

BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU



THE OVERTON WINDOW
ERESH OMAR JAMAL

WORLDWIDE, there is an increasing trend of decreasing privacy for the mass of the people that, I believe, we should all be worried about. In Britain, for example, there is now 1 camera for every 11 person.

The same increase in surveillance cameras can be seen worldwide, including in Bangladesh. And it is not just the public spaces that are being monitored constantly by heaven knows who, but the private spaces as well.

In the US, according to *The Washington Post* and others, the government "has been able to secretly spy on its citizens through their computer's webcams for several years" (FBI's search for 'Mo,' suspect in bomb threats, highlights use of malware for surveillance, December 6, 2013). The revelations of Edward Snowden, of course, not only verified these facts, but have revealed a level of government surveillance that goes way beyond.

In an interview with the BBC's 'Panorama', Snowden revealed "that government spies can legally hack into any citizen's phone to listen into what's happening in the room, view files, messages and photos, pinpoint exactly where a person is (to a much more sophisticated level than a normal GPS system), and monitor a person's every move and every conversation, even when the phone is turned off" (Edward Snowden's New Revelations Are Truly Chilling, *Zero Hedge*, October 8, 2015). Orwell's Big Brother was an amateur in comparison to the Big Brother that is watching us.

Not convinced yet? Well, do you have a Facebook account? Because again according to *International Business Times*, "Facebook is tracking which sites its 800 million users [now more] visit - even after they have signed out" (Is Facebook Tracking You Online?, November 16, 2011). And it's not only Facebook, tons of other companies "use Facebook's platform as a way to track you" as



well. And while it watches everything you do, it in fact controls what you see. In February 2012, Facebook allowed scientists to conduct a mass experiment in "psychological manipulation on 700,000 users without consent, to see if it was possible to manipulate their moods" by controlling the posts that users would see (How Facebook's news feed controls what you see and how you feel, *New Statesman*, June 30, 2014). How about that for thought-control? Similar allegations of selective censorship have been made against Facebook, by various organisations, on numerous occasions - some have already been proven to be correct.

People are already cautious about the deteriorating privacy that has now become universal. But what many don't realise is that privacy is actually correlated with freedom. Just think about it. Many countries in the world still have oppressive regimes that don't

take dissent lightly. Not only is it risky for someone under such a regime to express dissatisfaction with the state, but they cannot even do it privately, in fear of who might be watching or listening. If that's not Orwell's thought-control, I don't know what is.

Then there are the more overt forms of thought-control and censorship that is being put into place. The Digital Security Act, 2016, in Bangladesh, is a perfect example. As experts have already pointed out, the act will shrink space for intellectual discourse and promote self-censorship (Digital Security Act, 2016: How does it affect freedom of expression and the right to dissent?, *The Daily Star*, October 29). In some cases, it completely outlaws discussions on topics that are essential for determining the nation's history and even its future.

And as Orwell wrote, "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

Worryingly, it is that right of ours that is being taken away from us everywhere, both overtly and covertly. In most cases, in the authorities' own words, "to protect the people from terrorism". But as one of the founding fathers of what I believe 'was', and most people think 'is', the freest country in the world, America, Benjamin Franklin said, "Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both."

And that is exactly what has been happening, with Europe being the perfect example. Even with all its excessive surveillance, why has Europe failed so miserably to prevent so many terror attacks on its soil, if that was not the case? It is because as numerous experts have already pointed out, including the father of all whistleblowers, one of the former top men in the National Security Agency, William Binney, large scale meta-data collection of every

individual cannot be processed in time, ever, to stop terror attacks or any other crime for that matter.

Yet, governments around the world keep insisting on its population submitting data after data to government agencies. Just think about the recent bio-metric registration drive in this country. Why is it that I, as a sovereign being, have to submit my fingerprints (and all the other information) to a centralised authority just to be able to have the luxury of using a cell-phone? What if that information ever fell into the wrong hands? What if I just don't want to submit it? Do I have the freedom any longer to not do it and still use a cell-phone? No!

And who is to guarantee that all governments of this country that I will have to live under - present and future - will be benign enough not to misuse it? Or use it against me, for one reason or another, including for dissent?

There is none. And that is another part of this trend. While people are being watched everywhere, listened to, and being forced to submit their data just to have some of the most basic rights within a civilised society, governments and other centres of power are becoming more and more secretive.

Accountability and transparency is becoming nonexistent when it comes to the powerful. Indemnity laws, national security issues, etc., are being used as excuses to hide what the centres of power are actually up to, and how exactly, from the public. Meanwhile, our privacies, along with our freedoms, are slowly being taken away from us, without many of us really noticing much.

And the truth is, both of these are essential in any civilised society. Because as Justice Louis Brandeis, credited for developing the 'right to privacy' concept once said, "The most cherished right among all civilised men is the right to be left alone." And a society which does not cherish that right enough to force a reversal in the trend of increasing surveillance is clearly not civilised enough to realise why it must.

The writer is a member of the Editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

Is child protection a far cry?

MD. ABDUL QUAYYUM and OLI MD. ABDULLAH CHOWDHURY

AT the time of writing this article a five year old girl child from Parbatipurpazila of Dinajpur, was fighting for her life after being raped and tortured. We don't know whether she can come back to her normal life. Her body was burnt with cigarettes in parts and she had wounds in her private parts. Doctors were contemplating conducting a surgery as part of long-term treatment to heal the child but will it be possible for her to be healed from the mental trauma?

Abuse of children in Bangladesh has become an epidemic that we fail to prevent despite having stringent laws, trial process, public outrage etc. Children are facing violence in a range of settings including at home and in the family, in schools and in care and justice systems, in workplaces and in the communities. Children are being brutally raped or tortured with the culprits hardly ever getting punished.

A few weeks ago the nation celebrated the World Children Day and Child Rights Week 2016. Our Honourable Prime Minister urged all to build a society where there will be equal rights for all children. But where are we standing now? In a recent report titled "Children in Bangladesh-Progress Towards Commitment" launched by the Child Rights Advocacy Coalition in Bangladesh, shows, 1,095 children were killed in the last four years (2012- 2015) across the country. A number of 2,931 children died unnatural deaths alone in 2015 and shockingly 292 children were murdered. There is also an alarming rise of rape incidences; a total of 976 children were reported to be raped during the last four years in Bangladesh. Abduction of children is also increasing, as at least 572 children were kidnapped in the last four years. Bangladesh ShishuAdhikhar Forum (BSAF)



maintains data of child killings and there are some shocking revelations. A total of 40 of the 292 children killed last year and 41 of 366 victims in 2014 were murdered by their parents. This trend has been fairly consistent and protection issues are clearly neglected.

Child Marriage is another big threat to the development of Bangladesh as the country has one of the highest rates of child marriage worldwide. According to a recent estimate, 39 percent of Bangladeshi girls are married before they are 15, 74 percent before they are 18.

In a recent report of Save the Children, Bangladesh ranks 111 among 144 countries on the Girls' Opportunity Index. The report ranks the countries according to opportunities provided to ensure development of girls. Child marriage, education, teenage pregnancy, maternal deaths and number of female representatives in national government are the five indicators used to rank a country in this index while Bangladesh has been placed in the

lowest strata alongside Afghanistan. 'Child marriage' has been identified as the biggest obstacle to girls' development.

Bangladesh is one of the earliest signatories of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and it has been stated in Article 3(1) of the CRC, 'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'. Bangladesh government enacted the new Children Act in 2013 on the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and adopted the provisions for child-friendly justice and different kinds of professional responsibilities in a number of settings, such as, child help desks in the police station, separate children's court and child development centres, national child welfare board and provision of probation officers. Recently Honourable Prime Minister inaugurated

the toll free 'Child Help Line - 1098.'

Despite all these efforts, we still cannot prevent the abuse of children that we are seeing with each passing day. Law cannot function properly, if the society is not functioning properly. Ethics, values and morality have been playing a phenomenal role in child protection which requires an active participation from the individual member, family, community and society as a whole along with the processes of law. Meanwhile government needs to make sure the proper implementation of the law, Speedy Trial Tribunal for any form of violence against children.

It is encouraging to note that the government has decided to hold a speedy trial of the rape of a 5-year girl in Dinajpur. However, a comprehensive child protection mechanism must be developed involving all stakeholders including representatives from local government, judiciary, NGO and law enforcing agencies.

Would there be a combined effort to ensure every last child is protected in Bangladesh?

The writers are Senior Manager, Communication and Media, Save the Children and Senior Officer, Communication, Save the Children, respectively.

QUOTABLE Quote

ANTOINE DE SAINT EXUPÉRY
The Little Prince

Only with the heart can one see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Skating category
- New Testament book
- Accumulate
- Crack
- Clear
- German thanks
- Whirlybird
- Formerly called
- Wrath
- Secret file
- Contrived
- Tender of nursery rhyme sheep
- "Serpico" director
- Thwart
- Turned on
- Censored
- Lennon's love
- Director Howard
- Layers
- Banded quartz
- Dance parties
- Chair repairer
- Contract negotiator
- Stage direction
- Gnats, e.g.

DOWN

- Rain, informally
- Dawn goddess
- Sulky
- Sign of disuse
- Parking lot feature
- Young person
- Film's Lupino
- Canvas shoe
- Regular care
- Herd head
- Dorm sharers
- Place to get tickets
- Go down
- Caustic stuff
- "I Like Ike," e.g.
- Lease signer
- Bread buys
- Goal
- Wedding reception events
- Support
- Latest fad
- Casual shirt
- Slip

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

T	I	B	E	T	N	O	P	A	R
A	R	U	B	A	A	R	O	S	E
B	A	S	E	S	G	E	T	I	N
I	R	K	S	G	L	A	D		
P	A	N	T	E	S	A	U		
A	L	E	S	E	A	N	C	E	S
L	A	S	S	O	T	O	K	Y	O
E	S	S	E	N	C	E	D	E	W
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E	T	H	E	R	E	R	R	E	D

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