

| TECH |

CODING FOR KIDS: 400 CHILDREN JOIN PROGRAMMING SESSION

SAURAV DEY

It is a common perception that coding or computer programming is not for everyone and that it requires sound knowledge of computer science to learn coding. But, there are people around the world who have been trying to make coding interesting and accessible for the youth, especially for school children. Microsoft's 'Hour of Coding' is one such initiative in Bangladesh.

On February 3, 2017, Microsoft Bangladesh arranged a 'Kids Coding Session' in order to orient school children on coding. Four hundred students, from class 1-8, participated in the two-hour coding session at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

It was a coding session unlike any other, where the children were introduced to codes through mobile games. The participants were split into groups of three. They used Microsoft and Code.org's recently released tutorial "Minecraft Hour of Code Designer" to build a simple Minecraft game and their own custom gaming experience by plugging together blocks of code to control the behaviour of sheep, zombies and other creatures in the game. Participants were required to change the behaviour of the objects through moving blocks of codes.

Wellington Perera, Developer Experience Lead for the Southeast Asia New Markets, Microsoft Asia Pacific,



PHOTO: COURTESY

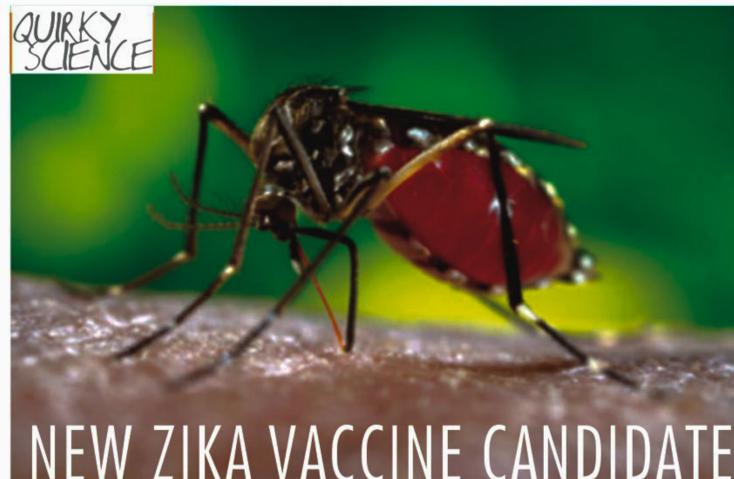
conducted the workshop. Munir Hasan, Coordinator Youth Programme, Prothom Alo moderated the session.

Managing Director of Microsoft Bangladesh, Sonia Bashir Kabir, addressing the participants, highlighted the importance of embracing technology as a user as well as a producer for the progress of a nation. "Bangladesh, with its promise of 'Digital Bangladesh', has laid a very fertile ground

for technology as a foundation for the nation," she said. "We are passionate about taking technology to the hands of the people of Bangladesh, especially children. Most children are very tech savvy when it comes to mobile phones. Exposing these children from class 1- 8 (elementary to middle school) to technology – software programming, apps & gaming – will encourage them to study science and start

programming from an early age." Ahnaf Akib, a fifth-grader who attended the session, said, "I didn't know that coding would be this fun. Now I can tell my friends that I know how to code. The session was interesting and I want to learn coding further."

The session was a part of a global movement called 'Hour of Coding' initiated by Code.org. ■



NEW ZIKA VACCINE CANDIDATE

A new Zika vaccine candidate has the potential to protect against the virus with a single dose, according to a research team led by scientists from the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. As reported in Nature this week, preclinical tests showed promising immune responses in both mice and monkeys.

"We observed rapid and durable protective immunity without adverse events, and so we think this candidate vaccine represents a promising strategy for the global fight against Zika virus," said senior author Drew Weissman, MD, PhD, a professor of Infectious Disease at Penn. "We hope to start clinical trials in 12 to 18 months."

The research involved a collaboration among Weissman's laboratory at Penn and several others, including the laboratories of Barton F. Haynes at Duke University and Theodore C. Pierson at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

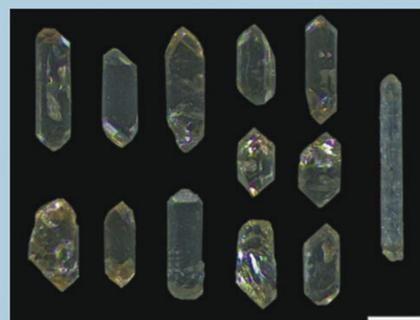
Prompted by the recent Zika virus outbreaks in Latin America and some parts of the United States, scientists around the world have been racing to develop candidate vaccines, and already several have been tested in animals. The new candidate vaccine is the first to show such potent and long-lasting protection without the use of a live virus.

Some 470 million years ago, during the middle part of the geological period known as the Ordovician, an asteroid collision took place somewhere between Mars and Jupiter. The collision caused an explosion that sent a cascade of meteorites towards Earth. The heavy bombardment on Earth continued for millions of years, and even today some 20% of all meteorites that reach Earth originate from this asteroid break-up. At the same time, Earth witnessed the greatest rise in marine biodiversity since the origin of multicellular life. So, the question is: was there a connection between these two fundamental events in Earth history, as has been proposed? A new study now demonstrates that the rise in biodiversity commenced long before the asteroid collision.

The link between these two fundamental events -- the so-called Ordovician radiation and the sustained meteorite bombardment -- has, for many years, presented a paradox in science. We are used to hearing the story of meteorite impacts that leads to the loss of species richness, such as when the dinosaurs went extinct 65 million years ago. But could the opposite scenario be a

possibility as well? asks Assistant Professor Christian M. Ø. Rasmussen from the Natural History Museum of Denmark rhetorically. He is co-authoring the study in which an incidental finding of the rare mineral zircon within the meteorite-bearing rock layers led to an answer to the paradox.

ASTEROID MYTH BUSTED



Source: Sciencedaily.com

| INTERVIEW |

In 2015, Teach For Bangladesh, a partner organisation of Teach for All, a global network of organisations working towards educational equity around the world, undertook a unique leadership development programme. Thirteen graduates from top universities were appointed as full time teachers in the most under-resourced schools in the country. They worked in over-crowded and understaffed classrooms, immersed themselves in the surrounding communities, while undergoing extensive professional development. On February 1, at an alumni induction ceremony in Gardenia Grand Hall, these graduates from leading institutions became alums of the Teach For Bangladesh Fellowship.

Wendy Kopp, CEO of Teach For All, was present at the ceremony and spoke about collective leadership in diverse communities. After leading Teach For America's growth and development for 24 years, in 2013, Wendy transitioned out of the role of CEO, and today, she remains an active member of the board of Teach For America. Wendy led the development of Teach For All to be responsive to the initiative of inspiring social entrepreneurs around the world determined to adapt this approach in their respective countries. She is the author of *A Chance to Make History: What Works and What Doesn't in Providing an Excellent Education for All* (2011), and *One Day, All Children: The Unlikely Triumph of Teach For America and What I Learned Along the Way* (2000).

The *Star Weekend* catches up with this inspiring woman to learn about her journey, the need of stimulating and creative classroom environment and much more.



Wendy Kopp

IN CONVERSATION WITH WENDY KOPP

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

PHOTOS: COURTESY

What events in your life could be considered your earliest exposure to founding Teach For America back in 1989?

While growing up, learning more and more about my country I realised that what we, the United States, aspire to be a place for equal opportunities. But we are really not one. In my country, when children are born, their racial economic background actually predicts where they might end up in their life. I just became more and more focused on that issue, as a Public Policy Major and also as a concerned college student. I was convinced that people in my generation were popularly known as "me generation" - supposedly a generation that only wanted to do get a degree and make a lot of money, and I actually thought that was not right. I wondered why Liberal Arts graduates, like myself, were not being recruited as grassroots level leaders to teach our highest poverty community. I thought how powerful it would be to have all these promising future leaders have their first two years after graduating from college teaching in the low income communities, instead of working in the Wall Street. I thought that would reshape their priorities and career paths, and that actually worked as my motivation.

Why do you believe students might opt for being a fellow and teach in a high-need community after completing graduation, instead of choosing a job that promises higher salaries and more personal growth opportunity?

We have in fact seen that all across the world there are some sort of positive changes happening in the rising generation. Not everyone, but many college students and recent graduates want to be part of something larger to make real differences in the world. And I think what we



are doing is tapping into that, saying here is a way for you to be a part of the generation of people who are going to channel their energy. This group of people are going to work for the most disadvantaged children, and get the training and development they need to become effective teachers and collaborative lifelong leaders. Through two years of teaching, they come to understand the complex challenges that their students and school might face, and how to tackle them with necessary support.

When we visited a number of classrooms where Teach For Bangladesh fellows are employed, we discovered that all of them demonstrate a positive learning environment that can promote creative skills development in children. In your opinion, how can such a classroom environment promote positive interaction among learners?

We are working on reimagining the education system through intensive training and ongoing professional development. Countries all over the world quite narrowly focus on the academic outcomes, which is important but not sufficient. We came to realise where the world is headed, given the changing nature of economy, massive global challenges about everything from conflict to environment. We need to make sure that students in our classrooms grow as leaders who have the competency, disposition and awareness to shape a better future for

themselves and for the rest of us. In the classrooms of Teach for All, we are trying to bring in global perspectives, and a warm, safe and engaging environment for children so that they can truly focus on the process of learning and performance based skills.

This month, the second batch of alumni of Teach for Bangladesh will be graduating. After completing the two year long leadership programme, what kind of work do they undertake across the region and around the world?

Some people misunderstand the nature of this kind of leadership programme as they think it is only about those two years, but, in reality it is about those two years and every year after those two years. We believe that this challenge of educational inequality is a very complex issue, and there are many changes that are necessary in order to tackle this complexity. The big question that brings us all together around this network is who is going to do all that needs to be done in a world where we routinely lead our most capable, educate future leaders, and channel their energy everywhere but into this field that works for the most disadvantaged groups of children. What we are trying to do is change that, and we hope to inspire many future leaders and cultivate their ongoing leadership skills for changes in the pursuit of fundamental, long term, sustainable changes.

In India, where Teach For India has been active for nine years, 71 percent of the alumni work directly with children or educators, and another 28 percent are organisational leaders. Another group of alums started 25 new English medium secondary schools where the city is supporting them with the establishment of the school buildings. This is just one of the many examples of how we are seeing real community level changes through our alums.

"The Teach For Bangladesh Fellowship is a paid, full-time, two-year leadership development program that places top graduates and young professionals as teachers in our nation's most underserved schools. Applications for the 2018 Fellowship are due February 22. Visit teachforbangladesh.org/registerfor more information. ■