

Prospect of IT in Bangladesh

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At present Information Technology (IT) is a subject of widespread interest in Bangladesh. There are around 100 software houses, 35 data entry centres, thousands of formal and informal IT training centres and numerous computer shops. The Government has declared IT as a thrust sector and that computer training centre will be set up in each divisional and district headquarters of Bangladesh. Import of computer hardware and software is now duty free, VSAT is deregulated, high speed DDN (Digital Data Network) has been introduced. One fourth of the 45 recommendations of JRC report on software export has already been implemented; rest is in the process of implementation. A tremendous activity is going on in every sector including e-commerce, e-governance, computer networking, Internet, web browsing, web applications, multimedia product development etc. Some active steps and initiatives are already there, as described below for an exposure of the present and future prospects of IT in Bangladesh.

Telecommunication: Bangladesh has one of the lowest tele-density in Asia, with a mere 0.6 (in India 1.5) lines per 100 people. In terms of phone connectivity, the charge of Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTTB) is one of the highest in the world, approximately US500.00(*in India US60*) for normal single telephone line connection. However, there has been significant improvement in services of telecommunication within last few years. Present government is also trying to get additional telephone lines from a Canadian firm. If these telephone lines are available in Bangladesh, most of the PC users will be able to use internet and find a scope to build up international career.

Associations and professional bodies: The associations and professional bodies who are playing vital role to develop the IT sector in Bangladesh are as follows:

* Bangladesh Computer Society (BCS) was formed in 1979. This is an association of the IT Professionals.

* Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS) was formed in 1987. This is basically an association of Computer Vendors.

* Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) was formed in 1998 to promote the interest of IT business, especially for software development and related IT services.

* Bangladesh Software Marketing and Promotions (BSMP), a private organisation, has been formed with the view to helping the local computer programmers and promote their software.

* Bangladesh Computer Writers Association has been formed to promote the writers activities in the country.

* Bangladesh Association for Information Technology Education (BAITE) has been formed to promote the activities toward standardising informal IT education in the country.

Banks support: Well-trained Bangladeshi IT professionals can start their business like Data entry, Web development, Multimedia, ISP and Medical Data Transcription services, Cybercafe and IT Training Centre. They can easily get financial help from bank. A number of government banks have already started credit programmes to encourage the entrepreneurs in software industry. Some private banks are using our locally developed software too. However, due to some constraints the outcome is not up to the expectation.

Government initiatives: The Government of Bangladesh has taken some important initiatives to develop our IT sector. Still we are waiting to see a fruitful change in our Information Technology. However, some remarkable steps of government are highlighted for information.

* IT has been declared as a thrust sector.

* Quick implementation of the recommendations of JRC report (a high powered committee for software export).

* Waiving all taxes and duties from import of computer hardware and software.

* Hundred percent remittances of profit and capital gains for foreign investors without any approval.

* BTTB's implementation of DDN service.

* Decision to link Bangladesh to global highway through submarine cable link by next two years.

Bangladesh Computer Council: Bangladesh Computer Council is the apex body of the government dealing with Information Technology. BCC is running according to BCC Act, 1990 as an autonomous organisation under the administrative control of the Ministry of Science Technology. BCC is playing various types of roles regarding the IT booming over the country.

Human resource: Human resource is the most important component for IT industry. Bangladesh has a huge educated, unemployed youth force with the ability to read and write English. The country can take advantage of its immense manpower to train and prepare programmers and IT professionals. Government has already started a project to develop Computer Programmers in Bangladesh. All the universities are offering one year post-graduate Diploma course for the graduates. Our unemployed educated persons can take this opportunity to build their career as IT professionals.

IT awareness: Young generation in Bangladesh is very enthusiastic and has correctly identified IT as the future of the country. There are numerous computer clubs, computer festivals, programming contests, web design contests, IT related seminars and discussions in many cities of the country. There are about

16 magazines and four digital IT magazines are being published monthly and some daily newspapers publish IT pages once/twice a week. A few of the magazines are in collaboration with other international magazines, however, most of these are Bangladeshi origin. There are a few interactive sites and forums. A number of business centres and cybercafes have started up recently. Most of these business centres provide e-mail; e-mail to fax, phonefax services and cyber cafes offer Internet browsing.

E-commerce: Recently there has been a surge in E-commerce activities in Bangladesh. There are E-commerce related seminars and symposiums in the country almost everyday and all the major training centres are offering courses on E-commerce. Government is now formulating laws for e-commerce to enhance the business rapidly and smoothly.

IT park and international market: Some private organisations have already started to work for setting up IT park and IT villages in the country. Some investors are foreigners and they are very much interested to build Bangladeshi students as IT professionals. They have already started to commission their views. Our Bangladeshi students can take this chance and hit the international job market in the IT field. There are lot of scopes of working and entering into the international market. Just we have to take proper initiatives. Bangladeshi IT professionals have a good demand in international IT job market, which has been proved by some of our BUET students.

Conclusion: Our Bangladeshi students should be more aware about Information Technology and they should take proper decision to build their career. Indians have changed their whole financial position by IT. Their government also is very much serious about IT. Any way, Bangladesh has a long way to go in a very short time to enjoy the fruits of information age. It will be only possible when there will be political commitment with better IT infrastructure, internal network, country domain and above all a high speed fibre optic link to the Information Superhighway.