

2007 Fundraiser for Computer Literacy Program: Volunteers Association for Bangladesh - New Jersey (VAB-NJ) builds on its success



NEW JERSEY: 4th year in a row, VAB NJ held a successful fund raising event to support its Computer Literacy Program. VAB NJ continues to produce results by ushering Computer Literacy to underprivileged youths in remote villages in Bangladesh. By July this year, the program established 59 centers.

This year the fundraiser was held at the Rutgers Cook College Center. Adhering close to its published program the event started at about 5:45 PM and went a little past 11 PM. The venue was colorfully decorated with large posters, each displaying photographs of an operating center along with some pertinent statistics. Following

registration of some 200 guests, the national anthems of both USA and Bangladesh were played with all the attendees standing. This year there were a number of invited speakers. VAB NJ paid tribute to the Imdad Sitara Foundation by designating Mrs. Sitara Khan as the first speaker. The late Dr. Imdad Khan and his wife Mrs. Sitara Khan supported VAB NJ in attaining its first year's goal of setting up twenty centers. The Foundation came up with necessary funds for ten stations and the honorariums paid to the teachers. Even though Dr. Khan passed away in 2006, Mrs. Khan continued her late husband's legacy by renewing her support for the program. In her opening remarks, Mrs. Khan reiterated her commitment to the program. On behalf of VAB-NJ Dr. Khurshid Hossain (Lucy) put together a touching photo album celebrating Dr. Khan's life, which she presented to Mrs. Khan. Mr. Manzurul Islam from ATN Bangla praised efforts of non-resident Bangladeshis in pursuing the Computer Literacy Program (CLP) by devoting significant time out of their busy life for lifting up the lives of underprivileged youths of Bangladesh. Dr. Fazlur Rahman Chowdhury of VAB presented the goals of VAB and enumerated its various achievements on the broader scope of education in Bangladesh. He presented some details such as the number of scholarships given and number of science laboratories established. His presentation was highlighted by a video presentation including direct clips from VAB activities in Bangladesh.

The next two "in-house" presentations were by Prof. Swapan Kumar Gayen of VAB NJ and Dr. Ananya Raihan of D. Net. Prof. Gayen presented the chronology of the CLP program and the milestones it achieved thus far. He elaborated how the triad of VAB NJ, D. Net and the host institution accepts roughly \$2,600 from each sponsor, supplements about \$1,400 and creates a center with four computers and printer and peripherals. He mentioned the efforts expended by D. Net in recruiting and training two teachers from each center, in negotiating with the center management (typically a village school), in setting up of the physical infrastructure of the lab, in maintaining each center by hardware and software care. Perhaps the highlight of the presentations was the one by Dr. Ananya Raihan. Dr. Raihan traveled from Bangladesh some 10,000 miles away just to attend the event. In his presentation he highlighted some of the logistical challenges they faced and how they overcame those challenges. He also touched upon how others view this novel effort of CLP. He mentioned that at the Educational Conference on Information Technology held in Cairo in 2005, a speaker mentioned that CLP is the *only* program of its kind in which the program was funded by NRBs themselves. He also mentioned, in recognizing the viability of the project, Microsoft South East Asia came forward and partially funded a second tier ambitious project by establishing thirteen Community for Learning, Information Communication and Knowledge (CLICK) centers. These centers will emulate the CLC model but unlike most CLCs those will be based at community centers. The principal aim of the CLICK centers will be to provide more advanced training to unemployed educated youth in rural Bangladesh so that they can find employment as information technology professionals. The curriculum will include desktop publication, web-site development, database programming, and information services for rural population. Training in the CLICK program is expected to open up new employment opportunities for the graduates. Dr. Raihan was confident that this year Microsoft is expected to significantly expand the CLICK program.

This year's youth program in the CLP fundraiser event earned the audience's praise. It started with a data-rich presentation by Ashirul Amin, a graduate student from Fletcher School of International Affairs at the Tufts University. Ashirul spent the 2006 summer by going around the established CLP centers and through a structured set of questions evaluated the CLP program. His presentation described how the CLP is making a difference and also identified areas of enhancements. Following Ashirul, Malik Rashid, co-founder of Network of Young Bangladeshi Association Professionals (NYBAP) presented a new perspective of success stories by Bangladesh Professionals. Anadil Hossain, co-producer of the now internationally acclaimed recent movie "Namsake" presented her experience in movie making. Uzma Akhand made a presentation of her organization GRAM (Generating Resources Achieving Mobility) and Ridwan Awal Ami talked about his experience in youth events.

Following a sumptuous dinner served by Shalimar, the audience was entertained by famous Bangladesh artists, Mohammad Saadi, Milia Ali and others. Dr. Motasim Billah delivered the concluding remarks by thanking all the patrons for supporting the program.

VAB-NJ encourages interested individuals to get involved in its CLP initiative by participating in the Adopt-a-Learning Center program or donating generously in cash or kind to the CLP fund. VAB is a U.S. tax-exempt registered organization, and contributions made to VAB will qualify for tax deduction. VAB's web site www.vabonline.org has more information about the organization, its various projects including CLP, and how to participate in VAB's activities.