



“

The successes of Aadhar, UPI,
and SaaS need to be replicated
in internet governance.

”

TV Ramachandran,
President,
Broadband India Forum

SPEEDING ON THE INDIAN HIGHWAY OF IG

The term *internet governance* (IG) has become an important conversation piece today in many circles – academic, governmental, industry, and civil society. The perspectives are many and, while many are factual and pertinent, quite a few are, regrettably, incorrectly premised. There seems to frequently be a tendency to think of IG as some esoteric administrative framework for which the government is mainly responsible. Nothing could be further from the truth. The internet, and its evolved form – high-speed broadband – are shaping the way mankind thinks, acts, and progresses, and have become virtually indispensable for the day-to-day existence of every citizen. Hence, IG cannot also be limited to being the sole responsibility of any one agency or entity.

Being inherently free, open, and democratic, IG has to necessarily be a framework involving all actors, and represents the development and application by governments, the private sector, and civil society in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the optimal development of the internet. Understandably, it has to embrace a large spectrum of issues that can keep continuously changing. It is not limited to ICANN, IETF, IAB, and ISOC. It goes much beyond any and all of these and targets a holistic development of the entire internet ecosystem for the well-being of all and with the involvement of all types of actors.

If IG is a global responsibility and cannot be insular in objectives or actions, does India need to bother about it unduly or can it rest with the UN for acting in the common interest of all nations? Absolutely not! Being the most populous nation in the world and the largest functioning democracy of more than 1.4 billion people, with a humongous number of 800 million or more internet connections, India has a big moral responsibility to not be a passive observer but play an active responsible role in shaping the policies for the internet ecosystem. India also features the staggering number of 780 languages, of which at least 22 are major languages as per the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. There is also an astonishing cultural diversity in our sub-continent. All these pose huge challenges to secure internet inclusion and, therefore, India's learning and governance activities could have a profound part to play in the global framework.

India's way forward on the IG highway is, in all probability, going to be long and hard – surely not strewn with roses.

However, with the committed involvement of a large multi-stakeholder group and the leadership of the government (MeitY/NIXI), India has taken some firm and positive steps since the last year. An India Internet Governance Forum (IIGF) was constituted in the third quarter of calendar year 2021, and the first IIGF Conference with the theme *Empower India through Internet* was successfully conducted from November 25 to 27 in 2021. There were a total of 19 sessions, featuring 14 workshops, an inaugural, a valedictory, and 3 plenary sessions. 40 papers were submitted and there were a total of 114 speakers. IIGF 2021, which was honored with a special message from the Hon'ble Prime Minister, was presided over by the Hon'ble Cabinet Minister (MeitY), Minister of State (MeitY), and the Secretary (MeitY); it had the participation also of global internet stalwarts and technology CEOs, the Chair of ICANN Board, and the Chair of MAG IGF as also many leading CXOs from India and abroad.

India cannot afford to rest on the laurels gained last year. It has miles to go and needs to focus on the ever-growing list of priorities in cyberspace. This is a decade of exponentially more powerful technologies playing out in our day-to-day life. This is more so in our country since Indians are known to have a higher propensity for IT and ITES and love to adopt and absorb new technologies. Sure enough, the multi-stakeholder IIGF Coordination Committee appears to have set its goals right by adopting the overall theme of *Leveraging Techade for Empowering Bharat* for its flagship conference, scheduled to be held from December 9 to 11, 2022. Their program is showing a total of 17 workshops, 2 high-level panel sessions, 2 main panel sessions, 3 fireside chats, and 3 flash talks. The topics to be deliberated include, inter alia, how to leverage the techade in an optimal way for empowering Bharat, the role of digital payments, digital landing and digital platforms, accessibility and inclusion in all its facets and colors, special perspectives on the responsible AI, Metaverse, and Web 3.0, the potential of online skill-based gaming for securing special niches for India, etc. The range of subjects is truly wide and comprehensive but, then, the challenges are no small ones. It is earnestly hoped that adequate justice is done to all the subjects through deep discussions and deliberations.

The remarkable successes demonstrated by India in the areas of Aadhar, UPI, and software-as-a-service (SaaS) now need to be replicated and sustained in the all-important area of IG if India is to achieve and maintain a position of a global superpower in the digital world. ■