

The Dark Web: A nightmare possibility

RAMISA ROB

THE Internet may, at first, seem like a safe haven as it makes it easier for all of us to share the most personal information. But it's really a double-edged sword, where the opportunity cost of convenience is cascading risks of crimes; around 400 children are victimised by cyber-crime per day in Bangladesh, as reported by human rights NGO, Ain O Salish Kendra, on May 19 this year. Put another way, the advancement of the legitimate World Wide Web has also led the illegitimate world of unethical "hackers" to mushroom on the other side. Since more people are increasingly using the internet (BTRC reported in 2018, that around 90 million people in Bangladesh use it), we need to thoroughly understand this electronic universe, spotlighting the cautionary tales.

To begin, the World Wide Web is divided into three layers; most of us "surf" only on the "Surface Web" (the one we see when we use Google). Everything on the Internet that cannot be found using public search engines is tucked in a private repository "Deep Web," estimated to be around 400 to 500 times larger than the Surface. The chunk of cyber-assisted offline crimes (where victimisation isn't merely virtual but rather in-person) cooks in the smaller (and shadier) subset of Deep Web called the "Dark Web"—also a treasure trove for illegal activities, such as trading all drugs imaginable, malware markets, guns, child pornography, and chillingly, hit-men hiring networks. These aspects should be enough for law enforcement agencies, especially counter-terrorism forces, to seriously keep an eye out on what's happening on the Dark Web. To shrug this off would be a grave mistake. A 2018 report by a foreign policy think tank, Henry Jackson Society, entitled "Terror in the Dark," revealed the growing usage of Dark Net by terror groups to recruit militants.



ILLUSTRATION: RAMISA ROB

the mysterious Dark Web may seem like it requires top-secret codes to enter. But it's simply done by using a special software, TOR browser (The Onion Router), well-known for its ability to prevent online surveillance, which can be downloaded in a matter of 5 minutes without a fee. And this means vulnerable youth, face no issues finding their way to this dangerous land. But here's the paradox: all websites on the dark web use .onion—instead of .com—encrypted to circumvent maximum user anonymity, and in turn privacy. So the dark web is by nature, more secure for everyone. And that's a writhing-triggering drug for hackers, because it means they can commit crimes and the Internet will protect their worst interests.

Interestingly, since 2014, Facebook has had its own onion server, adopted for the added "security" that comes from hiding your IP address and location. If you open Facebook

from Bangladesh using "facebookcorewwi.onion"—it can appear that you're in Sweden. Sounds like a great way to keep out the stalkers right? It's ironically ear-candy for hackers, which inflates their self-confidence to a bullet-proof status. One such criminal, from Bangladesh—or perhaps a group of them but let's pretend he's one person and call him "Z"—has been chronically victimising many young adults with invincible crutches in the Dark Web.

Deploying a method called "phishing," Z sends a malicious link to female victims, that opens a masquerade Facebook page, and then as the real account owners are about to login, he uses a "python script" to hijack the personal information and snatch control of the accounts. After phishing into the profile of A, a 17-year-old girl, who was one of his victims—Z entered her Facebook messenger chat thread with her boyfriend, B, also 17, and

began blackmailing him (in Bangla) to send Tk 10,000 by 9pm. Or else, he threatened to publicly post—on A's Facebook page, where her family and teachers could see—their intimate photos and videos which he had retrieved from the media shared between the two. Z quickly switched to messaging B on WhatsApp and the number he was using had a Latvian area code, meaning it was a "proxy" sim, that can be bought from the Dark Web to mask one's footprints.

He even provided precedence, in screenshots, of the damage he had done earlier to a previous female victim who failed to meet his demands. This form of cybercrime where the perpetrator threatens to release sexual images, is called "sextortion." As the clock ticked, Z started posting photos in "Part 1", shortly following with "Part 2", but he could still not be tracked, since the IP address of this too was obscured, using the Facebook onion server. Now, in this situation, what would these two teenagers have done? The correct response is to seek immediate aid, which they did by submitting a complaint to BTRC and calling their victim helpline, then calling 999. But not a single person picked up.

It gets worse though. B even went to Mirpur thana, where officers refused to even listen to the whole situation, let alone solve the problem. Thanks to the lacklustre system, around 10pm, the teenagers had to desperately manage cash, and fulfil Z's wishes through a bKash agent. And when B returned home, he was scolded by his parents, who had not the slightest clue that their son was being harassed, abominably. Md Saimum Reza Talukder, lawyer in Bangladesh Cyber & Legal Center (BCLC), informed me that in almost 80 percent of the cases he dealt with, victims didn't tell their families, and also didn't want to file any complaint to police. Though the adults—parents and police—in this case, didn't know how to react, the teenagers handled the perilous predicament, in the best way they could.

Yet, while victim-blaming might be the

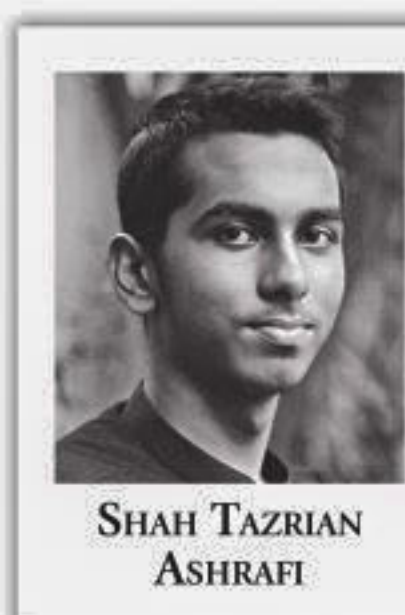
reason why we cannot address these issues, it's a pervasive cultural transgression itself that won't be solved anytime soon, and this "hacker epidemic" is not going to wait for it to stop. Sadly, for the time being at least, prevention is the only available cure. So it would be wise for young adults to refrain from leaving personal information on the net—in chat media files—for their own safety. On the other hand, in one of the cases BCLC received, a young boy in class 8 turned out to be a perpetrator, and that's what adults must start countering. But most parents of children I know, would interpret these horrendous stories to mean "the internet is poison," and then restrict kids from using it. Not only would that be unrealistic, it's also not even a valid conviction. Internet is not "unsafe" in design; the onion sites with its shield of encryptions is "safe," but that feature is exploited by vile individuals. So the technology is not the problem. It's the way certain human beings use it. And this is why we must break the silence over what goes on in the Dark Web.

One answer to this growing issue is Open Source Intelligence (OSINT)—a recent phenomenon used by security professionals to collect and analyse public information from various sources, and to track the social media handles of criminals on the dark web. Yet, that allows nefarious parasites to also access OSINT software to find your information from your phone numbers, birthdates, ID card images, posted on your social media handles, and then use that to harass you. Crime prevention pathways can be subverted to commit crimes, just like legal routes can be taken to harm people. This full circle is surely terrifying, but the point here is to highlight that dangerous things do happen, and pernicious communities do exist. And only with that awareness can we really do something about it.

*The names have been changed to protect privacy.

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Banning zoos, 'rewilding', and tackling climate change



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As a six-year-old obsessed and fascinated with the wild, I remember asking my mother once: "How do tigers protect the environment?" She said, "They keep the poachers and tree-cutters away. The more the tigers, the less the deforestation."

We all remember the plight of a lion in Dhaka zoo. The image of its debilitated condition made rounds on social media, pulling our eyes out to focus on an important issue—the plight of captive animals. The four-year-old lion, Heera, hasn't apparently eaten anything for days.

As per the experts, the zoo is in urgent need of restructuring in every sector. Experts say that animals' mental health is as important as their physical health. They sometimes don't eat or act natural when under strain. Although restructuring of the zoo is a temporary means of relief, it certainly isn't a permanent solution. The permanent solution would definitely be freeing the animals, rehabilitating them.

Surely, animals don't deserve to rot in prison cells while the visitors take great interest in their movements, while the zookeepers steal their food and make them starve to fill the zookeepers' own stomachs (as seen in a video report by Somoy TV). They don't deserve to get plucked out of their original habitats to be put inside cages for entertainment and education. Any entertainment that causes severe damage to the environment and our fellow living beings isn't entertainment. Any education that causes captivity of free beings isn't education.

Both can be achieved by other means, but by enslavement of animals.

In this fiery, CO2-choked age that is hurtling towards a climate catastrophe, we need to give importance to the concept of banning zoos and rewilding instead. Because that is one of the many radical ways we can try to recover this damaged planet of ours.

In a TED talk, an acclaimed journalist of *The Guardian*, George Monbiot, sings praises of the term "rewilding". He presents before the audience remarkable impacts that "rewilding" has had on the environment. For instance, in Yellowstone Park, California, as the number of deer ramped up greatly (since there were no animals to hunt them), the grasslands and vegetation kept on disappearing. The residents around the park were unable to control the herds of unstoppable deer.

However, when wolves were reintroduced in the park in 1995, things changed. The wolves fed on the deer and the deer grew cautious. They became aware of areas to avoid where the fear of wolves lurked. As a result, vegetation started mushrooming in many parts of the park significantly. Grazed lands became thick with greenery. Common birds, migratory birds were attracted by the foliage. They started moving in in great numbers. Vultures, hawks, birds of prey, bears rushed in to feast on the carcasses left by the wolves. They increased in numbers. The soil's retention capacity became powerful because of the newly emerged trees. Their roots strengthened the soil, reducing soil erosions, causing the rivers to "meander less" and flow smoothly.

All because of the wolves that had been absent in the area for almost 70 years.

The Yellowstone Park is a marvellous example of how certain species can send huge waves of change in an ecosystem. It is also an



PHOTO: NAVID NOOREIN

Juboraj, the lion, led a solitary existence for thirteen years in Comilla Zoo. A video showing Juboraj's ailing condition went viral on social media. He passed away on December 12, 2017.

eye-opening example of how natural troubles can be dealt with natural measures. How "rewilding" can invite massive advantages to our planet.

So, as the dead zones keep increasing in our rivers, poachers keep roaming the forests instead of animals, rivers keep dying, massive chunks of soil keep eroding due to lack of healthy vegetation, and animals keep being put and starved inside prisons, the concerned authorities need to take radical actions, not only on pen and paper.

They can start by banning zoos and rehabilitating wild animals where they truly belong—the forests.

To guard the forests from poachers,

skilled, non-corrupt forest rangers should be appointed. The locals should be encouraged to receive thorough training and take up the jobs of forest rangers. That would ensure both the animals' safety and a sustainable livelihood for the locals.

Private/government companies shouldn't be allowed to infiltrate the forest areas. The authorities should ensure that they maintain the distance that's required to avoid disturbances in the animals' environment.

The government should allot a healthy amount of budget towards funding animal conservation projects. It should also stint the growth of companies and give importance to afforestation, which is the only thing that

matters in the long run.

When we start rehabilitating the wild animals, there will be hopes of certain ecological systems waking from the deep slumber of despair. The vegetation in certain areas will increase since animals like elephants, turtles, and pangolins play major roles in preserving the flora by scattering seeds through defecation and roaming. Apex predators like tigers and leopards will keep the number of other species in control, reducing over-grazing of forests. Birds will start coming in. The number of animals will become healthily balanced. There will be more carbon-trappers (that we desperately need at the moment), more torrential rainfalls due to increased vegetation, less river erosions, less poaching.

In the face of new pollution-causing companies' birth near the Sundarbans (and its removal from the UNESCO World Heritage List), the authorities must take effective steps. They should relocate the companies or simply ban them. After all, if the Sundarbans collapse, its surrounding areas will be swallowed by strong floods and cyclonic surges that the forests quell. Same is applicable for other parts of the country.

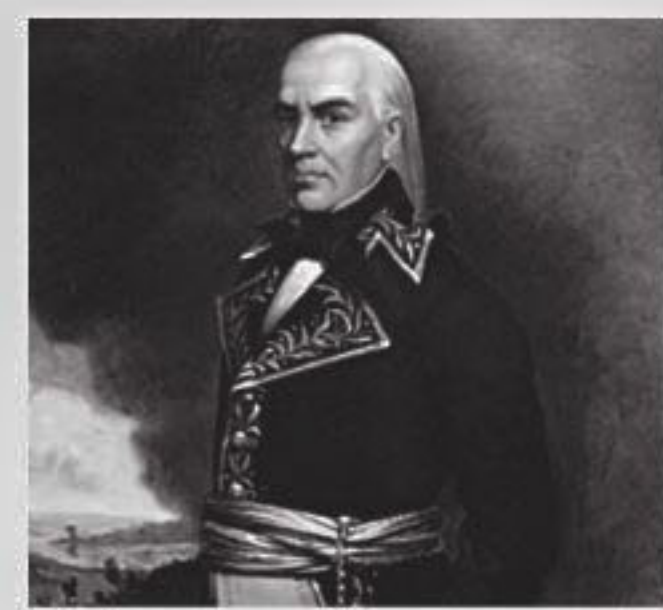
Companies can wait. Our dying climate cannot. We have had enough of those. We don't want our so-called development to contradict itself. No development is a development when it harms the earth.

Without animals, the forests won't survive. Without forests, carbon-dioxide and the temperature will increase, and the rivers will die. Without rivers, the soil will grow barren, and livelihoods will face uncertainty.

Rewilding is necessary now, more than ever. Zoos are not.

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



A portrait of Francisco de Miranda

JULY 5, 1811

Venezuela declares independence from Spain

Under the leadership of Francisco de Miranda, Venezuela declared its independence from Spain. This started the Venezuelan War of Independence. The country gained independence 10 years later in 1821.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Heats up
 - 6 Glossy fabric
 - 11 Scientist Newton
 - 12 Madrid museum
 - 13 Diamond substitute
 - 15 Chow down
 - 16 Solid wood
 - 17 Sleuth Spade
 - 18 "Message received"
 - 20 Jersey rapper
 - 23 "Wheel of Fortune" host
 - 27 Company bigwig
 - 28 Destiny
 - 29 Silver or gold
 - 31 Wander off
 - 32 Components
 - 34 Maximum amount
- DOWN**
- 1 Use a setting on
 - 2 Tibet setting
 - 3 Talk crazily
 - 4 Buddy
 - 5 Fish flock
 - 6 Big nails
 - 7 Museum focus
 - 8 Skin art, in slang
 - 9 Notion
 - 10 Standard
 - 14 Crone
 - 18 Sports summary
 - 19 River vessels
 - 20 Ring feature
 - 21 Lumber-jack's tool
 - 22 Horse healer
 - 24 Mayo buy
 - 25 One - time
 - 26 Crucial
 - 30 Case worker
 - 31 Severe
 - 33 Fan cry
 - 34 Obsessed captain
 - 35 Heady of "Game of Thrones"
 - 36 Gaunt
 - 38 Flower feature
 - 39 Retain
 - 40 Ticks off
 - 42 Compete
 - 43 Common article

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7-9

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

P	A	S	T	C	R	O	P
B	I	T	T	A	I	R	E
A	M	M	A	N	T	O	W
S	P	O	K	E	S	E	V
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S	E	T	A	R	N	O	L
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C	O	R	P	S	E	G	O
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M	E	T	O	O	P	A	N
D	O	N	E	E	D	G	E

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.