

Part I: Introduction to Internet Governance Issues

Renowned 20th century German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas¹ wrote extensively on the concept of a public sphere – a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment. The birth of the Internet was seen as a seminal step towards the creation of such a public sphere. This ideal is reflected in Jon Perry Barlow's "A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace"² which was a direct reaction to the Communications Decency Act 1996. Barlow envisioned a cyberspace which is the promise of a new social space, global and anti-sovereign, within which anybody anywhere can express to the rest of humanity whatever he or she believes without fear.

The freedom and lack of geo-political boundaries may not exist in an idealistic state as visualised by Barlow. Surveillance by states over their citizens, threat of economic and political shutdown by cyberterrorists and intrusion are becoming commonplace news in the cyber era. The much discussed event of the two week shutdown of all banking, government and political sites of the most wired European nation, Estonia, in May 2007³ is a harsh example of the increasing vulnerability of entire nations on the cyberspace.

The freedom and lack of geo-political boundaries may not exist in an idealistic state as visualised by Barlow but with the advent of sophisticated geo-location software it is getting increasingly plausible to trace the Internet Service

Provider (ISP) through which the Internet was accessed. Further, in most nations ISPs are required to keep details of all their users and provide the same to the authorities when required.

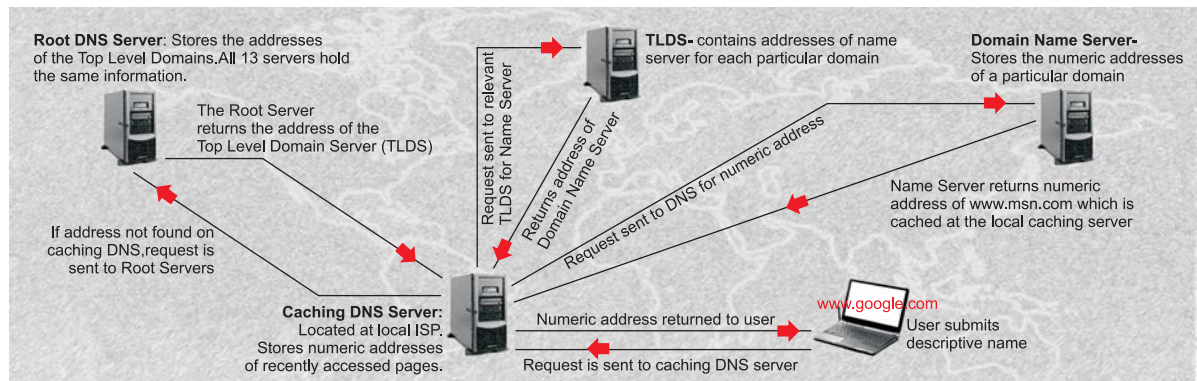
The Internet is a worldwide, publicly accessible series of interconnected computer networks that transmit data by packet switching using the standard Internet Protocol (IP). It is a "network of networks" that consists of millions of smaller domestic, academic, business, and government networks, which together carry various information and services, such as electronic mail, online chat, file transfer, and the interlinked web pages and other

resources of the World Wide Web (WWW). Each node (computer) is identified by a unique number called the IP Address. However, we do not use these numeric addresses and instead use descriptive names such as *www.google.com*. An important foundation of today's network services on the Internet is the Domain Name System (DNS) introduced in 1984. The DNS enabled Internet servers to be accessed by means of easily memorable names rather than numbers, and for the names to be stored in a distributed database to which all Internet hosts had access. The Internet as we know it today originated in the United States. Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) controls the assignment of IP addresses and domain names. ICANN, formed in 1998, is a privately owned, not-for-profit organisation registered in the US. We will delve into infrastructure, DNS wars and alternate roots in upcoming issues.

"In managing, promoting, and protecting its [the Internet] presence in our lives, we need to be no less creative than those who created it"

-Kofi Annan

How DNS resolution works



Emergence of the Internet Governance Forum

One of the working definitions of Internet Governance is ‘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 programmes that shape the evolution and uses of the Internet’¹. The Internet is not a centralised entity. The core of the Information society does not lie in a single nodal point but is spread at its edges in the form of its users, the people. The power of the internet is that everyone can create content. This very fact is also the largest threat from this medium. It allows us to engage in electronic commerce, research, entertainment, communication and explore its unlimited resources. However it also allows spam, viruses and other harmful content to creep in.

The governance of the Internet cannot be done in the traditional manner. As Kofi Annan said “... In managing, promoting, and protecting its [the Internet] presence in our lives, we need to be no less creative than those who created it. Clearly, there is a need for governance, but that does not necessarily mean that it has to be done in the traditional way, for something that is so very different”. The term governance itself is problematic when it is applied to something as multifaceted, widespread and global as the Internet.

The multistakeholder polarised interests and points and counterpoints led to the establishment of the Internet Governance Forum. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held its first phase summit in Geneva in the year 2003. The summit agreed to follow the dialogue on Internet Governance in the Declaration of Principles and Action Plan. This working group was to prepare the ground for a decision in the second phase of the summit in Tunis in November 2005. The summit requested the UN Secretary-General to set up a Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) to achieve this goal. This group was to report its work for consideration and appropriate action at Tunis.

At WSIS, Tunis, the WGIG report suggested the need of an organisation like the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). After reaching a clear consensus among its members the WGIG proposed in paragraph 40 of the Report that presently there exists no global multi-stakeholder forum to address Internet-related public policy issues. It recognised the merit in creating a space which addresses issues that are cross-cutting and multidimensional and that either affect more than one institution, are not dealt with by any institution or are not addressed in a coordinated manner.

The convening of the IGF was announced on 18 July 2006, with the inaugural meeting of the Forum being held in Athens, Greece from 30 October to 2 November 2006. The report of

the WGIG divided Internet Governance issues into four broad categories. These included:

- Infrastructure (mainly IP addresses and the Domain Name System)
- Security, Safety and Privacy (including spam, viruses and cybercrime)
- Intellectual Property Rights, Trade and Copyrights
- Development Issues

The IGF is to meet every year. The second meeting of the IGF was held in November 2007 at Rio, Brazil. India is hosting the third meeting in 2008 in the city of Hyderabad followed by Egypt in 2009. The IGF Secretariat is hosted at Geneva, Switzerland. Nitin Desai, United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Adviser for Internet Governance, is the co-chairman of the IGF and has headed the past two meetings in Athens and Rio and will be heading the one in India.

UN Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon, in his address at the IGF2007 held in Rio, Brazil, referred to the IGF as a non-traditional UN meeting and as a “new model of international cooperation and, just like the Internet, it is in constant evolution”. His message went on to say: “The Forum can develop a common understanding of how we can maximize the opportunities the Internet offers, how we can use it for the benefit for all nations and peoples, and how we can address risks and challenges”.

IGF in India

This year India will be hosting the third meeting of the IGF in the city of Hyderabad from 3-6 December 2008. There are five key dimensions to Internet and therefore its governance – Infrastructure, Legal, Economic, Development and Socio-cultural. These issues are reflected in the IGF’s agenda through its various themes – Access, Critical Infrastructure, Security, Development, Openness, Capacity Building, and Diversity. Over the next five months, leading to the Internet Governance Forum we indulge in the dimensions mentioned above.

References

- i. Habermas Forum, <http://www.habermasforum.dk/>
- ii. A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace, <http://homes.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html>
- iii. The cyber raiders hitting Estonia, 17 May 2007, BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6665195.stm>
- iv. WGIG Report, June 2005, <http://www.wgig.org/docs/WGIGREPORT.pdf>, page 4

Other online resources

1. Internet Governance Forum – <http://www.intgovforum.org/>
2. IGF2008, India – <http://www.igf2008.in/>
3. Diplo Foundation – <http://www.diplomacy.edu/>
4. ICANN – <http://www.icann.org/>



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