

ICT fair abuzz with tech-savvy youth

The exposition organised by Bangladesh Computer Samity ends on Dec 29

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A MID great youthful excitement, Bangladesh Computer Samity's computer fair kicked off yesterday at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Titled "BCS ICT World 12", the theme of the exposition is "technology and education for development".

Spread across 90 stalls, the exposition, in

its 14th year, will give visitors a 'touch and feel' retail experience of the latest of gadgets.

"I am spoilt for choice with all the varieties on display here," said Munir Hossain, a student of Dhaka University, who came hoping to catch a bargain on laptops.

About 52 local and foreign companies are participating in the fair, where there are offering special prices.

"It is the discounts on offer that have made the fair irresistible," said Pallab, a young pro-

fessional.

But it was the stalls showcasing mini-tablets for around Tk 10,000 and multimedia projectors with touch-sensitive screens where most visitors flocked to.

Stalls selling anti-virus software and wireless broadband also drew a sizeable crowd.

Finance Minister AM Muhith inaugurated the fair, where he mentioned of government's plan to set up a technology university at Gazipur.

"ICT is the best way to reduce corruption in various sectors, including in land digitization, administration and in police department," Muhith said.

Mustafa Jabbar, BCS's former president, said the Computer Samity has been working to spread the information technology education.

"But the IT businessmen are not in a good condition as profit has been slashed," he said.

Platinum sponsor of the event was Dutch Bangla Bank Ltd, whose Managing Director KS Tabrez said: "ICT catalyses people's lifestyle."

Keeping it in mind, he said his bank has introduced mobile banking to the country.

Entry fee to the fair is Tk 20, and each ticket is entered into a raffle draw with prizes ranging from laptops to smartphones to other gadgets.

Entry for schoolchildren, however, is free upon presentation of a student identity card.

Seminars on modern technology, musical shows, interactive sessions with celebrities, digital art competition and quiz contests have also been arranged on the sidelines of the exposition.

The exposition will end on December 29.



Visitors take a look at laptops being showcased at a fair, known as BCS ICT World that began at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.



Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus discusses social business and development issues with Nepalese Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai and his wife Hisila Yami at the PM's official residence in Kathmandu.

Nepal's interest in social business deepens

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus urged the businesspeople of Nepal to consider investing in social business.

"Money is a means, it cannot be an end. What you do with money to help other people is what an end is. We are only on the planet for a short time. Helping others is the only way to put your signature on the planet."

On the second day of his visit to the Himalayan country, Yunus delivered the keynote speech at the opening of the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) on Saturday.

Prime Minister of Nepal Baburam Bhattarai attended the programme at the chief guest along with former Nepalese Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, President of CNI Binod Chaudhary, current and former ministers and all of the top businesspeople of the country.

Later in the day, Bhattarai together with his wife Hisila Yami received

Professor Yunus at his official residence in Kathmandu, where they discussed the potential of social business in Nepal.

Yami, who has been a revolutionary leader of the Maoists in her own right, was interested in coming to Bangladesh to learn how Grameen Bank and social businesses created by Professor Yunus had impacted the lives of the poor.

She was particularly interested in seeing housing programme for the poor implemented by Grameen, as well as the programme focused on beggars, that has been the focus of her own study and work. She is an architect by profession.

Earlier, the Nobel laureate addressed a gathering of students and young entrepreneurs organised by Tribhuvan University and CNI on Social Business and Youth and urged them to create a world of their dreams and using all the resources that they have, especially technology, to chart a brand new future for the world.

Russia unveils \$25b oil link to Pacific

AFP, Moscow

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday unveiled the final extension of a new \$25 billion oil pipeline to the Pacific that underscores the energy power's gradual shift away from stagnant European markets.

The East Siberia - Pacific Ocean (ESPO) link is also expected to expand sales to the United States and fulfil Putin's dream of cementing Russia's place as a dominant force on international crude markets.

Moscow hopes to make ESPO into a benchmark in the Asia Pacific region that competes with WTI -- the US oil standard whose price some traders believe is too heavily based on domestic political factors.

But analysts worry that Russia may currently lack enough accessible oil in its underdeveloped East Siberia fields to keep the line fully flowing despite strong demand in China and Japan.

"There is just enough East Siberian for the existing pipeline," said Sberbank Asset Management energy analyst Valery Nesterov. "But expanding this pipeline further would be impossible without West Siberian oil -- and that oil is already meant to go west," Nesterov pointed out.

Putin brushed those concerns aside as he joined in the ribbon-cutting ceremony by video link from the Far East city of Khabarovsk.

"By completing the second leg, our potential is expanding," Putin said in televised remarks.

"This is a serious event."

The second leg of the 4,200-kilometre (2,600-mile) pipeline runs from fields west of Lake Baikal to the Pacific port of Kozmino near the northeastern edge of China.

The port -- previously connected to East Siberian oil fields by rail -- also provides Russia with quick access to Japan and South Korea.

But the head of the Transneft state oil pipeline operator said most of the crude from the final leg would in fact be destined for the United States.

"The American market will receive 35 percent of Kozmino oil," Nikolai Tokarev said at the opening ceremony in comments reported by the company's website.

"Around 30 percent will go to Japan and 28 percent to China. The rest will go to Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea."

Russia has repeatedly tried and failed to make meaningful inroads on the US oil and natural gas markets.

Its gas sales never materialised after the North American shale revolution made both Canada and the United States effectively self-sufficient.

Analysts also point out that US oil production is expanding at rates that should soon see the country outpace Russia and Saudi Arabia in the next few years.

"We can only be talking about a few tankers (going to the United States), and only in case if they are profitable," said ATON investment house analyst Vyacheslav Bunkov.

But Transneft's Tokarev appeared to be placing his bets on the US as he laid to waste the idea of offering Europe any assurances that the continent could continue to rely on Russian oil.

"We do not owe a single EU country a thing, and we are certainly not obligated to account for ourselves," RIA Novosti quoted Tokarev as saying.

Niche perfumers infuse Paris with new options

Afp, Paris

DEEP in concentration, Tina Queralt sorts through a scatter of white paper strips sprayed with scent. She has whittled the choice down to a handful in her search for The One: the perfect perfume.

One Saturday in the run-up to Christmas, the Parisian and her two daughters have come to investigate a niche perfume store called Nose, which holds more than 250 references -- and the elusive promise of personalised perfumery.

Opened in June, Nose is one of a new breed of stores that prides itself on cutting the marketing out of the scent business to put the focus back on the people at either end of the chain -- the creators and clients.

The concept behind Nose is an online questionnaire, where clients key in details on their tastes -- perfumes they have worn before, favourite keynotes -- and an algorithm generates five suggested scents.

"It's a starting point, not an ending. So it enables us to understand 'Who is the customer?'" explained the store's co-founder Nicolas Cloutier.

Tina and her daughters took the questionnaire in-store, and said the results closely matched their taste.

From there a salesperson guided them through the scents of Nose's 30 niche brands. Tina settled on "Aqua Universalis" by Maison Francis Kurkdjian, declaring herself "delighted" with the experience.

A perfumer for more than 20 years, Mark Buxton is part of the team behind Nose. Two years ago he opted out of what he calls "the industry" and started his own line, which is one of those on offer in the store.

When big companies develop a new perfume they typically brief the perfumers with a general idea of the smell they want, perhaps a character to keep in mind, and a price limit that affects the quality and quantity of materials used.

By contrast, perfumers say they have more room for creativity when working for smaller, niche firms because they are less constrained by cost ceilings, freeing them to use natural oils and high-quality synthetics.

Buxton never gives himself a price limit, and to him that's one of the biggest advantages of niche products.

"They have, in general, great diffusion and long-lastingness, and that's because they're using high quality products," he told AFP.

Of course that increases the price. At Nose perfumes average around 100 euros (\$132) and up. At a nearby beauty chain, the range falls between 30 and



British perfumer Mark Buxton smells perfume in a bottle at his working place in Paris.

90 euros, with Chanel "No. 5" midway at 54 euros.

-- "You don't see much packaging here" -- Mining a similar vein, New York-based Le Labo opened a Paris branch in July, offering its own combinations of essential oils, which are kept separate from the alcohol base used for diffusion until a customer makes a purchase.

Jovoy, another niche perfume boutique, opened its second shop in February. Owner Francois Henin says he looks for a connection with the people behind the brands he stocks.

"What we sell is full of passion," he said. "It's because the perfumers are authentic that their products are authentic, and that they will last."

"You don't see much packaging here; we want you to see the promise of what's inside."

Often set up by perfumers going it alone, many but not all of them French, these niche firms will typically offer a range of six to 10 perfumes, stocked in 600 to 1,000 outlets, with an average turnover of 10 million euros.

The Nose team vets every new scent for quality and originality before putting it on sale. The store recently delivered its first bespoke perfume -- though for that level of personalisation, prices start in the thousands.

In France, the southern town of Grasse has been the centre of perfume making since the 17th century, under Louis XIV. The sun king reportedly used so much that the scent made him ill.

Up until the early 20th century, when perfumers began producing larger batches, they used to create for a single individual.

Today perfumes are heavily associated with fashion and celebrities, a trend started by Coco Chanel's "No. 5" in 1921. Since then perfumes have become a normal part of a designer's franchise.

But to Cloutier, perfumes hold a special place in that they are closely associated with memory -- mirroring the fact that the brain centres for smell and memory creation lie close to each other.

The link is important to perfumers as well. Mark Buxton's fragrance "Wood and Absinthe" was inspired by an evening in Corsica, when he and a friend raided the drinks cabinet and found only the notorious spirit.

"This whole ambience, this whole feeling with the absinthe, of course we were getting a bit drunk, and with the smell of the maquis, the woody notes, and this freshness in the air because the sun was going down, gave me the idea to capture this moment," he said.