

ACCOLADES FOR ICT CHAMPIONS

A promising sector for job creation, ICT is the next big export-oriented industry after garments. To recognise the role of the sector, The Daily Star and BASIS honoured four individuals and as many IT firms at a function on Friday. The event was organised in association with Brac Bank, TiE Dhaka and Le Méridien.

An early pioneer in IT

SOHEL PARVEZ

When Abu Yousuf Mesbah Uddin Ahmed first landed in the UK back in the 1970s, he did not imagine a life other than the one he dreamed of and that was to become an acturian after completing his studies.

However, financial glitches held him back from accomplishing his dream. Ahmed later moved on to pursue a career in IT with hard work and determination.

"He always felt IT would become important," said A Towhid, a long-time friend of Ahmed who passed away in 1996.

Towhid was speaking at the Daily Star ICT Awards, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, at La Meridien on October 28.

Ahmed, founder of IBCS-PRIMAX Software (Bangladesh), was honoured posthumously as an ICT pioneer for his courage in setting up an IT business in Bangladesh in 1989 when IT was still new and computers were seen, but hardly touched.

Ahmed joined British Railway after completing his education there and headed the IT (information technology) Department, Towhid remembered fondly. A couple of years down the line, he left British Railway and joined Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) in the UK as an IT manager. He helped design and develop many software packages. He aspired to develop software



LATE ABU YOUSUF MESBAH UDDIN AHMED

here by utilising the talents, skills and innovative ideas of the youth of Bangladesh, said Towhid. His dream came true when he met Toufiq Elahi Chowdhury, managing director of the then Bangladesh Shilpa Bank, on a flight to Dhaka from London.

Ahmed shared his vision with Chowdhury and was assured of finance. Ahmed, along with some friends, finally established IBCS-PRIMAX as a joint venture with a paid-up capital of Tk 50 lakh.

The company that began operations in February 1990 focused on developing human resources by training the local youth.

"At that time, computers were kept in veils. People had little knowledge about software," said Towhid, who

joined the company as a partner.

Reflecting on the past, he said Ahmed advocated for the importance of IT in Bangladesh and wanted the youth to learn technology.

Today, his dream has become almost a reality, he said.

The youths here are here making software, setting up IT firms and signing up for IT outsourcing by showing their talents.

IBCS-Primax has 150 software engineers. But a big part of the story is that 60 percent of IT entrepreneurs here received training from IBCS-Primax.

"He [Ahmed] would be very happy if he could see how the boys in Bangladesh have taken IT to a higher level," said Towhid after receiving the award on behalf of his friend.

DataSoft boss shows the way



MAHBOOB ZAMAN

SOHEL PARVEZ

Mahboob Zaman signed up for an IT business in 1998, when the use of computers was still at a nascent stage in Bangladesh.

The journey began with only Tk 10 lakh in paid-up capital. He was always firm in his conviction that the people of Bangladesh are logical, analytical and the country should tap the potential for IT.

Today, DataSoft Systems Bangladesh has an annual turnover of Tk 42 crore, employing 348 software engineers. It continues to expand its mission to take Bangladesh to a higher level and play a bigger role in the global economy.

"I don't see DataSoft as merely a

business. This is a mission to bring changes in the country," Zaman, managing director of the company, said in an interview with The Daily Star.

Zaman was honoured as an ICT pioneer by The Daily Star and Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services on October 28.

Since its inception, DataSoft has delivered 847 projects to both private and public sector agencies. The tasks include automation of Chittagong Customs House and providing solutions for land registration.

DataSoft also provides core banking solutions to nine banks, and services to more than 4,500 branches of 100 microfinance institutions.

However, the journey was not always smooth and there were a lot of hurdles to overcome, said Zaman. DataSoft is CMMi level 5 certified, which indicates that it is a top level software development process company.

It looks to explore business potential in Japan and exploit a new technology termed the 'internet of things'. The company also plans to go public this fiscal year to raise capital.

The internet of things is the proposed development of the internet where everyday objects have network connectivity, allowing them to send and receive data.

Zaman, also a former president of the BASIS, said just recently, the internet was used for human interaction, but now a machine interacts with another machine, a mobile phone interacts with an air conditioner.

"We have a good prospect if we can take our industry to work on the internet of things. We have to take the industry to a new level. We should all go for this mission. We can take our economy to a much higher level if we can exploit its potential."

For this, he said, it is necessary to deepen industry and academia relations with the objective to include computing in the educational system.

Zaman lauded the recent developments in the ICT sector that took place in the country.



SYED FARHAD AHMED

TigerIT: a bright spot in software

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Bangladesh-based firm TigerIT is leading the way in identification related software, developing national identification and immigration related projects of different countries.

The firm developed complete software solutions for national identity and voter registration in Bangladesh, a project that involved around 10 crore people in 2008.

The company is currently working on a project in Nepal on car number plate authentication, worth around \$45 million.

It also developed Bhutan's NID and finger print matching for immigration processes and border control.

TigerIT has implemented similar projects in Tajikistan, Moldova, Poland and in a US state.

Due to the achievements, TigerIT Bangladesh's Chief Executive Officer Ziaur Rahman was given the ICT Business Person of the Year award by The Daily Star on Friday.

"Actually, we are trying to build



ZIAUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh as an ICT hub in the world," said Rahman, after receiving the award, the first of its kind in the country.

In the garment sector, Bangladesh has established itself as a brand; company specification is not a matter here and ICT needs to recreate this, added Rahman.

"It will not be tough to become an ICT destination for outsourcing and software as we have talented manpower."

A third of the company's sales revenue is generated from the local market, while the rest is from international operations. Its annual earnings averaged \$100 million in recent times.



ASM MOHIUDDIN MONEM

A rising star in BPO

SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

Starting with only six people 10 years back, ServEngineBPO has emerged as a leading business process outsourcing (BPO) company that is now providing business solutions to more than 30 global clients.

But creating confidence among global clients was not so easy. It had to prove its worth by competing with an Indian BPO firm in winning a contract from a US-based company.

"That was the first big deal for us, and it was possible due to the commitment of our young talents," said ASM Mohiuddin Monem, chairman of ServEngineBPO.

ServEngineBPO, a concern of Abdul Monem Ltd, now specialises in back office processing, digital advertising operations, web and software development, data aggregation and analysis, quality assurance and testing, and call quality assurance.

It now has a team of over 500 young talents working round the clock. One of the unique features of ServEngineBPO is that around one third of its workforce is young, educated and empowered females.

The company was recognised as the ICT Solution Provider of the Year by The Daily Star.

"We will continue to flourish in IT and IT-enabled services and help establish a Digital Bangladesh," said Monem.

ServEngineBPO has been recognised as one of the top 100 global outsourcing companies by the International Association of Outsourcing Professionals (IAOP). It is the only Bangladeshi firm that has been securing a place on the list of "The Global Outsourcing 100" as a "Rising Star" since 2014 for its excellence in the IT industry.

Q-Cash: a leader in e-payment

SAJJADUR RAHMAN

Kazi Saifuddin Munir turned a crisis into a perfect opportunity.

He spent two decades in Sweden before coming back to his homeland in 1999. He worked very briefly as a consultant for computerisation in the largest state-owned Sonali Bank in 1999. He was surprised to see people in the bank did not even understand the Windows operating system in those days.

"Then I went to Bangladesh Bank and told officials there that I wanted to work with the scheduled banks on building a common network and they agreed happily," Munir, managing director of IT Consultants Ltd, recalled. "Then I hired four people and started the business of building a common payment processing consortium for banks, now known as Q-Cash."

The country's first ICT award for his company, IT Consultants Ltd, illustrates the point. ITCL has been recognised as the best solution provider in the local market category.



KAZI SAIFUDDIN MUNIR

Established in 2000, ITCL's Q-Cash is now the market leader in the rapidly evolving arena of electronic payment and transaction processing system. Three dozen banks are now ITCL's direct clients.

Q-Cash ATMs handle Tk 150 crore to Tk 200 crore every day and the transactions go up to Tk 400 crore a day during the Eid festivals.

ITCL has employed over 350 people, with 88 percent technical. ITCL also got listed on the Dhaka Stock Exchange last year. The company recorded Tk 8.8 crore in net profit and paid its shareholders 15 percent stock dividends.



AKM FAHIM MASHROOR

Bdjobs.com: a popular name

SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

Fresh out of Dhaka University, AKM Fahim Mashroor pondered over unique employment options, using internet as a medium. Not long after, he founded Bdjobs.com in 2000.

With a humble beginning from his living room with a programmer and a data entry operator, Mashroor, along with seven of his friends, invested about Tk 15 lakh in the next three years.

"None of us were from business background, but we had the determination. We started on a small scale with a small investment," said the chief executive officer of Bdjobs.com.

Bdjobs.com is now a leading career management site in Bangladesh, employing about 120 people. Its work hasn't gone unrecognised: only last Friday it was named as the E-Business of the Year at The Daily Star ICT Awards.

In the first 2-3 years, the company posted job circulars on the site after collecting them from different newspapers. "Our target was to create a position among the jobseekers. Later, we were able to persuade employers to give job circulars directly on the website."

Till now, more than 10,000 employers in the country have recruited more than 350,000 professionals at different levels through Bdjobs.com. On average, 1.1 lakh people visit the site every day. Over 10 lakh resumes are posted on the site.

After its success, Bdjobs.com sold 25 percent of its stake to the Australian top job site, SEEK International, at Tk 38.5 crore in 2014.

At that time, the valuation of the company was about Tk 150 crore. Mashroor said the company's yearly turnover is about Tk 20 crore.

HungryNaki: game changer in take-outs

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

A group of innovative youths has changed the scene in take-out and food delivery culture. It all began just three years ago when they were discussing possible business ideas.

During these brainstorming sessions, food was always a must, and it was a struggle ordering food from the different restaurants in the city at that time.

It struck them that they could work to simplify this process and it would definitely be a first in the country, said Ahmad AD, chief executive and co-founder of HungryNaki.

"So we put aside every other idea and focused on what we love the most - food."

HungryNaki, the most renowned food ordering platform in the country, was recognised as the ICT Startup of the Year on Friday by The Daily Star.

Launched in October 2013, it allows people to search and locate restaurants of their choice nearby



TAUSIF AHMAD

and takes orders on their behalf to deliver food to people's doorsteps.

The other founder members include Sazid Rahman, Ammar Bin Yeahea, Irtezar Ur Rahman and Tausif Ahmad.

Through its service, people can reach out to more than 800 restaurants in three cities - Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. It now plans to expand services to India and Myanmar.

Tausif Ahmad, also chief operations officer, said they now employ more than 100 people. "We aim to be the country's most successful e-commerce business with a sustainable model," he said.