

Would you believe? A Computer Literacy Center at Shailan Surma High School?

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Like most of Bangladeshis in our community I enjoy going back to Bangladesh to meet relatives and friends. However, my visit this February brought tears of joy to my eyes.

With my brother Eliash Hossain, I visited the Computer Literacy Center at Shailan Surma High School. The village of Shailan is about 40 miles northwest of Dhaka and about one and a half mile from our village. My brother and I walked to the School where the Asst. Headmaster greeted us. He introduced two teachers who went for the training at D. Net and also those students who were taking courses at the moment. I could not help a mixed feeling of nostalgia and euphoria. This was the same school I observed decades ago when having a clean book would make a student proud yet the today's children, who probably have never operated a type-writer are handling the keyboard and mouse. The computer lab was located in a spacious room on the second floor where in the door a CLP plaque is conspicuously displayed.



It was a pleasure discussing the details of their learning process with the students at length, the Asst. Head Master as well as the two teachers who went for the training on the computer program. The teachers told me about their challenges since the computer teaching is over and above their pre-occupation with the regular class. In fact, they have very little time to work with computers. Because computer learning is not an integral part of the government mandated curriculum, students were not much interested to go to the computer room. Furthermore, the school has to obtain permission from Education Board to run the computer class, a process the school has yet to undertake. I requested them to continue and try their best to make the project a success. After the discussion, they offered us tea and light snack. On way back I had an opportunity to meet Mr. Abdul Matin, the Executive Director of International Voluntary Services- Bangladesh (IVS-B). Mr. Matin is also a member of the Managing Board of Shailan Shurma High School and CEO of Sojag (a NGO). He is a very active social worker in the area. He donated all the furniture needed for the computer Center in Surma High. Since then we have been exchanging our ideas through e-mail on computer program.



Later Martin wrote me, “You may be interested to know that our school will not take any additional initiative to get the Govt. approval for the computer class. I have no other option but to agree with their proposal of the appointment of a separate teacher with required qualification who can make all sorts of liaison and communication with the Education Board to get permission to have computer class in our school. I don't think it will be that difficult to get a teacher with required qualifications but the question is who will pay the salary of the incoming teacher. I was told by the Headmaster that over the times the salary of the computer teacher might get govt. approval but this will take no less than two years. So the question is who will pay his/her salary for the next two years.” It is heartening to see that a person like Mr. Abdul Martin is thinking along the same line to educate village kids- the most effective communication technology of our time.

In spite of the bureaucratic stumbling blocks, I am very happy that some kids of the remote villages are learning computers. I understand that VABNJ and D.Net have already approached the Government to give blanket approval to each school with a Computer Literacy Center to offer Computer Programming as an “additional” subject.



I made a promise to the members of Chapil Udioman Nabin Shangha (CUNS, a voluntary organization in my own village) during the opening ceremony of newly build office building, to donate one computer as soon as a few students of the village would graduate from the center in Surma High.

CUNS have been actively working on village development programs since late seventies. I am very glad to see that they are now giving a serious consideration on Computer Literacy Program to teach village kids information technology. It is noteworthy to mention that this is the village where no drinking water, electricity, doctors, even tables or chairs were available in our child hood time.