Please do not Disturb

In the US, under federal law, telemarketers who call phone numbers that have been listed on a nationwide do-not-call registry database are subject to fines of up to $11,000 for each violation. Telemarketing has become very popular as technology has allowed companies to pitch their wares to millions of consumers over telephone, e-mail, and now even mobile phones. Our government should make similar laws to make our phone numbers off limits to telemarketers.

Mamun Akand
Savar, Dhaka.

Tea Time

Despite the availability of so many varieties of tea, British thirst for tea has been waning. In the last decade, the volume of tea consumed in Britain has fallen more than 20 percent. Britons still drink two cups of tea for every one cup of more expensive coffee, but that is down from six cups to one in 1966. And in the recent years, the value of coffee sales surpassed tea in Britain for the first time. Tea's fading popularity is attributed to faster-paced living, a generation gap and a stodgy image. Many people these days do not want to take the time to brew tea, and even fewer will interrupt their busy days for the leisurely, aristocratic ritual of afternoon tea. To many young Britons, tea drinking apparently has a dated image, vaguely reminiscent of the "old England" stereotype that young people find irritating. Tea has an old-fashioned, dowdy image, a lot of young people think. Long gone, it seems, are the days when tea was deemed the drink of distinction, inspiring G K. Chesterton, the British writer, to proclaim, "Tea, although an Oriental, is a gentleman."



However, head for head, Britain is still a tea-sipping superpower. The average Briton drinks more than 1,200 cups of tea a year. True, the current level is down from just over 2,000 cups a year in 1958 and more than 1,600 cups in 1976. But that is still nearly 10 times the per capita tea consumption in the United States and more than four times the tea drinking in the Soviet Union.

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The fear of the Unknown

The estimated number of people living today with HIV in Asia and the Pacific Region is more than seven million, according to a WHO estimate. The number of HIV infections is equally distributed between men and women, but infection rates in young women in today's Africa are close to three times higher than those among young men, reflecting the degree to which gender inequities are driving the epidemic, as many women in developing countries lack socio-economic independence, education and access to health information and services, and have difficulty avoiding exposure to the virus.

It has been projected that Asia will contribute 40% of all new infections by the end of the decade. Increasing sex trade, use of illicit drugs, and rates of sexually transmitted infections contribute to an increased vulnerability in the region. Injection drug use and heterosexual intercourse are the primary modes of transmission, although improper blood donation practices in China and unsafe injection practices in healthcare settings in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and surrounding countries have resulted in hundreds of thousands of infections.

Treatment facilities are alarmingly inadequate. There are still real challenges to reaching the goal of universal access to treatment of HIV. In many countries including ours, the speed of progress has rapidly increased, but to achieve universal access, the international community and the government ought to do much more to translate political and financial commitments into real actions. Organisations such as Ashar Alo Society and Ashar Prodeep give hope to people who are suffering from this deadly virus.

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