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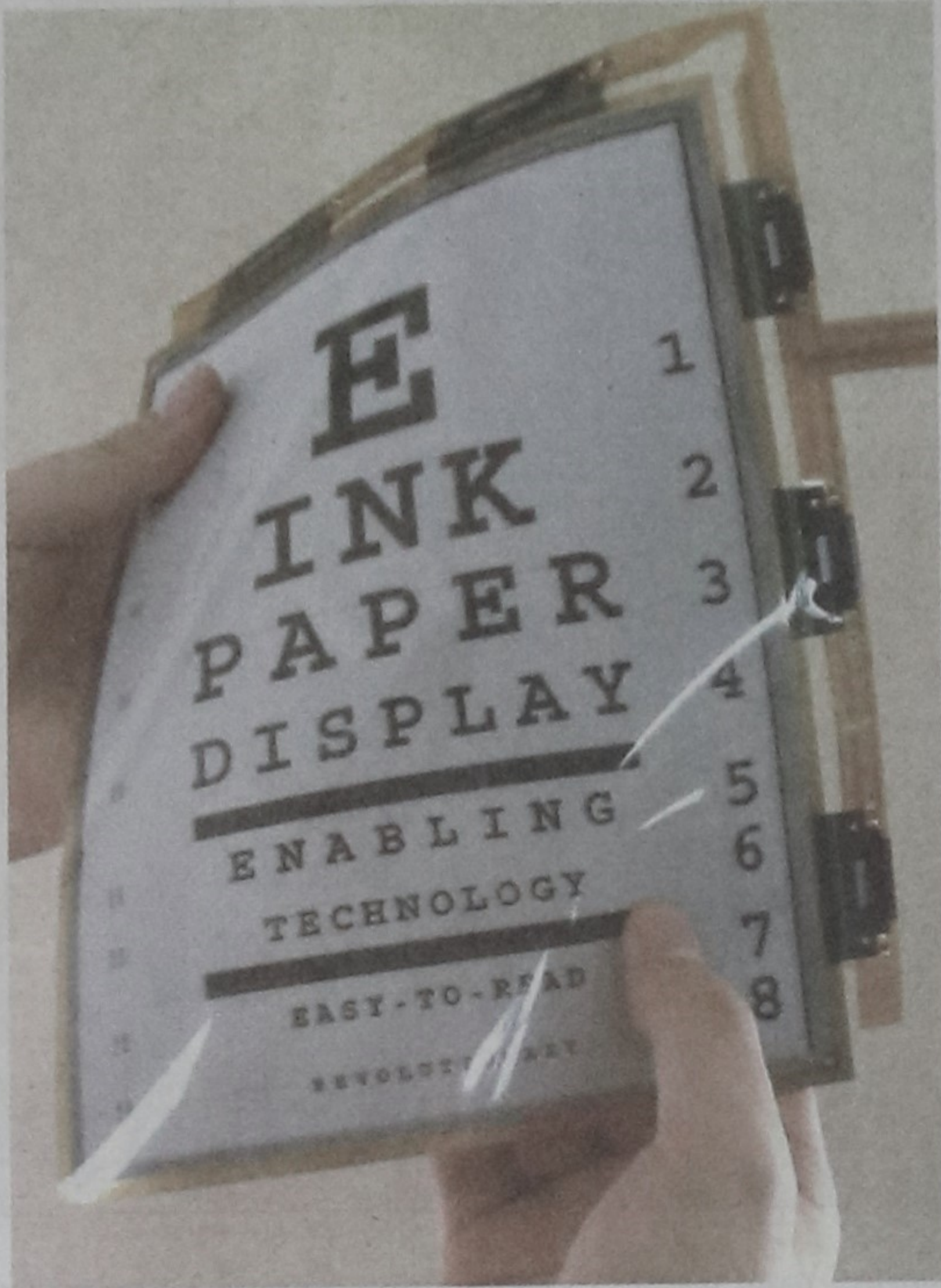
The future of newspaper: Paper or plastic?

NAHID AKHTER

ENVIRONMENTALISTS have always dreamed of a world where humans no longer need to cut down trees for paper. Sometimes, even literacy comes at a cost. In view of saving the endangered trees of the planet, more and more offices around the world are moving towards paperless endeavours by computerising most of their transactions, for example through online banking and using email and SMS for sharing documents and information.

One industry that mainly thrives on paper is the newspaper industry. Besides environmental issues, newspaper offices are struggling with higher production and delivery costs and decreased ad revenue from their printed product. What's more, online versions of newspapers are driving away more and more readers with the appeal of being free of cost, but not providing enough online revenue to make up for the difference. A Washington, D.C.-based research group estimated that if online ad revenue kept growing at 33 percent annually, it would still take a decade to break even with much larger print-ad revenues, which were growing at 4 percent.

Enter Amazon group and its new-found wireless electronic book-reader 'kindle', which can deliver any one of more than 88,000 books, including bestsellers, simply by downloading though a wireless network connection, and possibilities open up for a similar device to deliver newspapers, that will use kindle's key technology 'electronic ink'.

E Ink uses electronic ink for display; millions of tiny capsules filled with light and dark dyes that change color - charged dye particles move either up or down within the capsules - when exposed to an electric charge. Text using e-ink appears with the same

crisp clarity as print on paper, and the battery that runs the device draws little power, allowing it to go a week before it needs a two-hour recharge. Unlike liquid-crystal display of computer monitors and televisions, electronic paper technology does not need a

backlight; remains displayed even when the power source runs down; and looks brighter, not dimmer, in strong light.

Amazon currently offers 24 newspapers for use on the device. Subscribers pay $5.99 to $14.99 per month, and

each issue arrives wirelessly before sunup.

Plastic Logic now has a version of an electronic newspaper reader: a lightweight plastic screen that mimics the look - but not the feel - of a printed newspaper.

Newspaper companies have watched the technology closely for years. The ideal format, a flexible display that could be rolled or folded like a newspaper, is still years off, but color displays with moving images and interactive clickable advertising is foreseen to be coming in only a few more years.
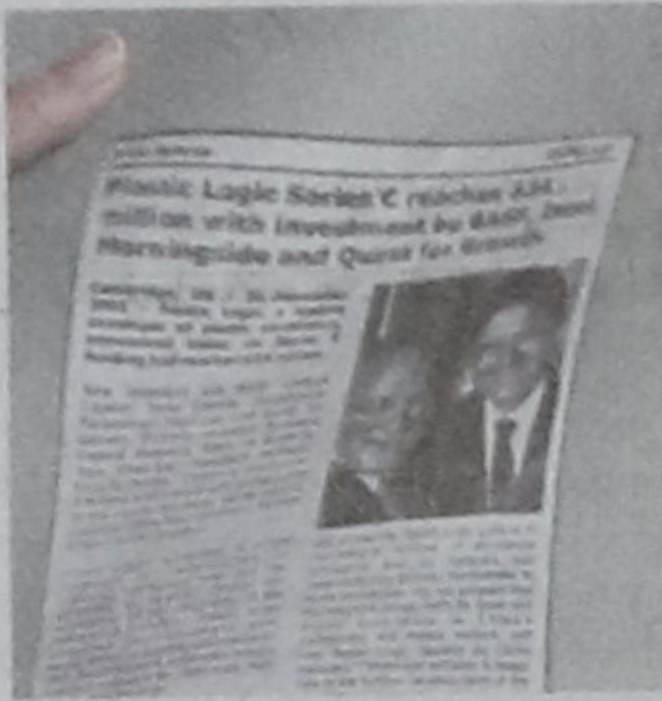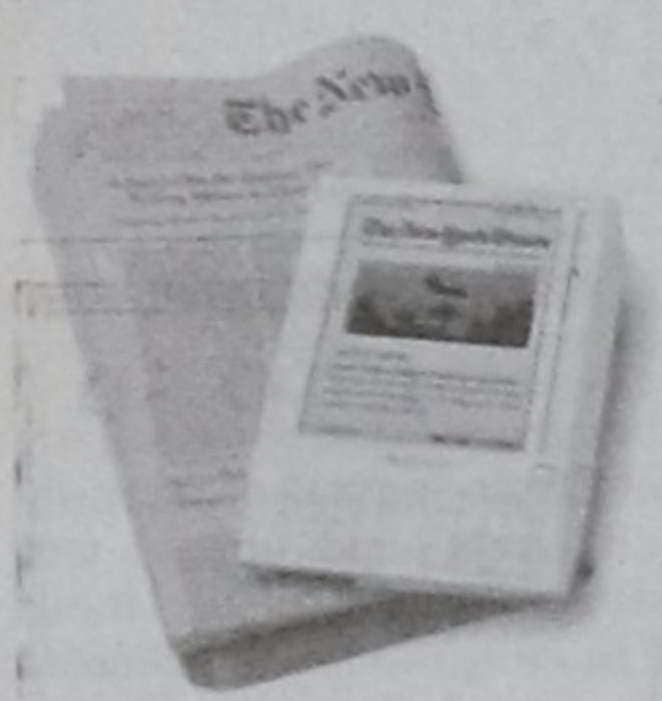
It is expected that within the next few years there will exist a technology that allows users to write on the screen and view videos. At a recent demonstration at E Ink's headquarters, the company showed prototypes of flexible displays that can create rudimentary colors and animated images.

Three requirements can be cited for e-newspapers to really catch on with consumers: the devices require larger screens (to allow room for better display of stories, photos and ads), color screens (a must for advertisers) and lower prices (the Kindle currently sells for $359).

Color is still a few years away, but several companies will soon launch e-readers with screens the size of an 8.5-by-11-inch piece of paperand unlike existing e-readers, which have glass screens, these next-generation machines will use flexible, plastic screens that readers won't have to worry about cracking.

The big question for newspaper companies is how much people will pay for a device and the newspaper subscription for it. Papers face a tough competitor: their own Web sites, where the information is free. And they have trained a generation of new readers to expect free news.

The challenge involved in creating a viable electronic newspaper is to develop a device that has the desirable characteristics of traditional paper in addition to its own inherent benefits (such as being automatically refreshable). Like traditional paper, the electronic newspaper must be lightweight, flexible, high-resolution, glare-free, and affordable, if it is to gain consumer approval. The makers of electronic books propose that the device could cost about the same as a year's subscription to a regular newspaper.

Mobile phone inventor wants devices to go back to basics

Martin Marty Cooper was the lead engineer of the Motorola team that developed the handheld mobile phone. Cooper is the CEO and founder of ArrayComm, a company that works on researching smart antenna technology and improving wireless networks.

AFP, Madrid

The inventor of the mobile phone said Wednesday the devices have become too complex, with a range of features from cameras to music, since he made the first-ever wireless call over three decades ago.

"Whenever you create a universal device that does all things for all people, it does not do any things well," former Motorola researcher Martin Cooper said at a privacy conference in Madrid.

"Our future I think is a number of specialist devices that focus on one thing that will improve our lives," the 80-year-old added.

Cooper, who was born in Chicago, was the lead engineer of the Motorola team that developed the handheld mobile phone. He made the first-ever wireless call from a busy Manhattan street corner on April 3, 1973.

"The first cell phone model weighed over one kilo and you could talk for 20 minutes before the battery ran out, which is just as well because you would not be able to hold it up for much longer," he said.

"What we did with this mobile telephone was create a revolution. Before the mobile phone existed we were calling a place, now we are calling a person."

Since that first call was made the popularity of mobile phones has soared, with more than four billion people owning one today, Cooper said, compared to only 300,000 in 1984.

Digital signature important for digitisation drive

MUSA IBRAHIM

DIGITAL society aims to make life easier by saving time and energy and stopping misappropriation in the everyday life. Moreover, the systems of tax return, the filing of information in the government offices, procurement and tender, applying for any license can be introduced with electronic or digital signature and digital certificate to transform Bangladesh into digital, the participants said at a seminar in the city recently.

Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) held the seminar on Commencing Digital Signature following the Information and Communication (amend) Act 2009 on its premises.

In the seminar, keynote speaker Munir Hasan, also consultant of access to information project under prime minister's office described the process of digital signature and said it is a mathematical system to confirm the identity of the information provider. In this

Panel of guests at the seminar held by BCC titled Commencing Digital Signature

system, the information remains absolutely uniform at the end. Moreover, it is used in monetary or any other secret transaction through Internet or other network.

He also said the government should monitor the role of digital signature assignee organisations and thereby make the e-commerce easier and can stop illegal money

transfer, unauthorised disclosure of government information while transaction and the cyber crime.

Public private partnership is important to accomplish the digital signature project, Munir Hasan added.

Dr Yeafesh Osman, state minister for science and communication technology (ICT) ministry lauded the initiative while addressing the seminar as chief guest and said traditionally it needs plenty of time to finish any the government file work. But once the digital signature system is introduced, time will be saved and the authenticity will be confirmed.

The government officials are needed to be motivated to achieve the target of digital Bangladesh along with the new dimension of digital signature, said AKM Abdul Awal Majumder, science and ICT ministry secretary said. He also stressed on skilled and trained manpower for this project.

Earlier, Md Mahfuzur Rahman, BCC additional secretary and executive director spoke in the inaugural session. Among others, Dr Md Zahidur Rahman, professor of computer science department of Jahangirnagar University and Md Abul Mansur, consultant of CPTU were present in the seminar as discussants. A question-answer session was also conducted with the participants in the seminar.

TECHNEWS

Digital ICT Fair begins on Saturday

StarTECH DESK

THE nine-day 'Digital ICT Fair-2009' will begin tomorrow at the Multiplan Centre at Elephant Road in the capital. With the slogan 'Let ICT be a Tool for Changing Days', the fair has been organised by the Multiplan Centre Shop Owners Association.

"We believe that the use of computer as well as information technologies would increase to a greater extent and its fruits would reach to the doorsteps of the people of all levels through the fair," Towfique Ehsan, convenor of the Digital ICT Fair-2009, told a press conference at the Jatiya

Press Club yesterday.

He also expressed the hope that fair would help materialize the present government's vision to build Digital Bangladesh by 2021.

About 400 shops will be set up from the fourth floor to the tenth floor on an area of about one lakh square feet at the Multiplan Centre, the largest IT market in the country. The fair also includes painting competition for children, debate, SMS and quiz competitions for students, seminar, symposium, free online ticket booking and internet browsing.

The entry fee of the fair has been fixed at Taka 10. However, school students can visit the fair without any fee.

Microsoft redesigns MSN, adds Twitter, Facebook

AP, Washington

Microsoft Corp. is giving its MSN Web portal a long-overdue makeover and says it hopes the new site will funnel more people to Bing, the software maker's search engine.

Microsoft is ditching the heavy blue background and stack of tiny text and menus across the top of the page that have defined msn.com for a decade.

The new site is cleaner, with a white background and simple, colorful links for "news," "entertainment," "sports," "money," "lifestyle" and "more" lined up across the top.

But it's still clearly a portal, filled with blocks of headlines. The most prominent real estate on the page is dominated by a slide show of the top five stories with big headlines and

photos.

Some of what appears on the MSN home page will be picked by editors looking for top stories. They'll get an assist from new software that uses Bing to find hot topics just as they begin to simmer.

Other stories on the home page will appear based on a Web surfer's location or other details gleaned from his or her browsing behavior.

In July, Web search became a two-team race when Microsoft and Yahoo announced that the Bing technology would be used behind the scenes on Yahoo's sites as well. That deal is awaiting regulatory approval.

This refreshed msn.com is rolling out to a small percentage of U.S. users on Wednesday but won't appear for everyone until early 2010.

PHOTOTECH

Arabic Bot

Students at the United Arab Emirates University in Al-Ain look on October 27, at what a team at the university's lab says is the world's first Arabic-speaking socially interactive robot. Greek assistant computer science professor and lab director Nicholas Mavrides said the human like Ibn Sina, named after the Islamic philosopher and scientist commonly known in English as Avicenna, said the robot could be used as a receptionist, salesmen or shopping assistants in malls.

PHOTO: AFP