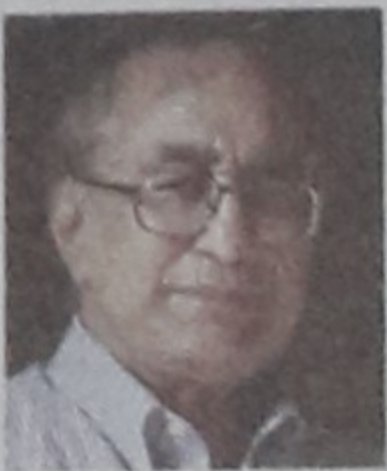## TECHSPOTLIGHT

Tech highs and lows, today and tomorrow

Experts share views

THE base of knowledge about the information and communication technology strengthened in 2009, thanks to relentless activities in public-private sector for reforming the lifestyle with ICT enabled services. Long anticipated, the sector started a flamboyant rolling on with laws, policies, public-private partnerships, positive growth in different areas and many more. The mentors of this sector shared their views with StarTech. Musa Ibrahim arranged the interviews.

Dr Jamilur Reza Choudhury
Vice Chancellor, BRAC University

Jamilur Reza Choudhury said, "The government has taken the Digital Bangladesh phenomenon as an objective -- whatever the people in remote areas are doing with it -- became a buzzword. Besides, I headed the committee that formulated the ICT Policy 2009 containing 306 action plans about which the ministers are fully aware. This is significant."
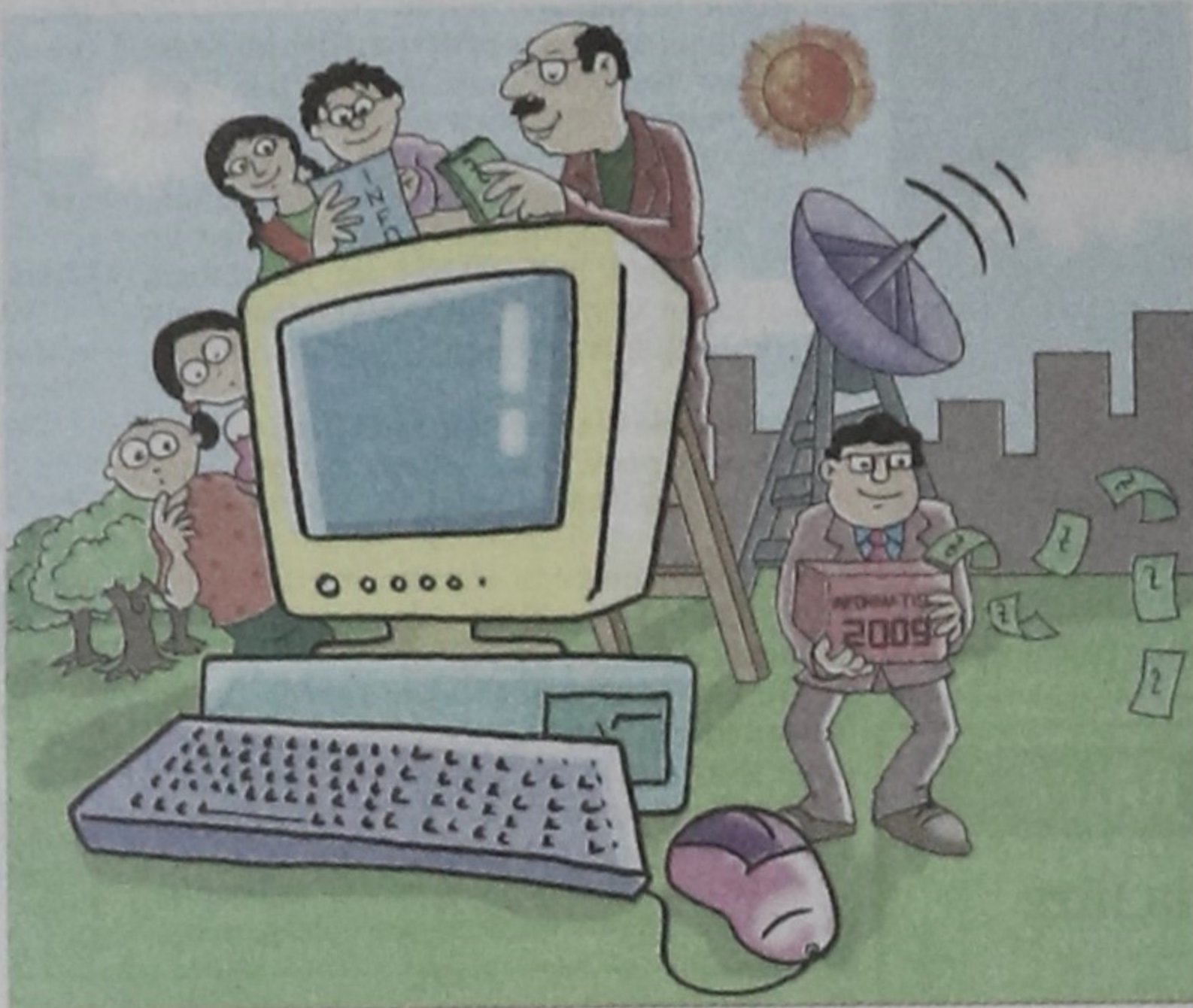
Different ministries and organisations developed websites through information (A2I) project. Among them, election commission's site is most resourceful as all the information of the lawmakers are there, Choudhury said adding online banking, automated clearing house at Chittagong port and Dhaka airport and MICR character supported automated cheque initiation are significant developments.

He also said, "The telecom sector is providing cell phone based Internet service -- though it is still quite expensive and with low bandwidth -- the people at the remote area are browsing Internet. Besides, BTCL reduced the bandwidth cost and many organisations like universities are now enjoying double bandwidth at the same price."

He mentioned one of our IT companies has ranked number one worldwide in AFIS software. He hoped that electronic financial transaction would be possible next year as the government initiated digital signature.

Dr Muhammad Zafar Iqbal
Professor of CSE Department at SUST

Zafar Iqbal said, "The expected advancement was not seen yet in the ICT sector. We need huge workforce for ICT knowledge based society. Our top graduates may be help in this regard. The public-private partnership could be a good help in ICT sector development."

The popular sci-fi writer voiced worries over the quality of our tertiary level education as many graduates could not perform well at work after completing university education. "This means we need to reform our education sector as per the demand of the society and to enable the students to perform just after ending their education," he added.

He said, "From now on, the education sector should be viewed as a whole. If we fail to do well at primary and secondary levels, we cannot expect any better in future."

Dr M Kaykobad
Professor of CSE Department at BUET and Fellow of Bangladesh Academy of Sciences

Kaykobad said, "ICT is not given as much importance in the education sector as in business sector. Bangladesh earns only a thousandth of what India earns from the ICT sector. The situation prevailed in the year 2009."

Nevertheless, some public and private universities such as BUET, University of Dhaka, NSU, AIUB and EWU have done well in the Association for Computing Machinery's (ACM) International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) over the last few years. Even in 2009, BUET and DU achieved 34th and 49th position respectively in the ACM ICPC world final, he added.

He also said, "If we invest more in ICT education, population will no longer be a burden on us. They will find job abroad boosting the wage earners' existing channel. India did it much earlier."

Dr Atiur Rahman
Governor, Bangladesh Bank

According to the central banker, 2009 was the year for e-commerce preparation.

"We've started the process to automate clearinghouse that will be completed in March 2010. A technical committee consisting of bankers and IT experts formulated the e-commerce policy. They are focusing on the priorities and tasks accordingly. Now we may run it on trial basis. Besides, we need a gateway for the e-commerce that includes user-friendly web development. Here the youths are doing very well with the technical security."

Munir Hasan
Senior consultant to Access to Information (A2I) project at Prime Minister's Office

Bangladesh moved forward positively in 2009 in the ICT sector with huge activities. The country enacted ICT law and ICT policy 2009 with 306 action plans. Shahjalal Science and Technology University started admission test registration through mobile phone. All the district commissioners and upazila nirbahi officers were facilitated with laptop and Internet connection to ensure 24/7 connectivity. He sees 2010 as the implementation year of the plans as infrastructures and info-structures were laid out in the 2009 for the e-society.

Mostafa Jabbar
President, Bangladesh Computer Samity

The achievements of 2009 are ICT policy, digital Bangladesh summit, initiation of digital university, the Bangladesh Bank's declaration to start e-commerce and many more.

Mostafa Jabbar focused on the positive change in government for serving the people in ICT sector that was absent earlier.

Habibullah N. Karim
President, Bangladesh Association for Software and Information Services (BASIS)

Habibullah pointed at three major advancements in 2009. "The 2008-09 fiscal year was ended with 32 percent growth in the software export sector. The country earned Tk 3.3 crore in 2009 which was 2.7, 2.6 and 2.5 crore in the year 2006, 2007 and 2008 respectively. This shows the software export sector marched with 2-3 percent negative growth in the last three years. But, 2009 was better," he said.

He also said the government also endorsed public-private-partnership tempo. This will also boost the ICT sector with tremendous development, self-sustaining and highly cost effective initiatives. These will propagate the e-governance portfolios and the huge ICT driven society. The year 2010 is going to be an eventful year for ICT sector.

Aktaruzzaman Manju
President, Internet Service Providers' Association of Bangladesh

He stressed launching WiMAX, functionalising IP telephony, high speed Internet with low tariffs, Internet radio as local content in the year of 2009. All he sees as the positive advancement in the Internet sector of Bangladesh.

But he also focused on the discrimination on allocation of frequency license, very high rate of inter-district connectivity in comparison to global Internet, no peering amongst two IIGs BTCL and Mango Teleservices though they use same submarine cables resulting into delay and waste of foreign currencies for Internet traffic, 15 percent VAT in Internet service that is considered high are hindering the growth of this sector in 2009.

He mentioned that helps from the BTCL could be a tool to eliminate the backlog in this sector.

CARTOON: MAHFUZ ROHE

Digital security certificates now in Bangladesh

STAR TECH DESK

BANGLADESH has entered into the digital era. Different government and non-government organisations are now eying to electronic money transaction and data transfer in a safer way. But the internet chaos ensues when websites are not encrypted with secure socket layer (SSL) technology -- the digital security.
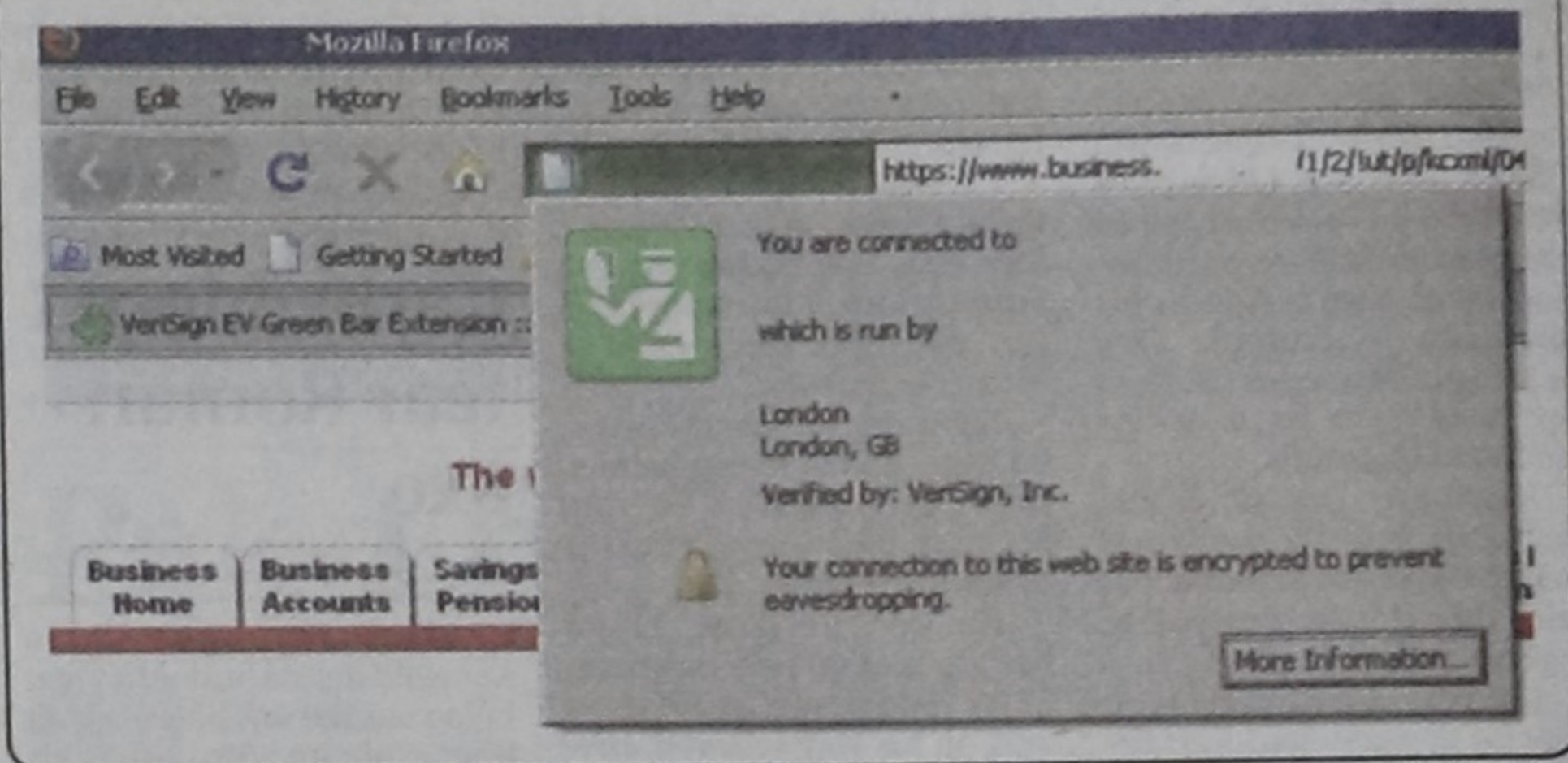
There are so many instances of being tapped in phone lines and have conversations on monitoring an extended period of time with no detection. The internet is no different. So, someone may tap and record the internet usage, capture passwords, social security numbers, bank account numbers, credit card information and confidential documents. Without encryption, the internet is an unusable resource for financial and data transaction.

So comes the digital signature. It keeps data safe and out of malicious hands during the online transition. The digital signature is a type of asymmetric cryptography used to simulate the security properties of a handwritten signature on paper. Digital signature schemes normally give two algorithms -- one for signing, which involves the user's secret or private key, and another for verifying signatures, which involves the user's public key.

A signature provides authentication of "message" -- may be anything from electronic mail to a contract. Digital signatures are used to create public key infrastructure (PKI) schemes in which a user's public key is tied to a user through a digital identity certificate issued by a certificate authority.

Once popular, SSL Wireless, is helping different institutions in getting digital signature while being a partner with Switzerland based company 'VeriSign'. VeriSign SSL Solutions, Including EV SSL, GeoTrust SSL, and Thawte SSL -- all are now available for banking and finance sector.

These products would also protect the customers of all sizes, including e-governance projects of the Government of Bangladesh and different e-commerce sites.

"SSL Wireless is helping customers with its customer care service if anyone send SMS to 6969 typing verisign in the message box," said Anisul Islam, General Manager of SSL Wireless.

TECHNEWS

'Ovijaan' crosses Mymensingh

StarTECH REPORT

IN a course to bring Internet closer to reality and with a vision to drive internet literacy in Bangladesh, Nokia's nationwide campaign 'Ovijaan' on December 20 reached Trishal, Mymensingh.

Nokia launched their countrywide corporate social responsibility campaign styled 'Ovijaan' on October 18 this year in a bid to aware students of 120 schools and colleges from 40 major district towns about internet and help them making personal e-mail identity. The campaign started with two cyber buses from two different directions -- one from Cox's Bazar (Bus 1) while another from Dinajpur (Bus 2). The 'Ovijaan' buses will continue its journey till February 14, 2010.

As part of the programme, the bus 2 equipped with computers and Nokia mobile handsets with internet connections visited different places in the district till December 22.

An advocacy meeting was held on December 20 at the Nazrul Smrity Kendro in Trishal of Mymensingh in this regard.

State minister for Science and ICT Yeafesh Osman, as the chief guest in the meeting, reiterated Bangladesh Government's commitment for the development of the ICT sector and also stressed the importance of easy and affordable access to internet in the rural community, especially among youths.

The minister also extolled Nokia for this unique initiative and encouraged Nokia's efforts in helping the country to take a step towards reaching the dream of a Digital Bangladesh.

Prem Chand, general manager, Nokia Emerging Asia (Nokia EA) assured the meeting about Nokia's wholeheartedly support Bangladesh Government's vision of utilizing ICT for development and vowed to remain partner with the government for rapid growth and expansion of ICT and internet in Bangladesh.

Parliament members Reza Ali (Mymensingh -7), Md Matior Rahman (Mymensingh4), Md Amanullah (Mymensingh-11 and Hayatur Rahman Khan (Mymensingh-2), marketing chief of Nokia EA Nowfel Anower and manager, retail & customer marketing of Nokia EA Prazzal Kumar Talukdar were, among others, present at the meeting.

TECHNEWS

Twitter gets more business friendly

AFP, San Francisco

TWITTER is testing a way to let businesses better use the popular microblogging service in what could be a future money-making opportunity.

Twitter is testing a "Contributors" feature that enables companies to have accounts that workers can share when it comes to firing off text messages to customers or others.

Accounts bear the names of businesses, but workers fielding questions or announcing developments would get bylines identifying their tweets.

"It enables users to engage in more authentic conversations with businesses by allowing those organizations to manage multiple contributors to their account" Twitter said in a post at the San Francisco firm's website on Tuesday.

"The beta will be released to a limited subset of folks for some time so that we can get an idea of how the features work from a system perspective."

Twitter said it will launch Contributors publically after it "kicks the tires a bit."

The announcement comes as short Twitter text messages referred to as tweets are being incorporated in real-time results in Internet search engines.

Twitter has been working on ways to make money from its globally popular service, and revenue producing ideas mentioned to date include selling premium accounts that businesses could use for marketing or image building.

Twitter has won millions of users since it launched the service that allows users to pepper one another with 140-character-or-less messages.

Nationwide fibre optics network on approach

StarTECH Desk

Bangladesh is coming under a telecommunication transmission network soon with a view to strengthening communications to cope with the challenges of the 21st century.

Fiber@Home Ltd, the first firm to have license of Nationwide Telecommunication Transmission Network from Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, has been working on the network.

The firm already brought Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Chittagong, Bogra, Pabna, Kushtia, Jessore, Comilla, Gazipur, Tangail, Natore, Jhenaidha, Narayanganj, Feni, Narsinghdi, Brahmanbaria, Habiganj, Moulvibazar under the network.

Fiber@Home at a press release claimed that it accomplished a 3-year target, set by the authorities, in mere six months.

Work was going on in full swing to set up high bandwidth capacity optical fibre to bring some more upazilas under the network.

The zones under the Fiber@Home Ltd will have the latest services of telecommunications via SDA, MPLS and other advanced telecommunications facilities.

Other districts will be brought under these services soon.

All the zones will be ready by January 2010 for the services.

NASA, Microsoft take Web surfers to Mars

AFP, Washington

NASA and Microsoft launched an interactive website on Tuesday that allows Web surfers to become Mars explorers.

The website is located at beamartian.jpl.nasa.gov.

The "Be a Martian" website invites members of the public to help scientists perform such research tasks as improving maps of the red planet, the US space agency and US software giant said.

"We're at a point in history where everyone can be an explorer," Doug McCuistion, director of NASA's Mars Exploration Program, said in a statement.

"With so much data coming back from Mars missions that are accessible by all, exploring Mars has become a shared human endeavor," McCuistion said.

Users can, for example, count craters on Mars, a task NASA said had posed a challenge in the past because of the vast numbers involved.

The website hosts hundreds of thousands of pictures of Mars including many which have never been released to the public before.

It features a "virtual town hall" where users can have questions answered by Mars experts and offers prizes to software developers who create tools that provide access to Mars images for online, classroom and Mars mission team use.