



PC recyclers thrive in Old Dhaka

IQRAMUL HASAN

Abir Hossain, a business student of Northern University, came to a *vangari*, or scrap, shop in the city's Chankherpul area with an old 15" Samsung monitor.

At a first glance, anyone would think he might come to repair his CRT monitor. Instead, Hossain came here to sell his old monitor after several failed attempts to repair it.

Like Hossain, many people visit these shops to sell their old tech: monitors, casings, hard disks, ram, printers, cell phones and other electronic goods.

Similar shops are in most area of capital, including Gulistan, Segun Bagicha, Elephant Road, and Old Dhaka.

According to environmentalists, the huge amount of solid waste poses a serious threat to the environment and human health when not properly recycled.

A study on e-waste by Sarwar Uddin Ahmed, a professor of Independent University early this year estimated that current annual e-waste from personal computers and cell phones totals 18,000 tonnes. That is more than double 2008's level, 8,917 tonnes. Much of it contains toxic metals.

And the amount is climbing, according to the study, published D.Net, an eco-research NGO. At the end of 2012, the amount of e-waste from the old computers will be 17,959 tonnes, and from cell phones another 7,702 tonnes.

Most observers agree that the level of recycling in Dhaka is far ahead of that in many developed countries, if only due to the poverty of the population.

Interviews of Dhakaites city in the study found that only 22.8 percent said they dump electronics after they have no further use for them.

Sahazhan Bhuyian, president of Dhaka Metropolitan Old Goods Merchant Co-operative, said his

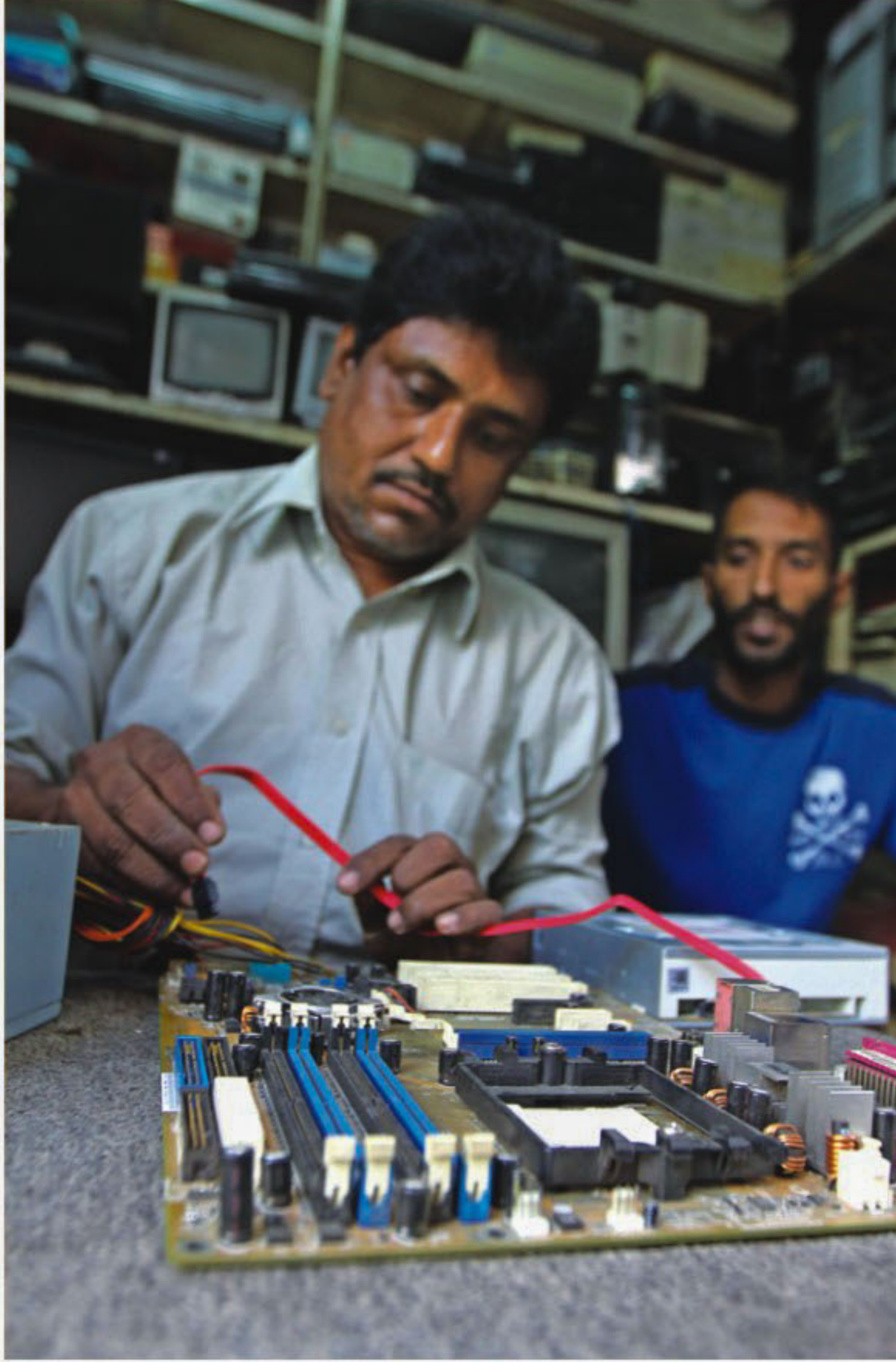


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

association had 222 members in Dhaka City, including 125 shops in Chankherpul. At least 100 non-member shops trade in obsolete and spoiled electric goods.

Iqbal Hossain, a worker of Hopewell traders of Chankherpul, said the shop collects old computers and other electronics from corporate houses via tenders -- up to 600

At a time -- but do not dismantle them on site.

"After collecting the appliance, we separate components under different heads for resale," he said. They send monitor to Nawabpur, the keyboard and mouse to Islambag, and a photocopy machine to Motijheel.

"But we break the power-

generating appliances ourselves to separate the different conductors," he added, referring to the universal power supplies.

The bad smell hints at the hazards lurking in the piles of old electronics. Far worse toxins would be released if a fire broke out.

According to the same study, computer and cell phone components contain lead, mercury, copper, cadmium and other toxic elements, including polybrominated diphenyl ethers known as PBDEs. These can damage human nervous, respiratory, endocrine, reproductive and liver systems.

Cell phone batteries may damage kidneys, and single battery may contain enough cadmium to pollute 6 lakh litres of water.

Computers become obsolete after a few years so it is normal to scrap them, said Mustafa Jabbar, president of the Bangladesh Computer Samity, the association of PC retailers. "But the important matter is how the obsolete computer is handled," he added.

According to Jabbar, during the last caretaker government period, his association successfully opposed the governments' decision to import old computers in Bangladesh.

"There is no policy regarding the management of e-waste in the country, and we approached the government several times to formulate a separate policy," he added.

According to Jabbar, traders and users have little awareness of the danger of e-waste, and environmental ministry is apathetic.

Jabbar said that in Australia, retailers of computers and other electronics collectively manage the e-waste generated from such products that are now obsolete.

If the electronics sellers manage the waste from obsolete products in Bangladesh, the computer association is ready to support them, he said.

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Few smartphone owners are loyal to their brand: survey

REUTERS, London

The booming smartphone market shows no sign of slowing but manufacturers will have to fight hard to keep their customers as smartphone owners show little loyalty to their current brands, a GfK survey shows.

The survey, to be published later on Monday, found that 56 percent of smartphone owners in key global markets were keeping their options open about which phone they would buy next, with only Apple commanding a significant degree of loyalty.

With features such as Wi-Fi, GPS and high-resolution cameras now commonplace, owners of Internet-enabled phones are increasingly concerned with the ease of accessing attractive services to enhance their devices, often through app stores.

"Loyalty with a handset is a lot more complicated these days in that people buy into experiences at the high-end level," Ryan Garner, the lead analyst on the survey, told Reuters.

"If a phone doesn't do what it says it will do, or what the owner hopes it will do, the maker will lose loyalty."

The survey found that just 25 percent of smartphone owners planned to stay loyal to the operating system running their phone, with loyalty highest among Apple users at 59 percent, and lowest for Microsoft's phone software, at 21 percent.

Of users of Research in Motion's

BlackBerrys, 35 percent said they would stay loyal. The figure was 28 percent for users of phones running Google's Android software, and 24 percent for users of Nokia Symbian phones.

Nokia, the world's biggest maker of cellphones, is revamping its software strategy under new Chief Executive Stephen Elop, and is due to release two new platforms next year.

GfK conducted the survey of 2,653 mobile phone users in Brazil, Germany, Spain, Britain, the United States and China online during October and November.

The German market-research company also found that 37 percent of cellphone owners in all those markets excluding China planned to upgrade to a smartphone on their next purchase. They did not ask the question in China for logistical reasons.

Sales of smartphones nearly doubled in the third quarter and are expected to be up more than 50 percent for 2010, according to IT research firm Gartner, outpacing growth seen at closer to 30 percent for the cellphone market as a whole.

Smartphones command far higher margins than regular mobile phones, although that profitability is being eroded by new competition from vendors who have been able to enter the market thanks to Google's open-source Android software.



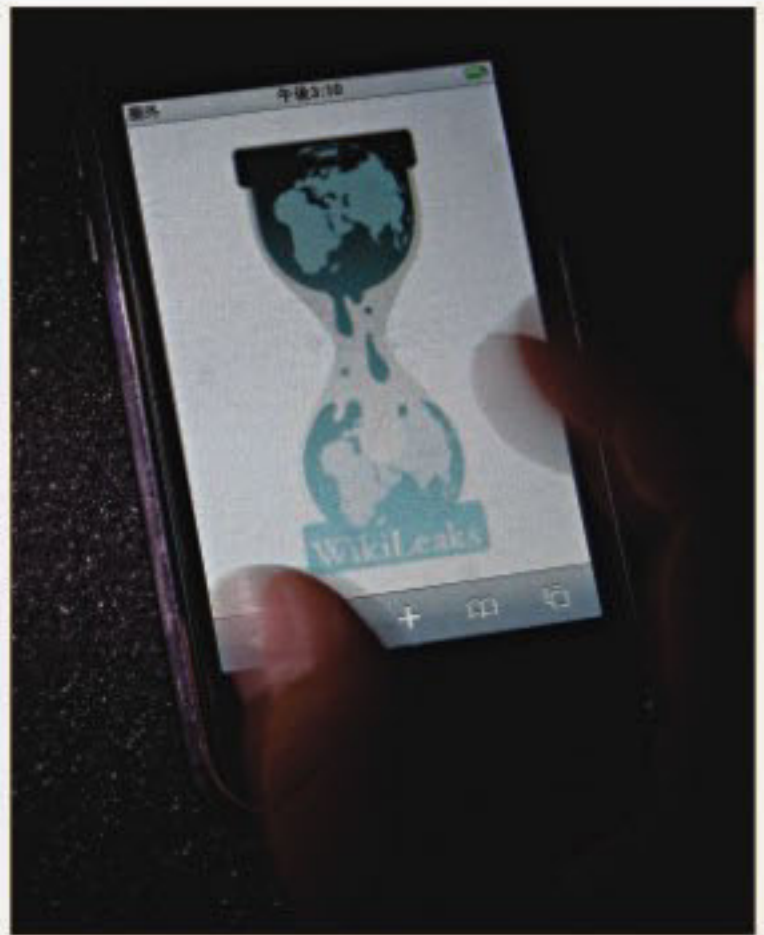
WikiLeaks website kicked off Amazon's servers

AP, New York

Amazon.com Inc. forced WikiLeaks to stop using the U.S. company's computers to distribute embarrassing State Department communications and other documents, WikiLeaks said Wednesday.

The ouster came after congressional staff questioned Amazon about its relationship with WikiLeaks, said Sen. Joe Lieberman, an independent from Connecticut.

WikiLeaks confirmed it hours after news agency reported that Amazon's servers had stopped hosting WikiLeaks' site. The site was unavailable for several hours



before it moved back to its previous Swedish host, Bahnhof AB.

WikiLeaks released a trove of sensitive diplomatic documents on Sunday. Just before the release, its website came under an Internet-based attack that made it unavailable for hours at a time.

WikiLeaks reacted by moving the website from computers in Sweden to those of Amazon Web Services.

But that move exposed WikiLeaks to legal and political pressure.

"If Amazon are so uncomfortable with the first amendment, they should get out of the business of selling books," WikiLeaks said in a tweet.

Seattle-based Amazon.com would not comment on its relationship with WikiLeaks.

"The company's decision to cut off WikiLeaks now is the right decision and should set the standard for other companies WikiLeaks is using to distribute its illegally seized material," Lieberman said in a statement.

As an organization, WikiLeaks has no firm geographic base, but founder Julian Assange sought to establish residency in Sweden to take advantage of laws protecting those who funnel information to the media.

EU launches Google investigation after complaints



REUTERS, Brussels

EU regulators opened a formal investigation into Google on Tuesday, putting pressure on the world's top Internet search engine to offer concessions to settle antitrust complaints and avert a lengthy battle like Microsoft.

The move by the European Commission came more than nine months after British price comparison site Foundem and French legal search engine ejustice.fr alleged Google's search algorithm demoted their sites in Web search results because they were rivals.

Microsoft-owned Ciao, from Bing, also filed a complaint with the European Commission about Google's standard terms and conditions.

"The (European) Commission will investigate whether Google has abused a dominant market position in online search by allegedly lowering the ranking of unpaid search results of competing services," the EU executive said in a statement.

But Competition Commissioner Joaquin Almunia said it was premature to say there was a problem with Google's business practices.

"I want to be very clear that this does not mean that there is definitely a problem -- it is far too early to say that," he told a European Parliamentary hearing.

Google said it would cooperate with the regulator.

"There is always going to be room for improvement, so we will be working with the Commission to address any concerns," a Google spokesman said.

The company defended its formula for ranking websites and said it had stopped using exclusive contracts almost two years ago.

"We built Google for users, not websites, and the nature of ranking is that some websites will be unhappy with where they rank," the spokesman said.

"Those sites have complained and even sued us over the years, but in all cases there were compelling reasons why their sites were ranked poorly by our algorithms."

The Commission said it would also look into allegations that Google sets exclusivity obligations on advertising partners, preventing them from placing certain types of competing ads on their websites, as well as on computer and software vendors, with the aim of shutting out competing search tools.

Sneak Peek

Samsung Electronics showed-off its latest tablet computer Samsung Galaxy Tab along with its other computing products during an event held at a hotel in the capital recently.

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