

The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

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Recently Grameenphone, Prothom Alo and the Daily Star organized a roundtable on "Safe Internet: the Next Generation & Our Responsibilities."

Here we publish a summary of the discussions:

Debashis Roy, Head of Corporate Responsibility, Grameenphone

Research shows that when people get access to the internet, one out of ten is lifted out of poverty. Bangladesh is ranked 149th out of 189 countries in terms of use of mobile internet, ahead of India and Pakistan. This is indeed a significant achievement for a country like Bangladesh.

We have more than 54 million internet users in Bangladesh. A significant proportion of them consist of the youth (85% within the age bracket 18 to 34). Research from the Boston Consulting Group shows by 2017, 100 million new children will come online in 12 Telenor markets. Of them 85% will be accessing internet through smartphones.

We did a nationwide study on Internet Safety among young students to find their usage pattern as well vulnerability. A significant portion of them faced bullying, received nasty messages and requests to disclose personal information, particularly female users. Interestingly, when they face such situations they usually (67%) seek help from their friends instead of going to their parents and teachers. It is also true that they get very little help by approaching parents and teachers. Most of them hide their internet browsing experience from their parents.

To change this situation we need massive awareness campaigns. Parents and teachers need to talk with children about internet usage. We have to empower our young generation with knowledge and techniques to tackle the challenges of cyber insecurity.

Rasheda K. Choudhury, Executive Director, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)

Forty percent of those in secondary education are first generation learners. Their parents are not literate, let alone tech savvy. First, service providers and NGOs can help and educate them on the issue through courtyard discussions. These people can also be reached through microcredit programmes that are already in existence. Second, teacher training programmes are of paramount importance. For students aged 11-18 in schools, despite more subjects having been introduced, there's a severe lack in teachers. Because it's not possible to provide additional counselors, existing teachers can be trained in the art of counseling.

The sad part is that around the world, education budgets generally increase. Here in Bangladesh, it is often slashed. It has come down from 14 percent in 2000 to 10 percent of the total budget. Internet has a considerable effect on socio-economic status. For example, primary question exams that are leaked online, cannot be accessed by those in rural areas who do not use the internet.

Tarana Halim

The internet is definitely about freedom. Every single Bangladeshi native is free. Internet has revolutionised Bangladesh, and prevention is not the answer. But we are seeing the visible effects of not filtering out harmful data every day. By the time we send out a complaint to Facebook and wait for a response, 100 girls may commit suicide. Every time we try to address an issue, other problems show themselves. For instance, in dealing with SIM registration, we found out about “spoofing” and “SIM cloning”. We must create a strong technical workforce of our own. Many brilliant tech students leave the country and provide services abroad. We end up hiring consultants spending millions in the process. We should be employing our own tech experts; we should use their skills to the fullest so that they can train others in the field of cyber security.

Mahfuz Anam, Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star

One of the most creative visions of the Prime Minister is the idea of a Digital Bangladesh. The internet represents freedom of thought and freedom of choice. We are internet immigrants, not internet natives. We don't know how everything works. But the human urge for freedom, for the multiplicity of choices, and for creativity will always exist. The internet plays a vital role in all this. The end note of this discussion should be one that's positive, as the internet has more virtues than vices. People do not want to live in a state that regulates people's private lives but at the same time the state has to be aware of the negative aspects the internet has, as is the case with any scientific innovation. We should do everything to encourage the use of the internet. Prevention will not work.