

Twitterdom with a new king should worry us all



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ELON Musk, a self-proclaimed free-speech absolutist and the world's richest man, is the new king of Twitterdom. His takeover of Twitter may have provided the company a much-needed new direction of exploring uncharted adventures, as its founder Jack Dorsey says, "Solving for the problem of it being a company, however, Elon is the singular solution I trust." The reason for using "however" by Dorsey in his tweet was in his words, "In principle, I don't believe anyone should own or run Twitter. It wants to be a public good at a protocol level, not a company." The way Musk, Twitter's top troll, bullied the management of the company and bought it indicates that the platform may not remain a space for public good as it becomes a private property. Here's a reminder about the acquisition of Twitter that he said, "this is not about economics, this is about power and influence."

With 86.1 million followers, Elon Musk is the top Twitterati, but he has also courted controversy by taunting others on the Twittersphere. Musk has been described as a troll by none other than a former insider of the company, Twitter's former head of news and currently the executive director of the Aspen Institute, Vivian Schiller. And there's no dearth of examples. *The New York Times* reported that before his pivotal meeting with the Twitter's board, Mr Musk tweeted in which he made fun of Bill Gates for taking a short position on Tesla. His tweeting habit does not give much confidence in his post-takeover tweet that he hopes his "worst critics remain on Twitter."

The way the Tesla boss bought Twitter was also quite unconventional. He first wanted to know how much it would cost for buying by firing a tweet. Then he



ILLUSTRATION:
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acquired more than nine percent of the shares, but discounted speculations of taking a seat on the board or interfering in running the business. But within days, he made a new enticing offer through a tweet to buy the whole company, and the deal was done at an unprecedented speed. His critics, therefore, have every reason to argue that Musk is desperate to gain more power, and promotion of free speech is a mere facade.

Why does the Twitter takeover by Elon Musk matter for anyone in Bangladesh, when it has a tiny audience of about 750,000, whereas Facebook has a whopping 44.5 million users? Social media platforms worldwide have been increasingly coming under scrutiny—mainly owing to its power of democratisation, but also for its toxicity. The role of social media for free expression is crucial in general, but especially important in countries where democracy is weakening or rulers are becoming autocrats. Therefore, prospects of more freedom of expression or free speech should be a very welcoming development. If any one of the existing social media platforms becomes more democratic, then there's bound to be some positive impact on the rest. And in terms of social influence, Twitter with more than 300 million users enjoys a certain edge over

Facebook or Instagram, despite those having far larger subscriber numbers. It's due to the nature of the content, which is more news-oriented than personal and family affairs and networking. But the scary prospect is its potential toxicity, where individuals could face an endless torrent of abuse based on their skin colour, faith, gender, political ideology, and so on. Vivian Schiller told BBC's Radio 4 on Monday that about two weeks ago, when asked how he would make the platform more free speech-friendly, Mr Musk could not give a clear answer. Musk's declaration, so far, is that he wants to see more "free speech" and less moderation. Many right-wing forces, like Trumpian Republicans in the US, who have long been complaining that Twitter's moderation policies favour the freedom of speech of left-leaning viewpoints, rejoiced. According to Ms Schiller, this moderation is an art without which this public space is ungovernable. She also admitted that the Twitter management had not always had it right.

The most glaring example in the US of Twitter being used to incite violence was the January 6 insurrection at Capitol Hill by Trump supporters, fuelled by conspiracy theories that led to the permanent ban of the outgoing president on Twitter. In India, presumably the

largest democracy in the world, we have seen how religious hate preaching on Twitter has been spreading communal division and violence. It, therefore, makes Elon Musk's proposition of unbound free speech a serious cause for concern as it could amplify disinformation too.

There is no doubt that we all love freedom of expression and hate censorship, but not without restraints on the spread of hate and violence. Some of his memorable tweets include those against Covid lockdown bolstering conspiracy theorists, extending support to Canadian truckers' disruptive sit-in protest, and violating Securities and Exchange Commission directives that led to wiping out of USD 14 billion in a minute from the share market. Repeating such erratic behaviour now will no longer make him accountable to anyone, other than expensive private legal actions.

One thing that encourages most of us is that Elon Musk has promised to bring transparency in Twitter's algorithm, making the metrics of populism and support visible, and cracking down on bots. If it happens, then ghost followers of many popular but controversial figures will disappear. In India, Twitter's third top market, political observers have begun speculating that the IT cells of major political parties will be folding as they are accused of maintaining bots and troll armies. However, Musk could have brought in such transparency without taking it out from the public control, as he had the opportunity to take up a seat on the company board with the single largest holding of his shares.

Many observers believe that the USD 44 billion takeover will push politicians and regulators around the world to bring in new and stringent rules on social networks and force them to take more responsibility for the content they carry, issuing steep fines for non-compliance on material that incites violence, is abusive or classifies as hate speech, among other things. In the US Congress, before Twitter's takeover, it was the Republicans who were pushing for taking on Big Tech companies, and now Democrats have started gearing up for a fight.

NATIONAL LEGAL AID DAY

Three ways to improve our national legal aid system



'JUSTICE' IN PRACTICE

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TODAY marks the National Legal Aid Day, which was introduced by the government in January 2013, in an effort to increase public awareness of national legal aid services. As foreign funding for NGO legal aid shrinks with Bangladesh emerging as a middle-income country, the time to mainstream, strengthen and expand governmental legal aid has never been more urgent. Yet, 22 years after a national legal aid system was mandated, public awareness about it remains less than adequate.

On January 26, 2000, Bangladesh introduced the Legal Aid Services Act 2000 (LASA), a law "to provide for legal aid to the litigants who are incapable of seeking justice due to financial insolvency, destitution, helplessness and for various socio-economic conditions." Section 3 of LASA mandated the establishment of the National Legal Aid Services Organisation (NLASO) to carry out the purposes of LASA, "as soon as may be after the commencement" of the law. However, it was only in 2009 that the NLASO was finally established.

Section 6 of LASA requires a National Board of Management to lead NLASO, comprising relevant high-ranking government officials such as the Law Minister, Attorney General and Vice-Chairman of the Bangladesh Bar Council, etc. Section 9 of LASA requires District Legal Aid Committees to be established in every district, comprising relevant district level government officials such as the District and Sessions Judge (who is to be the chair), District Public Prosecutor, and President of the District Bar Association, etc. The Committee must also have one representative from a relevant NGO active in the area.

So far, a District Legal Aid Office has been established in the District Judge Court premises of all districts, along with a corresponding District Legal Aid Committee. The government has also appointed a District Legal Aid Officer, who is an Assistant Judge or Senior Assistant Judge, and the list of all District Legal Aid Officers, along with their contact details, is available on the NLASO website. The government has also been establishing legal aid committees at the upazila and



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union levels, but these are often criticised as being inactive in practice. The website, for instance, has no information or contact information for upazila and union legal aid committees, as it does for the district ones.

According to LASA, all applications for legal aid must be submitted to the concerned District Legal Aid Committee and if any application is rejected by the District Committee, the applicant may appeal to the National Board within 60 days from the date of such rejection. Recently, NLASO has also introduced an online application system, which legal aid seekers can use to virtually submit their legal aid applications to their nearest district legal aid offices.

The Legal Aid Service Policy 2014 was formulated to clearly set out the eligibility criteria for legal aid. Section 2(1) of the Policy clarifies that legal aid recipients would typically need to have an annual income of less than Tk 1 lakh, but in the case of freedom fighters and applications for legal aid at the Supreme Court, the income needs to be less than Tk 1.5 lakh. However, Section 2(2) of the Policy establishes that certain vulnerable individuals would be deemed eligible for legal aid (without reference to their income status) such as victims of human trafficking and women and children who have faced physical or sexual violence and persons with disabilities, etc.

The legal aid services provided by NLASO can be categorised in three main forms. First, it provides legal advice to individuals, and since 2016 it has been operating a toll-free legal aid helpline (16430) through which anyone can receive free legal advice. Second, it provides alternative dispute resolution by mediating civil disputes and disputes relating to

petty crimes (i.e. compoundable offences) between parties. Third, it provides court based legal assistance and representation through its panel lawyers, for cases where mediation has not been successful or where mediation is not an option (i.e. grievous offences which are non-compoundable, such as rape and murder, etc). According to a factsheet published by NLASO in March 2022, its legal services have reached over 736,000 beneficiaries since 2009.

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Bangladesh

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Local Government Engineering Department

Office of the Upazila Engineer

Upazila: Balaganj, District: Sylhet

www.lged.gov.bd

Reference No. 46.02.9108.000.18.02.2022-358

Invitation for Tender

e-Tender Notice No. 05/2021-2022

e-Tender's are invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the works as stated below:

Package No.	Name of works	Tender ID No.	Tender security (Tk)	Tender security submission date & time	Tender opening date & time	Tender method
EUCPW-186	Construction of Administrative Extension Building & Hall Room at Balaganj Upazila, Dist-Sylhet. Under Upazila Complex Extension Project (2nd Phase)	666840	2500000	30-May-2022 14:30	30-May-2022 15:00	OTM

This is online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches up to **30-May-2022 14:30**. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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