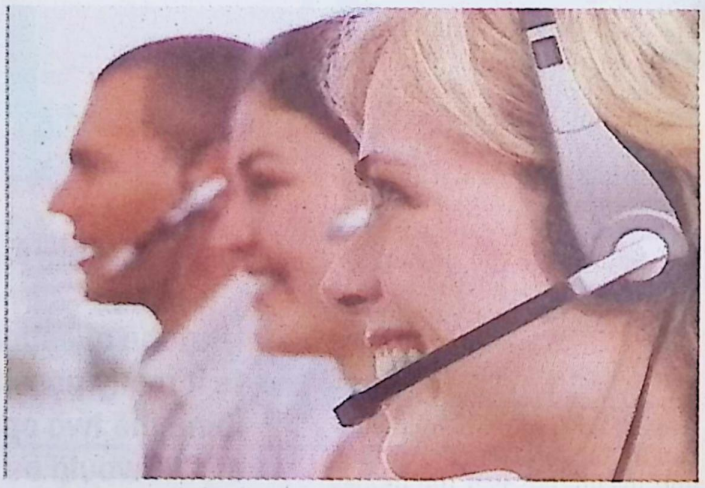
Call Centers:
A Dose of Reality

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THE latest business news to grip the nation is the much-hyped about advent of the call center industry. With the overall Call Center outsourcing market expected to grow steadily and reach $20.1 billion in revenues by 2012 from $19.5 billion in 2005, this sector undoubtedly offers many opportunities for Bangladesh but it may just fall short of revolutionizing our country's economy overnight, as some rumors would have us believe. To get a rational view on the prospects of this industry very new to Bangladesh, Star Campus decided to consult Saif Mahmood, CEO, LiveBean Bangladesh Ltd. His company has recently initiated a tripatriate joint venture with USA and India to open up a training academy in collaboration with the Call Center School, the leading company in the world for the professional development of individuals in the call center industry.

It has been claimed that Bangladesh can take advantage of the rising costs of operating call centers in Phillipines and India in recent years by utilizing its low wages and large labour force a claim that was critically examined by Mr. Saif. While he doesn't question the fact that there is man power available for employment in call centers at much lower rates here than in neighbouring India, he does question the capability of the existing work force of carrying out the complex responsibilities of call centers. Besides fluency in English and basic computer literacy, a person needs to possess sound customer service skills to be an effective call center operative. But because of lack of exposure to the extremely competitive standards of call centers, Mr. Saif feels that there is an acute lack of human resources in our country with the specific set of skills that are required to excel in this industry. That is why, although a call center operative can be hired for 20,000 rupees a month in India, he estimates that a salary of more than 50,000 takas will be sufficient to induce a person with similar sets of skills to become a call center operative in Bangladesh under current circumstances Mr. Saif vehemently negates the belief held in certain quarters that the call center is a dot.com phenomenon which may soon die out like its predecessors. On the contrary, he believes that this is a HR intensive industry which uses IT as a support mechanism. He points out that Bangladesh has access to the same technology available in the United States or India, i.e. Avaya-Lucent technologies which are deemed to be the best in business. The differentiating factor in this industry is not the technology, but the quality of service provided through the usage of this technology. Because of the current worldwide trend of retaining existing customers, he believes that this industry has a long way to go. That is why, although Bangladesh is a late entrant in the market, he is optimistic about the long-run possibilities for Bangladesh.

But for these possibilities to materialize, he believes that Bangladeshi organizations need to have a major time commitment and make investments in developing the man power to meet the international standards. Comparing the many training academies for call center that have sprung up like mushrooms near Farm Gate

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