

# Robots for everyday life



STAR

A smart robot, Intelligent Military Robot, is on display at BASIS SOFTEXPO, a software fair that ended in Dhaka yesterday. The robot can alert its owner on his mobile phone of trespass by intruders into his house.

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

PEOPLE with infants often feel the need for monitoring their children during sleep hours. Children may wake up and start crying and the parents may not be nearby to soothe the babies. This was one of the needs that prompted a Bangladeshi young talent Feroz Ahmed Siddiky, who is also a teacher of United International University (UIU) in Dhaka, to build a voice guided utility robot.

With the robot in place, it is possible for the parents to instantly know the position of the baby for safety and listen to the cries with the help of a remote that will transmit voice and pictures. It is the robot that sends the messages on its own even though the baby cannot speak or use the device.

The robot sends voice and pictures to a person holding the remote using the GPRS core network, which is the central part of the General Packet Radio Service.

It allows 2G, 3G and wideband code division multiple access (WCDMA) mobile networks to transmit IP packets to external networks such as the internet. The GPRS system is an integrated part of the GSM network switching subsystem.

With the advent of technology, the quality of people's lives is getting better in many aspects. There is technology for almost all conveniences that fit people's lifestyles.

The robot is able to suit a variety of needs. It can direct a disabled person by indicating direction in voice.

Siddiky invented the device as a thesis requirement on his master's programme at the university last year. He said it primarily took nearly Tk 150,000 to make the robot.

But the manufacturing cost of the device will now be Tk 40,000 apiece. "This is a unique invention," he said.

His thesis project made him a champion at the annual Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) competition under the IT Innovation Search Programme. He received a

trophy and a cheque of Tk 100,000 as recognition for his invention on the sidelines of the five-day BASIS Softexpo-2012.

BASIS organised an event in Dhaka on Saturday to award talented individuals and companies for their contribution to the IT sector. BASIS awarded 31 companies, professionals and students this year -- 26 awards were given on the basis of competition and five were awarded in recognition of their contribution to software and ICT sector development.

Biplob Ghose Rahul, coordinator of the BASIS event, said responses from the visitors were high this year.

On the sidelines, BASIS received a total of 2,500 applications from job seekers for different IT and software companies.

Of the total number, 500 applicants have been selected primarily. Of the selected candidates more than 300 fresh graduates might get jobs in IT and software companies after final selection, he said.

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# Dreams of e-services at flagship IT fair

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

HUNDREDS of IT fans thronged the exposition for software and IT-enabled services in Dhaka yesterday as the five-day event came to an end.

The government's Access to Information (A2I) programme came up with its flagship Union Information Centre.

Such centres have been established in each of the country's 4,501 unions. They provide IT and internet services to people living in rural areas, said Monirul Islam, a graduate who has been working at Kasipara union under Baulfal upazila in Patuakhali.

Onnorokom Group, one of the fastest growing IT and research-based companies in the country, showcased its range of innovations at the fair.

It put on display its Bulk SMS Service, which can help an individual or company send thousands of short messages to intended recipients with one click; Onnorokom Digital Voltage Stabiliser, which ensures safe voltage; Edunext, education management software; and Automatic Fire Extinguisher Ball, which can douse fire.

It also displayed its biggest innovation yet: the Electronic Voting Machine, which has been successfully used in city corporations and municipalities elections.

The group showcased Rokomari.com, an online shopping portal. It will help readers buy books without physically visiting any store and paying the bills upon receiving the delivery, said Mahmudul Hasan Sohad, chairman of the group.

Ajkerdeal.com offers discounts up to 90 percent on dining, travel, entertainment, movies, spa, healthcare services, fitness centres and beauty parlours, said Abul Khayer, business development executive of the company.

Sheikh Mohammad Ismail, manager of MFI Practices of DataSoft Systems Bangladesh Ltd, said the company has displayed all of its products and services. "We have offered garments and real estate management systems. Our solutions for microfinance institutions will help them take quick decisions."

He said enthusiasm surrounding IT has increased in the country in the last couple of years, particularly among the

young generation.

"Our future seems bullish. Our exports are growing."

Zahid Hasan, system support officer of Troyee, said they received greater responses from professionals and students compared to last year.

Aftab Mahmud Khurshid, chief marketing strategist of Gobrand, said it is a nice initiative.

He said he thinks the IT sector would be the next big thing for the country after garments, which accounts for 80 percent of Bangladesh's \$24 billion exports.

"We have the potential. But we will need to properly market, brand and patent it. We have to inform the world about our huge human resources," said Khurshid.

The fair featured 12 seminars, 12 technical sessions and 30 open discussions, said organisers.

Set up in 1997, Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) is the national trade body for software and IT-enabled service industry of Bangladesh. It has over 450 members.

Organisers said the biggest ICT exposition in the country at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre has been an immense success.

"We got a huge response and we are happy," said AKM Fahim Mashroor, senior vice president of BASIS, which organised the event.

"Our target was to demonstrate what our youth is doing. It is not a place to buy or sell products. It is a platform where stakeholders come to know each other and their innovations," he told The Daily Star.

Themed 'Empowering Next Generation', both local and foreign and government and private companies showcased their IT solutions and IT-enabled services at the 'BASIS SOFT-EXPO 2012'.

The fair brought together professionals, young IT minds and leading companies to discover the best solutions on the market to improve workplace productivity and performance.

About 140 leading companies took part in the 10th edition of the annual event. Thirty IT companies from the Netherlands, Denmark and the United Kingdom showcased their solutions and services.

# Fashion hotels show jet-setters luxury Italian style

AFP, Milan

FROM Dubai to Jamaica, Australia to Brazil, high-end fashion hotels are mushrooming as growing numbers of luxury travellers seek a taste of the glamour and indulgence that only stardom used to bring.

Offering presidential suites with everything from private cinemas to personal chefs, Italian brands are investing heavily in the latest fad -- creating "lifestyle experiences" which guarantee guests designer perfection.

"This is a massive area of investment for designer labels," said Salvo Testa, professor in fashion management at Milan's Bocconi University.

"It's no longer just about getting you to wear Armani, for example, it's about getting you to eat, sleep and dream Armani as well."

Despite the economic crisis, Italian labels in particular are a driving force in the sector, with a Bulgari hotel opening in London in April and hotels planned by Missoni and Armani for Kuwait, Oman, Cape Town and Marrakesh.

"American brands are not luxurious or aspirational enough to interest rich clients, especially in Asia, the Middle East or South America -- and French designers worry about over-exposing their brands," said Testa.

Italian brands, meanwhile, have been gradually innovating with secondary fashion lines and homeware, and have even broken into the restaurant business -- all of which are elements then incorporated into their hotels," he said.

As the well-heeled flock to Milan in these days for fashion week, catwalk shows are followed by parties in the Bulgari hotel, or celebrity-packed dinners in the city's Dolce & Gabbana, Just Cavalli and Moschino restaurants.

Those searching for a more intimate



AFP

A model displays a creation as part of Jil Sander Fall-winter 2012-13 collection on Saturday during the women's fashion week in Milan.

dining experience can head to the Armani hotel, where it's possible to book a table in the kitchen and watch the chef rustle up a fare dreamt up by the billionaire designer Giorgio Armani himself.

The hotel is the 77-year-old's second venture into the luxury lifestyle business -- his first opened in Dubai in 2010 -- and he regularly checks in on an experience which can cost guests up to 11,000 euros (\$14,800)

a night.

"He lives just round the corner from the hotel. I see him around a lot, popping in and out. He's a renowned perfectionist," said taxi driver Giancarlo.

"I took his manservant once to get the Versaces' three Persian cats washed. Money down the drain, it's not the sort of world for me," he said.

The Armani ideal, however, is to wel-

come guests from any background and make them feel at home -- so much so that they have highly trained personal "lifestyle managers" who are on call 24 hours a day to attend to every whim.

Newly-weds who have blown their savings on a night of luxury but have nothing to wear for their romantic aperitif in the bar overlooking Milan's famous cathedral can ask their personal manager to get them

kitted out.

"You're heading out to a party and need a fashion advisor? We'd arrange one for you, or of course you could shop in the Armani clothing store downstairs," said Andrea Zeno Villa, the hotel's marketing and communications manager.

"What party? Everything you could ever need is right here," said his colleague Viviana Giussani as she showed off one of the signature suites, which cover two floors and come with a kitchen and private gym or cinema.

The brand's in-house shops also sell Armani flowers, chocolates and books.

"It's a win-win situation for the fashion houses. They enter into partnership with large hotel chains which fund the venture, rake in the royalties and build up brand awareness and brand loyalty," said Testa.

"They start attracting VIPs, and celebrities like Lady Gaga hire a room to change for a concert and come to use the hotel as a second home," he said.

While the flagship stores cater for guests looking for authentic Made-in-Italy luxury, it is the hotels in wealthy and emerging markets which draw in what the Burberry brand calls the "travelling luxury consumer".

"China is the most tangible emerging market for luxury growth. Chinese are travelling abroad and spending up to six times as much overseas as they do at home," said Isabel Cavill, a luxury expert with Planet Retail research group.

Testa said most guests were likely to be searching for a sumptuous experience coloured by a Mediterranean generosity and good hospitality.

"The vastly wealthy Chinese and Russians are travellers who place their money and trust in Italian fashion brands because there is such a dearth of culture and intimacy in their own luxury services back home," he said.