| CYBER SECURITY |

WHY SHOULD THE VAULT 7 LEAKS BOTHER YOU?

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What does the publication of 8,571 confidential documents of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), including its hacking programme, mean to an third-world normie like you, safe in your cushy corner of Dhaka where the internet connection isn't even that great? After all, you have nothing remotely criminal on your computer and have nothing to be afraid of.

While we Bangladeshis needn't get our collective knickers in a twist, the implications of the leaks are alarming: it means that our data is becoming increasingly more vulnerable, and that the state authorities put in place to preserve civilian safety have put those lives at risk. So why should the CIA's ability to hack and take control of smartphones, web browsers or operating systems bypassing anti-virus software bother you, you ask?

CIA didn't disclose vulnerabilities to companies for repair

Year Zero, the first part of the Vault 7 dump, "introduces the scope and direction of the CIA's global covert hacking programme, its malware arsenal and dozens of 'zero day' weaponised exploits against a wide range of US and European company products, including Apple's iPhone, Google's Android and Microsoft's Windows and even Samsung TVs, which are turned into covert microphones." After the NSA's illegal surveillance techniques were leaked to the public in 2013, the US government promised to disclose serious vulnerabilities, exploits, bugs or zero days for the protection of consumers and critical infrastructure. The exploits can spread around the world in seconds, and if undisclosed, put civilians at the mercy of cyber criminals and rival nations—anyone can exploit them.

Cybercrime and computer flaws are in fact two sides of the same coin. Last Saturday, Edward Snowden tweeted a study by Harvard that found vulnerabilities like those that the CIA hid from companies are increasingly abused by other hackers. A 20 percent rediscovery rate for high and critical severity bugs in 2016 basically means there is a one in five chance that a hacker can exploit the same flaws as the government.

Perhaps the CIA's nonchalance about the fates of private individuals is epitomised by how it actually paid to retain the holes in our tech devices for future use, or its adolescent side commentary in the documents: "You know we got the dankest Trojans and collection tools."

Data has been, can be, and will be misused

While no one is undermining the legitimate purposes of government surveillance, history, even the recent past, has shown that information need not even be criminal to be targeted. Internal memos of the British government show staff abusing their powers for things like finding addresses to send birthday cards and checking details of family members for personal convenience (*The Verge*, November 2016). The NSA admitted to its employees intentionally misusing the agency's surveillance power to snoop on love interests, and even random foreign women without any valid reason.

While some trespassings are not necessarily of national interest, others just about equate to racial profiling. Government records obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) found that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram had given users' data to Geofeedia, a controversial social media monitoring company that aids police surveillance programmes and targets South Asian, Muslims, Sikh and Black protestors. Geofeedia's marketing materials referred to unions and activists as "overt threats" and claimed that the product can help monitor the "Ferguson situation" (The Guardian, October 11, 2016).

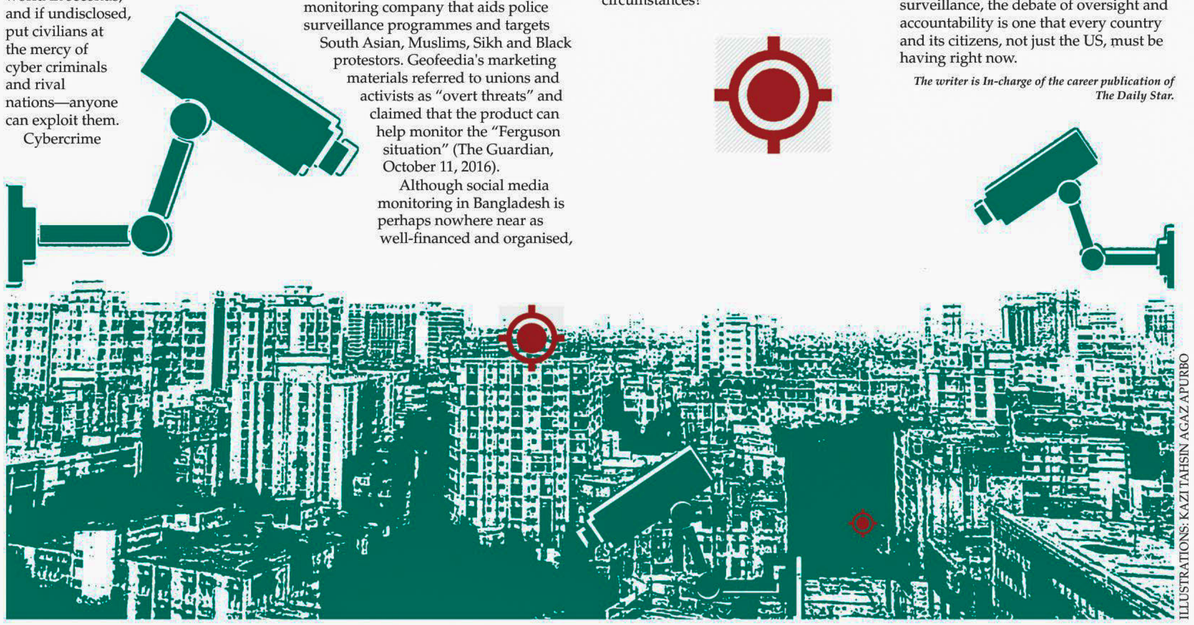
Although social media monitoring in Bangladesh is perhaps nowhere near as well-financed and organised, non-violent online activity has been known to get people thrown in jail on multiple instances. Only last May, a young woman was sent to prison in Kushtia on account of a 'blasphemous' Facebook status, whereas in 2015, a Jahangirnagar teacher was sentenced to three years in prison for a 2011 post "related to road crashes and accusing the government of awarding drivers with licenses without tests" (The Daily Star, August 12, 2015).

Indeed, these highly accessible exploits exposed by the CIA combined with the increasing surveillance of governments symbolise a threat to democratic power. With the state fattening its store of civilian information, there is a shift in the balance of power that is not in favour of the people and democracy. When you penalise a person for criticising the powers at play, have you effectively doused the flames of an all-annihilating anarchy or silenced the voice of a socially conscious citizen with a valid concern? Is it imminent crime that has been impeded or the right to have an opinion about one's own circumstances?

Far reaching consequences

In his statement on the Vault 7 leaks, Julian Assange commented, "Comparisons can be drawn between the uncontrolled proliferation of such 'weapons', which results from the inability to contain them combined with their high market value, and the global arms trade." And indeed, the leaked documents show that hacking tools and programmes have already been exported to countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK, and are fully exposed for cyber criminals to abuse for blackmail, identity theft, etc. The leaks of the Vault 7 documents aim to continue the debate and judicial reform in surveillance that was triggered after the NSA leaks. But in a country like Bangladesh, where civilians are not even aware of the extent of surveillance done upon them, where they have been ostracised and persecuted for expressing their opinions, the implications are dire—self-censorship and total uncertainty in fear of a government crackdown. In light of the legalisation and extension of rampant and mass surveillance, the debate of oversight and accountability is one that every country and its citizens, not just the US, must be having right now.

The writer is In-charge of the career publication of The Daily Star.



ILLUSTRATIONS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

| HUMOUR |

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE AND HOW TO OBTAIN A DRIVING LICENSE IN BANGLADESH

EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

There are two ways to get a driving license in Bangladesh. One involves roughly seven steps for most people.

1. You get the form, fill it up with a leaky ball-pen and submit.
2. You pay the requisite amount and wait for the day they will call you to hand over the learner's permit.
3. Then you wait some more while binge watching all dragon slaying seasons of Game of Thrones (GoT).
4. Just before that episode where everybody dies, you get a notification to sit for your verbal and practical exams.
5. Somewhere along the way you are asked to head to one of the centres for your mugshot and fingerprint. They might require a possible DNA test, a few hair samples, if you have any, and a tooth for dental records. They keep the tooth for future reference.
6. Some of these exams you fail, because they are designed in a way to keep average drivers off the road. Which makes you wonder why no one knows how to drive.
7. You come back after watching the GoT season finalé confident that you will slay the exams. Many months down the line, after having binge watched all of Netflix, you finally receive a license that sets you on a course of survival training.

Then there is the other way. We all know it. We choose to ignore it like that slightly irritating itch that we hope a few casual queries on social media will solve. This requires only two steps.

Step 1: You find a guy and throw a whole lot of money at him. Anywhere between 9-11k, depending on how well the guy is recommended or how shiny his moustache is. It's always a guy and half the time they have facial foliage. Step 2: You will have to show your face for driving tests and photographing. And you get to keep your tooth. All this takes about two months.

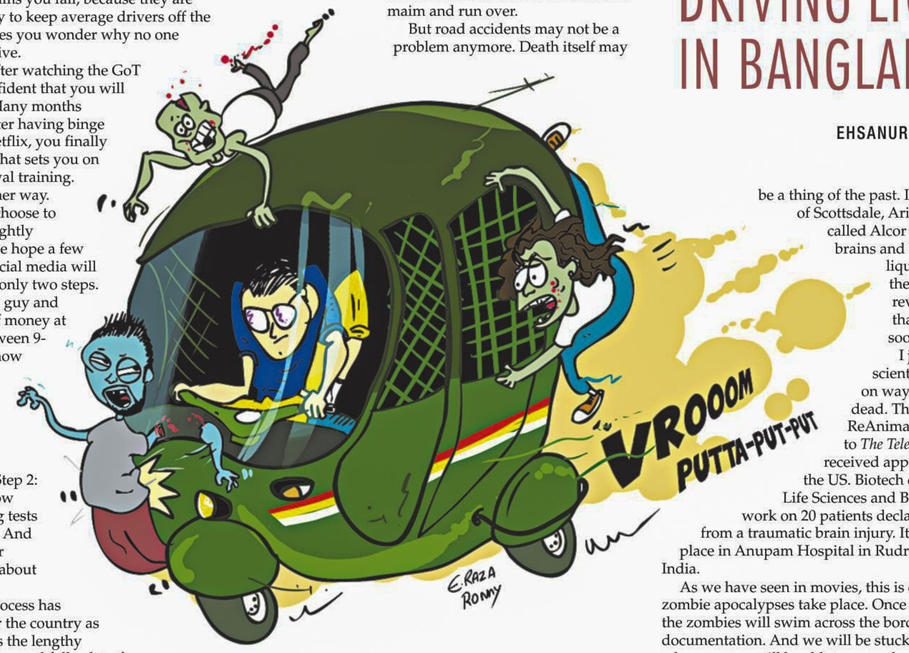
The secondary process has multiple benefits for the country as a whole. It expedites the lengthy process, saving the general folk a lot of valuable time often eaten up by traffic jams. Many young industrious and often dubious men become self-employed. Given the current trend, they could call themselves start-ups. Like most start-ups they ask for money before actually doing anything.

In the end, it is those very people contributing to the traffic jams because no one ever learned how to drive. That includes the bus driver that runs down the motorcyclist. Also the ambulance driver that eventually hits another car. And finally, the morgue appointed driver who is, most likely, also the ambulance driver. We don't have hearses, we have ambulances doing the same duty. How would any of these people in our overpopulated city keep busy if licenses were obtained the lengthy way? Perhaps this is how BRTA is keeping the economy fluid while the traffic stagnates. And when the traffic moves, death and destruction ensue. We might as well be selling licenses at every shop named Babul Traders. We can sell licenses to maim and run over.

But road accidents may not be a problem anymore. Death itself may be a thing of the past. In the arid location of Scottsdale, Arizona, a company called Alcor is storing 147 brains and bodies, frozen in liquid nitrogen, with the hopes of being revived one day. And that day may be here sooner than we think.

I just heard scientists are working on ways to reanimate the dead. The aptly named ReAnima Project, according to *The Telegraph*, has just received approval in India and the US. Biotech companies Revita Life Sciences and Bioquark Inc are to work on 20 patients declared clinically dead from a traumatic brain injury. It is also taking place in Anupam Hospital in Rudrapur, Uttarakhand India.

As we have seen in movies, this is exactly how zombie apocalypses take place. Once India is down, all the zombies will swim across the borders without any documentation. And we will be stuck in traffic jams where no one will be able to move because no one really learned how to drive. ■



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ABOUT TOWN

IHF CHARITY GALA NIGHT 2017

Organiser: It's Humanity Foundation
March 18, 6 – 9.30 pm, Lakeshore Hotel & Apartments, Gulshan– 2

LONDON 1971: UNSUNG HEROES OF THE BANGLADESH'S LIBERATION WAR

PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

Organiser: British Council Bangladesh
March 10-17, 9am – 6pm, British Council Bangladesh, Fuller Road

HERSTORY: WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS EXHIBITION

Organiser: HerStory: An Energis Initiative
March 11-24, 5 - 8pm, EMK Center, Midas Center Building, Dhanmondi