

Why you should care about net neutrality

RIZWANUR ROB

OVER the past year or so, you have probably heard that a contentious "fight" about net-neutrality was taking place in the US, and you might have thought—"why should I care?" If you are a person who uses the internet for more than five minutes a day, you should care because it may soon affect you. Whether it is checking your emails while stuck in Dhaka traffic, scrolling through Facebook and Instagram posts on your phone, or watching YouTube or Netflix videos at home—all these are likely to be affected by how this issue plays out in the US.

It is very hard to describe the complexities of the overlapping structures that form the internet, but a useful analogy would be a complicated system of water pipes. You might only be consuming the water (data and services) but if there is only one pipe that delivers to you, you do not want someone else deciding what, how much, or when the water will be delivered. Net neutrality rules are a guarantee that others cannot decide this for you. These rules ensure that Nafisa from Dhaka visiting google.com using a specific Internet Service Provider (ISP) will not be treated any differently than Wahid browsing yahoo.com while using a different ISP during his weekend trip in Chittagong. It means that your ISP cannot choose to make a deal with Amazon Video to allow them to stream high-definition (HD) video to your TV and computers, but not allow you to watch Netflix in HD. Thus ultimately net neutrality is about fairness and equality on the internet.

What would a world without net neutrality look like? One such scenario would be where certain websites and services partner with some internet providers and offer their own products at a cheaper rate, or at faster speeds while slowing down their competition, or even charging them a higher fee. An extreme version might even see an internet provider completely blocking access to a website like Netflix because it supports a different competitor like YouTube. This sounds horribly unfair does it not? If this sounds familiar, it is because parts of this horror story are already playing out in different countries around the world. Facebook's Free Basics service allows Robi subscribers to browse Facebook for free. Using Facebook's Free Basics or its Internet.org service

gives you a walled version of the internet in several countries. It is a version of the internet that Facebook controls—where it sets and enforces rules as it chooses. Google has plans for its own version. Some people may argue that there is nothing wrong here—the underserved are getting access to the internet for free. Is that really the case? Or is it Facebook and Google ensuring that people use only their services—a race to capture the next billion users? If this was really about corporate social responsibility (CSR) and helping the poor and the underserved, then these corpora-

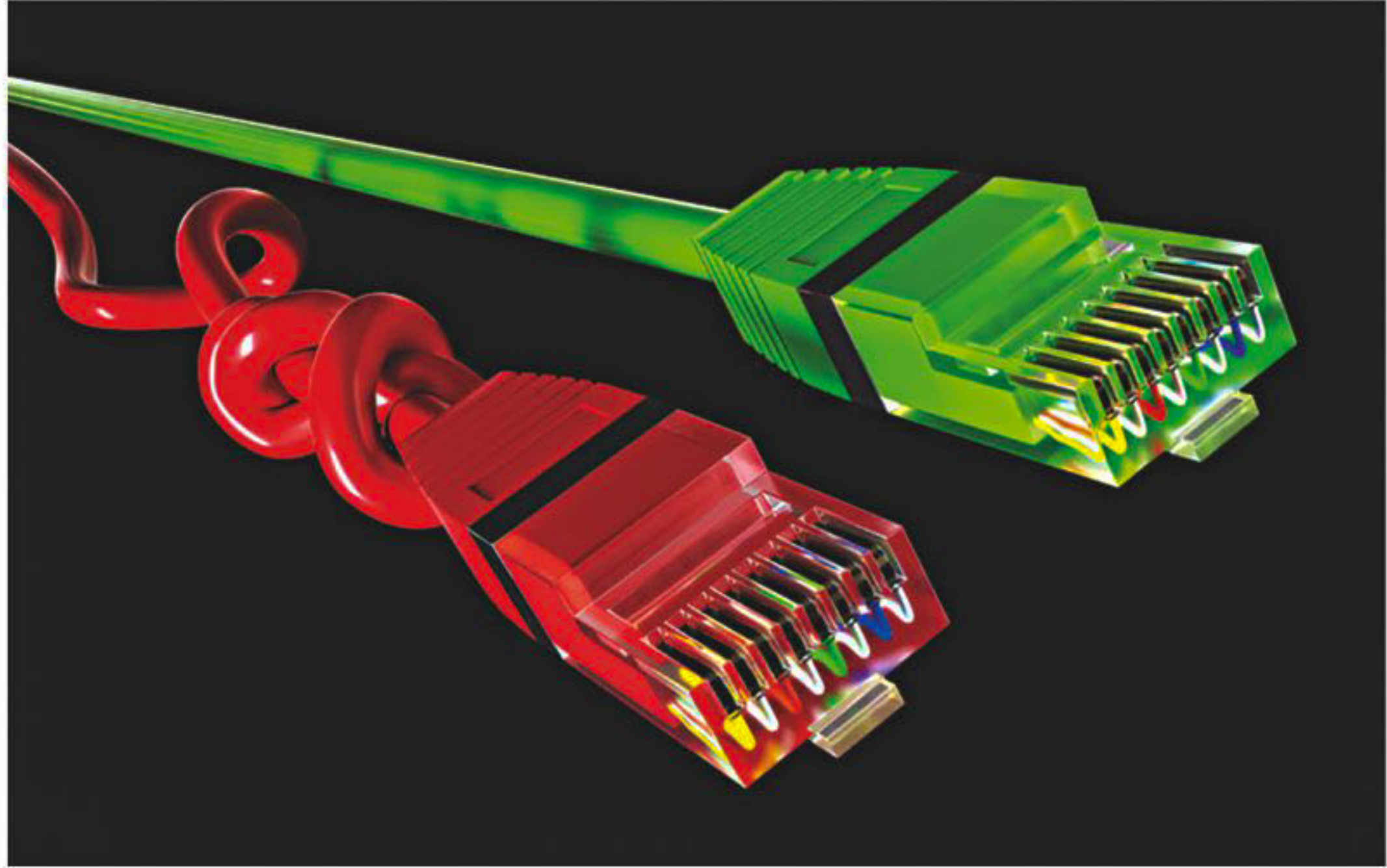
panies who might want to sell you their products. It means a loss of control of your own personal data, your sense of privacy.

As an economist, I can also tell you that "efficiency" and "fairness" don't always go hand in hand. In economic parlance, the argument for removing net neutrality rules is that it will improve efficiency. The argument that is offered goes along these lines: removing rules and regulations will allow companies to innovate, come up with new ideas—like Facebook's Free Basics—and make the world better. This ignores the notion that some

Talking about net neutrality is important, because it does not exist in Bangladesh. There are no laws regulating ISPs asking them to treat all data equally. ISPs are more than welcome to pick winners and losers, or even coerce payments from others. This might not be important at this very moment, but it may soon become significantly so. ISPs already have broad powers to restrict access to websites under the directive of courts and governments and have done so in the past. We as consumers have little recourse but to protest loudly against such moves. Yet it is important to discuss and inform public opinion so that our leaders start taking consumer rights and concerns into consideration. We need strong laws and guidelines to ensure that our citizens are not harmed. We have made significant leaps in providing access to the general public. The government's broad initiatives under Digital Bangladesh and Vision 2021 have resulted in more than 73 million internet users and 21 million people on social media as of June 2017 according to internetworldstats.com. It is important that we do not forget to protect them too.

Which brings me to this following anecdote and my current headache. I often find it interesting to run internet speed tests whenever I feel things are not working as fast as they should. So back home in Dhaka for a brief two week break in the midst of the wedding season, I took a few minutes to run a few speed tests to ensure that a certain unnamed ISP was sticking to its claim of offering me a dedicated 8 Mbps connection. Netflix's own fast.com (great because it has a memorable name and thus easy to recommend to others) which I consider to be the gold standard informed me that I was getting speeds up to 6.9 Mbps. Considering I have a complicated situation with three different routers and an extender set up as the "network", I found the results reasonable. Running a test on speedtest.net of course made me question the trustworthiness of my ISP. Consistent results of 25-28Mbps. Four times what fast.com says. I wonder why they are so different? An attempt to game the system perhaps?

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tions would support and subsidise the whole open internet, and not just their own services.

I am an economist who works on applied microeconomic issues. I deal with how markets work, who pays what, and why. I can tell you that on the internet, if you are getting something for free now, you will either be paying in the future or you are the product. What does that entail? It means that these companies collect and aggregate your personal information and then send targeted ads to you. It means minute details of your likes and dislikes are stored and then sold on to com-

panies who might want to sell you their products. It means a loss of control of your own personal data, your sense of privacy. As an economist, I can also tell you that "efficiency" and "fairness" don't always go hand in hand. In economic parlance, the argument for removing net neutrality rules is that it will improve efficiency. The argument that is offered goes along these lines: removing rules and regulations will allow companies to innovate, come up with new ideas—like Facebook's Free Basics—and make the world better. This ignores the notion that some

Remembering Justice Murshed

M TAMIJUDDIN AHMED

THE late Chief Justice Syed Mahbub Murshed was arguably one of the most distinguished constitutional lawyers and eminent jurists that our South Asian sub-continent has ever seen. He was indisputably, our nation's most articulate advocate of human rights and the most eloquent civil libertarian. Not only did Murshed discharge his duty to the nation with outstanding competence, he also set a high standard for all professionals to emulate.

Murshed was a person of discipline and built up his brilliant academic career which culminated in his becoming a barrister from the honourable society of Lincoln's Inn in London. However, despite Murshed's aristocratic background, he had his roots with the people. He always tried to systematise within the realm of the rule of law to ensure more adherence to the fundamental rights of citizens.

In late 1954, he was elevated to the bench of the High Court. As a judge Murshed remained committed to his life-long ideals of liberty, justice and excellence. His judicial pronouncements delivered while sitting on the bench of the Dhaka High Court and the Supreme Court of Pakistan briefly as an ad-hoc judge in 1962 plus as Chief Justice in early 1964, reflected the ideals of judicial independence. Some of his judgments created constitutional history and international acclaim.

Justice Murshed remained unique and exemplary. The power of public understanding and knowledgeable oratory at public functions, were characteristic of his personality. In many ways he was the aristocrat in the finest sense of the term. He was firmly committed to the ideals of



Syed Mahbub Murshed (January 11, 1911 – April 3, 1979).

PHOTO: COLLECTED

democracy, by upholding the cause of justice even against extreme odds.

Murshed fearlessly upheld the rule of law without fear or favour. Mentioning, what some other jurists said about him, the late Justice Abu Sayed Chowdhury describes Justice Murshed's courage-cum-boldness and wisdom as a worthy successor of his uncle Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Haque. Justice Abdur Rahman Choudhury in his tribute called Murshed a giant among men. Late Justice KM Sobhan mentions "In life and in death Murshed was a king without the trappings of a monarch." The great HS Suhrawardy termed

Murshed "as an unfailing protector of civil liberties."

Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed observed "that when true history of the 20th century be written a period might as well be called the age of Murshed."

When our country was under Pakistan rule, when those who governed our country from a thousand miles away were determined to impose their culture upon us and erase ours, it was Murshed from the Bengali intellectuals who stood up to fight for our age-old traditions and cultural identity. It will always be remembered that in 1961, he was one of those who organised the "Tagore centennial celebrations" and this was in defiance of the then Pakistani rulers. When the great tide of nationalism which swept the country in the 1970s, originated from ripples that were noticeable in the fifties and sixties the distinguished person who figured prominently in this process was Murshed. The stirrings of a nation in the making in the late 1950s and 60s found eloquent expression and these were reflected in the manifold speeches, judgments' and writing of Justice Murshed. He became among the most articulate spokesmen of Bengali nationalism.

In his earlier professional life as a lawyer despite preoccupations, Murshed found time to write and publicly speak with brilliance and participate in political, social and humanitarian activities. His article "Quo Vadis Quid-e-Azam", where he criticised the policies of Jinnah in defence of his uncle Fazlul Haque appeared in *The Statesman* in Calcutta and *The Telegraph* in London in 1942 and created a huge stir. During the famine in 1943 and the communal riots later in 1946, Murshed worked actively founding the Anjuman Mofidul Islam. Deep down,

It was Murshed's protest resignation as chief justice that made the intelligentsia in the country find him an acceptable presidential candidate against Ayub. During our war of liberation, his refusal to collaborate with the ruling military-junta is also recorded by historians.

Murshed was a Sufi and a liberal who spoke of tolerance which was against any form of communalism. During the communal violence that shook the sub-continent in the partition year, he was one of those men responsible for setting into motion, the process that culminated in the Liakat-Nehru pact. Murshed was also drawn into the language movement.

In 1966, Mazaharul Haq Baki the then President of the Chattr League records that no one except Chief Justice Murshed dared to accept to be the chief guest at their annual conference.

At a critical time in our history, when President Field Marshal Ayub Khan was about to celebrate his so-called decade of reforms and the Agartala Conspiracy case was being framed, Murshed resigned from the post of Chief Justice to join the masses in the fight for democracy. Among the things that he did was to help organise the defence of the Agartala Conspiracy case. Subsequent to this, Murshed entered politics directly, which added momentum to the anti-Ayub movement.

Murshed's joining the mass movement added momentum to the struggle. Subsequently, the movement forced the Ayub regime to withdraw the Agartala Conspiracy case and release SK Mujib and all co-accused unconditionally.

Perhaps what is most significant was that during the round-table conference while Ayub was virtually on his knees and in addition, with the dissolution of the one unit in West Pakistan, the demand for one man one vote became a reality. Prior to this, in the then Pakistan National Assembly, there was parity of 150 seats each for East and West Pakistan. As the "one man one vote" proposal was accepted, 169 seats out of 300 came to East Pakistan for the next national election.

It was Murshed's protest resignation as chief justice that made the intelligentsia in the country find him an acceptable presidential candidate against Ayub. During our war of liberation, his refusal to collaborate with the ruling military-junta is also recorded by historians. Hence, in fact it can be said that Justice Murshed is among the keeper of our national conscience.

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QUOTABLE

Quote

THOMAS CARLYLE

Scottish philosopher and writer (1795-1881)

Go as far as you can see. When you get there, you'll be able to see farther.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1"Beat it!"

6West Pointer

11Ancient

12Tara family name

13Spring sign

14Inspid

15Be generous

17Purpose

18Count start

19Drinks

22Bankroll

23Brokers' numbers

24Humdingers

25Warning

27Chinesetea

30Corpus –

31Hurried flight

32John, to Ringo

33Consider the same

35Curacao's neighbor

38Road reversal

39Wall worker

40Moved slowly

41Sacked out

42Throws off

DOWN

1Follow secretly

2Solar halo

3Came down

4Open space

5Magical auras

6Corn core

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42

1-13

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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O N T O P

H O E

S E N D

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I W I S H

P U R E E

S P E A R

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT