



RIGHTS monitor



Proper enforcement of law needed to tackle cyber crime

KONIKA BISWAS

Swapna Chowdhury, a pretty and smart girl, works in a media outlet. Everything was going well for her until some of her objectionable photos were found on a website. Of course, the pictures were shot without her permission. Naturally, she found herself in a very embarrassing situation in her own circle. After personal investigation, Swapna (not her real name) came to know that it was her ex-lover who did the dirty job. They were pretty close even a few days ago. They broke up for some good reasons and the 'gentleman' took revenge in this distasteful manner.

Let's talk about Shovon, 22, and Trina, 20, a pair, studying BBA at a private university. They are found close to each other in places like corridor, empty classrooms and car. Suddenly, it was discovered that some pictures featuring them in compromising situations had been secretly taken by mobile camera and circulated to other mobile phones. Such complaints have become too common these days and this has been the result of a love craze of the young generation. Nowadays youths are increasingly using cyber cafes as their dating places. According to newspaper reports, various types of antisocial activities take place in these cafes in the name of net browsing. For Internet browsing, there are separate cabins for pairs where their intimate moments are videoed secretly. These pictures are later made available on the Internet. A few days ago, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) raided such a cyber cafe in Mohammadpur area.

Teenager Sharna Sharif, a student of a renowned girls' college, is also a victim of cyber crime. Montu, a muscleman, had been teasing her since she was in school, forcing her father to lodge a complaint with police against him. Montu got angry after having warned by police and decided to blackmail Sharna. He took photos of Sharna on her way back home from college and posted them on an Internet porno site with her address and telephone numbers. And then indecent phone calls and letters kept coming to Sharna.



There is another example. The Principal Information Officer of a well-known private bank suddenly began receiving huge spam (unwanted) mails from unknown business entities with various offers, including access to different porno sites and selling of sex-stimulating medicines. He has to spend a quite sometime everyday in deleting these mails.

A report published on the Internet by America on Line (AOL) says it exchanges about a billion spam mails everyday. The number stands at about 13 billion in the whole world. A European Union research in 2001 showed such unwanted mails cost additional US\$ 10.6 billion in addition to helping the criminals instigate racial conflicts through the Internet.

The above-stated incidents are some of the examples of cyber crime. The 'cyber crime' is a much-talked-about matter among those who use the Internet. This is such a crime that can endanger a person's wealth and dignity. Cyber criminals are very talented and experts of computer programming. Instead of using it for a good cause, they are using this high-tech knowledge in committing crimes. It is very difficult to tackle cyber crimes. A spammer can have access to any computer with the Internet from anywhere in the world. So they can use the Internet account without the permission of the subscriber. The spammer can even steal secret information from the computer by which he or she can cheat someone and tarnish his or her image.

A cyber criminal from any corner of the world can harm millions of people. For example, a huge number of people will be affected if the transaction data of a country's stock exchange is stolen or erased. But, it is very difficult to trace a spammer or hacker, as this crime is committed electronically. It is difficult to follow a cyber criminal because he or she is not involved physically with the incident. Furthermore, they do not work from any particular area. Actually, the whole world is their workplace making the job really difficult for the law enforcers. So, it can be said that Internet-related crimes can suppress the severity of other crimes. In the face of this ongoing threat, many countries, including the USA, the UK and Japan have taken initiatives to check it. Even, Bangladesh's neighbouring countries have also begun thinking about publicity, enactment of necessary laws and their proper enforcement. In India, the proper enforcement of the law to tackle cyber crime has already begun. Pakistan is also working to address the problem.

Let's talk about the situation in Bangladesh. Compared to other countries in the world, the Internet technology has come to Bangladesh lately. But, the country does not lag behind when it comes to cyber crimes. The country's Internet system is becoming a centre of cyber crimes like stealing information, pornography etc. To address the problem, it is essential to enact a stringent law. And, after a long wait, many discussions and criticism, the Information Technology Act, 2006 was passed in parliament. IT specialists think it is possible to take effective measures against cyber crimes, including pornography, by properly enforcing this law. This law is very tough indeed. Under the law, an offender is liable to long-term imprisonment and huge fine. But, not a single case could be filed yet under this law. The law enforcing agencies, however, have launched some activities in this regard and they are hopeful of doing some good jobs pretty soon. According to advice from the National Security Intelligence (NSI), measures are being taken to keep watch on cyber cafes and internet-related activities.

How can cyber crimes be controlled in Bangladesh?

Dr Kamal Uddin Ahmed, project director of high-tech park of Bangladesh Computer Council and a cyber crime specialist, says, 'At this age of free flow of information, it is not possible to completely stop particular harmful sites from entering Bangladesh. But, the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, the internet-related regulatory body or the chief of any organization taking internet service may set up a perimeter with the server for filtering harmful sites. This measure will reduce the possibility of crimes. It is done in many developed countries. But, this is not enough.'

According to officials of some leading internet service providers, cyber crimes can be tackled quite easily. They say if the system is known the origin of a mail can be detected. Even, with the help from service providers like BSNL and Google it can be known which computer a mail came from. If they want they can close any harmful site for their subscribers. But, government orders and legal activities are needed for this.

Internet service providers are ready to assist the government in capturing cyber criminals, including providing IT training. 'If the government wants, we can certainly extend cooperation,' says Russell, Ahmed, chief operating officer of Global On Line. Cyber Cafe Owners Association general secretary Ashfaq Uddin Mamun admits antisocial activities do take place in some cyber cafes. 'In our country, there is no specific cyber cafe-related guideline. Many are conducting objectionable activities due to absence of tough legal measures.'

HUMAN RIGHTS advocacy



Equality for the disabled

MOHAMMAD SHAHIDUL ISLAM

DECEMBER 3rd was the International Day of Disabled Persons. This year the theme of the day was 'Decent work for Persons with Disabilities.' Bangladesh has signed and ratified this convention recently. Now more commonly called differently-abled persons or persons with disabilities, the world is yet to see equality being granted to this substantial segment of the population. The theme of the Day is based on the goal of full and equal enjoyment of human rights and participation in society by persons with disabilities, established by the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1982.

One of the most pressing needs for the disabled is accessibility. They have every right to gain access to facilities enjoyed by able-bodied persons, but there are many modern buildings in Bangladesh and elsewhere that have not taken the disabled into account at the design stage.

Accessibility can mean simple things, not grandiose designs. Ramps and lifts instead of stairs, railings, specially designed washrooms, visual guides for the deaf and audio signals for the visually impaired are just a few of these.

In some countries, currency notes have tactile features that help the blind identify the monetary value. Subtitles on films and telegrams help the deaf to appreciate and enjoy those creations.

Bangladesh does have an impressive healthcare and education record envied even by many developed countries. But Bangladesh does lag behind the West and even some developing countries as far as accessibility for the disabled is concerned. All political parties should have supported an initiative to ensure that accessibility laws would be strictly implemented soon or later.

We hope the authorities will succeed in this endeavour. Thereafter, no new buildings and structures should be approved if there is no provision for the disabled and even older buildings should be urged to retro-fit disabled-friendly facilities where possible.

Disability is caused by many factors. Some disabilities are birth defects, but most other disabilities are caused later in life by disease, accidents (at work or on highways) and the conflicts witnessed in many countries. But many of these disabilities can be prevented.

For example, diabetes, if untreated, can lead to blindness and/or the amputation of a leg. Road accidents too can be prevented if all drivers and road users including pedestrians observe road rules and act with discipline. Simple practices such as clearing mosquito breeding grounds can eradicate diseases such as filaria.

Nor should disabilities be thought of as permanent in this modern world. The latest artificial limbs are only second to the real thing. A Cochlear implant is virtually an inner ear that helps those with auditory difficulties to experience a whole new life.

But the most interesting development is the fusion of the mechanical aids with the body's own biological sensors - cameras that link up with the optic nerve may one day help the blind to literally see the world in a new light.

The latest advances in medicine can prevent and even cure many disabilities caused by disease. The adaptation of ordinary devices to make them disabled-friendly is another aspect - cars can be tailored to be driven by persons with disabilities.

In the meantime, we must do everything possible for the uplift of the disabled and to make them feel at home in an able-bodied persons' world.

It is in this context that the UN should be commended for addressing discrimination against the disabled in the sphere of employment. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has stressed on the goal of decent work for persons with disabilities.

The crux of his argument is that every person deserves opportunities for productive employment in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

It would indeed be a pity if a differently-abled person is denied some form of employment even when he or she possess the required qualifica-



tions and the capability to discharge the required duties despite the handicap.

The truth is that persons with disabilities are deprived of adequate employment opportunities in nearly every society. According to the UN, at least half of all disabled people in developed nations, and the vast majority of those with disabilities in developing countries, are unemployed. Most others are underemployed, or will never have full access to the labour market.

It is a vicious cycle. They encounter difficulties gaining access to an education or acquisition of employable skills. Later on, fears and prejudices about their abilities deny them the work opportunities available to others. This bleak picture should be changed to ensure justice to the disabled persons seeking work.

The best hope for the disabled in this regard is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is expected to enter into force early next year. It recognises the rights of persons with disabilities to work and employment on an equal basis with others.

The disabled need not beg for mercy and dignity. A dignified life for the disabled should no longer be a dream.

The writer is a human rights activist and freelance contributor.

LAW watch



UN Body plans to end investigation of contracts

The General Assembly is preparing to put an early end to an in-house panel that has exposed more than \$600 million in tainted United Nations contracts and is currently investigating an additional \$1 billion in suspect agreements. A budget committee of the General Assembly is scheduled to

the panel itself be investigated for the way it has treated officials and diplomats. In its effort to curtail the task force's work, Singapore succeeded in winning over the powerful Group of 77, an assemblage representing the developing world that has grown over the years to 130 nations.

vote as on a resolution that would force the panel to close down its operations in six months. The effort to scuttle the panel is not a budget matter so much as a political one, and it represents the continuing suspicion developing countries have about international intervention in their affairs.

The fight has been led by one country, Singapore, which contends that a United Nations official from there has been treated unfairly in an investigation. The resolution also recommends that

United Nations procurement officer, on fraud and bribery charges for steering \$100 million in contracts to an Indian company in exchange for cash and deals on Manhattan luxury apartments. The current argument is not an economic one. The task force is asking the committee for \$4.9 million for the whole year, an amount that would almost surely be offset by the amount of reimbursed and repatriated money the United Nations would receive from the outcomes of the task force's work. It has already identified \$25 million in misappropriated money.

The case that led Singapore to try to shut down the panel involves Andrew Toh, who has been in various forms of suspension and paid leave after questions were raised two years ago about the leasing of two Peruvian helicopters for a peacekeeping operation in East Timor. This October, Mr. Toh was cleared of charges in that case but found negligent in not properly declaring his financial assets for 2004 and 2005 and not cooperating with the task force. Mr. Toh contends that he was denied legal counsel by the task force. The task force said that Mr. Toh was not entitled to it under United Nations practices.

Singapore contends that the panel is engaging in unfair tactics in trying to preserve itself. Kevin Cheok, the country's deputy ambassador, complained to the budget committee. "Anyone who voices concern about the behavior of the procurement task force has been painted as somehow being pro-corruption or anti-reform," Mr. Cheok said.

United States prosecutors used the task force's work to help convict Sanjaya Bahel, a former

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