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HP Labs launched

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, FEB. 27. In a time-honoured stratagem of U.S.-based information technology companies to set up development centres in India with a view to leverage on low costs IT skills provided by the subcontinent, HP announced the launch of its HP Labs India in Bangalore. The IT lab would develop low cost innovative solutions for the local market. With a start-up cluster of 30-40 software professionals, "the lab will utilise HP's technologies to develop unique solutions for the Indian market," the company's Director, S.Ramani, said.

The new lab is the seventh centre in HP's worldwide network of development lab and forms part of the company's global strategy to provide information technology to communities which are "technologically excluded."

Interesting, since the lab is not a philanthropic venture, but a sustainable business project, according to Debra L.Dunn, Vice-President, Strategy and Corporate Operations.

The two pivotal units of HP Labs would focus on language technology, which includes speech communication interface for computers and innovation of suitable access devices to provide Internet access at low cost, communication concepts and techniques relevant to the environment of small towns and rural areas in developing countries. Some of the innovations are a four-in-one PC and a single CPU, which costs lesser than a normal PC, and a solution that allows user to download web pages in any language and listen to the transcript in the local language.

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Cheap solutions needed for IT to reach rural masses

Our Bangalore Bureau
26 FEBRUARY

CHEAP, innovative solutions need to be developed to improve the penetration of information technology in developing nations such as India, said Mr V Rajaraman, honorary professor at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc).

Multi-function, high-end machines which are very popular in developed nations such as the United States have little utility in India, especially in the rural areas, he said, at seminar organised by Hewlett-Packard to mark the inauguration of their development lab in India.

Instead of trying to spread high-cost, multi-use personal computers in India, the extensive cable TV network can be used as a means of disseminating data, he added. Innovative thinking is required to make such machines user-friendly in rural areas, he explained. For example a touch screen could be used instead of a keyboard in these areas, Mr Rajaraman said.

In urban regions, people require computers to check on travel reservations, consumer durables' prices in addition to word processing. Mr Rajaraman said popular word processors offered too many under utilised applications for users. The computer for a typical home user was little more than a combined information access device and a typewriter, he explained.

To provide these devices, manufacturers can also use cheap liquid crystal displays, he added. Mr Rajaraman also advocated the use of 100 to 150 low-cost devices, in schools with small IT budgets and a large student population, to ensure that each student spent time on it, instead of learning in groups of three or four.

Despite the availability of these machines, there are several hurdles facing the implementation of cheap technology, Mr Colin MacLay, deputy director at the Harvard Centre for International Development said. He claimed that most 'killer' applications, had little use in rural communities. Politicians and bureaucrats, who often received grants from organisations such as the World Bank for IT implementation in their departments, must be trained in its use, he stressed. Another problem is how to increase the reach of IT to the millions of children who do not have access to schools, he added.

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HP Showcases Mass Use Products

OUR EFE BUREAU
Bangalore

With a view to do what the PCO revolution did to telephone usage, technology incubation and research outfits are all set to focus on India to develop mass use products (especially information access and Internet access products) which is expected to not only bridge the digital divide, but also perhaps be the next mass revenue earning method for the modest Indian.

Among the technologies on show at the HP Labs India-organised event in Bangalore, the newly established research outfit of HP demonstrated a 4-way Linux PC, which can simultaneously handle four users (with four monitors , 4 keyboards and 4 mouse attached to the same CPU) which was developed at HP Labs in Grenoble, France. This solution if made available in India could be available for as little as Rs 8,000 per seat and could be deployed in a cyber-cafe environment.

The other initiative is the HP Photoshop concept, which makes all the equipment for digital photography and printing (PC, scanner and a photo-printer) available to a small business for Rs 1.40 lakh.

Going forward HP Labs India is actively looking at a collaborative model which will see it forge ties with other similar programs, like Media Labs Asia of MIT. HP Labs is also interested in working on joint projects with other players. ◆

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HP unveils new lab for industrial research in Bangalore

By Our Correspondent

Bangalore, Feb. 26: Global IT major Hewlett-Packard company announced the launch of its industrial research lab in Bangalore which is dedicated to generating usable, economically sustainable and low-cost technology for India through understanding the relevant social, cultural, economic and technological drivers.

"Most of the work is exploratory and very speculative in nature. But, when we hit the bull's eye, we can expect large payoffs," Mr Per-Kristian Halvorsen, director, solutions and services technology centre, HP Labs said. The Bangalore research lab is the second such in Asia with other labs operating in Bristol in the United Kingdom, Mass in the US, Grenoble in France, Haifa in Israel and Tokyo in Japan.

"One of our focus would be to design and develop new low-cost access devices that are affordable and user-centric in this part of the world. The new access devices would be developed using a blend of ideas from anthropologists and technologists and analysed for the need of the local people," Mr Halvorsen disclosed.

The research conducted will help HP's e-inclusion efforts — a business initiative with a social mission to bridge the digital divide and broaden access to social and economic opportunities in traditionally underserved markets. According to Ms Debra L. Dunn, vice president, strategy and corporate operations, HP, the focus among other things would be on language technology, including speech communication interfaces for computers.

Low-cost access devices to provide internet access at low cost, equipment and software that can be used in a shared mode, to enable access to benefits of Information Technology to those who cannot afford to acquire standard equipment.

"We will be dwelling on communication concepts and techniques relevant to the environment of small towns and rural areas in developing countries," Ms Dunn said.

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Now technology to promote culture

DH News Service

BANGALORE, Feb 26

Want to have the experience of whizzing past the bustling streets of Banaras in a two-seat bicycle rickshaw or to explore the panoramic view of the Banaras temple spired skyline or to know myths and the meaning of the river Ganges ? No problem, futuristic multimedia technologies using cultural objects that replace the conventional personal computer and its mouse will give the feel of the rich cultural heritage of India.

As one clicks the device, the representative images on the device are displayed on the computer screen providing audio-visual glimpses of a particular cultural theme like Shiva's meta identity, culture of Banaras, among other things.

Thus, the computer becomes an instrument of learning about the culture as well.

There are no keyboards or mouse visible in the Crossing exhibit. Instead, interaction with the digital content will be through a variety of smart, touch-based interfaces such as physical icons, pop-up boxes, wearable accessories such as rings and other jewellery.

A multimedia project - "The Crossing: Living, Dying and Transformation in Banaras", developed at the Xerox Media Labs, Delhi, belonging to Palo Alto Research Centre (PARC), Xerox Corporation, USA, was showcased at the exhibition, coinciding with the inauguration of HP Labs India here today.

"The Crossing project is a unique example of how art, culture and technology can converge on one interactive platform. The Crossing demonstrates futuristic forms of information access in which technology surrenders to the human hand," the project developers noted.

The project which was launched in 1998, has been developed under the direction of artist Ranjit Makkuni and India's leading intellectuals and artistic talents.

Besides showcasing futuristic technology, this living document helps preserve diverse viewpoints of artists, craftmen, painters, musicians and dancers whose skill often face extinction because of moernisation. Project's embedded system engineer Must-afa said as many as 21 exhibits have been developed during the last years and these can be used extensively to promote culture, tourism and education in India and across the world. "Already, we are talking to different State governments on these possibilities," he added.

TEXT RECOGNITION: The Language Technologies Research Centre (LRTC) of the Hyderbad bas-ed Internat-ional Institute of Technology also exhibited its system which can speak out or read out arbitrary text in Telugu and Hindu.

According to a LRTC representative, the system would be useful to read out texts over telephone or to read out information to illiterate people, or blind people.

The system was in its initial stages of development and was yet to be used in any projects, he said.

He said LTRC's goal is to develop technologies dealing with language, be it translation, speech processing or optical character recognition.

Projects like Tamil OCR from Indian Institute of Science, Indian Language software from Modular Infotech, Rural connectivity solution from CDOT were among those displayed at the exhibition.

INAUGURATED: The HP today opened its Lab here to benefit third world countries by evolving native and cost effective IT solutions to them. The HP Labs, India, would work on ideas and innovations focusing on the unique conditions in the developing world, without which rapid and widespread use of information technology world would remain a dream.

Speaking at the inauguration of the Lab, HP Centre's director Kris Halvorsen said IT products and IT services for emerging economies have to be designed around the best technology available anywhere.

Stating that HP had an obligation to bridge the digital divide, he said the mission of HP Labs India was to innovate specifically for emerging economies.

The areas identified were Language technology, communications technology and new access devices.

HP plans technical symposiums in premier institutions

BANGALORE, Feb 26 (DHNS)

In a bid to attract brilliant students to develop technologies for masses in countries like India, HP Labs India will hold technical symposiums and other events in prominent education institutions like Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institute of Science every year.

Speaking to reporters here HP Labs India Director S Ramani said there was a need to lure students to innovate solutions for emerging markets. "Today's technical symposium attracted a lot students from IISc. We have to educate students that there are several opportunities in India and intellectually challenging also," he added.

Mr Ramani said that the HP Labs India and Media Lab Asia, the unique research programme, would collaborate on projects including one to provide wireless connectivity in rural areas.

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Local Language Technology To Bridge Digital Gap

HP's new B'lore facility to focus on 'people' products

Our Bangalore Bureau
25 FEBRUARY

HEWLETT-Packard (HP) Labs India, the newly created facility in Bangalore, will work on developing products and solutions that will put people across all segments of society in touch with technology. The lab's primary focus is to help bridge the digital gap that countries like India face. HP Labs India is among the six other such labs of HP spread across the globe.

The lab which will be 30-40 people strong in its first phase, will partner with premium local institutions like the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and IITs to build solutions that will permit low cost computing to happen, said Mr S Ramani, research director, HP Labs India, at a press meet here on Monday. HP Labs works both on high risk and speculative programmes like developing computer chips from molecules and on strategic ones like transforming computing access from stationery to mobile, he said. HP Labs has, for instance, developed a computer which will permit simultaneous link of four monitors, keyboards and mice, he said.

HP Labs India is working on developing local language technology including speech communication interfaces, communication concepts and techniques relevant to the environment of small towns and rural areas and new models for human interaction with IT equipment and software.

Debra L Dunn, VP (strategy and corporate operations), HP, at a press meet in Bangalore on Monday. *ET Photo*

Ms Debra L Dunn, vice president strategy and corporate operations, HP said that HP Labs India will look at local challenges and economic needs, and work on providing computing solutions to address them. It will work on projects for Brazil, India and South Africa, she said. HP has a software development facility in Bangalore which employs over 1,000 professionals. It also has a 400-person eBusiness centre which does transaction processing.

HP positive on merger: Sounding very positive about the HP-Compaq merger, Ms Debra L Dunn, vice president strategy and corporate operations, HP said HP's merger with Compaq will go through. HP employees across the globe are very supportive of the proposed merger, she told ET.

HP leverages on its intranet to keep in touch with its employees and constantly conducts surveys to find their perception on issues relating to the company, she added. The merger with Compaq will help HP accelerate its vision of combining intelligent appliances 'with always-on internet' to enable e-service of all kinds, said Ms Dunn.

If the merger goes through there is bound to be some overlap in areas which may necessitate some trimming of employees. With specific reference to India, she does not anticipate the need to let go of many employees. Sales and customer-facing employees will not be eliminated, she said. Organisational streamlining will have to be done and only then will the picture be clear, she added.

HP is looking at how best to further leverage the talent pool that India offers, said Ms Dunn. There is an opportunity for enhancing the work done in India, she said, referring to new avenues like business process outsourcing (BPO). "We are considering various ways to do this — either through partnerships or on our own," she added.

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HP Labs India goes Online

OUR EFE BUREAU
Bangalore

Hewlett-Packard Company has announced the inauguration of its HP Labs in India, which will be the company's seventh such industrial research lab in the world. The HP Labs in India will be a 40-man centre headquartered in Bangalore.

Other similar labs are located across the globe in the US (two labs), UK, France, Israel and Japan, besides India.

This project, which is part of the company's overall e-inclusion vision is looking at developing innovative technologies for the emerging countries. After India, the plans will be rolled out in Brazil and South Africa.

HP Labs India has also initiated an alliance with IIT-Madras. ◆

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HP launches IT lab in India

Our Bureau
BANGALORE, Feb. 25

HP has announced the launch of HP Labs India in Bangalore, which will develop low-cost innovative solutions for the local market. HP Labs India is the seventh such centre in the world and is part of the company's worldwide strategy to take IT to communities, which are "technologically excluded".

HPI will start with a 30-40 strong team and will leverage on HP's technologies to develop unique solutions for the Indian market. Technologies for the inkjet printer, the 64 bit PA RISC architecture and the LHD originated from the labs, said Dr S Ramani, Director, HPI.

Other innovations, which have yet to be productised include the four in one PC, which has four monitors, four mice and a single CPU costing significantly lesser (around Rs 8,000) than a normal PC.

The Labs focus on language technology which does not restrict the usage of IT to people who know English. One solution, for instance allows users to download Web pages in any language and listen to its transcript in the local language. Making the interface easy is also one focus area for HPI, Dr Ramani said.

Other areas of focus for HPI include access devices to provide Internet access at low cost; communication concepts and techniques relevant to the environment of small towns and rural areas in developing countries; and understanding the relevant socio economic context.

The first HP program under the e-inclusion scheme to bring IT to new users was launched in Kuppam recently. Around $ 1 million is expected to be invested in the project over the next two years.

The company is setting up a digital network to provide various services starting with the Government services such as land records, birth and death certificates and bill payments online.