

Short Story

Real Solution to Problems

A group of employees was working in a software company. It was a team of 30 employees. This was a young, energetic and dynamic team with keen enthusiasm and desire to learn and grow. The management decided to teach the employees about finding real solution to the problems.



The team was called to play a game in a banquet hall. The group was quite surprised as they were called for playing game. All reached the venue holding various thoughts. As they entered the hall, they decorated the hall beautifully with colourful decorative papers and balloons all over the place. It was more like a kid's play area, than a corporate meeting hall.

Everyone was surprised and gazed at each other. Also, there was a huge box of balloons placed at the centre of the hall. The team leader asked everyone to pick a balloon from the box and asked them to blow it. Every one happily picked a balloon and blew it.

Then the team leader asked them to write their names on their balloon, carefully so that the balloons didn't blow up. All tried to write their names on the balloons, but not everyone was successful. A few balloons blew up due to pressure and they were given another chance to use another balloon.

Those who failed to mark their names even after the second chance were ruled out of the game. After the second chance, 25 employees were qualified for the next level. All the balloons were collected and then put into a room. The team leader announced the

employees to go to the room and pick the same balloon that had his name on it. Also, he told them that no balloon should blow up and warned them to be very careful!

All 25 employees reached the room, where the balloons carrying their names were thrown here and there. They were searching for the respective balloons carrying their names. While they were in a rush to find the respective balloons, they tried not to burst the balloons. It was almost 15 minutes and no one was able to find the balloon carrying his own name.

The team was told that the second level of the game was over. Now it is the third and final level. They asked the employees to pick any balloon in the room and give it to the person named on the balloon. Within a couple of minutes all balloons reached the hands of the respective employee and everyone reached the hall.

The team leader announced; this is called real solutions to the problems. Everyone is frantically hunting for solutions to the problems without understanding the ideal ways. Many times, sharing and helping others give you real solutions to all problems.

Facebook: Opening the gates to the Web or closing them?

Does the fact that only 30 websites are part of Facebook's Free Basics mean an increase in its 'gatekeeping' power? ANUP KUMAR would like to know

About a month ago, on December 9, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) released a new consultation paper, on the regulation of "differential pricing" charged by Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) for data usage, for public comments. This was the second round of public consultation by TRAI over data related services offered by TSPs. The second round was prompted by widespread criticism of zero-rating services, such as Free Basics by the Facebook-Reliance consortium and Airtel-Zero by Bharti Airtel.

The open period for filing of public comments and rebuttals ended on January 7 and TRAI is expected to announce its verdict on regulating zero-rating data services by the end of January.

To bridge the digital divide and get more users, Facebook has launched Free Basics in 36 countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Maldives in South Asia, in partnership with local mobile phone companies. In India, Free Basics was launched in partnership with Reliance Communication, one of the major players in the mobile telecom business in the country.

The Free Basics application can be downloaded on a smartphone or any mobile device. It allows a user to visit a selection of empanelled websites on the Internet "for free without data charges, and include content on things like news, employment, health, education and local information."

For the moment, TRAI has suspended Free Basics and other similar services because prima facie it appears to violate established pricing rules under the Telecom Tariff Order (TTO). The current TRAI regulation on tariffs mandates that any differential pricing, including zero-rating, must be non-discriminating, transparent, not anti-competitive, non-predatory, non-ambiguous and not misleading.

Many activists, technologists, developers, and people from the startup community argue that the manner in which zero-rating services have been set up breach the foundational principle of Net Neutrality on the Internet. The Net Neutrality principle prohibits blocking or slowing down content by differentiating among websites in any differential pricing plan for data usage.

Some have pointed out that the prefix "free" is misleading because like everything else in the sharing economy of the Internet, Free Basics is not actually free. However, this line of criticism is mostly philosophical because we know that there are free services on the Internet. All of us have entered into such a Faustian bargain with our free emails, social networking accounts and free messaging services such as WhatsApp and Viber. All the seemingly free services on the Internet that we have come to depend on collect user data, which is then monetized through targeted advertising and other means.

The central issue in the public debate during the open comment period was the tension between the digital divide and Net Neutrality. The debate was vigorous and occasionally even disparaging towards the opposing sides. In such a climate, the TRAI will find it really hard to come up with a win-win solution that will be acceptable to Net Neutrality advocates and those who want Internet access extended to almost 70 percent of

Indians who currently don't have it.

It is a fact that in the new digital economy, the majority of Indians are being disadvantaged by the digital divide and are losing out to competition. Additionally, without near universal access to the Internet, the public policy tilt in favor of the digitization of government services and growing e-commerce will only further exacerbate the gulf between the haves and the have-nots.

Indeed, there are alternative models that stay clear from violating Net Neutrality such as free Internet access in community libraries in the West, free Wi-Fi in urban public spaces, subsidized connectivity in rural and underserved areas, and free modest size data package from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in lieu of watching advertisements and the collection of user data by the providers.

Then there is a model that has not been talked about a lot in India: it involves imposing a cess on TSPs that can be used to create a universal service fund. The government can use this fund to subsidize a small monthly data package, say of about 500 MB, which can be offered to people who do not have the means.

However, a problem unique to countries such as India with huge disparities among the haves and have-nots is that the basic infrastructure isn't there for most community and subsidy models. Moreover, most alternative models fall short when it comes to providing universal and efficient services on mobile devices.

To supporters, zero-rating services like Free Basics on ubiquitous mobile phones, are a quick solution to the growing digital divide. To critics, it is a Faustian bargain in which, for the sake of universal access and bridging the digital divide, we are being asked to ignore the violation of the Net Neutrality principle that for many is the soul of the Internet.

**Dominant gatekeepers**  
Besides, this may also make a few telecom and tech companies gatekeepers of all information. A few dominant gatekeepers will have the power to select a very small selection of websites from a highly diverse and pluralistic information ecosystem. This could have a negative impact on the political

economy, the free market and even on democracy.

The pushback from critics against an earlier iteration of zero-rating under the internet.org web portal forced Facebook to tweak it with the Free Basics app, which seemingly gets around the egregious violation of the cardinal principle of Net Neutrality by offering its platform, in principle, to any website that would want to join it. In India, the Free Basics app at the time of writing this article had about 30 websites empanelled for zero-rating in the approved list.

(These include *BBC News Daily*, the following news channels—Aaj Tak, IBN Live, Reuters Market Lite — the newspapers *Amar Ujala*, *Bhaskar Jagran*, *Maalai Malar*, and *Maharashtra Times*, *Hungama* and an astrology channel, four health sites, and so on).

According to Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, Free Basics, without violating the Net Neutrality principle, gives essential Internet access to millions of people in India and in other parts of the world, who cannot afford to pay for data charges over and above the basic charge they pay for a mobile connection and device.

Zuckerberg in a column urged the public in India to support Free Basics because Facebook had addressed the "legitimate concerns" raised earlier during the internet.org public debate. Implicitly, it seems that he was suggesting that Free Basics is not only a name change from internet.org. He argued, "Instead of welcoming Free Basics as an open platform that will partner with any telco, and allows any developer to offer services to people for free, they claim - falsely - that this will give people less choice. Instead of recognizing that Free Basics fully respects net neutrality, they claim - falsely - the exact opposite."

**Walled local gardens replacing the open ecosystem?**  
I think the central question for tech pioneers such as Zuckerberg and all of us is: In the emerging digital political economy with services such as Free Basics, are we witnessing the making of walled local gardens of information replacing the open ecosystem of the World Wide Web?

It is highly probable that in the new digital marketplace we may end up

with multiple zero-rating services curating their respective information gardens walled from each other. Until now, the Internet has avoided that with Net Neutrality as the linchpin that is holding together national regulatory regimes.

Zuckerberg and his supporters have argued that a user can still choose to access the Internet without any content/website restriction using the usual web browser on her device. Evidence from other countries is that, in fact, many users after experiencing the benefits of limited free access to Internet do choose to opt for a regular access outside the zero-rating wall of Free Basics.

This most likely may happen with this zero-rating services in India too. Once people get on the Internet, in a very basic way for email and social media, they see other benefits too in education, health, and commerce.

Technically speaking, Zuckerberg may be right, but Facebook with its Free Basics is not doing enough to mitigate the concerns on net neutrality. However, the fact is that until now, in India, only about 30 websites have been empanelled on Free Basics. This only supports the argument that Free Basics will further enhance and consolidate the gatekeeping power of Facebook, which has been growing over the years, as more and more people say they get their news and information from the Facebook feeds.

So there are some pertinent questions that Facebook must answer - because the related issues are still shrouded in ambiguity and secrecy - before TRAI allows Free Basics to chip away at the principle of Net Neutrality for the sake of bridging the digital divide in India.

Surely, there must be technical considerations for a website to get on the free list yet why such a small number of websites? What qualifies a website to be empanelled? What must a website give to Facebook-Reliance to get on the list of approved websites for zero-rating? Is there a cap on the list of empanelled websites or will the list for all practical purposes be unlimited? And finally, what guarantees have Facebook-Reliance offered on the issue of data security to online companies, developers and consumers?

Bangladesh Police seize five time-bombs near Biswa Ijtema site

**ANI**  
**Gazipur, Jan. 17:** The police seized five time-bombs and a remote from Gazipur city, some five kilometres off Biswa Ijtema site in Tongi on Sunday. According to the Daily Star, Superintendent of Police, Gazipur, Md Harun-ar-Rashid, said that the devices were meant to be used to sabotage Biswa Ijtema. The second phase of Biswa Ijtema,

the largest congregation of the Muslims in the world, is continuing today amid sermons being delivered in Tongi on Dhaka's outskirts.

Tens of thousands of devotees, both from home and abroad, are converging on the congregation venue and attending the prayers with reciting the names of Allah and hearing the sermons.

Wanted Sub-Editor

Imphal Times is looking for an experience sub editor with excellent writing skill in English who can read Bengali written script. Working hour is 12 noon till 3 pm. Honorarium is Rs. 3000 p/m. Preference will be given to candidate who had already work in English daily as desk editor. Age no bar, and Imphal Times have no problem with those candidates working in other newspaper at night shift.

**WHENEVER YOU SEE CONSTRUCTION AND MINING EQUIPMENTS, JUST THINK OF US**  
**A SOLUTION FOR EVERY CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT**

**Automobile Engineering Works-1**  
**R K WORKSHOP**  
**New Checkson Road, Purana Rajbari**  
**Imphal East.**  
**Manipur - 795 001**

ALL KINDS OF SPARE PARTS AVAILABLE  
AFTER SALES SERVICE TO YOUR SATISFACTION

Authorised dealer **BEML Limited**  
(A Government of India Mini Ratna Company under Ministry of Defence)

Letters, Feedback and Suggestions to 'Imphal Times' can be sent to our e-mail: [imphaltimes@gmail.com](mailto:imphaltimes@gmail.com). For advertisement kindly contact: - 0385-2452159 (O)

National & International News

11 killed, 20 injured in suicide attack near Afghan official's home in Jalalabadz

**Agencies**  
**Jalalabad, Jan. 17:** At least 11 people were killed and 20 others injured following a suicide attack near the residence of a senior Afghan official in Jalalabad on Sunday morning.

Officials have confirmed that the explosion took place near the home of provincial council member Obaidullah Shinwari in Jalalabad in Afghanistan's Nangarhar region, TOLO News reported.

On Wednesday, Islamic State claimed responsibility for a deadly gun and bomb siege targeting the Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad, in the first attack by the group on the Pakistani government.

Afghan officials said all three attackers and seven security forces were killed in the brazen assault in eastern Nangarhar

province, where the group has made alarming inroads in recent months.

The four-hour siege near the consulate comes amid renewed international efforts to revive peace talks with the Taliban, locked in a tussle for supremacy with Islamic State terrorists in Afghanistan.

Sunday's attack also came two days after armed militants opened fire on the residence of an Afghan consulate official in Peshawar's posh University Town area in Pakistan.

First Secretary of the Afghan Consulate, Humayun Yousafzai, who lives in the house, escaped unhurt on Friday.

This week, representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and China met in a bid to revive stalled Taliban peace talks, even as the

insurgents wage a brazen winter campaign of violence.

The so-called "roadmap" talks were meant to lay the groundwork for direct dialogue between the Afghan government and the Islamists to end the 14-year Taliban insurgency.

The four-country group is set to hold the next round of discussions in Kabul on Monday.

Wallet Lost

I, the undersigned have lost my wallet containing my ATM Card, Service ID Card on the way between 2<sup>nd</sup> MR to Bazar. Finders are requested to handover it to the undersigned.

Sd/-  
Phoabug Phaoimei  
Langthabek Chingkhka  
Mobile no. 908966743