Hackers in Bangladesh: why do they hack and how

The Daily Star looks at the hacking scene and talks to a Bangladeshi hacker

AFTER "Virus", the second word to strike terror in any computer system administrator's heart is probably "Hackers". But, the term "hacker" itself is undefined. People who gain unlawful access forcefully into other computer systems are commonly known as hackers. Another such term is "crackers". They are actually the dark cousins of the hackers. But the difference is, while the hackers meticulously examine the codes and nature of the system they want to explore, the crackers just use off-the shelf tools to get into a machine, and most often, to vandalize the system. But, when it comes to being a baddie, hackers and crackers are both alike.

So, what do the hackers think of themselves? Carolyn Meinel, uberhacker, the creative mind and author behind Happy Hacker and "The Happy Hacker" (American Eagle) book series says, "Hacking is wanting to figure out for yourself how things really work. It's knowing that there are things that aren't in the manual and that oftentimes the manuals are wrong. And, it's pursuing this information obsessively. A hacker is a wonderful, decent human being. It's more fun to create a new operating system (like Linux, created by hackers) or server (like the commonly-used Apache Web server) than trashing someone else's system". While writing her book "Uberhacker", Carolyn Meinel took a break to talk to Shewire. Here are some excerpts:

Shewire: How can hacking make the world a better place?

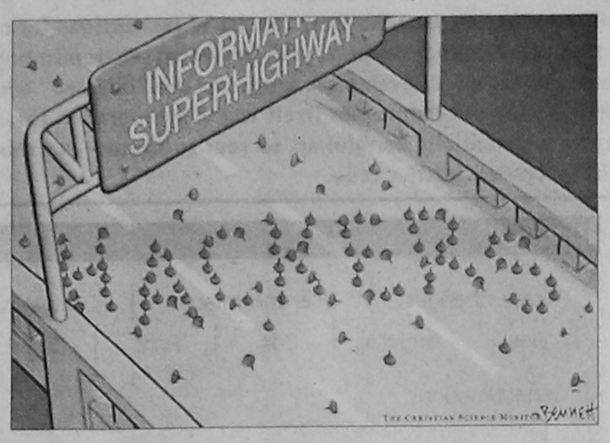
CM: Again, Linux is a prime example. It's almost as widely used as Windows NT, and I predict it will be the most common operating system in the world. A cheap, used computer with a hacker-written operating system is fast enough to be a Web server. We save people money and save old computers from the trash heap. The hacker who created PGP (Pretty Good Privacy, an e-mail security program) risked jail time so that people could communicate in private. Email was created by hackers back in the days of the Arbornet. Hackers created the Internet. Freedom of speech has spread throughout the

planet, and with hacking, everyone has a voice. Hacking is also an economic benefit. A kid in Bangladesh can turn a crappy computer into an Internet server thanks to the tools of the hackers, creating a level playing field for himself or herself. Anyone has the opportunity to learn from the world, or make money selling local products from anywhere.

Shewire: What are some of your future goals?

CM: I want to keep on writing cool books to open people's mind and heart, and I want to bring peace and prosperity to the world. I want to teach people to unleash the power they have. I want to encourage them to get together and work on neat projects. It's amazing when that happens.

It's really comforting to hear these words from a REAL hacker. But in Bangladesh, being a hacker is all about showing off. A kid, or a guy defaces the



startup screen of Win 9X, and claims that he "hacked" that file to make it look like that. Bigger losers make the computer show the startup screen of Win ME, while it's booting into Win 9X. But the real danger is not a problem of the developed countries anymore; it's knocking on our doors.

The year 2000 saw the "supposed" Millennium Bug threat, but more important to us, one real ISP hack, and an attempted hack on another one. BRAC Bdmail got hacked on the 29 of April 2000. When the users tried to send emails, the mails bounced back, and they got a mail stating that BRAC Bdmail has been hacked as a protest against the malpractice of the ISP's here. It also said that the ISP's are only bothered about the money and not about the security and service issues. The Daily Star ran a series of reports on this crime back then. And the *Bdmail* officials had mixed reactions about it. They denied that there had been any such hacking. "We had a little problem in our systems, but there wasn't any hacking," one official said. Another official requesting anonymity had said, "Probably someone was playing foul in the area where Daily Star is located." But the truth came out later, when it was hacked again within four days. This time, the hacker (or hackers) snatched the Primary and Secondary Domain Name Server (DNS) addresses. When requested by the ISP to give them back, the hackers had an interesting way to retaliate. They had set some conditions to free the domain. The hackers demandedtransparency, unity and quality customer service from the ISPs. They were also critical of the activities of ISP Forum, an organization of the local ISPs. Ultimately, the hapless ISP had to switch its DNS address to BRACBd.net from Bdmail.net.

BRAC Bdmail was not the only one. Insiders from the leading ISPs like Grameen Cybernet, ProshikaNet and ISN have unofficially acknowledged that they all have faced attacks like this, but not of this magnitude. "Such interventions are frequent here but for a lack of knowledge of general users, complaints are not so much," said an Internet expert of the Grameen Cybernet.

Experts believe the new millennium will be heralded by such sophisticated crimes since there have already been a number of instances of hacking e-mail, Internet and mobile telephones in Bangladesh.

Unauthorized use of mobiles through breaking security systems or using logic is also on the rise in Bangladesh.

In daring raids, hackers have used mobile-to-mobile phones for international or NWD calls.

"The hacking culture will in near future become part of the cultural heritage of today's kids along with Internet technology. The future looks bright for hackers in Bangladesh," said Nayeem Ahmed of BISL. "Bangladesh is simply not ready to prevent them."

Computer professionals said the country's stock exchanges and automated banks could be targeted by Bangladesh's next generation of hackers.

"The possibility of more intelligent hackers emerging is ripe since computer education is accelerating", said an IT professional.

Another "most talked-about" topic in the IT arena was the alleged hacking of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) mainframe system on March 30, 2001. Whether it could be called hacking or not, there is the fact that an unauthorized access was detected, and a certain key softwarethe market administration and control (MAC) and surveillance softwarehas been stolen by an unidentified person who also had the password to log on to the servers.

The hacker also had access to valuable data regarding the market. It was known that he gained access through a Fireball server on a WAN connection. The system administrators changed the logon passwords immediately, to prevent further access. Fortunately, trading continued for the next few days unhampered. And according to the brokers, that was the danger period. With that over, the brokers let out a sigh of relief and got on with their business-literally.

So, back to the question: why and how do the Bangladeshi hackers hack? We were fortunate to catch up with a hacker, a guy in his early twenties, to know the answers. For obvious reasons, his real handle and identity will not be revealed. We shall call him "Task Force".

The Daily Star (DS): Why do you hack?

Taskforce (TF): Well, I feel that the ISPs in Bangladesh are real money sharks. They want the users to feed them money while they don't care what they (the users) get. And with the high usage rate, I cannot stay online for as long as I want. Hence I try to steal passwords from others, so that I can use the net as much as I want.

DS: Don't you think that it is unfair for the other users?

TF: It all depends upon how you look at the scenario. From my perspective, I am quite justified in my actions. I know of people who pay thousands of takas in mobile phone bills, just to get all lovey-dovey with their darlings. They use the Internet for the same reasons: to get Emails, and to chat with the lovers. These are the kinds of people I despise. The Internet is a vast store of knowledge, and you have to explore it to know about it. It's not just another medium for communication, it's like the cave of Ali Baba. You say the enchanted words, and it opens up for you, revealing the wealth inside.

DS: So how do you do your trick?

TF: The kind of people I talked about is also the kind who knows about everything but computers. And this weakness of theirs is my advantage. The way I work is my secret, but there's one thing. As a hacker, I'm still learning. But I can be called a cracker. I use tools widely available on the net to do my things. That's all.

DS: What is your opinion about broadband service in the country?

TF: I think it is the exact way to stop password hacking here. If we can be online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, then why should we bother about lagging dial-up connections? But, the government should step into this business. It's not too much for the private sector, but the red tapes need to be removed. We need to be connected to that gigabit optic fiber line. And though it would mean more hacked PCs, users would not need to worry about their passwords. They would need to encrypt their hard drive. And the threats for the corporate systems will be the same.

Hackers or crackers, they are an elusive breed. They live in their works, not in their words. But still, the question remains: will our country be strong enough to withstand a cyber attack? With a ramshackle IT infrastructure and monopolies ruling the IT and communications sector, the future is as yet uncertain. We have seen two governments' reign during the past ten years, with much said and little done regarding the IT industry. We need trained IT professionals, not smart clerks, who can take the lead in the 22 century. The 21 is already here; there's no good talking about it. Let's face the future, not fight it.

The other side of the hacker

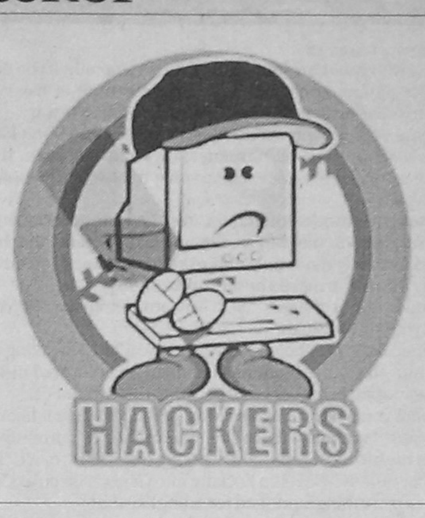
SHOEB SALEHEEN

THANKS to Hollywood, the very word "Hacker" tends to flash a stereotypic image in our minds: a guy in his late teens or early twenties, hammering away at the keyboard, in the ungodly hours of the night. He is trying to get illegal access to a FBI, CIA, or a big conglomerate database that has a wealth of secret info. It's simple, all it requires is a password. So, with his typing speed of 100 WPM, and the database allowing infinite retries, bang! He's in after only a few mistakes and couple of good guesses. After that, he downloads the entire dbase and the rest is history.

What is hacking? Hacking is not going into a system and destroying files and just messing up files in a computer. Hacking is not going into the IRC advertising and showing off what script or bot you're using. Hacking is not emailbombing, using programs, winnuking someone, using ICMP attacks on someone, or saying that you are a hacker. However, hacking *is* intruding a system and exploring the host's computer and getting whatever information you need and getting yourself out and clearing your trails without getting yourself busted. It's all for the sake of knowledge. The hacker's motto is: "Knowledge is freedom, and freedom is knowledge." Some do this to explore, find the secrets of the government, show the host of a server their problems and to help newbies out as best as they can, or to just show off their "skillz", or to get popular, or to gain friends, or even to get a girlfriend (what a pathetic reason.).

Being a hacker is not child's play. It takes the urge to read, and, mountainous amounts of patience. Reading is the first thing for being a hacker. If you haven't got the urge, then you can kiss the thought goodbye. You'll have to learn a lot about the operating systems that power the Net; WinNT, Unix, Linux, Solaris, BSD...

Programming is important to your hacking career. You cannot become a hacker without learning how to code. When you code, you make the program do what you want it to do, you tell it what to do and how you want to do it. You can make various programs such as crackers, exploits, scripts, etc. C++, Visual C, Perl as the lingo's to learn.



Some might not believe it, but hackers do obey some rules. They are:

1. Never intentionally damage *any* system.
2. Never alter any system files other than ones needed to ensure your escape from detection and your future access (Trojan Horses, Altering Logs, and the like are all necessary to your survival for as long as possible.)
3. Never leave your (or anyone else's) real name, real handle, or real phone number on any system that you access illegally. They *can* and will track you down from your handle!

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This emerging sector currently employs about 1.5 million workers, of whom 80% are women This sector transformed the once neglected destitute women to a regimented, matured and skilled human resource.

Our efforts towards eliminating child labour from the apparel industry has been highly acclaimed throughout the world. Up to now, over 10,000 former child-workers have been covered under formal and non-formal schooling programs such as - "Earn and Learn" Skill Training Programs etc.

Our entrepreneurs are innovative and dedicated. Bangladesh is an flexible, customer driven and "competitive price point" - apparel producing center of world standards. We are committed to make Bangladesh the best ethical sourcing country of the words

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Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association

BTMC Bhaban (Ground floor), 7-9 Kawran Bazar, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh.

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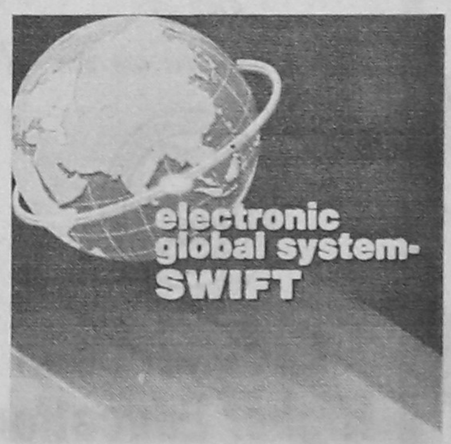

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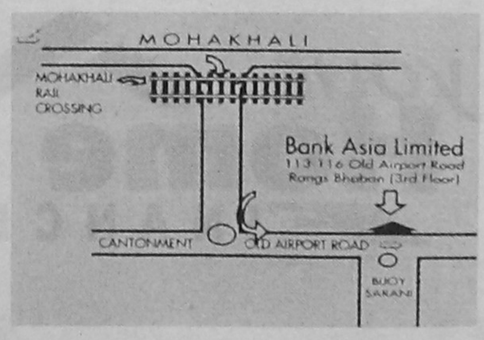

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