

Please do not Disturb

CHINTITO

You would be surprised to know how "lucky" your email ID and mobile number and car license plate and dental record serial number can be. They are all potentially big prize winners, if you were to believe the notifications that pop up on your computer or cell phone handset.

The senders of such important messages are not so good in English. It does not matter; for they are talking about money, and that is spoken in numbers. As I did and possibly many of you did before, about a month back I received this email with the first word of the sentence not beginning with a capital letter:

"your mail id has won a grant prize get back to us for more info:name, age, phone, country"

Also about the same time, I got an SMS. It read money: *"Congrats Your Mobile Number Has Been Awarded $ 3 Million USD From DTAC COMPANY Thailand, To Claim Send Your Name and Mobile No to:* dtac@dtactelecom.com"

Today I am not rich moneywise, nor am I moneywise, because I did not respond to such important provocations. We are so bad at responding. Our spouses would tell you that, yours too.

If perhaps the winning amount was to the tune of Taka three hundred or maximum three thousand, maybe, just maybe, some of us could have been lured to give the breaking news a serious thought. I mean, in a world economy where we have to buy a dozen toilet rolls every week for a year to earn a FREE soup bowl 'made in China', why should some email ID offer me a prize money that is my forefathers' collective earning in fourteen generations?

Jokes aside, one could be in grievous trouble by replying to such gibberish. Your digital privacy could be violated and your security severely breached. You could be feeling very sorry and angry and stupid. Not a happy combination under any circumstances, unless of course we are talking about someone missing the alarm, and then missing a bus/train/flight and then falling in love at the check-in counter.

An example of breach of privacy, if not security, is the easy availability of one's mobile number with different vendors in this country. Why do I say that? Sometimes I have received such unwanted and undesirable, although couth, calls from overseas numbers from which spake a Bangladeshi voice. Proof of authenticity!? They are selling car tracking systems, offering high interest rate for fixed deposits, promoting a second home in Malaysia. *Arrey bhai!* I do not have a car. Tracking, hah! I do not have any money to stock. Deposit, hah! I do not have my first home. Second home, hah!

It is a matter of great pain as with SMS after SMS they try to draw your attention and commitment to items ranging from palatial apartments to onions at x amount per kg, from one crore taka vehicles to platinum credit cards, from plasma television at 0% interest to a free second facial.

It can be downright humiliating and well, as I said, painful because the person receiving the SMS may not have enough to buy his family a square meal. Palatial apartment? What that could be, sighs a farmer in a northern district. Is plasma television a health programme, wonders a student studying for his HSC biology? I cannot have a facial done, cries in silence an acid victim at a rehabilitation centre.

If club and association elections over the past few years are any indication, the coming national elections will see a boom in the SMS business and uncalled for mobile calls. I have been pleaded to 'cust' my vote in elections of societies and organisations of which I am not even a member for lack of qualification or wealth, or simply because I belong to another gender.

A possible election scenario: At the dead of night your notification may sound to indicate the arrival of an SMS. You keep your mobile on 24x7 to keep in touch with your near and dear ones, and wonder who could that be sending a message so late. It has to be important. There you are. It reads: East or West, *omuk* Bhai is the best. He lost your vote, I know. But you lost your sleep. And you could be someone whose health condition may worsen if you do not catch the right amount of sleep. But who cares? Mobile companies are making more money.

I for one have decided not to ever purchase anything from stores which wake me up at 3AM to announce via SMS that they are open that day, I could not care. Or from the one which interrupted a delicate moment to tell me that their carrot juice is on special offer along with 5kg of mutton. For heaven's sake, leave us alone. Can't you see we are busy? Oh, I forgot, you actually cannot. ■