

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Image processing computer by Vicom, circa 1985.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Becoming an Engineer

I went to the U.S. on a scholarship as an undergraduate Physics major. After a semester, however, I was having trouble believing fundamental concepts of modern physics. So I changed my major to Electrical Engineering. Being strong in mathematics I jumped right in and earned decent grades. The switch did not cost me extra semesters. But troubles of conviction continued nagging me. I could not envision a career designing electric circuits.

Then one day a teacher told me about a nascent field of Electrical Engineering that married mathematics and engineering with photography. I took to this subject, image processing, like a fish takes to water.

After completing a Masters in it I looked for a job. This was 1983 when America was in a recession. It was very hard for a foreign student to find American employment. Sending out resumes proved fruitless so I volunteered at an engineering start-up company making an image processing computer.

I quickly found my employer had draconian policies. Everyone was required to work six days a week. Further, after working all day, we had to resume work after dinner. Our dictatorial president smoked profusely, and his secretary (whom we called The General) was always rushing into his office with a lighter to light his cigarettes. The product, being expensive, failed to sell. The company went bust. It was a blessing in disguise because I immediately landed another software job. My new company, with normal work hours, was called Vicom. It, too, made an image processing computer, but reasonably priced. Vicom was led by Dr. Bill Pratt, a founding father of image processing. I was delighted to work with him.

That was my entry to Silicon Valley. It was going to be my home for the next two and a half decades.

In 1983 the valley was a sleepy region of Northern California just waking up to the prospect of changing the world. Technologies developed in the valley were coming together – computers, software, digital pictures and sound, networking, and integrated circuits which compressed all these functions into a silicon chip – and many saw this as a source of untold power and wealth. Graduates of the best universities arrived every day for this gold rush.

Fresh arrivals were often nerdy: unkempt appearance, thick glasses, hair that needed brushing and poor interpersonal skills. However, if you hung out on Saturday afternoon at Computer Literacy bookstore or the cavernous electronics store Fry's, you saw the techies in true form, bubbling with enthusiasm like kids in a toy store.

On my second day at Vicom I got a coding assignment. I saw it as both a test and an opportunity to prove myself and wrote the software quickly. But its output (result) was unexpected. All eyes turned on me as I was the newcomer: was my software buggy? However, working virtually non-stop for two weeks, I proved my software was correct. The flaw arose from a subtle misunderstanding of the computer's hardware. Bill and I came up with an alternative approach. The output worked fine this time. We ended up writing a paper and presenting it at an international conference. (Once in a while I find someone citing this work in their thesis and feel tremendously gratified.)

The road ahead beckoned. I was on my way to becoming an engineer.

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Reform 'discriminatory, unjust' Hindu laws

Demands Bangladesh Hindu Law Reform Council

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Terming traditional Hindu laws "discriminatory and unjust", a newly formed organisation, Bangladesh Hindu Law Reform Council, yesterday demanded that the antiquated laws be reformed and codified to reflect the concerns of women, children and other marginalised communities.

They called for elimination of gender inequality from the Hindu Law of Inheritance Act, equal guardianship under the Hindu Guardianship Act, reform of the Hindu Adoption Act, introduction of the Divorce Act and compulsory marriage registration.

They placed these five-point demand at a press conference in Dhaka Reporters' Unity.

In her keynote speech, Dhaka University Associate Professor, Dr Moyna Talukdar, president of the organisation, highlighted that the traditional Hindu laws were discriminatory towards women, children, people with disabilities and the transgender community.

These laws have remained unchanged for almost a century and have not been codified,

5-POINT DEMAND

- Eliminate gender inequality from Inheritance Act
- Equal guardianship under Guardianship Act
- Reform Hindu Adoption Act
- Introduce Divorce Act
- Make marriage registration compulsory

which are hampering the rule of law, she added.

Dr Talukdar pointed out that the laws were adopted during the British rule and were not compatible with traditional Hinduism.

"Although these laws were prevalent in the name of religion, the relationship of these with the religion is nominal in reality. There are clear provisions in Hinduism that women can divorce and remarry, but women can't do this under existing Hindu laws. Husbands can marry as many times as they want, but women can't ask for divorce, or remarry," she observed.

Highlighting inequalities and inconsistencies in existing laws, she said that the Hindu Inheritance Act denies a daughter

the right to her parents' property, while the right to adopt also belongs to men, who can only adopt male children.

Pulak Ghatak, general secretary of the organisation, said the organisation had launched on September 1, with a 101-member executive council, with the objective of uniting the nation behind these demands.

"Some are opposing the demands to protect vested interests. But a majority of practitioners of the Hindu religion, women of the community, Buddhists and all humanitarians want to reform the law," he said.

Rights activists Reena Roy, Lakshmi Rani Barai and DU Associate Professor Niru Barua, among others, present at the press conference among others.

BRT to open in Dec next year

Says Quader

BSS, Gazipur

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday hoped the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) from Gazipur to Dhaka airport would be opened in the next year along with much-anticipated mega projects -- Padma Bridge, metro rail and Karnaphuli tunnel.

He said this while visiting the ongoing works of the BRT project at Tongi in the district.

Quader, also general secretary of Awami League, said the ongoing construction work of the BRT project from Gazipur to Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport is causing huge sufferings for people of Gazipur and northern districts as well.

The drainage system on either side of the road remains in a poor condition, which is exacerbating public sufferings during monsoon, he said.

"I hope people won't have to suffer during the next monsoon and vehicle movement will continue smoothly on this route," he said.

The minister said the BRT project progress stood at 63.27 percent.

"I hope it will be possible for the prime minister to inaugurate the BRT project in December next year along with much-anticipated major mega projects -- Padma Bridge, metro-rail and Bangabandhu tunnel under Karnaphuli in Chattogram," he said.



A DAY OF PROTESTS



The capital's Jatiya Press Club was buzzing with demonstrators yesterday. Clockwise, Old Dhaka residents held a human chain to point out the reported failure of Dhaka South City Corporation's mosquito control measures. To protect Chattogram city's CRB area, known as the "oxygen centre" of the city, many protested the government initiative to build a hospital there. Meanwhile, others held up placards, demanding for affordable daily produce and rations for those in need.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Death anniv of Rama Chowdhury observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The third death anniversary of freedom fighter and writer Rama Chowdhury was observed in Chattogram yesterday. Marking the day, Rama Chowdhury Smriti Sangsad in association with CRB Rakkha Sammilito Nagarik Samaj paid homage to Rama at her sculpture in the city's CRB area.

A cultural programme, in which poems and songs written by her were performed, was organised there in the afternoon. A discussion was also held. Rama died at CMCH on September 3, 1918.

She was born at Popadia village in Boalkhali, Chattogram on October 14, 1941. She graduated in Bangla from Dhaka University in 1961 and started teaching at a school.

During the war, her husband left her as she refused to leave the country. On May 13, 1971, Pakistan army men burnt down their house and raped and tortured her.

None of her relatives or neighbours gave her shelter after her house was torched. She had to live in the open with three kids and often went hungry.

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Abul Mansur Ahmad remembered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Marking the 123rd birth anniversary of renowned litterateur, journalist and politician Abul Mansur Ahmad, an event to remember his life and works was held at Nazrul Smriti Kendra's auditorium in Mymensingh's Trishal upazila yesterday afternoon.

Abul Mansur Ahmad was born at Trishal's Dhanikhola village on September 3, 1898.

He passed away in Dhaka on March 18, 1979.

Sanjibon Jubo Sangstha and Abul Mansur Ahmad Pathagar jointly organised the event.

The speakers said in an extremely turbulent period of Bengal's history, Abul Mansur Ahmad fought hard

against social prejudice and religious bigotry through his writings.

They also mentioned many of his famous books, including "Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachhar", "Atmakatha" and "Aina".

The subjects of the books are still relevant, they said.

They said Abul Mansur Ahmad remains one of the leading satirical writers of Bangla literature.

Besides, not only he had an illustrious career as a journalist but also as a politician, they added.

To observe his birth anniversary, "Abul Mansur Ahmad Janma Jayanti Utjapon Committee" was recently formed, with Mohammad Alamgir Kabir as its convener and Robayet Hossain Rosat as member secretary.

Fazle Rabby, a local Awami League leader, was chief guest at yesterday's event, with Kabir in the chair.

Mohammad Bakebillah, chairperson of the Department of Folklore at Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in Trishal; chief advisor of Abul Mansur Ahmad Library Rombhu Nath Bashfur, and its advisers Altab Hossain and Real Abdullah and principal of Badamiya Islamia Madrasa Anwar Sadat Jahangir also spoke at the event.

Abul Mansur Ahmad's grandson Raihan Farazi was also present at the commemorative programme.

The launching ceremony of "Tarunney Abul Mansur Ahmad", a book written by Emran Mahfuz was also held at the event.



With little space for his feet, a boy precariously places himself on top of a rickshaw-van, trying his best to hang on to the vehicle. His family was moving to a new house, and the little one was tasked with keeping an eye on the furniture and pillows tied to the van. But this whole arrangement of trying to keep the belongings safe is in turn putting him in danger. This photo was taken on Thursday from port city's Monsurabad area.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Expand climate relations with Bangladesh

Momen tells COP26 President Alok Sharma

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has proposed the UK to expand their bilateral climate relations especially in transferring green technology, promoting green investment, and supporting climate mitigation projects such as building embankments to protect people from sea-level rise and river erosion.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen made the proposal as he held official talk with COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma at 9 Downing Street in London Thursday. They discussed hosting a Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF)-COP26 joint event on the side lines of the COP26 in Glasgow in early November.

Momen briefed Sharma on the COP26 agenda for Bangladesh focusing particularly on loss and damage and the proposed CVF-COP26 Leaders' Summit under Bangladesh Presidency.

Sharma assured Bangladesh of the UK's continued support for its climate initiatives covering areas, including collaboration to promote green financing and investment, and technology transfer for a green future.

NEWS IN brief

Indian press club to set up 'Bangabandhu Media Centre'

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Press Club of India will set up a media centre honouring Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, marking his birth centenary.

The "Bangabandhu Media Centre" at the Press Club of India located at Raisina Road in Delhi is expected to be inaugurated by Information Minister Hasan Mahmud on September 6, according to a tweet of India Today Foreign Affairs Editor Geeta Mohan yesterday.

The media centre will have digital facilities and an exhibition hall at the first floor. The Indian High Commission in Bangladesh confirmed the news as well.

Information Minister Hasan Mahmud is visiting India from September 5 to 8.

3 held with 31 passports in Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

BGB members claimed to have detained three people along with 31 Bangladeshi passports while they were trying to enter India through Benapole International check post.

They were detained from the International Passenger Terminal on Thursday night. The detainees are Shaon Hossain Jibon (30), Anisur Rahman (41), and Abu Sayed Tushar (40). BGB members took position in front of the passenger terminal after receiving news that a large number of passports were being "smuggled" to India through the Benapole check post, said Lt Col Selim Reza, commander of 49 BGB Battalion.

13 Indian fishermen arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Coastguards arrested 13 Indian fishers and seized a trawler for their possession for illegally entering Bangladesh maritime area in Mongla on the Bay of Bengal on Thursday night, said sources at Bangladesh Coast Guard.

Fishing nets and other goods were also seized from their possession, said Lt M Mamunur Rahman, operations officer, Mongla, Coast Guard West Zone.

Mongla Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Monirul Islam said the coast guard members handed over the 13 Indian fishers to the police station. They will be produced before court soon, he added.