

Bangladesh needs a 3G vision

LIRNEasia CEO tells *The Daily Star*

ABDULLAH MAMUN

Dr Rohan Samarajiva, chief executive officer of LIRNEasia, a Colombo-based think-tank that works to improve the lives of the emerging Asia-Pacific people by facilitating ICT, recently visited Dhaka to participate in the e-Asia event.

On the sidelines of the mega ICT event, The Daily Star had a chance to talk to him on telecoms infrastructure and 3G auction -- topics that have become very important for the telecom industry.

"I don't think anybody could be happy about the infrastructure situation here in Bangladesh. Do you have the platforms for the entrepreneurs that are available in the other countries?" he asked.

He also informed that even Afghanistan is now short listing and evaluating proposals for 3G licensing. Three licences will be given, 10 Megahertz each, and the evaluation process is underway. Where is Bangladesh?

Bangladesh has almost 100 percent telecoms coverage. People have limited income, so data should be available for the people at a lower cost. And that is possible only by 3G or 4G technologies. And for that, Bangladesh needs to lay countrywide fiber optic cables. BTCL (Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited) has done that by public money, which is now under the telecom ministry. Everyone should take their help, said Samarajiva.



ROHAN SAMARAJIVA

"If you can use the infrastructure, then you can facilitate the entrepreneurs of the country and can get them on board," he said.

He said the country should have a vision on what connectivity should look like after a certain period.

He said Bangladesh has a bad experience when fixed phone licences were given nationally and regionally without considering necessary resources. They did not have enough frequencies and also had bad business cases, he said. Now, the current licences giving to the mobile companies are more technology specified and restricted than those were given in the 90's.

The BTRC has plans to provide 3G licences by mid next year. He said 3G requires major investment. And the 2G

operators have already developed their network all over the country. It will be easier for them to roll out 3G with their existing network. The regulator should consider the business plan when they short list the proposals for auction, Samarajiva said.

He said if a company does not have 2G network, then it is almost impossible for it to roll out 3G.

BTRC is supposed to offer 2G spectrum to the newcomers after 3G auction. Samarajiva said, "I don't see any problem with this. But if the 3G licences are given by auction and 2G given without auction, it will not be transparent."

The government should arrange a workshop to take stakeholders' opinions before going for such decisions.

On whether 3G licences should be given to newcomers or existing operators, Samarajiva said, "There should be a synergy between the technologies. In Afghanistan, three licences will be given but the existing 2G licences have not been shortlisted. This is surprising. And we are investigating it."

In the United Kingdom, five licences were given for 3G and newcomers were also welcomed, which created tremendous pressures for the existing 2G licensees, he said. As a result, the price became high, he added.

"Auctions can result in irrational outcomes, which are called 'winners curse'. After winning the auction, an uncomfortable situation may arise when you may think

'what have I done!'"

In Bangladesh there are two Wimax licences that are still unused and nobody is taking those, he said.

In Hong Kong and New Zealand, 3G auctions were designed on the basis of how much revenue the companies would share with the governments. As a result the company did not give a large amount of money to the government in the first year, but it could give more as the business grows. "Bangladesh can follow the design."

Sri Lanka provided 3G licences to the existing operators at a price of \$5 million each.

Samarajiva said auction conditions cannot be changed afterwards. For example, he said, the Indian government at the 3G auction said the companies can provide roaming services among them. But now they are saying that they cannot do it. The government has changed the rule later. "Why was it not prohibited in the beginning, which many countries did?"

When talking about how 3G or any other broadband helps the economy, he said, "Broadband basically helps the economy by increasing the productivity of the workers and enterprises. People can work from anywhere they like when broadband is available. For payment approval, anything can be done from the middle of a road. It increases your knowledge productivity. People can develop various kinds of applications with the support of broadband."

Google+ rolling out facial recognition feature

AFP, San Francisco

Google is rolling out a feature that lets members of its online social network automatically find themselves in photos posted by friends.

The "Find My Face" feature being added to Google+ over the next several days is opt-in only, meaning people have to make a point to turn it on.

By leaving it to Google+ members to activate the feature, the Internet giant was sidestepping privacy concerns raised when social networking rival Facebook added facial recognition in an opt-out style this year.

"By turning on Find My Face, Google+ can prompt people you know to tag your face when it appears in photos," Google+ photos team engineer Matt Steiner said in a blog post.

"Of course, you have control over which tags you accept or reject," he explained. "We hope this makes tagging your photos much easier."

Google remains undaunted in its bid to create a flourishing online community that can go toe-to-toe with social networking powerhouse Facebook.

Sony eyes Vita push, feels Fitch heat

REUTERS, Tokyo

Sony Corp, set to report a \$1 billion loss this year, is banking on a big slate of new software to drive sales of its new PlayStation Vita handheld games device, even as Fitch downgraded the Japanese electronics giant to a notch above junk.

The Fitch ratings agency turned up the heat by downgrading Sony to BBB- - a notch above non-investment, or junk, grade - from BBB, citing the group's weakened financial performance and the challenges it faces in recapturing its former strong position in key markets.

The Vita, featuring a 5-inch OLED display and 3G connectivity, sold out in advance bookings in Japan, where buyers have rushed to upgrade from the PSP. Sony

has not provided a unit sales target for the Vita.

The United States and Europe may pose a tougher challenge as a February 22 launch date for the Vita comes well after the crucial year-end holiday sales season.



The challenge from smartphones and tablets comes on top of competition from long-standing domestic rival Nintendo, which aims to sell 16 million of its cheaper 3DS handheld games devices by March.

Sony on Thursday said it was keeping to its target of selling 15 million PS3 game machines in the year through March.

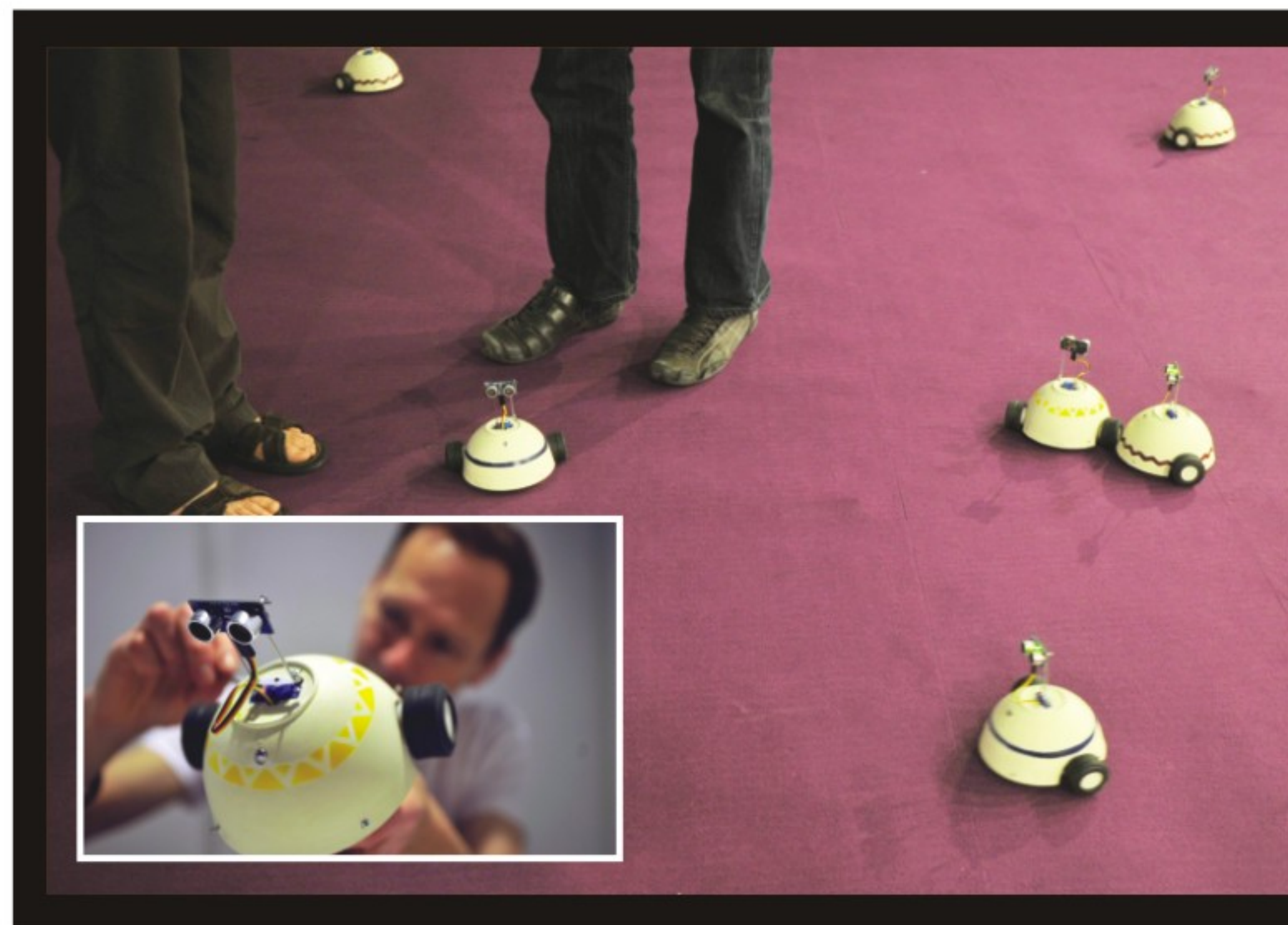
Another rival, Microsoft, doesn't offer a portable device.

Sony, which has forecast a fourth straight annual loss this year, launches the Vita in Japan this weekend.

It hopes a package of 24 software titles at launch will help the gadget avoid the fate of rival Nintendo's 3DS, which flopped shortly after launch, forcing a hefty price cut.

Welshman Andrew House, who took the top job at Sony Computer

Entertainment in September hoped the Vita would outsell its predecessor, the PlayStation Portable (PSP), which has shipped 73 million units since launching in late-2004.



TECHPHOTO

Influencia Exhibition

People stand amongst robots in the "Influencia: Living Life with Sentient Machines" exhibition at the SIGGRAPH Asia 2011 Exhibition in Hong Kong on December 13. The robots in the "Influencia" exhibition sense and respond to the presence of people within the area.

PHOTO: AFP

Dell to invest for long term



Harjeet Rekhi (R) speaks at the event.

IT & TELECOM REPORT

"Dell believes that Bangladesh is one of the key emerging economies in Asia, and we intend to invest here for the long term", said Harjeet Rekhi, Dell's general manager for the Developing Markets Group in South Asia.

Rekhi said this during a press meet to share Dell's strategy to deliver solutions that help customers navigate the ever-changing IT environment and make the most out of their IT investments in the virtual era.

He also highlighted Dell's commitment to strengthen its channel partner network in Bangladesh and grow the company's presence in the enterprise, consumer and public sector segments.

"As an end-to-end IT solutions provider, Dell is uniquely positioned to provide customers with full-suite solutions to help them manage their IT infrastructure from end user device to the data-centre to the cloud. Dell is committed to bringing our comprehensive offerings to customers in Bangladesh and working hard to be their trusted IT advisor," said Rekhi.

He further said the company is strategically working with its channel partners, who play a significant role in Dell's effort to deliver technology and ensure that their customers are well-ahead of the game instead of simply 'keeping up'.

This includes providing them with advice on designing, implementing, testing and running IT infrastructures that are dramatically more cost effective, energy efficient and scalable.

The consumer segment is also a key to the company's growth plans in Bangladesh. Rekhi said Dell aims to deliver great computing experience to customers with its wide range of products and solutions designed for the user segment such as Gen-Y and students, families with kids, and mobile professionals.

At the meet, Rekhi informed that Dell now has the strongest portfolio of IT solutions in the company's history.

He said the company sees value in driving the business around solutions and services -- that support its broader strategy to penetrate the mid to large enterprise segment -- with a much higher ingredient of intellectual property.

Nokia brings entry-level smartphone

IT & TELECOM DESK

Nokia announced the introduction of Nokia 500, an entry level touchscreen smartphone, in the local market, said a press release.

Despite being an entry level smartphone, Nokia 500 is said not to have compromised with quality or performance.

It has the Nokia's fastest processor to date, a 5MP camera, a music and entertainment experience and preloaded with Maps and turn by turn navigation.

The Nokia 500 is built on the latest Symbian Anna OS and has enhanced software features, latest Web browser technology and the new Ovi Maps.

With 1GHz processor, the Nokia 500 is one of the fastest

smartphones as an entry level smartphone. It allows people to use lots of apps at the same time, switch between apps quickly and easily, and does not slow down phone.

The Nokia 500 is pre-loaded with music and entertainment apps likes Shazam, Gig Finder, Lonely Planet and Michelin guides.

It also gives access to Nokia's latest maps technology, which is optimised for social networking so that users can check-in to locations around the world.

Its offline voice-guided walking and driving directions in over 80 countries help to avoid hefty data roaming charges.

The phone has a price tag of Tk 18,000.



BASIS begins programming contest

IT & TELECOM DESK

BASIS (Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services) is going to organise a programming contest "Code Warriors' Challenge" for the BASIS SoftExpo 2012, which will take place on February 24-28.

The contest has been divided in two categories - professionals and students. Participants must take part in groups. A group will comprise of 3 members with one additional member.

The contest will be held in four tracks - .Net, PHP, Java, and Android. Eight teams will be awarded from each category.

Interested groups may register at BASIS website (softexpo.com.bd). December 31, 2011, is the last date for registration.

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