Maiden R&D set up to nurture local talents

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Samsung Bangladesh Research Centre (SBRC), the first research and development (R&D) setup by Samsung Electronics in the country, will not only cater to local demands but also Middle Eastern and African countries, its managing director said.

Last month, Samsung Electronics, the world's largest technology company by sales, launched the R&D centre at Uday Tower in Gulshan, first of its kind by any multinational company in Bangladesh.

"Whatever you see in Samsung mobiles in Bangladesh, we will develop," said Nam Kyu Lee, managing director of SBRC Ltd. "But our target is not only the Bangladeshi market. We have also targeted other Asian and African countries including Australia."

"We will customise our products in line with needs of the consumers," he told The Daily Star during an exclusive interview recently.

So far, the SBRC, the Seoul-based company's 18th R&D centre in the world and second in South Asia, organised five job fairs and four campus-recruiting events at the country's top universities and hired 180 fresh graduates.

"We will hire 300 graduate engineers this year. Our ultimate target is to recruit 1,000 people by 2013. That will however depend on the performance of the current staff working here and R&D need of Korean market world-wide," said Lee.

Lee, 46, said they would also hire qualified and talented Bangladeshis living abroad, particularly in the USA and Canada.

All engineers and staffs currently working at the centre are Bangladeshis apart from two South Koreans, including Lee.

Lee said they are facing problems in recruiting skilled and experienced people. "Our engineers are not experienced. They have no experience about the domain of Samsung and mobile software development."

"We are training them on basic things for four weeks and then on project specific topic and mobile software for another four weeks. We will then start physical work."

Nam Kyu Lee

PHOTO: STAR

SBRC is working with Samsung's R&D centre in India and headquarters to train its people. "We have sent some of our engineers to India to work with staffs there. We are also sending a number of engineers to our headquarters in South Korea," said Lee, who joined Samsung in 1988.

Lee said the main focus of the centre is to develop software for mobile phones, which will be used by Samsung alone. There is also demand from R&D sector, so it will provide core software.

"Initially, our products will be used for Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and other Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries. We will also develop software for South East Asian countries and Australia."

He said they are working on developing software for feature phones or low-cost phones. "We will later move to smartphone segments."

"We will not develop hardware here."

The Samsung official said the SBRC is also working on developing digital camera applications and mobile testing system.

"We will develop mobile testing. Whenever we develop any mobile software, its needed to be tested before launching. Different models have been in place in different markets across the world. So, whenever we have a new model, we will have to test it internally."

On pilot basis, the SBRC has already developed software like Bangladesh tour guide to help tourists travelling the country with information where and how they can go.

"We have also developed software for Bangladesh calendar and clocks for prayers. These are available online free," he said.

"These are some of the examples we are working on. We will expand scopes as we move on. Our target is to provide all software solutions to Muslim people around the world," he said, adding that this is the first R&D centre in a Muslim country.

He said Bangladesh is a Muslim country with over 16 crore population. There are Middle Eastern countries. In South East Asia, there are a number of countries that are Muslim majority.

"We want to provide all software solutions to those countries. We will develop both feature and smart phones for Muslim people," he said. "They are our major target customers. Then we will extend our services around the world."

Lee said Samsung chose Bangladesh to set up the R&D centre due to its abundant cheap labour and huge population.

"Bangladesh is one of the populous countries in the world. We believe that there are a lot of talents in the country, but there is no multinational company here to tap their potential. It will be easy to hire talented people."

"We also do not have R&D centre in any Muslim country. We need such centre in one of the Muslim countries to extend our R&D scope."

SBRC is now working on projects provided by its headquarters, where its brands products are manufactured. But Lee said the Dhaka centre has to develop a good number of ideas.

"Every other R&D centre has its own characteristics. We also have to have our own characteristics. By next year, we will have to propose our projects."

"By 2012, we will start performing independently, as there is competition among R&D centres within Samsung. If we cannot generate ideas then we will have no speciality. We will only have to complete projects of headquarters."

Lee, who was educated in computer science at Yonsei University in Korea, believes if his venture succeeds then other multinational companies would consider setting up such centres in Bangladesh.

He urged the government to offer tax reductions for long-time to companies who want to set up R&D centres in the country.

Last year Samsung spent US$4.5 million to set up offices and bear other expenditures. This year, the spending could reach $6 million.

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Roundtable focuses on national ICT policy

IT.TELECOM DESK

Speakers at a roundtable urged the government to exempt tax on digital products until 2021 and to make a list of products that should be considered as digital products. At the roundtable styled 'Reflections of the National ICT Policy on National Budgets' speakers also observed that the vision of 'Digital Bangladesh' will not be achieved if all products for communications are not made zero duty for that certain period.

The roundtable was organised by Center for ICT Policy Research (CIPR) at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Chairman of CIPR, SASM Taifur moderated the round table discussion where software industrialists said the current income tax exemption on software and ITES will expire in a few months. So software houses asked the government to extend it until 2019 for the sake of the promising companies.

Made-for-Internet movie debuts on YouTube

AFP, *Washington*

YouTube on March 11 began showing what it said was the first feature-length Hollywood movie created specifically for the Internet.

"Girl Walks Into A Bar" is a comedy starring Carla Gugino, Zachary Quinto, Rosario Dawson, Danny DeVito, Josh Hartnett and Emmanuelle Chriqui,

YouTube's entertainment marketing manager Nate Weinstein said in a blog post.

The movie is described as "a comedy about a seemingly unrelated group of characters spending a single night at 10 different bars throughout Los Angeles."

It was directed by Sebastian Gutierrez, who wrote the screenplay for "Snakes on a Plane" starring Samuel L. Jackson, and produced by Gato Negro Films and Shangri-La Entertainment.

It can be watched at youtube.com/ytscreeningroom.

YouTube, which was bought by Google in 2006 for $1.65 billion, has been adding professional content such as full-length television shows and movies to its vast trove of amateur video offerings in a bid to attract advertisers.

Angry Birds creator Rovio raises $42m

REUTERS, *Frankfurt*

Rovio, the Finnish developer behind the Angry Birds smartphone game, raised $42 million from investors and named Skype co-founder Niklas Zennstroem to its board.

The funding round was co-led by Accel Partners, which has previously backed Facebook, Admob and Baidu, and Zennstroem's venture capital firm Atomico Ventures, Rovio said on Thursday. Angel investor Felicis Ventures also participated.

Rovio wants to expand across markets including mobile, social media and other platforms, and via merchandising and media production and partnerships, it said.

"Angry Birds will continue to grow and we aim to create more similar success stories," Mikael Hed, chief executive and co-founder, said.

Hed told Reuters in August he planned to turn Angry Birds into a fully fledged entertainment brand in the way Walt Disney's Pixar has done with characters from Toy Story and Monsters, Inc.

Angry Birds -- in which players have to help birds destroy the pigs who stole their eggs, with the help of a slingshot -- has broken new ground in mobile gaming by staying at the top of the charts, unlike most mobile-game crazes.
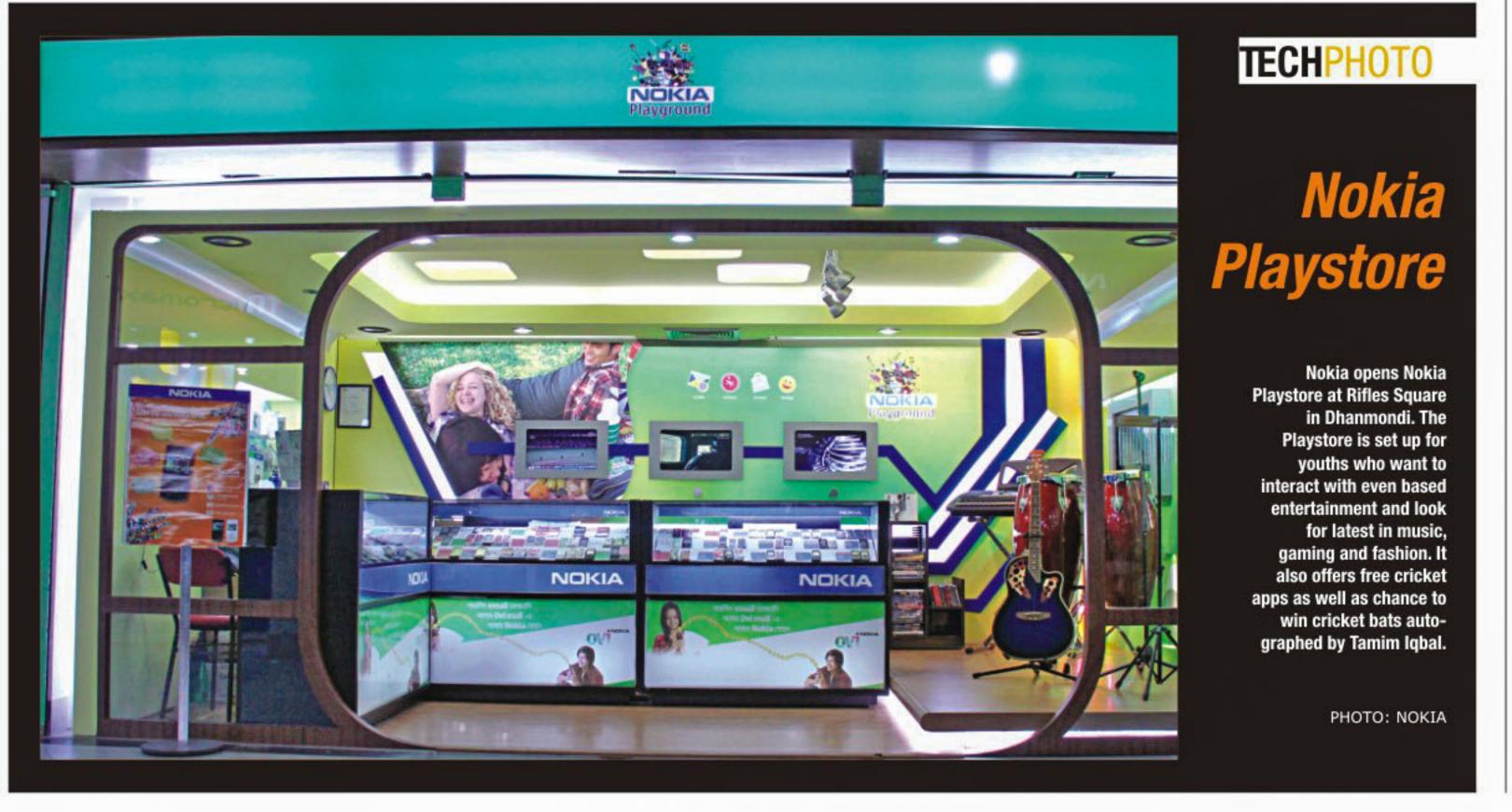
It is being played by 40 million monthly active users, Rovio said.

"This investment will give Rovio wings," Zennstroem said. "Angry Birds is one of the fastest-growing online products I've seen, growing even faster than Skype, and the company has done a brilliant job of extending it across different platforms and merchandise."

Over 75 million paid and ad-supported versions have been downloaded. Revenue share and revenue per copy vary, the company said.

Rovio said in August it is aiming for 100 million Angry Birds downloads through the next year or two.

Rovio was founded in 2003 after three students including Niklas Hed -- Mikael's cousin and now Rovio's COO -- won a game-development competition sponsored by Nokia Oyj and Hewlett-Packard CO. It changed its name from Relude in 2005.

TECHPHOTO

Nokia Playstore

Nokia opens Nokia Playstore at Rifles Square in Dhanmondi. The Playstore is set up for youths who want to interact with even based entertainment and look for latest in music, gaming and fashion. It also offers free cricket apps as well as chance to win cricket bats autographed by Tamim Iqbal.

PHOTO: NOKIA