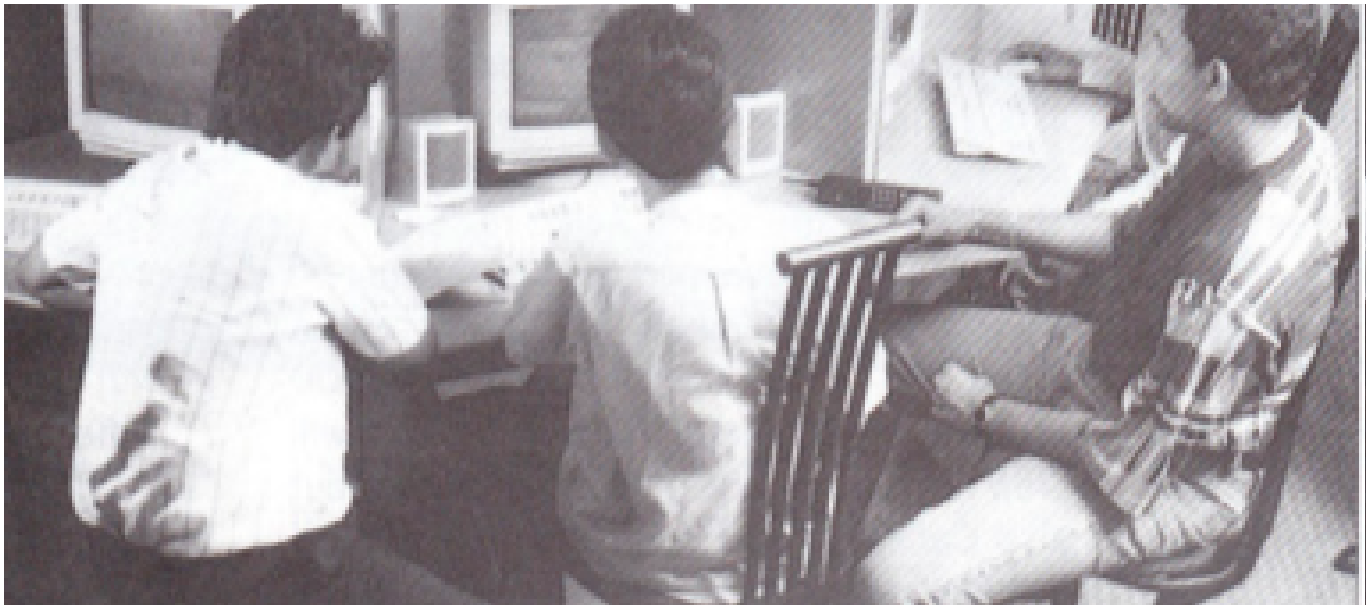


A Growing Interest in the Internet!



There are cafes in every corner of the city which provide you with the dish or the drink of your choice, yet the idea of a cafe which provides access to a wealth of information, be it on a simple thing like a university to suit your plan for higher studies or a buyer for your product or even information on a not so familiar subject like Ergonomics, is strange to most Sri Lankans.

But this is fast becoming a reality in Sri Lanka with the advent of Cyber Cafes, two

of which are already operational in Colombo. To explain further, a Cyber Cafe is generally open to the public and it provides computer and telecommunications technology in a relaxed atmosphere, over coffee or similar refreshments.


The Cyber Cafe

The network which makes all this possible is the Internet, which is considered the backbone of the information superhighway. The Internet is an international network of computers linked together by means of phone lines and fibre-optic cables.

The Cyber Cafe at 211, Union Place is the brain- child of Mrs Ratten Abdul Hussein. Having obtained her degree in Computer Science in Britain where the concept of Cyber Cafes originated not more than one and half years ago, Ratten thought it proper to get the best out of the interest in the Internet which has been growing fast in Sri Lanka recently and she started the first Cyber Cafe in Sri Lanka together with two other partners.

She says that since its opening on March 9, the Cyber Cafe has been visited by about 200 people.

The other Internet Cafe, known as the Surf Board is located in the Galadari Hotel and is a joint venture between Lanka Internet Services Ltd., and the Galadari Hotel.

“Concept of Cyber is not something easily understood in Sri Lanka, so we decided to call ourselves ‘Surf Board’ instead of Cyber Cafe because using the Internet is known as surfing,” says Vaseeharan Nesiah of the Lanka Internet who is in charge of the Galadari Internet Cafe.

The facilities available at the Cyber Cafes include accessing information in various fields on the Internet, E-mail and also video games and encyclopaedia reference.

Both cafes say most of their clientele look for information on subjects such as research material, business contacts, opportunities for higher studies etc.

Through Internet, you could access the Library of Congress or the university libraries of Oxford and Cambridge while in the E-mail, you may communicate with your friends who are connected to Internet world- wide.

If you are the type of person who receives a lot of messages through the E- mail, it is also possible to obtain a special E-mail box through a membership package which enables you to collect your messages at whatever time you want.

Thus, these Internet cafes are open to anyone looking for a place to relax, make friends or explore the wonders of the world- wide web, play games or send an E-mail message by paying an hourly rate for using the facilities. Also if you are not familiar with the use of the computers or the Internet, there are people to assist you in the Cafe.

The Cyber Cafe at Union Place also provides training courses for those who are interested in the Internet – there is a beginners course as well as a specialist training programme.

“With the advent of the Cyber Cafe (Sri Lanka), we hope to encourage more and more people to get on- line and enjoy the benefits of the Communication Age while not sacrificing the help and sociability that come with the human touch. These courses are intended to teach the basics of get- ting around and to help you out with some of the more confusing aspects” says Mrs Ratten Abdul Hussein.

They also hope to explain this programme by organizing workshops, both, for students as well as for the working people.

Vaseeharan Nesiah says that the Internet Cafe ‘Surf Board’ is like a shop window for his company, Lanka Internet which has been in operation for about a year.

He says that their main clientele is from the corporate sector and soon they hope to introduce video conferencing facilities where any person or group could engage in a conference with people outside the country.

The Cyber Cafe *at 211, Union Place, (tel: 94 1 334723) is open to the public from 1200 hrs to 2000 hrs on weekdays, and from 1000 hrs to 2200 hrs on weekends.*

The Surf Board *at Galadari Hotel, (tel: 94 1 544544) is open daily from* 1000 *hrs to midnight.*