Star TecH

Java
Java refers to a number of computer software products and specifications from Sun Microsystems that together provide a system for developing application software and deploying it in a cross-platform environment. Java is used in a wide variety of computing platforms spanning from embedded devices and mobile phones on the low end to enterprise servers and supercomputers on the high end. Java is nearly ubiquitous in mobile phones, Web servers and enterprise applications, and while less common on desktop computers, Java applets are often used to provide improved functionality while browsing the World Wide Web.

TECHSPOTLIGHT

Experts on ICT Roadmap

Better skilled manpower holds the key

MAHDIN MAHBOOB

THE ICT roadmap in Bangladesh has been a much talked-about issue in recent times. Although the country has been using these technologies since the 1960s, broader use started in 1986 with the formation of Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC). Afterwards, the 1997 recommendations on ICT development and the 2002 ICT policy were formulated. More recently, the government formed an e-government cell at the chief adviser's office, and completed an e-government horizon scan report last December.

Although a national policy on ICT was adopted in 2002, the Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology had not been able to achieve the goals set out for e-governance in the policy. This led the present government to appoint Spinnovation and DNet (together with an international partner, Gov3 Limited) to develop a short, medium and long-term national ICT action plan or roadmap for Bangladesh on the basis of the National ICT Policy 2002.

Accordingly, recommendations on the national ICT roadmap have been made to the government. There are five key work-streams in the roadmap which are further broken down into 13 mission critical projects.

This week in StarTech, we have tried to find out expert opinions, from academia and industry, on this issue.

Before going to their opinions, let's first take a quick look at the five key work-streams that have been recommended by the consultants.

Empowering citizens
One of the objectives under this project is to ensure that by 2011 all Bangladeshis will have access to ICT and the skills to use them. The ICT roadmap plans to deliver this by building a national partnership to establish tele-centres. Another objective is to ensure that digital contents in Bangla are easily produced and uploaded. The ICT roadmap will deliver this through a new national strategy for e-Bangla.

Transforming public resources
To transform the government, Bangladesh needs to have e-readiness. There have to be citizen-centric e-services, and a high demand for them (through a rich mix of channels—including mobile phones, web, kiosks and service centres). Every ministry must develop and deliver plans for e-service investments.

Broadening the ICT sector
The issues impeding the growth of the hardware and software sectors should be resolved to broaden the ICT sector. International ICT trade and investment campaign must

be undertaken to develop a globally recognised brand for Bangladesh as a centre for ICT investment, outsourcing and exports.
Enabling the market
Legal barriers to e-commerce must be removed and the necessary business changes put in place in the public and private sectors to take advantage of the new opportunities. The ICT roadmap plans to deliver this by establishing a certified authority to oversee the provision of digital certificates enabled by the ICT Act 2006, and

development of a partnership with the banks to establish the business and technical infrastructure needed to make e-commerce and e-government transactions a reality.
Leadership and governance
Accountability for delivering all aspects of the roadmap and associated elements must be clear to all stakeholders for successful delivery of the roadmap, and effective structures and processes must be in place. A full-time "chief digital adviser" reporting directly to the taskforce and the chief adviser, supported by a small ICT roadmap program management office, should be there to strengthen the governance.

Now we move on to opinions expressed by Prof Muhammed Kaykobad of computer science and engineering department at Buet; Mustafa Jabbar, president, Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS) and CEO, Ananda Computers; and Habibullah N Karim, president of BASIS.

StarTech wanted to know what they think should be the key ingredients in the ICT roadmap of Bangladesh and what, according to them, are the job prospects for private university graduates compared to those graduating from public institutions.

We also wanted to how the ACM-ICPC programming contests that are gaining fast popularity among computer science students in Bangladesh could improve their programming skills.

They also talked about the role of the government in decreasing the digital divide in the country.

Prof Kaykobad: Education, quality education, not only in ICT

courses but in all levels of education should be the most important single ingredient for ICT roadmap of Bangladesh. The only surplus in the country is human beings that we cannot utilise for national prosperity and develop properly. Investment in education is unacceptably low and we possibly

cannot foresee a change of attitude of our political leadership in this respect. Again application of ICT can make up the dearth of resources in education sector.

Investment in and priority of education have changed the fate of countries like South Korea and it is likely to have similar impact on our country as well. We should not loudly talk about globalisation. India never did.

We must be able to develop software systems of our own. If we cannot make it or maintain them, what is the point of using rocket technology? We should shun the path of being non-productive! We must produce at least as much as we consume. India has successfully done it.

After independence they failed to produce even blades of acceptable quality. Today, they are sending rockets to the moon. In early days they sacrificed the temptation of using quality Japanese products, from electronics to clothes. Now they have developed so much of expertise and we still remain mere consumers!

We must have software systems for ensuring e-governance and for other national interests by our professionals and will in no case allow different offices to keep black boxes developed by foreigners about which we hardly have any knowledge.

There is not much difference in job prospect of private and public universities. Since we are yet to generate sufficient amount of jobs inside the country, our entrepreneurs are quite often opting for low salary to quality of expertise. In fact, quality of education in our country is going down whether it

is public or private.

These contests do improve problem-solving skill, creativity, programming skill and aptitude significantly. This is why world famous universities like MIT, CalTech, Berkeley, Stanford, Harvard are giving so much importance to ACM programming contests. Even if we do not understand its usefulness, we should just follow the footprint of these famous institutions even without understanding. World famous companies like Microsoft and Google are chasing after contestants with lucrative job offers.

The government can distribute computers and other ICT accessories to schools and colleges of remote areas so that ICT rolls like computer aided learning (CAL) packages can make up for deficiencies in experiences and quality of teachers. Schools and colleges can be enriched with an ICT lab where students of different classes will be learning different CAL packages to improve their understanding.

Mustafa Jabbar: In my opinion ICT roadmap should be targeted at establishing a digital Bangladesh which will lead to a knowledge-based society. The government should first set a target to change its own way of working. There should first be a digital government.

Unfortunately the graduates coming from these institutions are not learning state of the art technologies to work in our software industry. The syllabus, teaching method and the quality of teachers are key elements to improve the situation.

I do not feel that only this com-

petition is improving the situation. Unless the basic education system is not improved, this will help may be only the BUET students.

The government should give computers to every kid and every house should be connected with broadband internet.
Habibullah N Karim: It must have an overarching vision for the nation which will be the beacon/goal of the roadmap.

It should have five components—legal framework issues resolution, ICT infrastructure development, e-government implementation with specific deliverables, making effective use of public-private-partnership opportunities for faster build up of ICT capacity and IT human resource development in sync with market demand.

The roadmap must be consistent with the overall ICT policy of the nation and must be implementation-focused.

The job prospects vary depending on the skillsets of the graduating students. For jobs that require broad technical excellence, graduates from public universities seem to do better but where communication skills are more important the private university graduates fare better. This is a rough generalisation and there are exceptions to both.

Such contests help build problem-solving skills and is a great confidence builder. These contests have proven a great boon for Bangladesh as these provided a platform for Bangladeshis to hone their skills in competition with the best from the whole world and we showed the world that we can hold our own when it comes to technical ability.

Broadband must be made available at very low cost at all parts of the country without any urban-rural discrimination. Modern WiMAX and 3G technologies will allow this at not-too-great a cost. Distance IT learning should be promoted to overcome the lack of qualified teachers in remote areas. The nearly 10,000 idle laptops lying with the Election Commission should be distributed to schools and colleges in remote areas for use by students.

The ICT roadmap must be done in consultation with all the stakeholders and shared with all sections of the society so that there is firm ownership of the goals and activities enumerated in the plan. The new ICT Policy 2008 recommended to the government by a committee comprising representatives of all stakeholder groups contains definitive action plans that can form the cornerstone of any ICT roadmap the nation wants to take on.

Information about the five work-streams are taken from: Article on ICT in Bangladesh by TIM Nurul Kabir (September 18, 2008).

TECHNEWS

ECS IT fair ends today

STARTECH DESK

ECS City IT Fair 2008, a yearly showcase of computing products, organised by the Multiplan Center Owners Assoicion is going on in full swing at the Multiplan Center in the capital. Inaugurated on October 30, with the slogan "Let computers be the tool for knowledge expansion," the fair comes to an end today.

Brac University Vice Chancellor Dr Jamilur Reza Chowdhury inaugurated the fair, while Mostofa Mohsin Montu, former member of the parliament and chief adviser to the Elephant Road Traders Owners Association spoke at the opening ceremony as guests.

Dr Chowdhury in his inaugural speech said the whole world has become a "global village" due to unprecedented success of information and communication technology. Now we live in information era, he added. He also said if we keep ourselves behind, we will be left behind from the world. We have to go forward by overcoming digital divide, he suggested.

He said in the competitive world of the twenty-first century, Bangladesh has to survive with quality and overall improvement of ICT, and there is no other way round.

Organiser Tofik Ehsan said they do not want to limit their duties only by organising fairs. They will also take initiative to help talented students who can't afford technological training and education.

Front line ICT product importers and traders of the country are exhibiting latest products of renowned world class brands at the fair.

Organisers have allocated more than 400 stalls at the fair for the exhibition. Shop owners are also offering various discounts and special gifts.

The fair has wide range of products from latest digital cameras to laptops, from mp3 players to mobile phone sets, from books/magazines to audio CDs, VCDs, from memory cards to LCD monitors.

To attract visitors and buyers the organizers arranged children painting contest, debate, gaming zone, free internet browsing facility in internet zone and seminars at the fair. There are also gifts for children as additional attractions.

To vote for Cox's Bazar and Sundarbans as natural wonders of the world, a special move has been taken at the fair. Bangladesh

Schoolgirls share a laugh while playing a PC game at the fair.

Parjatan Corporation has set up special booth for this.

The success of the fair is proven by the daily number of visitors thronging the Multiplan Centre. Youths are the major part of them. Organisers have arranged quiz competition for the visitors which became really popularity. Some even said they only came to fair only for the quiz, as there are 100 prizes for winners.

The fair also organized a semi-

nar on "Call centre and job opportunity in Bangladesh". Dr M Haider, chairman, Department of Computer Scince, Dhaka University was chief guest of this seminar. Former ambassador, M Kamal Uddin Ahmed, M Mustafizur Rahman, CEO, Adapmax were present at the event. The seminar was chaired by Towfik Ehsan, organizer of the fair.

Participants at the seminar said the call centre industry has huge potential in Bangladesh. There will be more than one hundred licensed call centers in the country by next year.

They also said US alone will provide 60-70 percent work and job opportunities will be created at the call centers for qualified people. Students can utilize this the opportunity to have part time jobs.

Dr Haider in his speech said call centres in Bangladesh has potential due to cheap labour cost. Even in neighbouring India labour costs are much higher. Therefore, we have to use this opportunity for our benefit.

The ECS City ICT Fair 2008 will end at 8:00om tonight.

TECHNEWS

CSE Festival 2008 at BUET held

STARTECH DESK

BANGLADESH University of Engineering & Technology (BUET), the most renowned engineering public university in Bangladesh organised the National Collegiate Programming Contest (NCPC) under the Department of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) as a part of its annual CSE Festival 2008 on October 24.

The Festival has always worked as a way of building good relationship among BUET CSE Department, other universities, and the Information Technology (IT) industry.

Organising the festival every year, BUET tries to focus the excellence of the students to the industries, a much needed step to flourish the IT industry in Bangladesh.

The aim of the NCPC is to

create the opportunity for our young talented programmers in the country to show their programming talents and to create a national awareness for the development of programming skills.

A total of 47 teams from different private and public universities participated in the contest.

Like most other times, the winner of the five-hour long contest was BUET. While Dhaka University (DU) secured the second position, North South University (NSU) grabbed the third.

BUET Falcon solved six problems out of eight whereas DU Knights solved four and NSU Arcturus solved three in the shortest time among five other teams who also solved three problems.

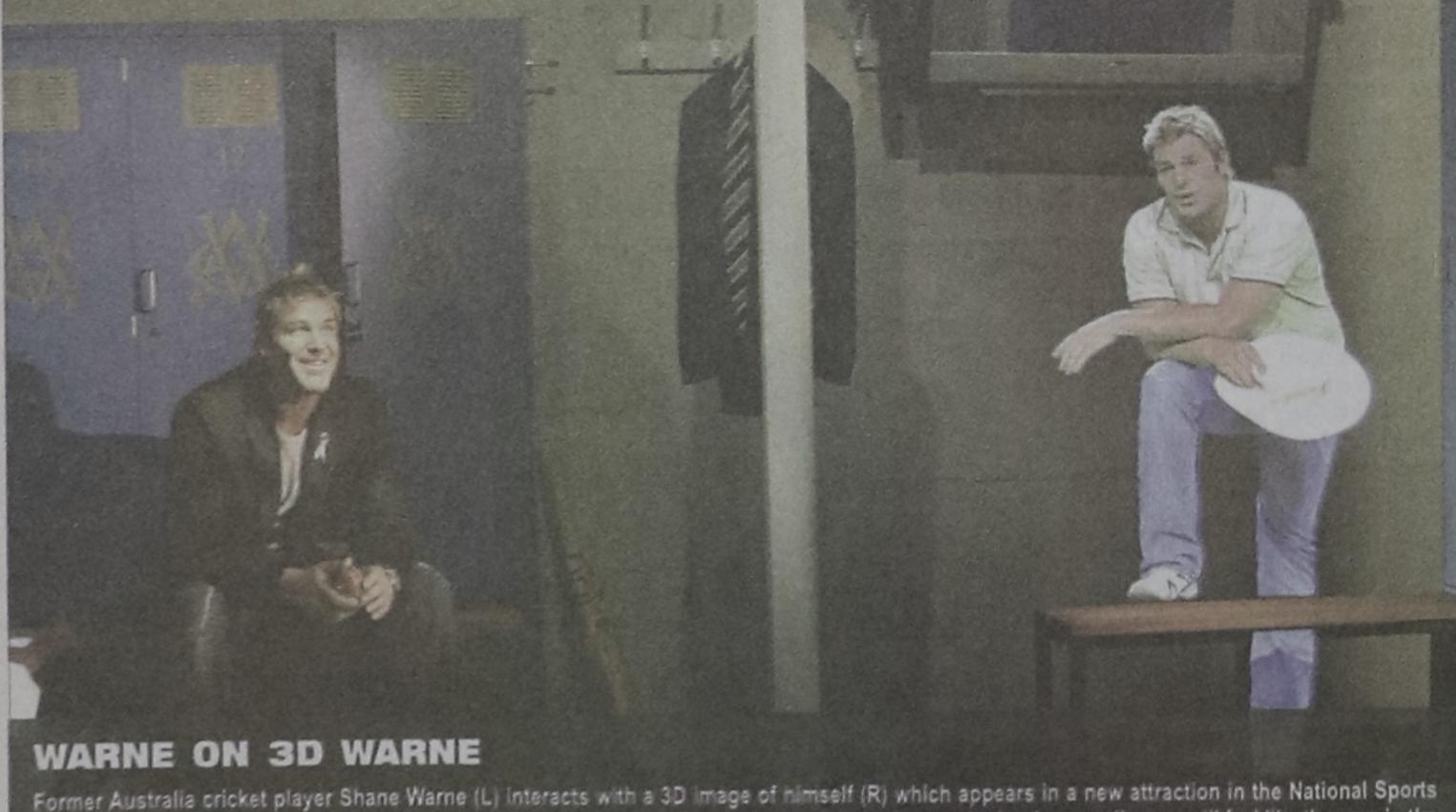CSE department also organised an Inter-University project

show as a part of the Festival.

BUET Inter University ICT Project Show is a step toward emphasising students' ability to provide technical solutions targeting research and application, principles and practices adopted by ICT industry.

The show consisted separate sections for Hardware and Software projects. To encourage the young scientists, there were attractive awards for three best projects in each section.

The festival included events like IT Fair, Project Show, Programming Contest, Career and Research Talk Show, Gaming Contest, Math Olympiad and Cultural events.

Different events of the festival were sponsored by Microsoft, Grameenphone, REVE Systems, Samsung, Eyeball Networks and bdhaat.com as online partners.

PHOTO

WARNE ON 3D WARNE
Former Australia cricket player Shane Warne (L) interacts with a 3D image of himself (R) which appears in a new attraction in the National Sports Museum at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, on October 27. Using the latest in simulated hologram technology, audiences will feel like they are in the room with Warne as he takes them into the MCG changerooms and shares the great moments of his career, including the infamous 'Gatting' ball in 1993 at Old Trafford.
PHOTO: AFP

TECHNEWS

Obama expected to be first US "Tech President"

AFP, San Francisco

SILICON Valley on Wednesday was looking forward to Barack Obama becoming a "tech president" that will champion Internet freedom and innovation.

Obama's history-making victory in the US presidential race not only gives the nation its first African-American commander-in-chief, it puts a technology-savvy politician at the country's helm.

"Obama likes technology and part of the reason he executed so well is that he used technology so effectively," said analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group in Silicon Valley. "That makes him a tech president."
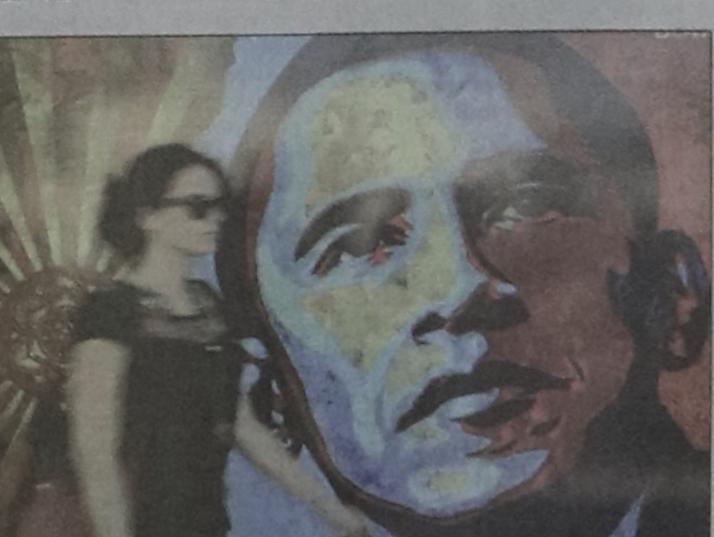
A report published by the Center for Responsive Politics indicates that leading technology companies in Silicon Valley gave five times as much money to Democrat Obama as they did to his Republican rival John McCain.

By Election Day, approximately 91 percent of the Valley's technology firms and their workers reportedly backed Obama.

"The Valley invested heavily in Obama; millions of dollars," Enderle said. "On the tech side, this is the president they wanted."

During an "AtGoogle Talk" campaign stop

at the Internet powerhouse's campus in Northern California, Obama vowed to defend net neutrality and deliver broadband Internet access to everyone in the country.

"We have to assure free and full exchange of

information, and that starts with an open Internet," Obama said during an on-stage chat with Google chief executive Eric Schmidt.

"I will take a back seat to no one in my commitment to network neutrality. Because once providers start to privilege some applications or websites over others, then the smaller

voices get squeezed out and we all lose."

Political debate regarding network neutrality focuses on whether companies operating lines handling Internet traffic should be allowed to charge for higher speeds or capacities instead of treating all users equally.

Service providers contend that charging for priority on the Internet will promote investment in networks and let them better manage congestion caused by tremendous amounts of digital data traveling online.

Internet firms, including Google, argue that service providers are making a money grab that would stifle online innovation and economic growth.

Obama agreed that having "the Internet divided up to the highest bidders" would shut out startups and discourage innovation.

While speaking with "Googlers," Obama said his priorities in the White House would include developing clean energy and using technology such as electronic medical records to help achieve universal health care.

Obama also promised to put more government information online so people could track, and comment on federal contracts and legislation.