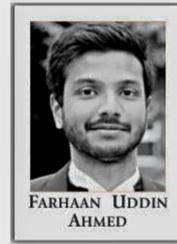


# Protecting data in Digital Bangladesh



FARHAAN UDDIN AHMED

**T**HE Digital Revolution in the latter half of the 20th century ushered in the Information Age; a period in human history featuring four key innovations: personal computers, the internet, smartphones, and data. At present, the innovation that is of the greatest significance in general is data. Data can basically be defined as any piece of information that is stored and can be transmitted electronically. Data, especially personal data, has become one of the most valuable commodities in the world. Therefore, not surprisingly, the commercial functions of four (Alphabet, Apple, Microsoft, and Facebook) of the top five most valuable companies in the world involve the collection, storage, and use of personal data. The commodification of personal data collected by these multinational corporations has increased threats of breach of privacy and misuse or abuse of private information belonging to ordinary citizens. To counter these threats, countries across the world have enacted legislations or implemented policies to protect their citizens. These measures are collectively referred to as data protection laws or policies. Fundamentally, data protection is defined as the process of protecting personal data against unauthorised access, misuse, abuse, destruction, or damage.

The Bangladesh government's vision of a 'Digital Bangladesh' has sparked a national digital revolution which is highlighted by the expansion of cellular subscriptions, digitisation of state-related activities (such as e-TIN registration, application for passport, registration for examinations, publication of results and notices, access to public information, etc.) and implementation of projects and programmes to facilitate the development of the ICT sector. To that end, the government has enacted legislations and drafted policies to guide this revolution and safeguard against abuse. The government has enacted the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, 2006, and proposed the Digital Security Act, 2016, with the aim of ensuring cyber-security and preventing cyber-crime. However, it is quite unfortunate that the government has not yet formulated any legislation or policy on data protection.

Data protection is an issue that has a

significant impact on the personal lives of every citizen. In recent times, personal information (which includes biometric data, call logs, internet browsing history, home address, salary, expenditures, credit card information, medical history, etc.) of citizens has been collected by various public and private entities like the telecommunication corporations, internet service providers, financial institutions, state agencies and government contractors. These entities that collect, store, or process personal data are referred to as data controllers or data processors. These databases that have been created or are being maintained by these entities are of great financial value. For example, a database

government actors from misusing or abusing personal data — including biometric data and medical history of citizens — that is being stored or processed by them. Therefore, it is essential that the government adopts measures to prevent misuse and abuse of the troves of personal data that have been collected by various public and private entities.

The European Union (EU) has been somewhat of a pioneer in data protection. Though one would not argue that the European approach to data protection is ideal, nonetheless, it is quite comprehensive, all-inclusive, and citizen-centred. Furthermore, the Data Protection Principles formulated by the

that the data is not transferred to a country or territory unless that country or territory ensures an adequate level of protection for the rights and freedoms of the citizen. It is highly advisable for Bangladesh to legislate and frame policies on data protection that will reflect and effectuate these principles.

Some may argue that it would be expensive and unnecessary to put in place such a data protection mechanism. However, establishing a data protection mechanism now will be more cost-effective in the long-term, considering that the digitisation and ICT sector in Bangladesh are still in their infancy (in comparison to what it is envisioned to



SOURCE: ALLEVENTS.IN

containing home addresses, salaries, and expenditures of individuals is of great value to retailers, who, based on this information, can target advertisements, gauge pricing and arbitrarily limit competition. It gets even more disturbing when a retail store begins to figure out that an individual is pregnant even before that individual herself comes to know of that fact; this is a true incident that was reported back in 2012 by *The New York Times*. To put it plainly, at present, there is no law nor any policy in place in Bangladesh that prevents telecommunication corporations, internet service providers, financial institutions, contractors and even

EU in the early nineties greatly encapsulate universal objectives of data protection. The Principles basically state that data controllers and data processors must always collect or process personal data in a manner that: (a) is fair and lawful; (b) is only for a specified purpose and strictly use it for that purpose; (c) ensures that the data is adequate, relevant, and not excessive to that specified purpose; (d) ensures that the data is accurate, up to date, and not stored for longer than is strictly necessary; (e) ensures that the data is protected against unauthorised access, unlawful use, accidental loss, destruction, or damage; and (f) ensures

be), rather than later, when expensive reconstruction of database infrastructures and management systems may be required. Moreover, the potential threats to privacy and of misuse and abuse of personal data are already quite severe considering the present circumstances. Therefore, to protect the personal data and privacy of ordinary citizens, it is essential that the government establishes a robust and effective data protection mechanism in Bangladesh.

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## Proposed Road Transport Act toothless

None of the stakeholders are happy

**A**CIVISTS and transport leaders in discussions on the proposed "Road Transport Act-2017" on May 4 took policymakers to task for the loopholes and vagueness of the proposed Act. Discussants stated that the proposed law fails to mention road safety and allows for heavy punishment for even petty offences making the entire proposition a farce.

While the punishment proposed for those involved in reckless driving that kills people is only a slap on the wrist of the errant drivers, the imprisonment provisions proposed for running a red light make one wonder at the logic of it. There is, for instance, the ludicrous provision for three years' imprisonment and Tk 300,000 fine for just one kg of overload. Are the police going to stop every truck in the country and weigh its load before fining or imprisoning truckers? The inconsistencies and impracticality of some of these provisions are mind-boggling to say the least. There is little information on how the government proposes to produce qualified drivers and make vehicles safer. Also, what about uniform fare rates to be followed by transport companies?

We have said before and we repeat our call that all stakeholders' concerns need to be addressed. The proposed Act certainly does not reflect that; and it remains a very big question whether some of the proposed provisions are implementable at all. We feel that if the proposed law is enacted in its present form will, among other things, be a huge blow to passengers' concerns and safety.

## Crisis of safe drinking water

When will this end?

**T**HE sufferings of people caused by the lack of availability of safe drinking water have gotten more acute due to the unbearable scorching heat. A report published in this paper yesterday revealed that nearly a hundred people had been queuing outside Lalbagh Shahi Mosque for almost an hour in the sweltering heat to collect drinking water from the mosque since the water supplied to their homes by Dhaka Wasa is filthy and unsafe. This includes residents of Lalbagh's Killarmor, Islambagh and Kazi Reaz Uddin Road who have been going through this ordeal for the last seven to eight years.

The executive engineer of Wasa Zone 2 said that leaks in the pipeline are to blame for the contamination of water in the area. He also said that replacement work of supply pipes in Lalbagh area will start this December.

Over the years, the media has repeatedly highlighted the countrywide water crisis—both in urban and rural areas—and ill-maintained, worn out pipes have been identified as one of the major reasons behind pathogens contaminating drinking water causing serious waterborne diseases. However, what we have also seen over and over again is the complete disregard for citizens' needs and Wasa authorities resorting to false promises to quell criticism.

To say that it is disappointing that the issue of undrinkable water has not yet been resolved would be an understatement. The government needs to recognise water as a human right and prioritise it as such. It is high time for Wasa authorities to deliver on their word and take up more initiatives to address the lack of safe drinking water which is only expected to get worse as more and more people migrate to the capital.

# The unbearable suspense

ZAFAR MASUD

**E**XPERTS, journalists as well as ordinary voters with good memories agree that the current presidential election in France is the most chaotic political bedlam they have ever witnessed in their lifetimes.

A record number of 11 candidates participated in the first round that took place on April 23; their programmes were as diverse as one could imagine. While the independent hopeful Jacques Cheminade promised to take the nation to planet Mars in order to escape overpopulation, global warming and atmosphere pollution, his closest rival

a five-day beard and dressed in a rumpled undershirt bringing to mind a poor worker who was forcefully dragged out of his bed at midnight.

Then there was the gigantic, big-voiced Jean Lassalle who speaks with a Pyrenean mountain accent and is reputedly able to converse with cows, sheep and goats. His agenda was based on turning the country into a farming enterprise that would depend entirely on its production of fruits, vegetables, grains, wines, milk, cheese and meat.

Perhaps unfortunately for France, all the five daydreamers ended up with one percent, in some cases even less, of the votes.

But the biggest earthquake ever witnessed in the French democratic

The champion of the first round is undoubtedly Emmanuel Macron with his score of 24 percent. But appearances could be deceptive as there are many reasons to believe his connection with François Hollande, the Socialist Party president for another two days, remains for Macron an ineludible handicap.

An unknown and behind-the-scenes bank employee, Macron was appointed by the French president, first as adviser then as finance minister only three years ago. Last year, he resigned the post and announced his candidature. Neither of the left nor of the right as he claims, Macron formed his own party En Marche! (Move Forward!).

Though he lost no time in becoming a pop idol (he is only 39), Macron nevertheless remains François Hollande's man; and that is no advantage given the current president's pitiful five-year record of peak unemployment rate and the worst economic performance the country has ever experienced.

Macron's abrupt public statements, though they please the suburban immigrant voters around the major cities of France including Paris, are nevertheless a shock to many people. "France has no culture of its own," he said at one point. Then, at another occasion he announced that French colonisation was "a crime against humanity". Many are of the opinion that Macron's election would only ensure the repetition of Hollande's disastrous policies for five more years.

His rival in today's final round is Marine Le Pen, daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen who is the founder of National Front and is reputed for his often histrionic attacks on the leaders of both left and right. After winning a strong position vis-à-vis Macron in the first round, she announced last week she was not representing any political party but was a candidate of all the people of France.

Le Pen's agenda includes freeing France from the dictatorial grip of the European Union bureaucracy and re-establishing the country's borders that were rendered defunct by the Schengen Agreement. "Great Britain is today out of the European Union and it is not a ruined country as predicted by many," she says.

(By the way, this may sound a bit off

*The biggest earthquake ever witnessed in the French democratic history was a total wipeout of the traditional right and left parties. No conservative, socialist or communist candidate is present in the second round today!*

the subject but will interest Pakistani readers just the same that the first man to take the Brexit initiative was Imran Khan's late father-in-law Sir James Goldsmith who had founded the Referendum Party in 1994. He died three years later, rather prematurely at age 64, without witnessing the success of his movement).

To come back to the French presidential election, the climax of the contradictions between the two finalists was a face-to-face television debate that lasted nearly three hours earlier this week. Once again, old-fashioned restraints and reciprocal politeness were set aside as the rivals in turns scathingly mocked each other.

At one point, when Emmanuel Macron made a somewhat astringent reference to the risk of having a woman as the president of France, Marine Le Pen promptly retorted: "My poor friend, you do not have much of a choice. Either you will have me as president or, in case you are elected, you will be receiving your orders from Angela Merkel!"

Next morning's newspapers carried the details of the encounter and a majority of them proclaimed that Macron was heading towards an easy victory. But then, opinion polls had also announced a clean sweep by Hillary Clinton only a few months ago.

The unbearable suspense of May 7 will end exactly at 11 pm, Pakistan Standard Time!

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Nathalie Arthaud appeared convinced that a Marxist revolution would immediately follow, once she was in power.

Next in the line was François Asselineau who apparently remembers by heart the entire European Union constitution, clause by clause, word by word. He repeatedly spoke of an immediate exit, or Frexit if you prefer, as soon as he entered the Elysée Palace.

Another candidate who pledged an imminent blow-out of the capitalist hegemony was Philippe Poutou. He appeared in a number of TV debates with

history was a total wipeout of the traditional right and left parties. No conservative, socialist or communist candidate is present in the second round today!

While the score of the Republican Party's François Fillon, once prime minister of France and peremptorily considered a winner by successive opinion polls, remained stuck around the modest figure of 19 percent, his supposedly biggest rival, the Socialist Party representative Benoit Hamon painfully managed to amass less than six percent of the votes.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Children exposed to hazards

Child labour refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives them of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend school regularly, and any work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally harmful. Bangladesh has seen a phenomenal rise in child labour in recent years. Children are found working in affluent houses as domestic help, or at shops, hotels and restaurants, garages, etc. They are often exposed to health hazards on the job.

We need more social awareness programmes to highlight the dangers of these jobs that violate child labour laws. Most underprivileged children don't even know their own rights.

Children from poor families should be brought under vocational educational programmes so that they can be engaged in income-generating activities later in life. Bangladesh must ratify ILO Convention 138, which bans the employment of children under a certain minimum age. Collective efforts are needed to stop child labour. The state must play a proactive role in this cause.

Zubair Khaled Huq  
 By email