

SMART BANGLADESH

A BASIS PUBLICATION | NOVEMBER 2022 EDITION

Face to face with Zunaid Ahmed Palak
ICT: Bangladesh's next growth engine
Mujib100 app brings memories to life



**SMART
BANGLADESH**
ICT for the future



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CONTENT

- 02** **Commentary**
Insider's insight...no more, no less
- 06** **Special**
Good Luck Smart Bangladesh
- 08** **Face to Face**
Interview with the ICT State
Minister
- 12** **Cover Story**
ICT for the future; next stop: Smart
Bangladesh
- 16** **Feature**
Unlocking opportunities at GSA
- 18** **Feature**
Product of the year: Bangladesh's
next growth engine
- 22** **Event**
BASIS launches Luna Shamsuddoha
Award to celebrate women
- 24** **Spotlight**
Brotecs taking Bangladesh's name
to 'new heights'
- 28** **Startup**
Never give up: The story of
Pickaboo
- 30** **App Hub**
Mujib100 brings memories to life
- 32** **BASIS Bytes**

Insider's insight...

no more, no less



Russell T. Ahmed
President, BASIS



We want this platform to become a forum for advocating policy initiatives and laws that will strengthen and enable the IT industry, which currently faces a myriad of challenges. It will include articles discussing how other countries have managed to foster growth in their respective IT sectors and how that might be replicated in Bangladesh

There is little doubt that Bangladesh's dream of becoming a developed country within the next two decades will be on the back of technology. That the ICT industry will be the linchpin and play a significant role in realising this vision is only imperative.

While the global economy is going through a slowdown as a result of rising oil prices, the entire world is preparing for economic hardship. Countries around the world are wit-

nessing high inflation and Bangladesh, it appears, is bracing for impact too as an impending crisis looms over the horizon. However, such times of crisis offer unique opportunities and bring out innovation and enterprise. And it has been a hallmark of the IT industry in Bangladesh to have leveraged such opportunities over the last 20 odd years.

The fact that a fledgling industry in the 1990s has come to be regarded as one that could spearhead Bangla-



desh's growth to become an advanced economy, is testament to the resilience of the IT sector.

The top trade body for IT and software producers of Bangladesh, BASIS (Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services) took its first steps 24 years ago with only 18 members. Even then, no one denied the potential of the sector but we had a long way to go before we could play a major role in Bangladesh's economy. Today, with over 2,000 members, the BASIS accounts for most of the business and revenue from IT and software.

It was because of significant efforts of the BASIS members that the government was able to attain its vision of Digital Bangladesh by 2021. In fact, this trade body continues to boast much credit for many of the projects, whether it is in the private sector or related to e-governance, being implemented on the country's path to becoming Smart Bangladesh by 2041.

The IT sector has been identified as the one sector that could indeed overtake the RMG industry in monetary export volume by 2031. But more important than just exports, the government has embarked on its path towards the vision of Smart Bangladesh that will not come without the involvement of



We have identified seven pillars that will lay the foundation of a genuine Smart Bangladesh — human resource, foreign market enhancement, local market growth, startup ecosystem, industry promotion, access to finance and intellectual property

the private sector. Just like Digital Bangladesh owes a large part to the efforts of the private sector, so would Smart Bangladesh benefit from the inputs and efforts of BASIS members from the very outset, because these companies are the ones who will be at the leading edge of leveraging the benefits of a Smart Bangladesh.

Towards that, we have identified seven pillars that will lay the foundation of a genuine Smart Bangladesh — human resource, foreign market enhancement, local market growth, startup ecosystem, industry promotion, access to finance and intellectual property. The main principle of our agenda at BASIS is to create and expand the potential market, in other words create and increase demand for Bangladeshi IT products and services. On the other hand, take up initiatives at home to make sure that there is enough supply to feed that demand, which is why these seven pillars are so crucial to take the sector forward.

The ICT industry is not only aligned with that vision, but also very keen to be an integral part to drive Bangladesh's development engine. The industry has already achieved remarkable success and shows much promise to become another potential source of

employment, as well as foreign currency. However, there are challenges and bottlenecks that we must also address along the way to smoothen our journey towards vision 2041.

It is with that vision for a smarter Bangladesh in mind that we feel there is a strong need for a forum to discuss the topical issues the technology industry faces. We need a platform to champion the issues of concern so far as they relate to the IT industry and that does not merely mean public relations or highlighting successes at home and abroad, although this magazine will certainly do that too.

What we intend to do is shed light on our 'pain points', so to speak, in this publication. We want this platform to become a forum for advocating policy initiatives and laws that will strengthen and enable the IT industry, which currently faces a myriad of challenges. This advocacy will include analysis of the existing provisions to illustrate how they encumber the industry. It will include articles discussing how other countries have managed to foster growth in their respective IT sectors with appropriate regulations and how that might be replicated in Bangladesh.

Although a mouthpiece for the industry, this magazine will not be a run of the mill newsletter. We would rather see it grow into a sought after and much awaited periodical that industry insiders, policymakers and practitioners find useful and enlightening. The target audience will not be limited to the few thousand members of BASIS and the ICT ministry, nor will it be filled with jargons and technical writeups, although some analysis will predictably not be 'popular reads'.

The content of this publication will relate to fintech and mobile financial services, explore the potentials of artificial intelligence and how it could be leveraged in agriculture or shipbuilding or any of other industries, for that matter. Similarly, our advocacy will not be limited to the industry but go beyond other related sectors like banking and finance, as well as trade and commerce.

While we want this magazine to be a good read for just about any conscious citizen of Bangladesh, we would also target our clients and vendors. Since we will be showcasing our success stories and achievements, we would like to make sure that this publication gets sufficient visi-



A dream that can only be made into reality with active feedback and engagement of the readers who are our partners in this new initiative. If I were asked what the readers would get out of it, I would say just this, our readers will gain 'insider's insight in IT industry'

bility and mileage at home and abroad, especially among the potential clients looking to explore new markets or simply alternative sources for their products and services. We intend this publication to become a vessel to exhibit Bangladesh's potential and thereby attract investment, which we know is crucial for developing a tech company.

Together with full length feature stories, illuminating interviews, in-depth analysis, and sometimes ranting opinion pieces, "Smart Bangladesh" will strive to become a publication one needs to read to be in the know. This is still a dream though. A dream that can only be made into reality with active feedback and engagement of the readers who are our partners in this new initiative. If I were asked what the readers would get out of it, I would say just this, our readers will gain 'insider's insight in the IT industry'. No more, no less.

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Life - এ নতুন এক্সপেরিয়েন্স

Good luck, Smart Bangladesh

Smart Bangladesh is delighted to have a distinguished group of well-wishers who believe in the need for such a platform where critical issues will be broached and deliberated upon. We humbly appreciate their enthusiastic support on this new journey



বাংলাদেশের ডিজিটাল অগ্রযাত্রা অব্যাহত রাখায় বেসিস সবসময়ই উদ্ভাবন ও সৃজনশীলতাকে গুরুত্ব দিয়ে আসছে। ‘স্মার্ট বাংলাদেশ’ নামের এই ম্যাগাজিন প্রকাশ তেমনই একটি সৃজনশীল উদ্যোগ। আমি দৃঢ়ভাবে বিশ্বাস করি, ম্যাগাজিনটি দেশের তথ্যপ্রযুক্তি ও ডিজিটাল গুণগত মান উন্নয়নে অসামান্য ভূমিকা রাখবে। পাশাপাশি, বহির্বিশ্বে বাংলাদেশের ব্র্যান্ডিংয়েও এটি ভূমিকা রাখবে।

মোস্তাফা জব্বার
মাননীয় মন্ত্রী
ডাক ও টেলিযোগাযোগ বিভাগ
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার



This is indeed an exciting initiative. I am sure this will become a lively and vibrant platform for the IT industry. This should be used to further debates and discussions around certain issues and topics to the benefit of the readers, as well as the government officials. That is just one way to influence and bring about informed decision making.

A. Towhid
Founding President, BASIS



Although the IT sector could see the country into the next century as a rising economy, there are surprisingly low uptake of relevant issues in the popular media scene. I hope that SMART Bangladesh will fulfil our need for information and news of the latest development in the related fields.

Sarwar Alam
Former President, BASIS



BASIS's initiative to publish a monthly magazine, named, "SMART Bangladesh" is really applaudable. This publication will be a pertinent platform to disseminate plans and initiatives of "SMART Bangladesh 2041". I hope BASIS and its members will continue to play significant roles in successful implementation of "SMART Bangladesh 2041" in the similar way they contributed for Digital Bangladesh.

Shameem Ahsan
Former President, BASIS



I laud this novel initiative of BASIS in documenting IT news. I hope the articles published in the magazine will prove to be insightful which will provide the readers with a comprehensive view of the current status of Bangladesh's IT sector.

Engr. Subrata Sarkar
President, BCS



An inspiring initiative for the ICT industry for promoting its very own voice to the national and international readers. I wish a grand success of SMART Bangladesh Magazine.

Md Emdadul Hoque
President, ISPAB



I appreciate the endeavour of BASIS, coming up with such an instrument for promoting ICT industry decorated with insightful write-ups. If continued, I believe, it will emerge as the voice of this sector. Wishing the best.

Munir Hasan
General Secretary, Bangladesh Open Source Network (BdOSN)



I am elated that BASIS is set out to publish a tech magazine. In addition to contributing to Bangladesh's IT sector persistently, BASIS will now promote the successes of Bangladesh in a global sphere and inspire the Bangladeshi tech enthusiasts to pursue their dreams.

Shomi Kaiser
President, e-CAB



BASIS has been going great guns in the arena of ICT development since its inception in 1998. Their tremendous contributions to the IT industry have created the necessary impetus to take the ICT sector of Bangladesh to the next level. Their achievements must be exalted and celebrated! Publishing "SMART Bangladesh" adds a new feather in the cap for them. Congratulations to BASIS! Wishing you godspeed!

Wahid Sharif
President, BACCO



“A developed Bangladesh will be a
Smart Bangladesh”

Zunaid Ahmed Palak, MP

State Minister for ICT Division

Smart Bangladesh will go hand in hand with this country becoming an advanced economy. If anything, Bangladesh's envisioned development will come on the back of Smart Bangladesh. But the journey will be far from a walk in the park. ICT State Minister **Zunaid Ahmed Palak** shares his thoughts in an interview:

How do you envision Smart Bangladesh?

For me, Smart Bangladesh is where all citizens get the most out of the technological advancements being unfolded by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, meaning that the meaningful applications of technology will truly add value to people's lives whether the person is a farmer or an RMG worker or in any other vocation. Smart Bangladesh will be a technological hub for foreign investment and will be the most prominent identity of Bangladesh for the rest of the world. When we achieve our goal, we will have smart government, smart community, smart economy, and smart citizens; inclusive of all genders and races. Digital Bangladesh has already increased availability of services and reduced cost and time. With Smart Bangladesh, we want to make all government services more efficient and personalised for each and every citizen of the country.

The ICT industry in Bangladesh has had an extraordinary growth and development in recent years. We have already achieved Digital Bangladesh Vision 2021. Now, our goal is to become Smart Bangladesh – an innovative, efficient, knowledge-based, advanced economy by 2041; where the system of consumption and production will be based on intellectual assets. In particular, it refers to the ability to capitalise on scientific discoveries and applied research. The implementation of digital education, digital healthcare, digital agriculture, etc. has taken place under the Digital Bangladesh 2021 vision. So, as we chart our course towards Smart Bangladesh, the main components under 'Smart Bangladesh 2041' will be smart public services, smart education, smart healthcare, smart agriculture, smart commerce, smart transport, etc. A 'Smart Bangladesh Task Force' will be formed under the leadership of Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh



Now, our goal is to become Smart Bangladesh – an innovative, efficient, knowledge-based, advanced economy by 2041; where the system of consumption and production will be based on intellectual assets. In particular, it refers to the ability to capitalise on scientific discoveries and applied research

Hasina with the vision of Smart Bangladesh 2041. The vision aims to build smart cities and smart villages in order to take advantage of the huge human capital with the help of technology. To do that, we must focus on technologies like artificial intelligence, robotics, factory automation, microchip design and fabrication, and cyber security among others.

How does becoming Smart Bangladesh complement the country's journey towards a developed Bangladesh?

Leveraging the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Bangladesh aims to transform into a knowledge-based and resilient economy on its way to becoming a developed country by 2041. Historically, all the developed countries have leveraged the endowment of natural resources or technological advancements to catapult them to the summit of development. As we are not rich in natural resources, we'll have to leverage our human capital to take advantage of digital technology to pursue our ambition of becoming a developed nation. Accordingly, the government is working with Bangladeshi IT firms and trade associations that will serve the global market and promote our IT industry at the international arena and lead to sustained business linkage programmes for IT outsourcing, B2B platforms, and impactful capacity building programmes. BASIS also explores the possibility to expand our international market through networking with overseas clients and participating in international business meets. Currently, we have more than 184.05 million registered mobile phone subscribers and more than 127.55 million internet subscribers in our country. With a robust mobile financial service industry being served by a number of fintech firms, we can see a drastic change in our lifestyle as well as consumption and transaction patterns. Our life has become digital as well. We can now pay all kinds of bills via MFS accounts. We can do online shopping, pay our taxes online, and apply for tenders via e-tenders. The Smart Bangladesh Vision 2041 has set specific targets for different indicators. We aim to reach a per capita income of USD 12,500 from USD



We need to build skilled manpower, who will be science-minded, technology friendly, conversant with technology and efficient in innovation



2,824, making Bangladesh the 23rd largest economy in the world by 2041. Over the next 20 years, Bangladesh will have to cope with rapid transformational shifts in agriculture, education, health, transportation, communication, and in the way we work and conduct business. Smart application of the emerging technologies will drive Bangladesh in building a knowledge-based economy and eventually lead to a developed nation. Meantime, the World Bank has declared us as middle-income country and the UN has recognised our graduation to a developing country. Now, our goal is to become a high income and developed nation, and I am confident that we'll be able to materialise this vision in the wake of building Smart Bangladesh by the year 2041.

What are the three things we need to do right to get going on our journey towards Smart Bangladesh?

I would say the journey had begun with Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's vision of Digital Bangladesh 2021. Having achieved that vision, now I'm confident that we can go far beyond. As a matter of fact, Smart Bangladesh is not a

destination but a continuous journey for building a resilient nation being equipped by technology and innovation. If you ask about one thing we need to do, I would say develop human capital. And to this end, we must focus on establishing a sustained government-industry-academia partnership where each sector will deliver its part in a collaborative manner leading to a synergy in the human capital development spectrum. Then I would say easier and effective access to finance should be enhanced with appropriate policy and strategic intervention appropriate for IT firms, whose assets are intangible in nature. Thirdly, bringing innovations through cutting edge research and development in every sphere of our economy is another important area where we should focus our attention. This is why our government has been implementing a number of programmes in collaboration with the industry and academic institutions for building a robust innovation and startup ecosystem in Bangladesh. These issues are somewhat inter-related and the full potential cannot be achieved if they are not addressed in a coordinated manner. Moreover, progress in each must also be complemented by progress elsewhere. One project cannot come to fruition

in isolation but development in each field must happen in tandem.

What is the biggest challenge for the ICT sector in Bangladesh?

Well, I would say that no challenge is actually a challenge if you can turn it into an opportunity. We saw how e-commerce, digital entrepreneurship, and fintech boomed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The same thing can happen to any field if we take challenges as opportunities to improve ourselves.

However, if you were to insist, in a way it is an expansion of my previous answer — that is human resource. But more specifically, I would say knowledge and skills of our workforce and participation of other stakeholders. We have to make sure that people from every corner of this country are knowledgeable and efficient in the skills of IT sector. And to ensure that, we have made internet more accessible and affordable to everyone. We have already taken optical fibre backbone from cities to unions across Bangladesh. Our next target is to connect schools, health centres, community clinics, growth centres at the village level with the optical fibre network. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is going

to radically change the way we work, live, and interact with each other in every possible way and continue to unfold many opportunities coupled with a number of challenges. To leverage those opportunities and overcome those challenges, we have to recreate appropriate institutions and heavily reskill and up-skill our workforce aligned to the needs of the new era.

With the goal of introducing the young generation to this ever-growing sector and developing them into skilled digital citizens, Honourable Prime Minister emphasises on human capital development. As a part of that vision, the ICT Division launched the “Sheikh Russel Digital Lab” project to train children and youth about digital technology. It is a flagship project of the Government of Bangladesh for meeting the demands of Digital Bangladesh aligned with SDG and for strengthening institutional capacity ensuring the quality of education through optimum use of ICT. Thus, the government aims to establish specialised computer labs in educational institutions of all districts to speed up the expansion of computer education, quality education, job opportunity, skills, and develop language competency to establish local cyber centres in selected institutions to promote and inspire multimedia education at all levels of secondary education. Besides, our innovation hub-cum-incubation centres at the universities, in addition to dozens of specialised labs, have already been built at different universities. If we can strengthen our human capital base, we'll not only be able to benefit from this disruptive age but also shape this revolution in our own way.

What kind of role can ICT play in attaining Vision 2041, or more particularly what role can it play in poverty alleviation?

One of the goals of “The Smart Bangladesh Vision 2041” is zero poverty; a country free from poverty and hunger, which will be facilitated by our ICT sector as it will create a good number of jobs and earning opportunities by 2041. ICT is commonly thought to provide white collar jobs but it is capable of creating jobs for semi-skilled and unskilled people as well. Let's take the example of riders, deliverymen, or even MFS agents who have been enormously empowered by the digital technology and its innovative



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application. Thousands of women are embracing internet technology to sell their homemade products and turning out to be successful entrepreneurs with active contributions for bearing family expenses, especially for the education and health care services of their children. MFS, internet banking, and other fintech solutions as well as smart ID card introduced by the government facilitate such changes in different ways. Hundreds of public services have been digitised with reduced human intervention. Today, availing public services has become cheaper, faster, and more convenient. Smart Bangladesh will bring customised and personalised services with minimum or no human intervention ensuring efficiency, reliability, and accountability.

Last words?

I will go back to skilled human resource and say we need to build skilled and innovative manpower, who will be science-minded, technology friendly, conversant with technology, and efficient in innovation. We can reach our goal of Smart Bangladesh only when hardware, software, and humanware simultaneously integrate with each other. The people will have to play the prime role; otherwise, it will not be possible to use the digital tools properly despite having all the technologies.

Thank you very much for your time.

And thank you.

ICT for the future; next stop: Smart Bangladesh

On April 7, 2022, the country reached beyond the digital vision with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's announcement of Vision 2041. "The Smart Bangladesh vision will be implemented by 2041"

The story of Digital Bangladesh

There was a time when people had to visit government offices at least four to five times for just getting a birth certificate — first for understanding the application process, then to apply according to that process, then to find out the status of the application and this stage would perhaps require several visits, and finally another visit to receive the certificate. The number of visits and the time spent used to be much higher because the government offices ran on a sluggish analogue system.

In 2009, the government, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, decided to step out of this and initiated the 'Digital Bangladesh' vision. As part of the vision, the government set up computers in public offices, provided them with broadband internet, organised trainings for the officials, and... voila! Many of the public services are now online and the citizens can enjoy them at the snap of a finger.

But digital is not enough...

The story of Digital Bangladesh did not end there. On April 7, 2022, the country reached beyond the digital vision with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's announcement of Vision 2041. "The Smart Bangladesh vision will be implemented by 2041. The government will provide the country's youth

Impact of ICT so far

3600+



Public servants
trained

424



Public services
simplified

62+

Public offices use simpler
service process



130
million
internet
users



600,000
Freelancers

2000+

Services digitalised



9
Hi-tech
parks built

10,500



Women trained

2m



IT-based
employment

8,280



Digital centres



Bangabandhu-1
satellite
launched



with all kinds of assistance so that they can become IT oriented entrepreneurs,” said the premier. Smart Bangladesh will see a wave of change sweep through every sector, including agriculture, education, health, transport, and communication; and that change will most certainly stem from smart technology.

Planning the future

The government has planned 14 projects to achieve its vision for 2041 which would also usher in another stage of development for Bangladesh. These projects will be implemented by a high-level committee, a task force led by the Prime Minister herself, to bring about an inclusive digital society that brings marginalised people into the mainstream to ensure wholesome development.

While the Digital Inclusion for Vulnerable Exception (DIVE) project will conduct self-employment trainings, the government will continue to provide students with laptops under the ‘One Student, One Laptop, One Dream’ project to ensure their participation in online education. The Digital Leadership Academy will drive smart governance. Enterprise-based businesses will be developed as investment-friendly startups to increase contribution of



Smart Bangladesh, however, will also require a smart legal regime with appropriate provisions that not just remove the hurdles but also infuse dynamism into the private sector and provide appropriate encouragement through the right signals

micro and cottage industries, small and medium businesses to GDP.

Bangladesh Computer Council will set up an Alternative School for Start-up Educators of Tomorrow (ASSET) and Centre for Learning, Innovation and Creation of Knowledge (CLICK) to help these small and medium sized businesses with the necessary skills, knowledge and expertise.

Department of Information and Communication Technology has been assigned to set up two platforms — Agency for Knowledge on Aeronautical and Space Horizon (Akash) and Content Engineering and Linkage Lab (CELL) while the Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority will implement two projects — Bangladesh Knowledge Development Park and Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship Development (SEED).

The government will also take initiatives to create government services and infrastructure-based entrepreneurship on the Service Aggregator Training (SAT) model.

Together, these projects set out a comprehensive blueprint for Bangladesh with all the aspects in mind. There are measures to address all the bottlenecks and limitations that Bangladesh faces right now, ranging from skilled human resources to funds.

Acts to be passed, policies to be formulated

Smart Bangladesh, however, will also require a smart legal regime with appropriate provisions that not just remove the hurdles but also infuse dynamism into the private sector and provide appropriate encouragement through the right signals. The laws and regulations include the Data Security Act, Digital Services Act, Sheikh Hasina Institute of Frontier Technology (SHIFT) Act, Innovation Design and Entrepreneurship Academy (IDEA) Act, Agency for Knowledge on Aeronautical and Space Horizon (Akash) Act, Digital Leadership Academy Act.

The government also plans to formulate a National Startup Policy to ensure rapid emergence and proper growth of the startups.



What next?

These new policies and projects are expected to transform Bangladesh's employment scenario and economy. It is projected that ICT exports will hit USD 5 billion by 2025 followed by ICT-based employment notching up 3 million. At the same time, all government services are projected to have become available online by then. These changes will predictably lead to a significant improvement of living standards with average per capita income hitting the USD 12,500 mark by 2041.

The journey has begun

Quite in keeping with an ancient Chinese proverb — the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single footstep — the single footstep, although insignificant in terms of the journey ahead, towards Smart Bangladesh was the first campus-based IT business incubator at the Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET) launched in July 2022. The incubator will provide mentorship as well as financial and logistic support to about 220 entrepreneurs, trainees, freelancers, and potential startups. The incubator has a startup zone, innovation zone, industry-academic zone, brainstorming zone, an exhibition centre, an e-library, a data centre, research lab, and conference facilities providing 360-degree coverage for all possible needs of startups and entrepreneurs. That is how the government intends to work towards its overall 2041 vision too, with a self-sufficient 360-degree approach.

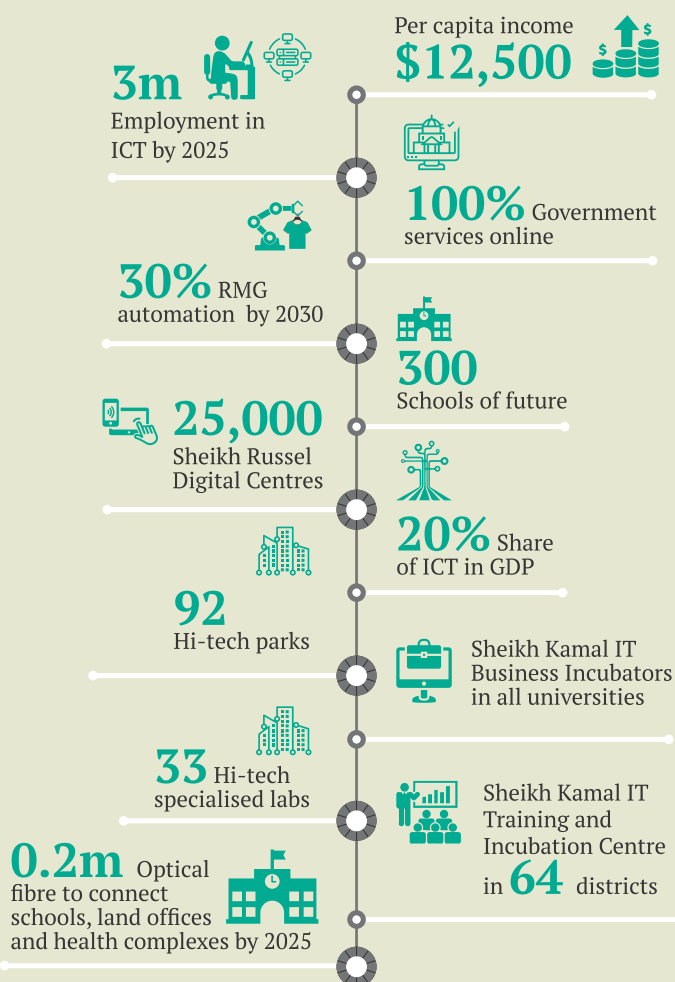
On the other hand, the government plans 92 hi-tech parks, nine of which have already been completed. About the benefits of the hi-tech parks, State Minister for ICT Division Zunaid Ahmed Palak said, "Boys and girls can be trained as soon as they have completed their higher secondary education and find employment with major European or American corporations from right here."

While laying the foundation stone of the Jamalpur Hi-Tech Park, he said, "A thousand youth will be trained here every year. On top of that, this park will create employment for another 3,000 young people."

Partner in development

Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) has a

Smart Bangladesh at a glance





major role to play in these projects and thus, will be a key partner in the government's vision towards Smart Bangladesh. In cue with the Prime Minister's announcement of vision 2041, BASIS organised a programme to discuss the role of ICT industry in Bangladesh's journey towards Smart Bangladesh. The association has already started doing its share by identifying seven pillars including human resource development, and industry promotion.

The association is set to transform BASIS Institute of Technology and Management into a university towards building qualified human resources with the right skill set for the IT sector. It also wants to set up an integrated research and development wing with government support for industry promotion. BASIS President Russell T. Ahmed said, "A roadmap is essential for public-private partnership with a clear and specified role for the private sector. We expect increased cooperation in all spheres including the ICT Division, and the Post and Telecommunications Division."

Hurdles ahead

Since the government has designed a mammoth plan to transform Bangladesh to a smart and developed nation by the year of 2041, it is also important to note that the journey may not be a smooth and relaxing one. There are a number of challenges that may impede Bangladesh's path in that journey. Lack of infrastructure, providing equipment and internet at a lower price, delay in policy formulation, organising funds

and regime change are several of the issues that may arise as challenges during the country's journey towards its next stop — Smart Bangladesh.

IT and ITES industry insiders also consider knowledge development for stakeholders and lack of evaluation mechanism as challenges. They believe that the industry should play a more active and effective role in planning and policymaking. "Stakeholders' knowledge development is crucial when we talk about the implementation of the 14 projects. Because the government is not going to work alone. It will work with different stakeholders and therefore, enabling them with fitting knowledge may be a challenging task for the authorities," said Adnan Imtiaz Halim, co-founder and CEO of Sheba Platform Ltd.

Smart Bangladesh requires a generation of people that is conversant with smart technologies and smart entrepreneurship. To orient the country's youth towards such things, a massive change in the national curriculum is also essential, which may turn into another challenge. Experts also predict that a huge social transformation should accompany the tech-based economy and governance. Tackling and/or adapting to this transformation will be a challenge that could be mitigated to a certain extent with the inclusion of the private sector players who are already driving for an IT-led growth of Bangladesh.

Economists and development specialists often mention that a big wave of unemployment may shock the country's overgrowing young workforce with

the advent of automation in different sectors such as RMG, transportation, agriculture and construction. "As we march ahead, we will have to face challenges one after another. But I think no other challenge is as big as ensuring inclusion while achieving a highly ambitious vision such as building a smart nation," said Adnan.

Fahim Mashroor, CEO of bdjobs.com, the largest job site of Bangladesh, said Smart Bangladesh is all about redesigning the process which would prove to be difficult despite the political commitment of the government. "Whenever there is an attempt towards reengineering the process, there is resistance internally. And it happens in the private sector as well as in the government sector."

He explained that since human resources, mindset or the machinery is not ready to go beyond digital and adapt to a new process, there will be internal resistance and that will become a key challenge to overcome.

Expectations of dreams coming true

Many – especially the IT entrepreneurs like Adnan and Mashroor – dream that the country will face these challenges with courage and overcome them one by one. Their high hopes have been fuelled by the country's run on the development track with a phenomenal pace for the last decade. During this period, the expectation of the country's people grew. They dared to dream bigger. Now, they expect that their dream will come true with necessary policy support in time as Bangladesh sets sail for a smart destination.

Unlocking opportunities at GSA

BASIS became the 'Headline Partner' of the annual global outsourcing event 'GSA - the Festival of Sourcing', at the 35th anniversary of GSA

With a view to promoting the ICT industry of Bangladesh, BASIS became the 'Headline Partner' of the annual global outsourcing event 'GSA - the Festival of Sourcing', at the 35th anniversary of GSA, held on July 5-6 in London, UK. The UK market accounts for 13 per cent of Bangladesh's total ICT export earnings. The fact that the UK is the largest ICT market in Europe and one of the largest IT/ITES export destinations for Bangladesh, turned out to be a deciding factor for BASIS to represent Bangladesh at the international event.

This event worked as a catalyst to increase exposure of Bangladesh's ICT sector, as well as establishing a productive business relationship with other European markets in addition to the UK. BASIS wanted to focus on the prospect of Bangladesh's ICT sector as 'The Next ICT Powerhouse', which highlighted Bangladesh as an alternative sourcing destination globally.

At the festival, BASIS showcased their IT/ITES potential and success stories of Bangladesh in front of almost 350 companies based in Eu-



rope, including Austria, Hungary, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, and beyond. Moreover, the participants were invited to bring their business to Bangladesh showcasing the wide range of government incentives and facilities provided for the ICT sector. BASIS expects to attract FDI for IT

market development in Bangladesh through this festival of sourcing.

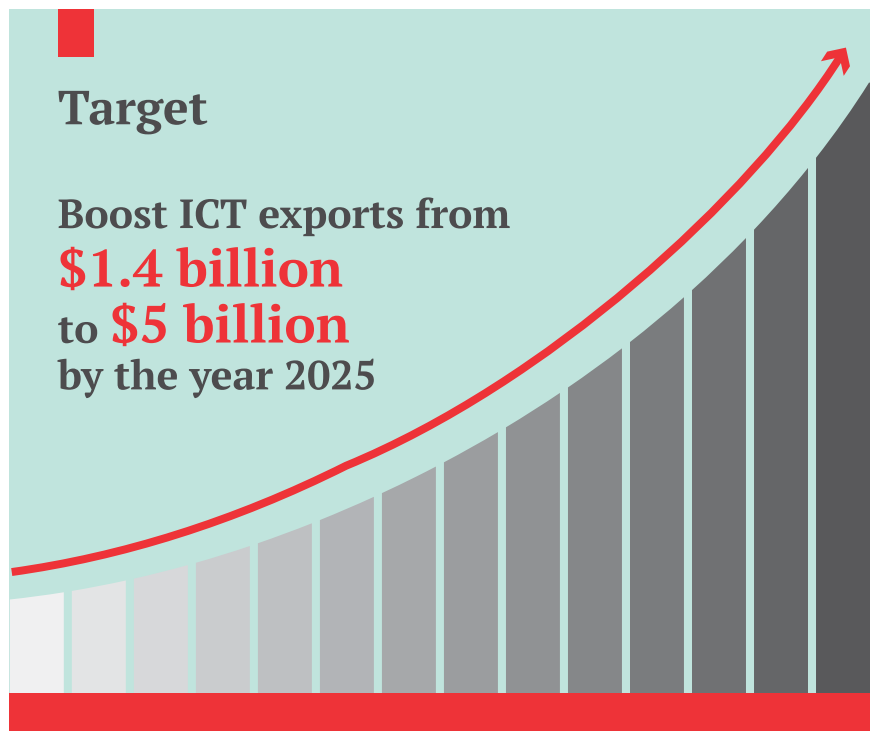
According to BASIS President Russell T. Ahmed, in keeping with the Prime Minister's announcement of ICT as the 'Product of the Year', BASIS is working towards their goal to increase ICT exports from Ban-



gladesh. They intended to leverage this status to boost ICT exports from USD 1.4 billion to USD 5 billion by the year 2025.

The 10-member BASIS delegation that attended the event included BASIS President Russell T. Ahmed, Senior Vice President Samira Zuberi Himika, and Vice President (Admin) Abu Daud Khan.

The Festival of Sourcing is an international event, held by the Global Sourcing Association (GSA). The two-day festival, organised by this UK-based non-profit industry association for the global sourcing industry attracts almost 250 IT professionals every day, including hundreds of online delegates, buyers, providers, advisors, vendors, and export destinations. The event is an opportunity for the leading IT industries of the world to showcase their potential and best practices, with an aim to connect with IT sectors of other countries. BASIS being the headline sponsor of the event will open new doors of opportunities and possibilities in Bangladesh's IT sector.



Product of the year Bangladesh's next growth engine

With about two million people employed in this industry and projected to add another million by 2025, the ICT industry is poised to become a game changer for the national economy. Considering this impressive growth during the last decade, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared ICT, 'The Product of the Year' in 2022

Bangladesh's fledgling ICT exports were worth just about USD 33 million in 2009. The industry has grown considerably since then both in terms of employment and net worth with exports notching up USD 1.4 billion in 2022 rising by more than 40 times over 13 years thanks to the enterprise and entrepreneurship of the private sector.

With over 2 million people employed in this industry and projected to add another million by 2025, the ICT industry is poised to become a game changer for the national economy. Considering this impressive growth during the last decade, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared ICT, 'The Product of the Year' in 2022.

Currently, Bangladesh exports software, IT enabled services (ITES), digital devices and hardware to 137 countries. Thanks to internet connectivity, the sector grows every day. The country is already connected with two submarine cables – SEA-ME-WE 4 and 5 while it expects to be connected with the 6th edition in 2024.

As of July 2022, there were about 127.55 million active internet users



in Bangladesh according to Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) meaning that this number of people had accessed the internet at least once in the previous three months. Among them, an estimated 0.6 million freelancers, mostly working for foreign companies, bring USD 150 million in export earnings just through a single international payment gateway.

Apart from the freelancers, hundreds of thousands work at over 4500 local IT companies. The Oxford Internet Institute (OII) says Bangladesh is currently the second largest supplier of online workforce, after India.

In November 2021, State Minister for ICT Ministry Zunaid Ahmed Palak said the country's ICT sector employed 2 million people, aiming to



increase employment to 3 million and exports to USD 5 billion by 2025.

IT and ITES related startups are coming up too, bringing us closer to that goal. According to Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), new companies are getting registered with the body on a regular basis. From just 18 members in 1998, BASIS grew over two hundred-fold to over 2000 members in 2022.

Among the three segments of the ICT outsourcing services, Bangladeshi companies and freelancers mostly provide the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and IT and IT enabled services, which are low-end and medium-to-high-end services. These include data-centres, data and content development, software development, video and image processing, customer support, telemedicine, medical transcription, web designing and development. Bangladeshi companies offer these services at 16-20 percent cheaper rates than those in India, and 30 percent lower than those in Philippines, according to Everest Group report of 2017.

The government wants to utilise these advantages and attract clients from across the globe. "We will work with BASIS in a public-private joint

Bangladesh tops the global online workforce in creative and multimedia services accounting for 25% of the global workforce. On the other hand, a total of 10.6% of the country's online service providers develop software and applications, which accounts for 2.5-5% of the global workforce

venture to create skilled human resources, in policy formulation and revision, technology and innovation, investment and coordination. We will soon have a joint working group," said Zunaid Ahmed Palak in January 2022.

Bangladesh tops the global online workforce in creative and multimedia services accounting for 25 per cent of the global workforce. On the other hand, a total of 10.6 per cent of the country's online service providers develop software and applications, which accounts for 2.5-5 per cent of the global workforce. All these sum up to 17 per cent of the global online workforce. As a result of consistent efforts from government and non-government bodies as well as individuals, Bangladesh managed to win the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) award for the 8th consecutive time in 2022.

Around 30 Bangladeshi companies have set up overseas offices in the USA, UK, Japan, Denmark, South Korea, Germany, Netherlands, Australia, and Canada. On the other hand, more than 40 companies among the exporters are established through a joint-venture with an overseas company or as an Off-shore Development Centre (ODC) with 100 per cent foreign investment. This type of expansion is helping the ICT



sector to further spread the 'Made in Bangladesh' brand all over the world.

Government initiatives and the role of BASIS

Bangladesh government's attention to ICT has resulted in effective and timely decisions like tax exemption on ICT products and services. In order to attract FDI, the government has developed 29 hi-tech parks to develop the industry in Bangladesh. The parks offer a wide range of investment incentives, including ten years of corporate income tax exemption for IT firms, three-year personal income tax exemption for foreign professionals and even VAT exemption on local bills. Besides, 28 sub-sectors enjoy similar tax exemptions. The government has also exempted taxes for six other ICT sub-sectors till 2024, which include vital sectors like e-learning platforms, e-book publication and IT freelancing.

As an association for the software exporters, BASIS demanded incentives for buyers and sellers towards a cashless industry, increasing government revenue in the process. Another proposal was to allocate BDT 5 billion to promote Bangladesh as a technical assistance provider internationally. As part of its policy advocacy, BASIS assisted in developing policy framework of the ICT sector advocating a seven-year tax holiday for registered IT companies, VAT exemption for e-commerce, and also helped implement a private equity and venture capital policy framework as of July 2015.

The limitless potential of ICT becomes severely constricted for a workforce without advanced literacy or skills that is often required for manufacturing products and producing services. Even the low-end ICT services like remote customer support needs intermediate literacy and numerical skills

BASIS works to facilitate the growth of the ICT sector in Bangladesh by initiating prestigious programmes like BASIS Soft Expo and National ICT Award to highlight achievements of tech-based organisations and private sector initiatives. In terms of branding and promotion of Bangladesh's IT sector in the international arena, the government and BASIS are proceeding hand in hand to reach the target of USD 5 billion export earnings by 2025. Besides the government's sincere efforts, effective measures from BASIS are making that lofty target more attainable every day.

Easier said than done

Thanks to the exponentially growing demand across the globe, ICT products and services stand as the country's most potential sector for export diversification and has been rightly

recognised as such. "Bangladesh has seen a significant growth in ICT export revenue in the last 3-4 years compared to many other countries," said Raisul Kabir, co-founder and CEO of Brain Station 23 Limited.

The export of ICT goods and especially services portray a potential for economic heterogeneity. The government announces products of the year to encourage exports from certain sectors according to its policy. The trend has been rather promising over the years. In 2018 it was pharmaceutical goods; agricultural products in 2019; light engineering products in 2020; in 2021 it was leather and leather goods. In 2022, ICT was announced as product of the year turning to high-value services and products.

A major advantage for ICT exports is in its intangible nature, meaning there are no transport and logistical barriers

whatsoever. It can be purchased from any part of the world by anyone, which proved critical during the pandemic when most of the world came to a halt. ICT services can be produced anywhere with only a steady, reliable internet connection and electricity access.

A study by Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute (BFTI), styled “Export potentials of trade in services in Bangladesh: Identifying the opportunities and challenges”, finds that obstacles in this sector are as common as its potential. It goes on to list entrepreneurs’ limited access to financial services, poor country branding and skyrocketing cost of internet in Bangladesh are only a few of the impediments encumbering the growth in this sector. Some other challenges include lack of proper education, foreign language skills, outdated national curriculum which subsequently results in a poorly skilled manpower and a high employee turnover cost.

Average education level is an important factor when it comes to a knowledge-intensive sector such as ICT. The limitless potential of ICT becomes severely constricted for a workforce without advanced literacy or skills that are often required for manufacturing products and producing services. Even the low-end ICT services like remote customer support needs intermediate literacy and numerical skills. Although education in Bangladesh has seen a substantial rise over the last decade — primary education rose from 48.8 per cent in 2011 to 61.1 per cent in 2019. In contrast, however, the percentage of people with an undergraduate degree increased from 4 per cent in 2011 to 5.5 per cent during the same period.

Bangladesh ranked 63rd on the English Proficiency Index among 100 non-English speaking countries, which is a hindrance since English is considered the lingua franca and official language of main ICT service importer giants like USA, UK, Singapore. Since China is another global importer of ICT products and services, Chinese proficiency would have gone a long way but there are no statistics available and even if there were, the numbers would very likely be infinitesimal.

Internet prices have not fallen much in the last few years. However, and fortunately so, income has risen, making

Industry insiders say that the government should encourage IT and ITES based start-ups instead of freelancers as start-ups can manage employment for more people and earn more foreign currency compared to freelancers



it somewhat more affordable and accessible. With more offers and packages to choose from, small ICT startups can now benefit from a lower cost of production resulting from more widely available internet. This is arguably one of the strongest factors strengthening exports, given the significance of the internet in this sector.

The study also reported, “Despite a huge prospect in the ITES exports from Bangladesh, aspiring firms still find it difficult to get loans on easy terms and enter the industry.” Venture capital with private equity could be one way to improve this situation. Banks and other non-bank financial institutions need to take a strong interest in ICT

and become a partner in the sector’s progress and prosperity.

Bangladesh may follow in the footsteps of other successful countries like India, Malaysia, Singapore, Dubai, Egypt, Costa Rica and South Africa to improve its brand to widen export prospects and destinations. The foreign ministry and missions have a key role to play in this regard and are striving to do so.

Industry insiders say that the government should encourage IT and ITES based startups instead of freelancers as startups can manage employment for more people and earn more foreign currency compared to freelancers. “Because, people who become competitors in freelancing websites can become associates in an IT firm,” explained the Brain Station CEO.

Instituting proper banking channels, simplification of taxes, prioritising

domestic IT professionals, increasing budgetary allocation in mass and specialised education, research and training have proven to be effective means to enhance growth of ICT products and services. Bangladesh could consider similar avenues for rich dividends.

Despite having a number of hurdles in the way, entrepreneurs expect the government’s declaration would push the country’s ICT export a far ahead. “I’d say that the opportunities in this sector outnumber challenges,” said Raisul Kabir. “I believe we can leverage these opportunities with the declaration of product of the year,” he said hopefully.



BASIS launches **Luna Shamsuddoha Award** to celebrate women

Named in memory of the late founding chair of Dohatec New Media, the Luna Shamsuddoha Award celebrates womanhood and recognises women's contribution to society

Commemorating the contribution and role of Luna Shamsuddoha, a former director of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), the top ICT association introduced the 'Luna Shamsuddoha Award' for recognising the contribution of women to our country; especially in 'non-conventional' fields like technology, finance, governance, etc. BASIS has introduced the award as it believes in women's rights and wants to acknowledge the contribution of brilliant women who are taking our society forward. The award ceremony will be held every year from now on in honour of the late Ms Luna Shamsuddoha, coinciding with the International Women's Day.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the award as the chief guest, Speaker of the national parliament, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, added, "Women should be given more opportunities to participate in the economy; they need to equip themselves as well. Only then will women be able to have the same footing as men and achieve their goals."

During the discussion, education minister Dr Dipu Moni said, "Despite the hurdles and obstacles, we women, have come a long way. Needless to say, there's much more to achieve." ICT state minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak added, "Luna Shamsuddoha had

such a dream that women would work largely in the ICT field. Already 15% women are working in this field. However, the number needs to grow further.”

Attending the discussion titled, “Women’s Contribution in Economy and Participation”, the speakers shared their memories of Luna Shamsuddoha. The BASIS president Russell T. Ahmed said, “I have seen very few people as humble, down-to-earth and cheerful as Luna Shamsuddoha. She was one of the inspirations behind my decision to run for the BASIS executive council.”

Several other speakers remembered their memories with Luna Shamsuddoha and how she had been an inspiration with an IT firm when people were still getting to know computers.

The first edition of the award ceremony recognised 10 women for their contributions and efforts in varied fields from diplomacy to research, from entrepreneurship to law enforcement. The recipients are Zuena Aziz, Principal Coordinator (SDG Affairs), Prime Minister’s Office; Saida Muna Tasneem, Bangladesh High Commissioner to the United Kingdom; Amena Begum, BPM, Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG); Dr. Haseena Khan, Microbiologist and Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Dhaka University; Sonia Bashir Kabir, Founder and Managing Partner of SBK Tech Ventures and SBK Foundation; Dr. Rawshan Arra Khanam, Consultant, Department of Respiratory Medicine at United Hospital; Dr. Sejunti Saha, Director of Child Health Research Foundation; Humaira Azam, managing director & chief executive officer of Trust Bank; and Tamara Hasan Abed, managing director of BRAC Enterprises.

“Luna Shamsuddoha had such a dream that women would work largely in the ICT field. Already 15% women are working in this field. However, the number needs to grow further”

Geeteara Safiya Choudhury, Chairman of GraphicPeople and Adcomm Limited and a former adviser to caretaker government, was given the lifetime achievement award for her outstanding efforts and achievements to inspire millions of women in Bangladesh.

Besides these individuals, three BASIS members received the award as well. They are Genex Infosys, BJIT and social enterprise Dnet. Both Genex and BJIT were awarded for employing the highest number of women in an outsourcing (BPO) company and software company respectively. Social enterprise Dnet was awarded for being the largest employer of women in proportion to men.

Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament was present as chief guest at the ceremony at Radisson Blu Hotel.

Education minister Dr. Dipu Moni, the prime minister’s private investment

advisor and Beximco vice chairman Salman F Rahman, and the ICT state minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak attended as special guests.

The Canadian envoy Lilly Nicholls, Swiss ambassador Nathalie Chuard, Berger Paints managing director Rupali Chowdhury, and executive director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) Syeda Rizwana Hasan were present as guests of honour.

The BASIS president, presiding over the event, also announced a scholarship programme in Luna Shamsuddoha’s memory at BASIS Institute of Technology & Management (BITM).

Luna Shamsuddoha, a pioneering ICT entrepreneur founded Dohatec New Media in 1992 to provide software solutions. It went on to work for institutions, government agencies, and corporations in USA, Canada, Germany, Switzerland and Bangladesh. Dohatec developed several e-governance projects and the electronic government procurement (e-GP) system as well.

Luna Shamsuddoha has been recognised for her trailblazing initiatives. She was also a member of the council of Global Thought Leaders on inclusive growth, Switzerland, among 32 distinguished persons including Nobel laureates, professors, former presidents and cabinet ministers. Ms Shamsuddoha was the first woman to chair the state-owned Janata Bank and was the founding president of Bangladesh Women in Technology (BWIT). She was a former board member and director of BASIS executive council as well.

Luna Shamsuddoha breathed her last on February 17, 2021 in Singapore.



Brotecs taking Bangladesh's name to 'new heights'

This Bangladeshi developer's company, Brotecs Technologies, helps aeroplane manufacturers with cheaper 'talk time' between the passengers and the ground

Nahid Hossain's product, as well as his service, is quite unique. He sells his wares to billion-dollar aviation giants like Bombardier, Gulfstream and Dassault, which sell fighter jets and private executive jets in nearly a hundred countries around the world. But they come to Nahid to make sure the pilots and VVIP passengers can keep in touch with the ground. Simply put, this Bangladeshi developer's company, Brotecs Technologies, helps aeroplane manufacturers with cheaper 'talk time' between the passengers and the ground.

This sounds simple enough to make one wonder why Brotecs has the edge. While there are dozens of systems that make air to ground (or vice versa) audio and video calls possible, Brotecs has developed a technology that reduces communication costs to almost a tenth. Before Brotecs, a ground to air call would set you back around nine dollars. Now it costs just a dollar.

The back-story goes way back to 2006 when Nahid and two of his cousins founded Brotecs. "We registered two companies, Brotecs Technologies LLC and Stitel Networks LLC, in the United States." With the help of his cousins, Nahid has managed to establish a company that specialises in air-ground communications and helps sports celebrities, musicians, business tycoons make audio and video calls while they are in the air — 'office in the sky' as they call it.

For all his communications expertise, Nahid has no idea who actually uses his products. "We do not communicate with the end clients directly though. My clients include complete satellite communication solution providers. I also have a few Fortune 500 companies on my client list," says the co-founder, managing director and CTO of Brotecs. He mentions the likes of Honeywell, Rockwell Collins, Gogo Business Aviation, L3Harris, Viasat, Inmarsat and Satcom Direct. These companies control the satellite communication (SATCOM) sector for the entire business aviation industry. And all of them come to Brotecs for specific SATCOM solutions.

"We are our own competition," says Nahid, while evaluating the current state of the market. However, satellite communication for business aviation is a very niche and sensitive market. Complete confidentiality and professionalism are absolutely imperative for Brotecs. More so, because this home-grown enterprise also caters to the defence industry



with cutting-edge military-grade secured communication solutions over satellite networks. Needless to say, the clients are government agencies for whom such information amounts to crucial intelligence, hence secrecy is of the essence. BroTecs provides aviation IoT solutions worldwide to over 150 types of military aircraft.

So, when Maverick (in the recently released sequel of Top Gun) is up in the air in his Hornet (F18) and talking to his base, is it BroTecs technology that they are using? Nahid declines to even acknowledge the question and puts the case to rest saying, “We have to comply with a plethora of regulations and maintain the trust of our cli-

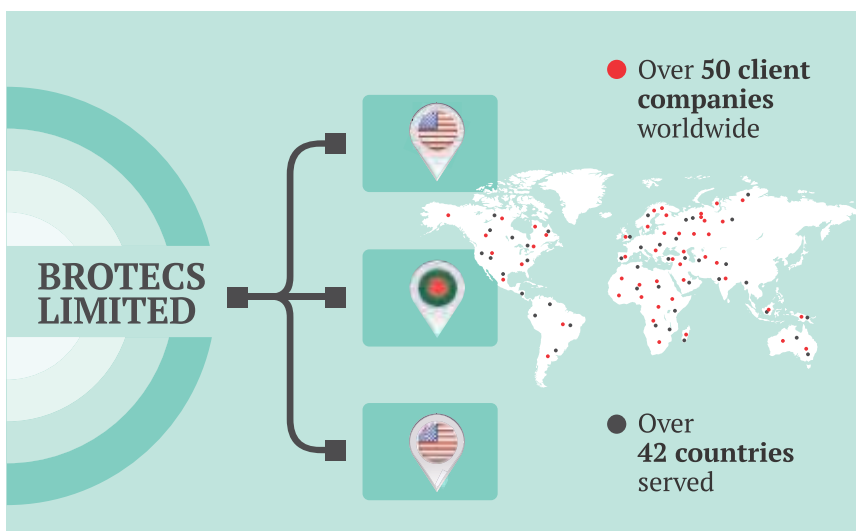
ents. And this is what has kept us standing in this business for the past 16 years.”

The beginning of the journey for Nahid had nothing to do with aviation though. “I was studying to be a civil engineer at the turn of the millennium. However, writing codes has always been my passion. That’s why I left BUET to complete my undergrad in CSE from AIUB,” reminisces Nahid.

The successful businessman started his career immediately after his SSC exams. “By the time I graduated out of university, I had already become the software engineering manager for a big company where people far senior to me were working under me.”

Becoming successful with a job could very well be the measure of success for many but Nahid is not one of them. After consulting his cousins, who were settled in the USA, he co-founded the three companies to do something he loves – research and innovation.

“I don’t like to call BroTecs a software development company. We won’t build a website or design an accounting software for you. We want to solve problems that can change people’s lives.”



Brotecs got its first big break from the Government of Mexico. Nahid and his team built a complete countrywide communication solution for the Mexican government. “During that assignment, we realised that we could solve many problems in the aviation industry.” No sooner had the thought crossed Nahid’s mind than they started to find customised solutions for SATCOM providers. After a year, they had something ready to show to SATCOM giants like Honeywell and Satcom Direct. Honeywell soon became eager to invest. Brotecs provided them with their first product a year later and has never looked back since.

“Now, our business is global. We provide customised solutions to Chinese businessmen, Arab sheikhs, European celebrities or American sport stars.”

Not only that, Nahid and Brotecs Technologies have their own products and patents. “I have five patents under my name. Three have already been approved by the US Patent and two more are pending.”

Father of a young girl, Nahid now envisions Brotecs Technologies as a leading health tech research and development company. Nahid says that this dream stemmed from a personal need. “It’s only been two years that I’m living here in Bangladesh permanently. Before that, when I was travelling to the US every other week, I used to be constantly anxious about my parents’ health.”



Brotecs has developed a technology that reduces communication costs by almost a tenth. Before Brotecs, a ground to air call would set you back around nine dollars. Now it costs just a dollar

Nahid believes that it shouldn’t be the case. “I’m already working with health tech companies like life365, health and lifeplus.ai. I want to develop a complete package that would make lives of patients, their family members, and their doctors easy. You can ask anyone to install the package at home and it will keep track of all vitals, remind the patient to take medicines, and inform the predefined doctor with vital history when need be.”

Boasting a customer base across the globe, Brotecs employs less than 100 workers across its three establishments. “Writing codes for aviation is not that easy. You need the finest codes that comply with all avionics

regulations and standards,” says Nahid. Hence, Brotecs has a very unique way of hiring people. “We ask people to solve problems. We monitor their attitude and approach to problem solving before we hire them for the company. And even after hiring, it takes more than eight months for them to write codes that actually go into production.”

Hiring skilled personnel is, however, the smallest of Nahid’s problems. He identifies the non-accommodating infrastructure as the main barrier to expanding his business in Bangladesh. “Look, the government gives the ICT industry various incentives and support for exporting our products. However, I cannot import the hard-





ware on which we write the codes.” More often than not, Brotecs has to work with embedded software. Embedded software is a piece of software that is embedded in hardware or non-PC devices. It is written specifically for the particular hardware that it runs on and usually has processing and memory constraints because of the device’s limited computing capabilities. Nahid’s frustration stems from not being able to make the people at Bangladesh Customs understand what an embedded software is and how the hardware works. “It would often take them a whole month to give us clearance for importing the hardware,” informs Nahid.

It’s not just Bangladesh Customs though, there are several policies that hinder the growth of the SATCOM sector in Bangladesh. “I cannot just set up an Iridium Satellite here in Bangladesh. I wouldn’t be able to get the permission for it,” says Nahid, identifying an example for which he had to set-up companies in the US to facilitate his business.

“One can have a powerful computer and start writing complex codes and they work. But we write embedded codes. If there is even one tiny bug in the code, it can take up to nine months to fix/rewrite, send, and install the code in the device,” states Nahid highlighting the tiny margin of error. Nahid believes that we need to start teaching the programmers to write secured and embedded codes from the beginning of their studies/career. Experts of the ICT sector also believe the same and suggest that universities could take the first step in starting this positive trend.

Turning his focus back to Brotecs, Nahid says, “Trust and confidentiality are crucial in the market we work in. All our clients compete with each other and they all take solutions from us because it is only we who have the technology. We provide



Complete satellite communication solution providers and fortune 500 companies like Honeywell, Rockwell Collins, Gogo Business Aviation, L3Harris, Viasat, Inmarsat and Satcom Direct are my clients



solutions and we also develop products when needed. We have developed next generation technologies like NEXT — a smart cabin router that has built-in AI.”

Products like NEXT have also opened up new means to solidify Brotecs stronghold in the market. Their technologies are so unique that aviation companies have started to modify their hardware to make them compatible with Brotecs products. If

they don’t, they miss out on the best satellite communication technology there is.

Brotecs is a uniquely inspiring example of Bangladeshi enterprise. It has shown that if you have a plan and a vision, you can make it big globally even if it is such a niche market as business aviation. So, the next time you see a Gulfstream or a Dassault aircraft, know that Nahid’s Brotecs and Bangladesh is a part of it.



Never give up: The story of Pickaboo



Morin Talukder
CEO, Pickaboo

Pickaboo has been a pioneer in Bangladeshi e-commerce not only in providing EMI facilities, but also in providing faster delivery and comprehensive customer service

Pickaboo is a Bangladeshi omni-channel gadget seller that has been in operation since 2016. Whether it is a smartphone, TV, or laptop, one can order online and/or pick it up. Or, someone could go shopping at any of their 17 retail outlets. Pickaboo is the largest one-stop shopping destination in Bangladesh. The online store offers the widest range of products ranging from electronics to household appliances, latest smartphones, camera, computing to accessories, fashion, health equipment, and makeup.

Stating his vision, CEO Morin Talukder says, “We want to make people’s life easy. It’s all about convenience. People in Bangladesh do not get the expected services from electronic gadget sellers,

even if it is a brand shop. This is something that we want to change.”

Back in 2019, Pickaboo was about to go bust. It had started in 2016 as a partner of Edison Group and MoMagic. But still, the online retailer had failed to raise enough funds and was on the verge of going bankrupt in 2019.

What happened next is an excellent example of Bangladeshi entrepreneurship. Morin and his co-founders convinced Edison to invest USD 100,000 as they wanted to start Pickaboo anew in 2019. Since then, Pickaboo has not had to look back.

According to the Pickaboo CEO, it now competes with companies like Daraz in online business and Gadget&Gear offline. “We were the first to introduce

EMI facilities for mobile phones. And now, everyone offers this service.”

Pickaboo has been a pioneer in Bangladeshi e-commerce not only in providing EMI facilities, but also in providing faster delivery and comprehensive customer service. In 2022, Pickaboo introduced a 3-hour delivery service. The service, called FastPick Express, promises guaranteed 3-hour delivery within selected areas of Dhaka. Pickaboo aims to expand the service outside Dhaka as well. However, fast delivery is not much in demand in the category of products where Pickaboo operates, which is mobiles and gadgets. Back in 2018, the company was also the first to introduce same-day delivery for the first time in Bangladesh.

These new and innovative steps suit Pickaboo perfectly as they have always been trying to find new ways for improved customer satisfaction. If someone buys a phone from Pickaboo and faces problems during its warranty period, all s/he needs to do is make a phone call. The rest is taken care of by the Pickaboo service team. They collect the phone from the customer's house, deliver it back to the customer after servicing. Not only that, they also provide a spare phone while the handset is being serviced.

“At first, everyone called me crazy. They told me that my phones would get stolen. No one wanted to provide us with mobile handsets for this service. But finally, Huawei listened to us and gave us three handsets. We also added some on our own. And guess what, we've been providing people with this service since 2020 and not a single phone has been stolen so far,” says Morin, proud that his conviction was not unfounded.

Pickaboo has built its positioning on superior customer service. In line with their vision, Pickaboo has also introduced a one-hour delivery service separately in partnership with Xiaomi Bangladesh where it delivers Xiaomi products within one hour in Dhaka city. Quick commerce has gained significant momentum across markets over the last two years. The hypothesis is that faster delivery can improve customer experience, and demands, and encourage customers to order more frequently. Pickaboo is betting in improved customer experience to expand their business throughout Bangladesh and so far, they have not been proven wrong.

The journey so far

2016		Starts off as e-commerce platform
2019		Goes almost bankrupt
2019		Gathers \$100,000 as new investment
2020		Reorganises and kicks-off omnichannel operation
2022		17 offline stores across country



Speaking about the challenges, Morin says, “Challenges will always be there. But you have to move forward. We want to digitalise the whole market system.” The Pickaboo CEO identifies raising investment as the biggest challenge because of regulatory reasons. But that is also changing. Companies like bKash, ShopUp and Pathao were able to raise huge amount of funds.

“So, things are improving. We've fought with Alibaba. Pathao fought with Uber. Chaldal is the market leader in online grocery delivery, but they've had to fight with FoodPanda's Pandamart. But all of us are still in the market with a strong foothold.”

Morin, however, says things could have been much easier and simpler had the term ‘e-commerce’ been defined properly. “Bashundhara City does not have to take responsibility for the shops they house. But we do. However, in reality, we are just like Bashundhara City. We allow individual retailers to do business on our platform.”

But it is not all bad, says Morin referring to government action against predatory companies that entered the market to make quick money and get out. “The government has already stopped these businesses. Companies offering 200-300% discounts are not there anymore because of government actions. So, there is hope. Things are moving in the right direction.”



Mujib100 brings memories to life

Scrolling down the app, users can watch videos related to the Father of the Nation including that of his historic speech of March 7, 1971. Then comes the virtual tour section, where the users can visit all the places with memories of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

House 10 is the fifth house on the right as one walks down road 11 of Dhanmondi. The two-storey family house on what used to be, and still popularly called, road 32 must have enjoyed peace and quiet in the early 1970s. This was where Bangladesh's founding father lived with his entire family in 1975 when they were assassinated. Steeped with history, this house has since been turned into a museum. A virtual tour through the rooms and corridors of this hallowed house is one of the features of Mujib100, an app launched by Bangladesh government's ICT division.

Short of a biopic or biography, the Mujib100 is perhaps the best way to get to know about Bangladesh's founding president. Nationally recognised as Bangabandhu, Father of the Nation, this app marks birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Mujib100 introduces the chief architect of Bangladesh's independence with audio visual materials, as well as text, to the youth of Bangladesh and beyond. Features include handwritten letters from Sheikh Mujib, along with audios and videos of speeches along with footage of the fire-brand leader.

The section 'Bangabandhu on this Day' features videos describing Mujib's life on a daily basis. There is another section with the latest updates about the centenary celebration. Scrolling down, users can watch videos related to the Father of the Nation including that of his historic speech of March 7. Then comes the virtual tour section, where the user can visit all the places with memories of Mujib.

The photo archive is followed by a section about the ongoing events on Bangabandhu. This is followed by a section on books and publications, audios,

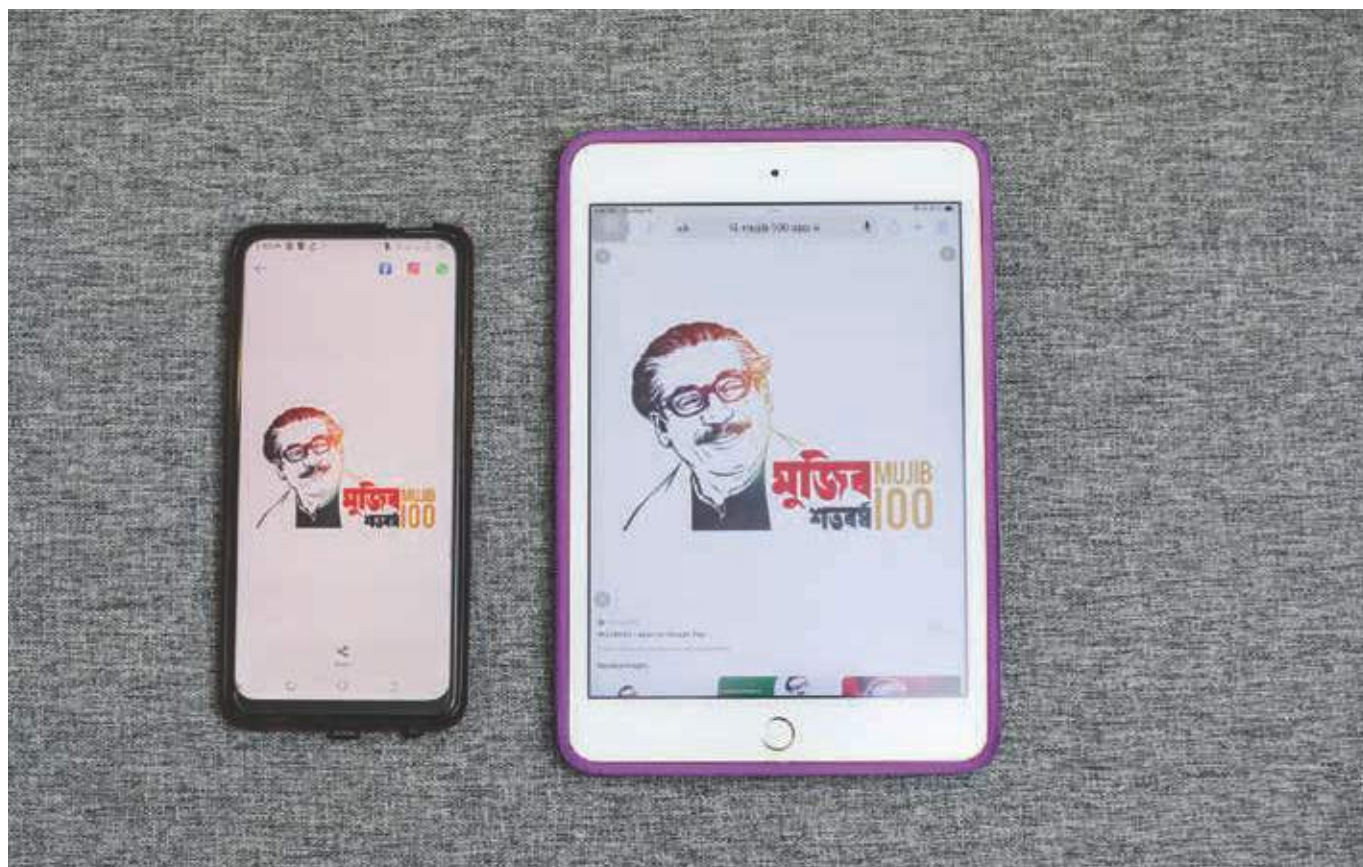
This app can be useful for people from all walks of life. However, it's been developed especially targeting the young generation since Mujib was the epitome of eternal youth

and the graphic novel 'Mujib'. The app also features people around the world recognising Bangabandhu's courage and dedication for the nation under 'Recognition'. The home page ends with Bangabandhu's letters followed by news reports on the centenary celebration.

The second page of the app is a timeline of Mujib's life with brief descriptions of the crucial years of the leader's eventful life. Videos are organised in five categories on the third page. The next page contains summaries of the e-book, the audio materials including his speeches, and a summary of the graphics novel. Bangabandhu's quotes and a quiz on him are categorised in the app's final page.

"This app can be useful for people from all walks of life. However, it's been developed especially targeting the young generation since Mujib was the epitome of eternal youth," said ICT State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak while inaugurating the app.

Palak's statement echoes with the lines on top written in fiery orange, "In your immortal spirit, forever may we rise."



BASIS set for 2022 ICT Awards

With registrations complete, participants are set to compete at the fifth instalment of BASIS National ICT Awards that acknowledge and recognise innovative IT/ITES products and services. This year's awards will have 108 prizes in 36 categories and will hopefully usher in a new generation of innovators ready to take the industry by the horns. The winners of highly innovative projects will be nominated to compete with international participants at the APICTA Awards, also known as the tech Oscars of Asia-Pacific Region.

Announcing this year's awards on September 20, BASIS president Russell T. Ahmed said that the organisation tries to select and identify innovative and ground-breaking products and services through this competition. Registration was open from September 20 to October 2, 2022.

Besides the BASIS president, the press meet was also attended by M Rashidul Hasan, convener of the BASIS National



ICT Awards 2022 and chairman of BASIS Advisory Standing Committee, BASIS director AKM Ahmedul Islam BABU, BASIS

Advisory Standing Committee co-chair Shah Imraul Kaeesh and and Uttam Kumar Paul.

Financial inclusion workshop



A workshop with Prime Bank discussed different issues and financial packages looking to boost financial inclusion on September 4 at BASIS headquarters.

In the event, Prime Bank's head of liabilities Md. Fazle Rabbi presented the keynote paper. Besides, Prime Bank's head of SME Syed M. Omar Tayyab also addressed the workshop.

During the workshop, Prime Bank presented various financial packages for BASIS members and explained how to obtain them. Prime Bank officials also discussed various services of the

bank and advised the BASIS members about easier and faster transactions. BASIS members spoke about various obstacles they faced in their transactions, as well as their banking problems like receiving loans. The bank officials present discussed and explained the possible solutions to such problems.

Chairman of BASIS Standing Committee on Access to Finance Ishtiak Mateen moderated the event while the association's Vice President Abu Daud Khan and Advisory Standing Committee Co-Chairman Shah Imraul Kaeesh, among others, were present.

BASIS meets the Danish Embassy

A BASIS delegation met with the Royal Danish Embassy on July 21, 2022 where BASIS president Russell T. Ahmed extended an invitation to Danish counterparts for joining the SoftExpo 2022 for a first-hand experience of the Bangladeshi industry. The meeting was also attended by BASIS VP Abu Daud Khan, Assistant Manager Nadia Tabassum, and Danish Embassy trade advisors Saadia Taufiq and Sakib Chowdhury.

BASIS meets PMIBD

A meeting between BASIS and the Project Management Institute Bangladesh (PMIBD) was held on July 16, 2022. After a fruitful discussion, both parties agreed that a successful collaboration will create an opportunity for executing different initiatives for the industry. BASIS President Russell T. Ahmed, and directors Ahmedul Islam Babu and Tanvir Hossain Khan were present along with the PMIBD delegation which included president Annesha Ahmed, Outreach Programme Director Mahmood Taseen Choudhury and Technology Director Ahmed Zafar Sadeq.

Access to IT export incentives

BASIS organised a workshop on the challenges in availing the government's cash incentives for software and ITES export on September 3.

Contrary to the general idea that the IT industry does not require high investment like infrastructure projects, the industry's development hinges very much on access to finance and at the initial levels of development tech companies require substantial investment. Thus, it becomes a matter of relief for the company wherever they can find some form of financial support.

BASIS President Russell T. Ahmed discussed the problems the participants face in getting cash incentives through Bangladesh Bank. He assured them that the BASIS leaders would pursue the authorities concerned to formulate policies suitable for software and IT services or make necessary amendments to the existing policies. He also urged the workshop attendees to contact the officials assigned to the cash incentives department of BASIS for such issues.

The workshop was conducted by Shah Imraul Kaeesh, co-chairman of BASIS Advisory Standing Committee.



Open banking key for financial inclusion

Speakers at a dialogue titled 'API and Open Banking: New Service Innovation for Banks and Fintech Companies' suggested that the API-based open banking should be introduced in Bangladesh so that more people can be brought under banking services.

In the open banking system, banks collaborate with fintech companies so that innovative financial services can be made faster and cheaper. Bankers and fintech companies urged the central bank to introduce supportive guidelines in this regard.

In the event, Brankas CEO Todd Schweitzer, heading one of the leading fintech companies in South-East Asia, shared best practices of open banking. Md. Khurshid Alam, executive director of BB, asserted the central bank's commitment to the required regulatory support for open banking in Bangladesh.

BASIS members learn about new VAT, tax rules



Over a hundred companies learned about the newly introduced changes in Bangladesh's VAT and tax rules at a BASIS work-

shop. The top IT trade body organised a workshop on the new VAT and tax rules resulting from the budget for 2022-2023

for its member companies. The workshop saw participants from a hundred BASIS members take part. As the industry progresses towards higher end technology which in many cases require excess funds, knowledge of VAT and tax rules can become crucial and in fact the difference between handsome profits and barely breaking.

The trade body president Russell T. Ahmed inaugurated the workshop, which was conducted by Shah Imraul Kaesh, co-chairman of the BASIS advisory standing committee. A keynote was presented by Kishlur Rahman who attended the event on behalf of KMS & Associates, a consultancy firm contracted to BASIS. Advisory standing committee chairman M. Rashidul Hasan and co-chairman Utam Kumar Paul were also present at the workshop.

BASIS launches hotline 16488

BASIS launched its very own hotline on June 12 at Dhaka's Radisson Blu Hotel. Calling 16488 will now enable seamless communication with BASIS, the top IT business body of Bangladesh.

Titled 'SMART Bangladesh: Role of ICT Industry', the event highlighted the contribution of software and ITES to Bangladesh's national development.

The Minister for Post, Telecoms and ICT, Mustafa Jabbar, said, "There are countless success stories of our ICT sector. But we have million times more potential to grow compared to what we have achieved so far."



State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, Nasrul Hamid discussed his ministry's support for the ICT sector. "Bangladesh is the only country in

the world where the constitution directs the government to ensure electricity for all."

Still few women in ICT

Women's participation in ICT is very low although the sector has immense potential for female employment, experts said at a roundtable on women's empowerment in ICT.

"This is the sector where women's participation needs to be increased and we need to start working from the school level," said Samira Zuberi Himika, BASIS vice president.

At the same time, women's participation should be increased at the policymaking level, their social conditions must be improved and

gender discrimination in the workplace should be eliminated, she added.

For this, it is necessary to improve women's skills in information technology, said Himika.

She was speaking at a roundtable styled "Use of ICT in empowering women in today's world" organised by the BASIS Women's Forum at the trade body's office.

The participants highlighted the activities of BASIS Women's Forum to increase women's participation in Bangladesh's IT sector.



MoU between BASIS and CTO Forum Bangladesh

An MoU was signed between BASIS and CTO Forum Bangladesh on July 16, 2022 to increase awareness and development of human resources in IT. In the presence of BASIS President Russell T. Ahmed and CTO Forum Bangladesh President Tapan Kanti Sarkar, the MoU was signed by AKM Ahmedul Islam Babu, Director, BASIS, and Md Arfe Elahi, Secretary General, CTO Forum Bangladesh, on behalf of their respective organisations.

InsurTech in Bangladesh needs to be formalised: Experts

The role of InsurTech players has to be formalised and boosted to bring about the paradigm shift within the overall insurance sector of Bangladesh, experts said in a roundtable. The roundtable titled 'Potential of InsurTech in Advancing Bangladesh's Economy' was held at the BASIS auditorium in the capital's Karwan Bazar on June 16.

Representatives from the Bangladesh Bank, different private banks, non-bank financial institutions, insurance companies, and other stakeholder organisations attended the event.

During the discussion, Bangladesh Bank Additional Director Masud Rana said Bangladesh Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA) should make necessary amendments to their policies to allow tech companies and insurers to work collaboratively to



develop and modify products to provide 4IR-based and hassle-free services to customers.

BASIS, as the peak industry body of all software and ITES entities in the country, expressed its interest in working in a coalition with the regulators and trade bodies and industry special-

ists to help raise the insurance sector's contribution to the country's GDP, which is currently 0.4 per cent.

The panel also urged regulators to meet at regular intervals with the industry players and experts to catalyse the formulation of a healthy InsurTech industry forward.



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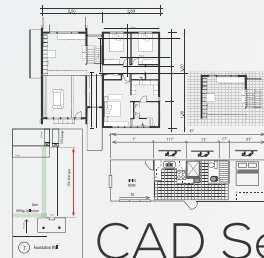
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