

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



IT Innovators at SoftExpo

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Innovators

An innovator is a special person. It takes dreams, hard work, intellect and risk-taking with no guarantee of wealth or fame. Innovations can range from "gem" paperclips to Java programming language. Being an innovator is not for everyone.

Then again, where would we be today without innovation?

At this year's SoftExpo - the annual software and IT services fair organised by BASIS - I met ten IT innovators (individuals and teams) who had competed with many to win a place here.

Some projects had a technology flavour:

A remote-controlled robot's movement caught the public's attention, but at its heart is a new voice recognition technology developed by F. A. Siddiky, Masters student at United International University. He spoke commands into a mobile phone, and the robot understood and obeyed him. Siddiky won innovation first prize.

Live Motions, developed by a team of animation engineers, speeds up production of three-dimensional animation by capturing movements of a real-life person using a low-cost kinetic camera and transferring those movements to an animation figure. Normally such speedups require expensive "marker" hardware.

Change, an Android phone application by BRAC university students, allows users to enter information into a Dhaka map, shareable by anyone with this type of phone. For example, a user can flag a spot with high-crime. Others can check the map for this warning.

Some projects addressed specific needs:

Talking Assistant is a small box which can speak one of twelve pre-programmed phrases. It assists those who cannot speak, either from birth or due to illness. For the elderly, making simple requests such as "I am thirsty",

or "Need toilet" becomes difficult. The product includes remote voice capability and is in Tk 4000 range.

An online library for the blind provides a database of audio books - especially school texts - which can be used by blind people.

Doctor Software is a comprehensive patient management and diagnosis programme developed by a physician. It integrates many aspects of a doctor's work, including, for example, possible diagnoses based on information entered. Originally running on desktop computers, there is now a mobile version.

Tomorrow Computer Vision is a marksheet programme for maintaining student marks in government schools. Today this work is cumbersome, requiring a massive ledger. The product is being used in several primary schools in Dinajpur.

Other projects had a general target audience:

A burglar alarm system from Jewel Super Technology alerts the owner via mobile phone when a house is broken into.

A comprehensive database on medicines, including drug information and health news, is offered by bddrugs.com. Team members are pharmacist alumni of North South University.

A social networking site, bartavubon.com, is all-Bangla and developed by Jagannath University students.

Several innovators were not computer scientists or engineers, but came from other professions. Finding problems or opportunities in their field - or, in one case, moved by a family tragedy - they learned IT and used it as a tool for building solutions.

BASIS deserves congratulations for organising this. Now, is the nation ready to embrace and reward its IT innovators?

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USING POPULATION'S POTENTIAL

Quantum leaps in growth possible

Says BB governor Atiur Rahman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh can make quantum leaps in growth and poverty eradication if it can unlock and harness the potential of its vast population, said Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman yesterday.

The country already positioned itself in the global community as a forward-looking nation with a firm footing on the path towards steady growth, he said.

Atiur was speaking at a discussion, "Quantum jump for Bangladesh", on the sidelines of World Marketing Summit at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the city.

The summit is the global initiative of the world's most renowned marketer Prof Philip Kotler and is being co-hosted by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh.

Over the past 40 years, the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by more than eighteen-fold while the population increased a little over two-fold, said Atiur.

GDP growth rate, which was only 1.1 percent and 3.2 percent during the 70s and 80s respectively, increased to 5.8 percent on an average from 2000 to 2010. In 2010-11 fiscal year, the rate was 6.7 percent and has been projected to grow by 6.5 to 7 percent in 2011-12 fiscal year, he added.

Trade openness integrated Bangladesh with the global economy, with trade to GDP ratio rising from around 20 percent of the 70s and 80s to 40.7 percent in 2010-11 fiscal year, said Atiur.

Poverty has come down as around 30 percent of the population is currently below the poverty line. It was around 57 percent in the 90s, he added.

At the event, Finance Minister AMA Muhith said the country witnessed a higher growth over the last couple of years, establishing sophisticated industries to attain the middle-income country status within 2021.

The government is working to solve the country's present infrastructure deficit, especially in the power and transportation sector, by undertaking public private partnership, he said.

Andrew Tilke, chief executive officer of HSBC Bangladesh, said the world will witness a change in the global trade pattern in the next couple of years due to the economic downturn.

He said intra-Asian trade will continue to grow further, fueled by the growth of the Chinese economy.

Nancy Lee, president of Social Marketing Services, said many foreign companies are relocating their operations in Bangladesh as the country can make quantum leaps in growth, which is currently positive and steady.

NEWS IN brief

Bus owners call off strike in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Inter-district buses and coaches resumed operation to and from Sylhet division yesterday morning after withdrawal of an indefinite strike enforced Thursday.

Sylhet's Inter-District Bus Coach Malik Samity called off the strike after discussion with Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity and Communications Minister Obaidul Quader.

The bus and coach owners enforced the strike protesting torching of three buses of Shyamoli Paribahan by agitating locals in Habiganj Wednesday night.

The locals were protesting crushing of a school-boy under a Shyamoli Paribahan bus.

Teenage boy jailed for stalking in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A mobile court here yesterday sentenced a teenage boy to one month's imprisonment for stalking a schoolgirl in Tala upazila.

The convict, hailing from the upazila's Uthali village, used to stalk a class VII student of Sujana Shaha Girls' High School on her way to and from school.

On Thursday, as the boy came to the school for the girl, teachers and local caught him and handed him over to Tala police.

Tala Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Md Mahbubur Rahman, also executive magistrate, went to the school yesterday and convicted the boy in presence of local people.

3 brick kilns shut for violating rules

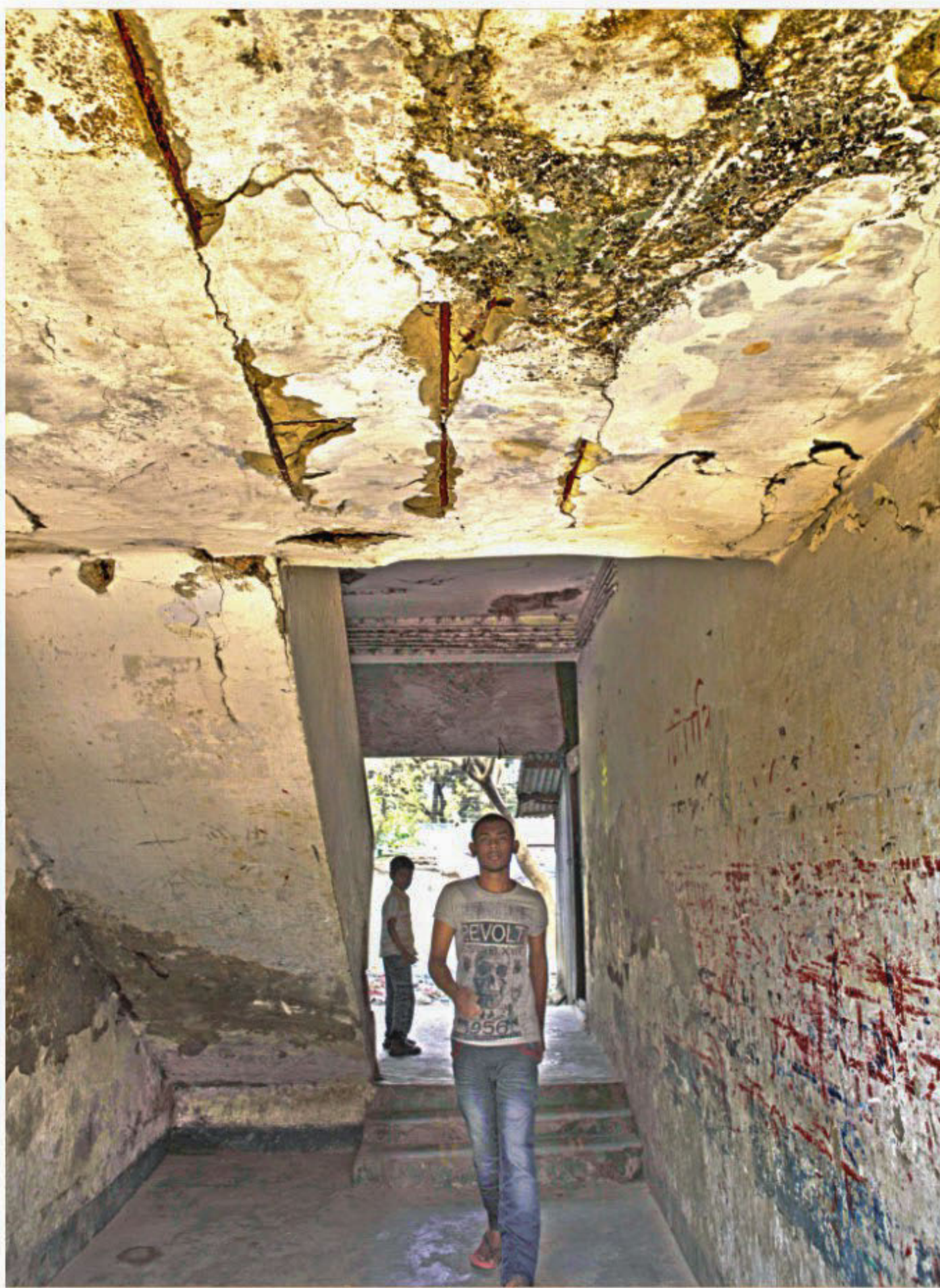
UNB, Bagerhat

A mobile court on Thursday afternoon shut down three brick kilns at Bagmara and Rahimabad villages in Sadar upazila on charges of violating rules.

The owners of the brick fields--Sarwar Hossain, Sheikh Abdul Khaleque and Jammu Paik--were also fined Tk 26,000 by the court of the Department of Environment (DoE).

Of them, Sarwar was fined Tk 15,000 while Khaleque Tk 1,000 and Jammu Tk 10,000.

The mobile court, led by executive magistrate Mehedi Hasan, found that burning woods were being used for the brick kilns violating rules.



The five-story building in Taltala residential area for government employees in the city has developed cracks all over it. Residents say the building, where about 50 families reside, has been in the danger of collapse for some 10 years. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

DHAKA TODAY

AGM

Dhaka University Alumni Association will organise its special alumni reunion and annual general meeting (AGM); Venue: Teacher-Student Centre (TSC); Time: 3:30pm.

Seminar

Gulshan Niketan Recreation Society will arrange a seminar; Venue: Gulshan South Park; Time: 7:00am.

Discussion

Bangladesh Rural & Human Rights Journalists Forum will hold a discussion; Venue: Jatiya Press Club; Time: 11:00am.

Sit-in

We are the 99 Percent will stage a sit-in protest; Venue: Teacher-Student Centre (TSC), Dhaka University (DU);

Time: 4:00pm.

Discussion

Bangabandhu Jatiya Swadhinata Parishad will hold a discussion; Venue: Jatiya Press Club; Time: 10:30am.

Rally

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) will organise a rally; Venue: Fine Arts Faculty, DU; Time: 7:00am.

Roundtable

Muktijoddha Oikya Parishad will organise a roundtable; Dhaka Reporters Unity; Time: 10:00am.

Discussion

Dakshin Asia Sahitya Sangskriti Parishad will arrange a discussion; Venue: Jatiya Press Club; Time: 10:30am.

Poor quality of water worries city dwellers

Wasa chairman believes only monsoon can help improve water quality

UNB, Dhaka

The quality of water supplied by Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) is unlikely to improve before monsoon as the water of the Buriganga and Shitalakhya rivers is highly polluted, says Wasa Chairman Golam Mustafa.

"It's well-known that the water of the Buriganga and Shitalakhya rivers is highly polluted and a huge amount of chemical has to be used to treat the water, causing a bad smell," the Wasa chairman told the news agency yesterday.

With the rise in mercury, residents of Maniknagar, Mugda, Moghbazar, Malibagh, Basabo, Khilgaon and Rampura have started complaining that there had been a serious short supply of fresh water in their neighbourhoods.

They alleged that Wasa has been supplying very poor quality of water for more than a month, which is unusable even for shower, let alone drinking.

Suraya Akhter Rima, a resident of Old Dhaka, said, "Wasa is supplying contaminated, stinking water and we, sometimes, find black substance in it, too...we simply can't think of drinking it," she said adding that a

glass of pure, crystal clear water is now a rarity.

Suraya said waterborne diseases like diarrhoea have broken out in their areas due to consumption of the contaminated water.

Mustafa Kamal of Malibagh said the water crisis is deepening in their area, too. "You know Wasa always supplies inadequate water, but now its quality has also fallen.

Wasa Chairman Golam Mustafa said, "Wasa can't supply adequate water in dry season due to fall in groundwater level. Water supply by Wasa usually falls during the dry season... whatever it supplies its quality is poor."

The Wasa chairman is also worried about the quality of groundwater. "The groundwater also gets contaminated as it is recharged with surface water...the surface water of the rivers around the city is highly contaminated due to industrial pollution," he said.

"We've no idea or study how much contaminated water is actually recharged from the rivers. We're worried about it," he said.

Paba Chairman Abu Naser Khan told the news agency that water management in the capital has become a big problem due to negligence of Dhaka Wasa. "Wasa is not only supplying inadequate water, but also the contaminated one," he added.



Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers is likely to occur at one or two places over Khulna, Dhaka, Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and weather may remain dry with temporary partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country in 24 hours till 6:00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the river basins of the country during late night till morning, Met Office said.

Day and night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

The sun sets in the capital today at 6:02pm and rises tomorrow at 6:18am.

Country's highest temperature 32.1 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Faridpur and lowest 13.0 degrees at Dinajpur.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max:	Min:	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	30.8	21.8	71	27
Chittagong	28.8	22.4	87	87
Rajshahi	31.2	13.2	61	38
Rangpur	28.8	13.4	59	43
Khulna	31.0	22.5	56	53
Barisal	30.0	21.8	96	66
Sylhet	29.1	16.8	73	68
Cox's Bazar	27.0	22.4	78	85

Ensure ramps in public transports, buildings

Physically challenged people urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Physically challenged people at a rally yesterday urged the government to ensure ramps in public transports and buildings to guarantee equal opportunities for them in education and workplaces.

Around 70 physically challenged people, many in wheelchairs or on crutches, attended the rally organised by Bangladeshi Systems Change Advocacy Network (B-Scan) at Central Shaheed Minar premises in the city.

Addressing the rally, Communications Minister Obaidul Quader assured the attendees that public transports to be imported by the government from now on would have ramps.

He also assured to do his best to address problems faced by physically challenged people. "I will take the matter up with the ministries concerned to solve your problems," he said, adding that changes cannot happen overnight.

One of the wheelchair users, Sumaiya Binte Shafi, expressed her grief over the sufferings she had to endure due to her physical limitations.

A fresher at Narayananj Girls' College, Sumaiya said she could not attend classes as the college had no ramps. "I attend my exams in college with the assistance of my parents," she said.

Another physically challenged person,

Jahidul Islam, doing his masters degree in business administration at a private university, said the thought of not having a ramp at his future workplace constantly haunts him. "An unknown apprehension grips me whenever I roll out of my house on my wheelchair," he added.

B-Scan President Sabrina Sultana mentioned that the rights and facilities for physically challenged people remained on paper only and were yet to be properly implemented.

Physically challenged people were always neglected in society. Installation of ramps in public transports and buildings require a little space and a small amount of money but open new possibilities for physically challenged people, she said.

"The national building code is not maintained by building owners properly," she added.

Executive Committee Member of REHAB Anisuzzaman Bhuiyan pledged that REHAB members from now on would construct buildings with ramps.

Valerie A Taylor, founder and coordinator of Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed, and Prof Dr Muhammad Zafar Iqbal also spoke at the rally.

Earlier, the rally attendees brought out a procession, starting from Teacher-Student Centre and ending at the Shaheed Minar premises.