

## Computer Literacy Program: First Five Years of Progress

*Zafar Billah and Farrukh Mohsen*

### *Manthan Award*



The Computer Literacy Program (CLP) was recognized as the best “e-learning” program in Southeast Asia and was bestowed the “Manthan Award Southeast Asia 2009” at a ceremony held in Delhi, December 18-19, 2009. The Manthan Award is conferred every year by “Digital Empowerment Foundation”, a Delhi-based non-profit organization, in collaboration with IT Department of the Government. of India and a number of non-government organizations. Participants in this competition are the SEARC countries (India, Pakistan,

Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives).

### *How CLP Started*

The rapid evolution of Information Technology (IT) has made a positive impact in social and economic improvements in the present world. In advanced countries, computer has now become a permanent companion and a necessary medium in education. In Bangladesh, computer and IT education is far short from the need of the country. The lack is especially acute in rural areas. Consequently, in the competition of entering the workplace after graduation, the children from the villages are falling further behind. The government is trying to redress this disparity but that effort is outweighed by the need. This is why, private initiatives are so important alongside that of the government’s. Realizing the dire consequences of allowing this disparity to grow, a group of expatriate Bangladeshis in New Jersey launched CLP towards the end of 2004. Realizing that for non-residents it is virtually impossible to



direct day to day activities in Bangladesh, the group enlisted the collaboration of D.Net ([www.dnet.org.bd](http://www.dnet.org.bd)), a premier non-profit organization devoted to spreading of computer and IT education in Bangladesh. Around the same time the group learned about the educational activities of Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB), USA ([www.vabonline.org](http://www.vabonline.org)). With the objective of elevating the standard of education in rural Bangladesh, VAB has been improving infrastructure, providing scholarships to underprivileged students in

Bangladesh, and helping to train teachers since 1998. The similarity of the objectives prompted the CLP group to form an affiliation with VAB and organized as the New Jersey Chapter of VAB (VAB-NJ).

The goal of the CLP is to promote the knowledge and usage of computers and information technology among the underprivileged youths in Bangladesh. VAB-NJ fosters computer literacy by making personal computers and basic computer training accessible to needy youngsters in Bangladesh. The

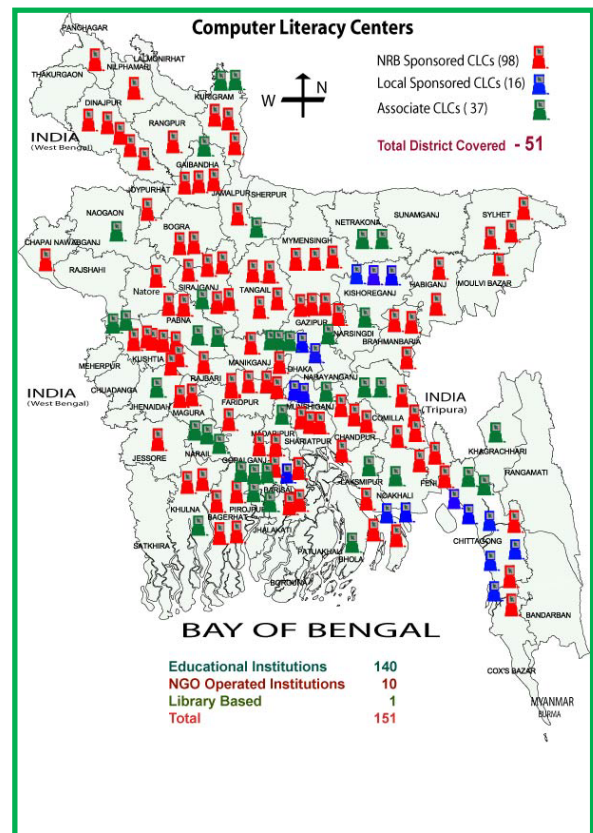
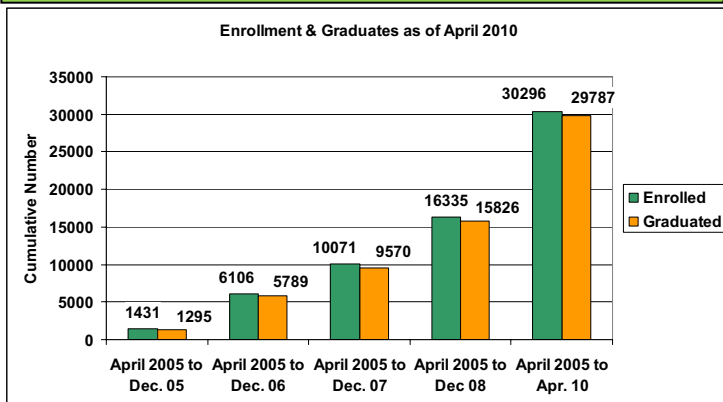
mechanism involves establishing computer literacy center (CLCs) in chosen educational or community institutions.

CLP is organized as a coordinated tripartite initiative between VAB-NJ, D.Net, and local school management. VAB-NJ provides vision and financial support for program implementation; D.Net provides partial financial support, develops curriculum, manages teacher training, establishes and maintains computer labs, and monitors program performance; and the school management provides the space and pays for the electricity for the lab. Under the CLP initiative, computer literacy centers (CLCs) are established at educational institutions primarily in underprivileged rural areas. Each CLC is equipped with a minimum four computers, a printer and peripheral equipment. Students are guided through a hands-on curriculum developed specifically for the program by experts in the field. Prior to establishment of a center, two competent and enterprising teachers receive a comprehensive two-week long training in Dhaka on all aspects of the curriculum. Students in a batch of eight receive 40 hours of hands-on training in basic computer operation, and Microsoft Word, Excel spreadsheet, and Paint programs, as well as, the use of internet (for centers with Internet connection; over 60% of the centers are connected with the Internet). A help guide “Esho Computer Shikhi” has been published in Bengali that describes the subject matter for the entire curriculum in easy steps. Each student is provided with a copy of the guide at a nominal cost.

### Progress Statistics

The accomplishments of the CLP as of June 2010 are summarized in the boxes and the bar graph below.

- Total number of established centers: 114 CLCs and 37 Associate CLCs\*
  - Coverage: 51 out of the 64 districts
  - 70% of the centers in underprivileged rural areas
  - Teachers trained: 300 (16% women)
  - Trained students: 29,787 (52% boys, 48% girls) (as of April 2010)
- \*The Associate centers are where the CLP curriculum has been introduced with the help of trained teachers*



### ***Beyond CLP***

Inspired by the successes to date, the VAB-NJ volunteers and their patrons are continually evaluating newer initiatives that leverage on the resources of the CLCs. One such endeavor is the “Computer Teaches Everyday English (CTEE)”. The aim of the program is to teach students conversational English with correct pronunciations. In 2009, this program was launched at five schools on a pilot basis. A compact disc (CD) that uses familiar settings and draws on students’ day-to-day experiences was developed for this program. The CD teaches the students English words and sentences using visual and audio cues. Specially trained teachers help the students learn correct English through pictures, sounds and speech articulation. A closely monitored survey at these five schools indicates that students trained under the CTEE program are learning English better and faster. VAB-NJ intends to extend CTEE on a much broader scale. Looking further ahead, plans are there to foster teaching of geometry, geography, science, and other subjects using computers and interactive educational CDs.

#### **Milestones**

- CLP wins Manthan award
- Bank Asia sponsors 13 centers with promise for more in future
- Imdad-Sitara Foundation provided support for 13 centers
- With the help of Relief International and other CLP patrons, Internet connection is now available at 52 centers
- Standard Chartered Bank provided 200 pre-owned but fully operational computers, and has pledged support for establishing full & associate CLCs
- Mustafa Kamal, a CLP trained teacher secured a scholarship from the US State Department for training under the “Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) Program” at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (UNL). He used the Internet connection at his CLC to find out about the program and apply. He was at UNL from September 20 through November 8, 2009.

### ***Digital Bangladesh and Non-Resident Bangladeshis***

The Government of Bangladesh has expounded the ambitious vision of a *Digital Bangladesh* by 2021. CLP, in a limited way, is preparing the grounds so that the lofty vision becomes meaningful at the grass roots level. However, 114 CLCs and 37 Associate Centers who are too minuscule for a country with more than 87,000 villages. Non-resident Bangladeshis can help spread the initiative throughout the country by sponsoring CLCs at appropriate institutions in areas of their choice, providing funds for program implementation, and what is even more important by actively participating themselves and encouraging others to do likewise (*Contact: E-mail: [vabnj@hotmail.com](mailto:vabnj@hotmail.com) ; Phone: 732-972-8362*).