

TANGENTS
BY IHTISHAM KABIR

Sun Days

The year was 1989. Right after I started working at Silicon Valley’s Sun Microsystems, I was at a dinner party. My friends were inquisitive about this high-flying company. I offered two observations: every other car in the parking lot was a Porsche, BMW or Mercedes; and every other (male) engineer had a ponytail.

My comments were meant to be a joke. But after many years, it seems the joke foreshadowed two things about Sun: runaway success and iconoclastic engineering.

Sun was my fourth engineering job in Silicon Valley. Founded in 1982, Sun designed and manufactured computers based on its own hardware and software. These computers were used by professionals who needed powerful, secure and failsafe computers: engineers, scientists, architects, financial analysts etc. They were seamlessly networked together. Sun’s cryptic motto “The network is the computer” was about this seamlessness – the desktop computer, the servers behind it, and their entire network became one and the same to the computer user.

I started there as a software engineer in the engineering research and development organization. For the next fifteen years I held architectural and managerial roles there.

Technological innovation was prized: engineers held great influence over the company. They broke boundaries and pioneered technologies we take for granted today – cloud computing, fast pixel processing, web services, self-driving cars, internet of things, to name a few. Sun was easily a decade or two ahead of its time.

Today Sun is remembered most for Java, a programming language which breathed life into a static and boring Web in its infancy. Java was invented by James Gosling, a computer scientist at Sun. In the early 1990s all the pieces needed for the World Wide Web (browsers, HTML, websites, network connectivity) were in place. The first web browsers, however, very limited. Java enabled web browsers to come alive.



The Java logo on a Sun T shirt.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

What happened next was astonishing. Java became hugely popular among programmers - the *de facto* language of the World Wide Web. Being inside, I was aware of Java’s popularity but perhaps not the zeal around it. But, when I presented Java in a technical standards conference in Tokyo in 1995, I was almost mobbed by dozens of engineers and scientists from all over the world eager to learn more.

There is little doubt in my mind that Java was a big reason behind the Web’s success and subsequent ubiquity.

Sun was an arrogant company. We joked that our salesmen’s job was to sit by the fax machine and collect purchase orders as they poured in. The company’s culture was “work hard, play hard.” Outrageous April Fool’s jokes were planned and executed. An

executive’s Ferrari was dismantled and reassembled in a pond while another’s office was turned into a miniature golf course. We laughed at the news of a robbery in a massive computer server warehouse in London. It had computers from all major computer manufacturers, but the thieves had stolen only Sun’s computers and left the others behind in a mess.

Because of Sun’s fame in innovation, I was able to hire the brightest and the best engineers. Working with them was a rewarding chapter of my life.

Sun’s success eventually came to an end – largely because the market changed faster than it did. But for many, including myself, it was the shining star of their careers.

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NO HAPPY ENDING

She trafficked herself to rescue her daughter, but death threats from the traffickers continue to haunt her

SHARIFUL ISLAM

After the incredibly brave rescue efforts to retrieve her daughter from traffickers in India -- an extraordinary story that stunned people in Bangladesh and the neighbouring country alike -- the mother from the capital’s Pallabi thought her ordeals were over.

And it came as a relief when Rab members arrested three traffickers of the cross-border gang on August 16 following her complaints.

Her euphoria, however, did not last long.

The 35-year-old mother is allegedly receiving death threats from family members and associates of two leaders of the trafficking gang -- Sohagh alias “Nagin Sohagh” and his uncle Iqbal Hossain Kalu of the nearby area in Pallabi’s Baunia Bandh.

“They are threatening us with dire consequences,” she told The Daily Star recently.

She mentioned that Kalu’s sister and Sohagh’s mother, Bithy alias “Nagin Bithi”, and Kalu’s wife are issuing threats. Both Kalu and his nephew Sohagh are behind bars.

The mother alleged that she came to know from two locals, who were released from prison, that Kalu and Sohagh had told them that they would soon come out of jail and gun her and all her family members down.

To make matters worse, three masked men, equipped with knives, attacked her bus helper husband on October 25 night on his way home.

“Riding an auto-rickshaw, three people, one of whom was bulky, stopped near my husband and grabbed his shirt. Two of them were holding switchgear (knives). My husband managed to run away with part of his shirt torn,” she said.

Since then, her husband has not left the house, even for work. Scared, she along with their children mostly remain indoors too, she said.

“To rescue my daughter, I got myself trafficked to India. It was as if a turbulent storm had blown over me. Now in my own country, my troubles seem to be even more severe,” said the mother, a worker in a Jamdani Patti in Pallabi.

The mother and her daughter’s shocking tale of kidnapping, human trafficking, and the rescue efforts hogged the headlines after the pair were caught trying to re-enter Bangladesh from India in June.

Sohagh and Kalu lured the girl with promises of a good job and trafficked

her to India on January 17 through the Satkhira border. She was sold at a brothel for Tk 2.5 lakh.

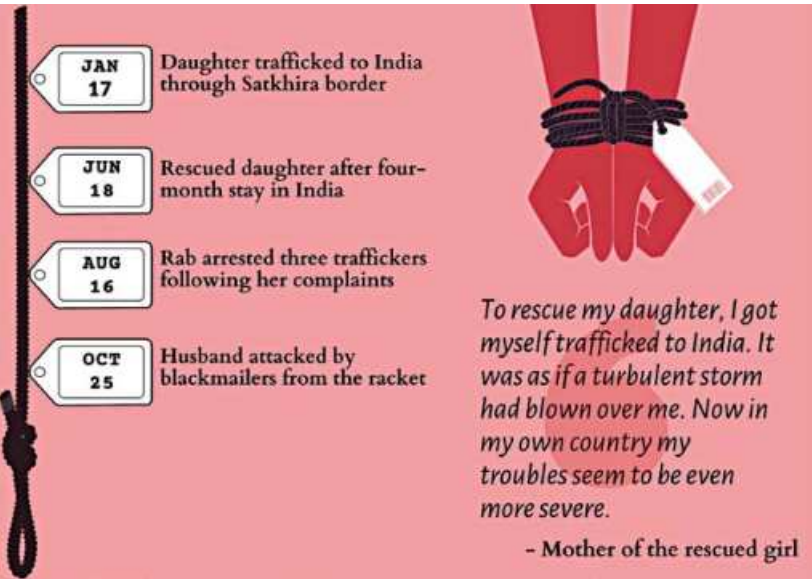
As the victim somehow managed to inform her mother about the trafficking and subsequent torture, the desperate mother willingly trafficked herself to India by the same gang around 40 days later.

The gang sold the mother at Tk 1.5 lakh. She also had to undergo sexual violence during her four-month stay in India. One day she jumped out of

“Both Sohagh and Kalu amassed a huge amount of money earned through human trafficking, muscle power and gang members. I am really scared,” she said.

Asked whether she lodged any complaint with the police, the woman said she informed the matter to an officer of Rab-4 who led the operation to arrest the four members of the human trafficking gang.

She would also lodge a general diary with Pallabi Police Station soon.



a running train while being taken to Mumbai from Delhi by the gang and managed to flee.

Finally, she reached Panjipara of Dinajpur North district in West Bengal and rescued her daughter with the help of locals on June 18.

After the return, the mother filed a case against Sohagh, Kalu, Billal Hossain, his wife Razia Khatun, another woman named Asma and eight to nine other unidentified members of the gang. Following the case, Rab arrested Sohagh, Kalu, Billal and Razia.

But now the mother and her family members are living in constant fear.

“How will we live? From where will we manage food if we do not go out for work?” she asked, in a choked voice.

The woman said they have already left their house at Shah Poran Slum fearing attacks and moved to a rented home. She did not disclose her present address when she talked to this correspondent at a neighbour’s home in Shahporan Slum at Baunia Bandh on October 31.

Rab-4 Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) Abdullah Al Mamun said she called him on October 25 night and informed him about the incident.

“She along with her daughter visited our office on Sunday and informed our senior officer and showed the torn shirt. She, however, could not recognise anyone,” Mamun told The Daily Star.

Rab-4 Company Commander Zahidul Islam said, “We have taken measures to ensure the security of her and her family members.” As part of the measures, Rab has increased its presence in the area, he added.

Getting exact data about the numbers of women and children trafficked to India is hard to come by. Following the arrests, Rab, however, claimed that Kalu along with his accomplices so far trafficked around 200 girls and women in the last eight to 10 years.

According to a 2018 BSF study, around 50,000 Bangladesh girls are trafficked to or through India every year, media reported.

Torchbearers of hope

6 receive ‘Alokito Grameen Nari Sammanana-2021’ in recognition of their contributions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamila Begum has been working as a butcher for more than two decades to raise her two children, after her husband abandoned them.

Defying all obstacles along the way, she now has a meat shop of her own in Dinajpur’s Birganj upazila, where nine workers are employed.

She was one of the six recipients of “Alokito Grameen Nari Sammanana-2021”, as recognition of their economic and leadership roles.

Voluntary organisations Alokito Shishu and Volunteer Opportunities, with support from UK Aid and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), organised the event in this regard yesterday at the capital’s Krishibid Institution Bangladesh.

At the ceremony, the six were awarded in two categories: “rural women entrepreneur” and “rural women leader”.

The “rural women leader” recipients are Khojista Begum Jonaky of Kishoreganj, Sabitri Hembrom of Rajshahi, and trans rights activist Manisha Mim.

The “rural women entrepreneur” recipients are Jamila Begum of Dinajpur, Shapla Debi Tripura of Khagrachhari, and Shirin Akhter of Nilphamari.

The event also observed International Day of Rural Women, which was on October 15.

At the ceremony, speakers said women’s unpaid work needs to be economically recognised to uphold their dignity in

society.

They said such recognition will also help reduce gender-based violence in the country.

Addressing the ceremony, MJF Gender Advisor Banasree Mitra Neogi said they have been campaigning for social and economic recognition of women’s unpaid work with the slogan “equity through dignity” since 2012.

The state needs to come forward for such recognition, she said.

Besides, other family members should share the load of household work, she added.

If women get official recognition of their different contributions, it will help reduce gender-based violence in the country, said Maasranga Television Chief News Editor Rezwan Haque.

Rezwanaul Haque Jami, head of e-commerce at Access to Information (a2i), said various opportunities for women should be made available in one platform, so women can know about them easily.

Addressing as chief guest, reserved seat lawmaker Aroma Dutta said the government has been tirelessly working to ensure equal rights for the country’s women.

Actress Shampa Reza said besides fighting for due recognition and dignity, women should build themselves to be good human beings.

Alokito Shishu Founder and Chairman Mithun Das Kabbo and MJF Programme Manager Zahed Hasan, among others, spoke at the ceremony.



Award recipients -- Khojista Begum Jonaky, Sabitri Hembrom, Manisha Mim, Jamila Begum, Shapla Debi Tripura and Shirin Akhter -- with organisers and guests at the ceremony.

PHOTO: STAR

Primates in peril

How loss of Sadhana Aushadhalaya’s business spilled over to Gendaria’s monkey population



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

A barrel of monkeys gather in feast hosted by Sadhana Aushadhalaya, a once famous ayurvedic pharmaceutical located in Gendaria in the capital’s Old Dhaka. As demand for ayurvedic medicines decrease so does the company’s capacity to accommodate the monkeys.

DIPAN NANDY

Since the early 20th century, Gendaria gained popularity in the city for hosting Sadhana Aushadhalaya -- the once-famed, now-fondly remembered ayurvedic pharmaceutical company.

There was another thing that got Gendaria’s name on the map: its population of monkeys. Interestingly, the monkeys and Sadhana had a common beginning.

The primates of Gendaria dropped anchor in the area at the beginning of its reconstruction in the early years of the last century, when the then-British rulers started developing it as a residential hub.

The monkeys were such an ever-present part of the community that, in 1914, Sadhana founder Principal Jogesh Chandra Ghosh

dedicated one of his rooms to the beloved apes. He used to feed them regularly too, and even a century later, Sadhana still keeps up this practice, albeit at a much narrower scope.

The fault is not Sadhana’s -- one thing that’s changed over these years is business itself. As demand for ayurvedic medicines has fallen, so has the company’s capacity to accommodate the monkeys.

From their number in the thousands, their population has now dwindled to a meagre 100 to 150, according to local estimates. Shortage of food is the prime reason, which compels the primates to cross Sadhana’s boundaries and plunder nearby houses in the neighbourhood.

And this is not a safe adventure. As the monkeys approach the houses, some people try to repel them with force, with stories abound of throwing hot water or

hitting them with heavy objects.

Besides this, some die by falling while jumping from roof to roof, while electrocution is a persistent cause of death as well.

Retired government official Manik Chandra Dey has been a resident of Gendaria for the last half a century. “There was once a time when they used to roam freely,” he told this correspondent recently.

“Sadhana’s medicines required molasses. Its smell drove the monkeys crazy, and they’d gather on the premises in numbers. Since Sadhana is no longer in its former glory, the monkeys aren’t doing all that well either,” he lamented.

According to the Asiatic Society’s “Encyclopedia of Dhaka”, Jogesh Chandra Ghosh -- a disciple of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray -- founded Sadhana after wrapping up his academic sojourns to Kolkata, the United

Kingdom and the United States.

Beginning life as a small establishment, it turned into a full-fledged factory by 1917. It started expanding operations soon, opening up branches and securing agencies in then East Bengal, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, China, Iran, England, the Philippines, and the US.

Tragically, during the Liberation War, Jogesh Chandra died at the hands of the Pakistani forces. This severely hampered Sadhana’s operations and triggered its gradual decline.

Although Jogesh Chandra’s successors tried to keep up the tradition, soon enough, their ration for the monkeys started falling. These days, the company can only provide 10kg of chickpeas every day, staffers said.

But of course, for all the monkeys here and those that