

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Unrealistic Facebook ban

It is a matter of parental control

A letter issued by the cabinet division stating students' and young peoples' studies are being hampered by excess time spent on social media network Facebook has predictably run into a storm of protest as hundreds of thousands use it for both leisure and other purposes. It is like cutting off the head to cure the headache. The response from Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has been one of pragmatism. Indeed, BTRC has pointed out rightly that such a ban will prove futile as there are applications like Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) that work their way around any attempted ban by the government. The last time the government banned Facebook, its messenger, Viber and Whatsapp for 22 days was in 2015 on national security grounds. Thankfully the government has backtracked from this unrealistic step. The ban would have caused a lot of legitimate problems. There are scores of businesses which use Facebook's large user base in Bangladesh to promote and indeed, sell their products. The last ban cost these businesses millions in lost revenue.

Our submission to the government is, do not arrogate the task of parenting to yourself. By all means launch necessary programmes for parental awareness. There are tools that allow parents or guardians to control computers accessed by children. These are readily available that restrict usage of some sites and it is here that the issues of unauthorised usage by children can be controlled. So instead of a blanket ban for six hours, efforts should be made for parents to take responsibility on how technology is used in their homes. Lastly, we should remember that it is not only children who use voice applications or Facebook; millions of our expatriate workers toiling in foreign lands keep in touch with family at home using these software, so any ban would hurt them also. We urge the government to take these into consideration before embarking on such bans in the future which will inevitably fail, but not before causing a lot of misery to a lot of people.

St Petersburg bombing

We condemn it

We deplore in the strongest possible terms the ghastly attack on a subway train in St Petersburg that has claimed 14 innocent lives. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who have been murdered in this cowardly act of terror. The recent attack in Russia has come hot on the heels of another senseless attack in London last month. Both of them bore the hallmarks of lone wolf operations, that show that terrorists without any organic link with any terror outfit is capable of inflicting great damage by easily penetrating into the heart of modern cities and its key point installations.

Faced with this new mode of perpetrating attacks, no country can now enjoy the luxury of feeling out of reach of the terrorists. While this calls for a battle that must be fought with determination, we must remind the countries and state actors of cutting across the political and ideological divide to eradicate this menace.

As these acts cannot be foretold, the emphasis needs to be put on human intelligence and quick response in case of exigencies. At the same time, security needs to be tightened. Also, the importance has to be put on assimilating the Muslim populations in the respective countries, especially where people of this faith belong to the minority. It has been witnessed that witch-hunt and alienation further breeds a sense of deprivation, which the terrorists use to rope in unsuspecting Muslims. This after all is a battle of hearts and minds, one which we cannot afford to lose.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Defence pact with India

The Prime Minister's scheduled trip to India on April 7 is crucial for Bangladesh for many reasons. The potential treaties of India's use of the Chittagong and Mongla's ports, as well as issues of Teesta water sharing, imbalance of trade, and the unabated border killings are expected to be addressed through this trip.

Under these circumstances we, the people of Bangladesh, would like to say that Bangladesh needs both India and China as close allies and development partners to boost its economy. It is unrealistic for India to expect Bangladesh to not maintain strategic relations with China, while also pursuing a close relationship with India.

India should understand that the Sheikh Hasina government has done everything possible to help India uproot insurgent forces from their northeastern states by providing transit and access to the Chittagong and Mongla ports. In return, India is yet to meet Bangladesh's much-awaited Teesta water sharing demand. Indian high officials have cited West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's delay in signing the treaty. But if she never agrees to do it, how will the matter be resolved? For how long will we wait?

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in turning down India's request for a 25 years' defence treaty, has suggested an MoU addressing several defence issues. We wholeheartedly endorse her stance. We want not only India but also China to be our closest friend and development partner. **Sajjad Hossain Juel**
University of Dhaka

THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

Development Bank (ADB) is also a co-financier to the project and had already approved a USD 167 million loan back in November 2016, to Bangladesh, to boost its natural gas production and expand transmission infrastructure.

In a press release, the AIIB said that the fund is meant to help Bangladesh's Natural

country. Guided by Jin Liquan — with his extensive experience working for the World Bank (WB) and the ADB — as President, some of the first loans approved by the AIIB last year included a USD 216.5 million loan for a National Slum Upgrading Project in Indonesia, a USD 27.5 million loan for the Dushanabe-Uzbekist and Border Road Improvement Project in Tajikistan and a USD 100 million for the Shorkot-Khanewal Section of National Motorway M-4 in Pakistan. Just last week, 13 new prospective members were approved to join the bank as well, bringing the total approved memberships to 70 states.

While the AIIB has been growing its influence, some fear the growing Chinese influence in the Asia-Pacific region with it. They are not completely wrong in the sense

neighbourhoods and region. With China increasingly investing in countries within India's close proximity, perhaps there is logic behind India's growing concerns. That, however, should not be the case. And the onus is on Indian and Chinese diplomats and high level officials to sort out the issues that time and again make the other side feel uneasy. Not on other countries. That should be clear to both. Asia is already suffering from a USD 26 trillion infrastructure gap according to a recent report titled "Meeting Asia's Infrastructure Needs" by the ADB. Take the example of Bangladesh, where public investment in infrastructure is equal to less than 2 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and the WB suggests raising it to 10 percent a year to attain the 7.5-8 percent GDP growth rate

Review, "China continues to swarm over us in South Asia. The latest sign of this has been the \$24 billion aid, loans and investment commitments made by Xi Jinping during his visit to Bangladesh in 2016". What this shows is that many still see India's interest to be in direct conflict with China's. And increased Chinese investment in Bangladesh as a sign of success for China alone, rather than one for Bangladesh too. But neither is true. As Mr. Joshi himself pointed out "A major problem in India's foreign policy is its illusion that it is somehow competing with China." But other than the reasons he pointed out, I would like to provide an alternate argument as to why that is.

That, again, is OBOR — the economic benefits of which, reaped by Eurasia and its individual countries are difficult to detail here (see Moving forward with BRICS and BIMSTEC, *The Daily Star*, October 26, 2016). Two points, however, should be mentioned. First, it is one of the biggest economic and developmental initiatives ever taken. Second, experts from all over the world and professions have already argued that it has the potential to 'reshape the globe and global trade'.

China has already indicated that it wants India to participate in the enterprise. But India's stance still remains unclear. Some analysts have, however, argued that after a poor year of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2016 and given the Trump administration's unwillingness to continue on with the 'American Pivot to Asia' policy (in which India would play a major role in 'containing' China), "there is every indication" of India "looking for a reset" in relations with China (Way to get back on board, *The Hindu*, March 23).

That can only be good news for the rest of Asia and Bangladesh. For too long have internal bickering and mistrust held back the development and progress of Asia. Among its very few success stories are the rapid development strides made by both India and China. But even they are, as of yet, incomplete.

Through cooperation alone between these two regional powers and others, can these successes, as well as new ones, be achieved and cemented. Thus, Bangladesh's policy must include working with both, but also to try and encourage and instigate cooperation between the two. At the end of the day, however, it is up to these two regional powers to decide whether to seek win-win cooperation or to accidentally stumble into some form of confrontation which can, in no way, benefit anyone looking for the betterment and benefit of the region as a whole.

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



The logo of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is seen at its headquarter building in Beijing.

PHOTO: AFP

Gas Infrastructure and Efficiency Improvement Project as gas shortages would "eventually impact Bangladesh's energy security and constrain the nation's economic growth". At a time when much has been made, both in terms of policy and rhetoric, of a potential gas crisis that may hit the country, it is very welcome news for Bangladesh, one would assume.

But the loan is also significant because of another reason — it marks the total amount of loan issued by the AIIB crossing the USD 2 billion threshold. Bangladesh has already been a recipient of some of that. Back in June 2016, the AIIB approved a loan worth USD 66 million or Tk. 517 crore for two power distribution projects to help improve transmission lines in the

that China has actively been looking to increase its influence in the region. But the real reason why, is because China is trying to get other Asian and Euro Asian countries onboard its vision for the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) stretching across Eurasia. And a most important reason for the creation of the AIIB was to fund development projects that would help turn that vision into reality, as explained previously by the Russian and Chinese Presidents.

One of the countries that have been a little sceptical about all of this is India, where Prime Minister Hasina is scheduled to visit soon. It is no secret that India and China are vying to increase their respective influences in both their immediate

that the country is aiming for, to become a middle-income nation by 2021.

So, when it comes to infrastructure development, every country in Asia should be open to investments from all channels, as long as it results in win-win outcomes. With such massive funding shortfalls, Bangladesh too needs all the foreign funds that it can get.

And when India considers Bangladesh to be such a close ally, should it not be pleased with the strides that it is making, rather than suspicious (at least regarding Bangladesh's intentions/ambitions)? As far as China's investment in Bangladesh is concerned, Manoj Joshi, a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Researcher Foundation had this to say in the *Eurasia*

Our web privacy at stake



NAHELA NOWSHIN

propaganda. This new sophisticated equipment will apparently enable the government to keep watch on internet users 24/7.

At this point, we don't have much information to work with, but whatever we know so far is disturbing enough to be concerned about the future of internet privacy in the country.

I am specifically talking about deep packet inspection (DPI) technology which is the centerpiece of this project. According to a report in this newspaper, the project will cost a whopping Tk. 150 crore of taxpayers' money and the government plans to set up 35 DPI machines, of which four are "very powerful".

First, let's get one thing straight. This isn't just another Digital Security Act or ICT Act (although they are not completely dissimilar in terms of the threat they pose to internet privacy and the fundamental right to freedom of speech). We are talking about round-the-clock internet surveillance using a type of technology (which at first may just sound like harmless technical jargon) that has the potential to infiltrate the web and log people's digital footprint on a mass scale. With DPI technology, the lines between mass surveillance and noble intentions of curbing online radicalisation and tackling cyber crimes can, and most likely will, be blurred. Perfectly law abiding citizens are at risk of being "monitored" through their personal data and internet activity.

So, what exactly is DPI? Deep packet inspection is a kind of computer network packet filtering that looks at the contents of the data being sent and re-routes it accordingly. An article titled "How deep packet inspection works" in *Wired* explains in layman terms how DPI technology functions. Computers gather the information you intend to send to someone in 'packets', which have a label on them called a 'header' which includes the type of information, sender and receiver. Normally, these data packets go unmonitored and the messages simply go from point A to point B. But when a network provider uses DPI it essentially means the contents of these packets are opened up for inspection according to a set criteria — which can be as innocuous as scanning for a virus or something more sinister such as internet censorship or eavesdropping. The criteria could include keywords that the scan picks up, and the contents are sometimes logged and re-routed if they pass the criteria.

To understand how DPI works, imagine a postal worker opening up a letter and reading it before it is sent to the intended recipient. Although DPI has many useful purposes, such as preventing illegal file sharing and

prioritising certain types of traffic that are bandwidth dependent, it is also one of the most intrusive techniques of online surveillance.

In August 2011, when Libya's uprising had already turned into a full-blown civil war, *Wall Street Journal* published an article exposing a security unit — part of a "broad surveillance apparatus" — located in the Libyan capital of Tripoli. The unit, found in the deserted compound of Gaddafi's secret police, was "lined with posters and English-language training manuals stamped with the name Amesys, a unit of French technology firm Bull SA." Amesys sold DPI technologies to Libya to help the Gaddafi regime spy on Libyan citizens and political opponents. Chinese telecom company ZTE Corp and a small South African firm by the name of VASTech also

common thread has always been the curtailment of political speech.

The post-9/11 world is one of heightened surveillance. Collecting massive amounts of computer-accessible information has become a favourite tool for governments in the war on terrorism. The terrifying reality is that snooping on emails, Facebook chats and Viber calls is extremely easy. And let's not forget that tech brokers who enable this shadowy practice are part of a booming industry. Internet surveillance is to tech companies what wartime is to arms producers and military service contractors — a propitious time for soaring profits and stock prices. As the relationship between national security and individual liberties becomes murkier, state surveillance, policing, and control gain favour globally.



provided technology to monitor operations and tap international phone calls, respectively.

The *Journal* also reported that back in 2008, Nokia Siemens Networks, a joint venture between Germany's Siemens and Finland's Nokia, installed monitoring equipment in Iran's national telecommunication network that allowed for the state to conduct DPI. (However, the *Journal* couldn't confirm whether the equipment is used specifically for DPI.) Iranian authorities reportedly unlocked the equipment's full capabilities after protests broke out around the country over the presidential election of 2009 that was marred by controversy and claimed to have been rigged by all three opposition candidates.

The use of DPI technology for dark purposes is widespread around the world — from China to USA, from Russia to Bahrain. Whether it is used in the name of blocking websites of child pornography (like Russia) or banning foreign social networking sites (like China) the

Apart from the use of DPI technology, the scale of the proposed government project and the enormity of its budget are also worrying. When you take into account that 141.5 million people in the country are internet-deprived and a paltry 13 percent of the population are internet users, a large portion of whom limit themselves to Facebook, YouTube and online games, it does not make sense why Tk 150 crore is being devoted to get this project up and running.

The implications of the Cyber Threat Detection and Response project for internet privacy and data protection are unlike anything we have ever seen before. More so because in light of the absence of internet privacy and data protection laws, the government has enormous power over the use of citizens' personal information and internet activity since nothing demarcates lawful use of user data from its unlawful use.

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