

## **First ISOC India Mumbai Webinar on *Internet Governance in Asia- Pacific Region: Role of The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)***

**Date: 27<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

**Time: 10.30 am IST**

**Speaker: Mr. Samiran Gupta, Head of India ICANN**

In order to make the Internet relevant for all users, it is important to engage with multiple stakeholders and agencies that govern the various facets of Internet. Fully recognizing and emphasizing the imperative of stakeholder engagement, ISOC India Mumbai Chapter, invited Mr. Samiran Gupta, Head of India, ICANN to deliver its first webinar on the role of ICANN in Internet governance within the Asia Pacific (APAC) region and the important themes in Internet governance that ICANN is presently working on. The webinar was attended by more than 30 participants including members from various ISOC chapters in India and APAC, members of various ICANN At-Large Structures, technology professionals, bankers and academicians.

Samiran began his talk by unpacking the digital dynamics of the APAC region. The region being home to a large population (around 4 billion), already has an Internet user base of 2 billion (48 % Internet penetration), with a fast-increasing number of active Internet and mobile users. The mobile industry of APAC region has been a driver to the region's economy. With a figure of \$ 1.1 trillion, the share of the mobile industry was close to 4.7 % of the region's GDP in 2014. In the Indian context, a 2016 research report by Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations(ICRIER) found that "a 10% increase in Internet subscribers can result in a 2.4 % increase in state per capita GDP". Indeed, The Internet has a manifold impact on nations' economies and people. Therefore, it is important to ensure that it is administered and governed in the right way.

In this context, ICANN plays a role of special significance. ICANN is primarily entrusted with providing leadership on and coordination of the technologies that underpin the functioning of the Internet. ICANN's focus is on protocol parameters, names and numbers (i.e. domain name system or DNS). ICANN works to ensure that the security, stability and resilience of the Internet's root zone is successfully managed. In its work, ICANN collaborates with technical partners such as Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), Regional Internet Registries, World Wide Web consortium (W3C), Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), root server operators, and several other bodies. It is also engaged with coordinating policies to ensure a smooth

functioning of these technologies and collaborates with global organizations such as OECD, IGF, United Nations, WIPO, ISOC and others.

An important aspect of ICANN's core functions is also known as the Internet Assigned Names Authority (IANA) functions that include managing the root zone, serving as central repository of IP addresses, and managing protocol parameters. Its other important functions are delegating country code Top-Level Domain names (ccTLD), generic Top-Level Domain names (gTLD) and supporting L-Root infrastructure among others.

Describing the ICANN ecosystem as being a part of the multi-stakeholder model of Internet Governance, Samiran informed the audience of how this model is founded on a healthy symbiotic relationship between its three components - the **Community** which develops the policies; the members of the **Board**, drawn from the community that ratifies the policies; and the **ICANN organization** that implements and administers these policies. This multi-stakeholder community comprised of Supporting Organizations (SOs) including the Country Code Supporting Organization (ccNSO) Address Supporting Organization (ASO) and Generic Names Supporting Organisation (GNSO). The SO's can initiate a policy development process (PDP). Any draft policy is examined and discussed by Advisory Committees including At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC), Government Advisory Committee (GAC), the Root Server System Advisory Committee (RSSAC) and the Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC). Once all SOs and ACs agree on a policy document, the draft may be shared with the Board of Directors. The next step is for the draft to be made open to public comments. Once comments are received from the wider public, ICANN organization prepares the final policy recommendations. Thereafter, the policy recommendation is voted on by the Board. Once ratified, the policy is implemented.

Speaking about new developments at ICANN, Samiran focused on two key ongoing initiatives of ICANN namely Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) and Universal Acceptance (UA). IDNs are essentially those domain names which are not in ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange). ICANN is relentlessly working towards bringing more domain names in local characters and scripts such as Devanagari, Sinhala, Bangla, Arabic amongst others, using Unicode standards. This has been done by allowing communities within countries to develop their own IDNs. For example, India has .भारत in multiple Indic scripts.

In the Indian context, the Neo-Brahmi Generation Panel (NBGP) is a key example of community engagement in Domain Name Systems (DNS). The panel which has volunteers from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Singapore, has finished its work on developing the Label Generation Rules (LGR) of 8 Indic scripts out of the total 9 Neo-Brahmi scripts. These 8 scripts that are in the process of getting integrated into the root zone of the Internet include: Devanagari, Gurmukhi, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Telugu, and Tamil. The 9<sup>th</sup> and remaining script to be integrated is Bengali. The development of IDNs needs to be especially recognized in the context of changing contour of Internet users. China and India have replaced US and Japan as top two countries in terms of global Internet users. Countries such as Bangladesh and Indonesia are growing at an impressive rate in Internet adoption as well. As IDNs

allow people to access domain names in their own languages, it provides more choices to Internet users in these countries.

However, new developments sometimes lead to unintended consequences. Challenges have arisen from the expansion of the Global top-level Domain (gTLD) space which saw the rapid proliferation in the number of gTLDs from 22 in 2012, to more than 1200 now including the use of IDNs. These challenges are collectively known as Universal Acceptance (UA) challenges. The basic principles of UA are that domain names need to be Accepted, Validated, Stored, Processed and Displayed exactly the way they are intended to across all systems. For example, a mail server should be able to read a top level domain which is longer than four letters, such as .accountant. Or, a browser should be able to locate a website that is in Indic script. To spread the message of UA readiness and provide tools and support, ICANN encouraged the community to set up the Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG) four years ago. More information about UASG is available [here](#).

However, the process of attaining UA readiness is not easy due to presence of multiple applications which may be part of a company's IT ecosystem. All parties have to come to an agreement on UA readiness so as to make all the systems UA ready.

Notwithstanding, there are significant economic benefits to be gained out of UA of IDNs and gTLDs. According to a white paper by Analysys Mason<sup>1</sup> commissioned by UASG in 2017, there is a business opportunity to increase the online revenue by almost \$10 billion dollars annually, if the software systems can be made to work harmoniously with the Internet infrastructure.

Moving on to ICANN's presence in APAC region, Samiran apprised that ICANN consciously and actively started globalizing its reach from 2013 onwards when the growth and velocity of markets started moving towards the APAC and Africa. To work with various stakeholders in the APAC region, ICANN has established a regional office in Singapore and engagement centres in Beijing and Seoul. Over the period of five years, ICANN has deepened its association with the APAC community by conducting a significant number of workshops and trainings in the region, organizing Asia Pacific Internet Governance Academy (APIGA) in collaboration with Korea Internet and Security Agency (KISA), and most importantly by setting up a webinar series known as APAC Space. ICANN also collaborates with regional ISOC chapters to work closely with the regional stakeholders and community. In India, the Indian School of Internet Governance (inSIG) is one such collaboration where ICANN partners with regional ISOC Chapters. On the technical side, ICANN has supported training initiatives around DNS Security Extension (DNNSEC) deployment, Root server instance deployment and general capacity development in the region as well.

Samiran finally concluded his presentation by informing the audiences about the various ways in which interested individuals and their associated communities can get involved with ICANN policy making process, including ICANN fellowships, conferences, forums and discussion groups.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://uasg.tech/whitepaper/>

The presentation inspired discussion on a range of issues with participants directing a few questions to Samiran. Addressing the question on security of domain names and fake domain names by Mr. Umesh Alle, Manager at Vodafone Idea Limited, and how ICANN monitors these issues. Samiran informed that ICANN ensures that security of root zone of the Internet is not compromised. For policies concerning fake domain names, ICANN works with domain names registrars in various fora. On CCAOI Director and President, ISOC India Delhi, Ms. Amrita Choudhury's question on challenges in proliferation and adoption of IDNs in India and the steps ICANN would take to improve the situation, Samiran spoke about the entire ecosystem that supports IDNs online. This starts from the availability of local script keyboard, the availability of content that can be searchable and then the availability of IDN top level domains. In this context, he reminded us of the government initiative to ensure the availability of bi-lingual or multi-lingual keyboards or various devices that allows users the freedom to use scripts of their choice. In the same vein, he reiterated the ICANN's commitment is to ensure that at the top level of DNS, people should be able to read, write and create names in local scripts. A related question was raised regarding how most gTLDs in India were taken for reasons such as IP protection and how specifically ICANN was planning to create awareness regarding the same? On this Samiran said that as the next round of the new gTLD process gets underway, a much more concerted effort to build awareness about gTLD, the perils of domain squatting and how gTLDs could be used for business or for other professional purposes would be undertaken.

Lastly on responding to Prateek's question on .amazon controversy, Samiran explained the same briefly. You can read more about the controversy at <https://www.cfr.org/blog/case-amazon-and-what-it-means-icann>. Samiran conveyed how community was hoping that an understanding between the Amazon-region nations and the Amazon company can be reached, to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. Samiran finally concluded the session by citing how this case was a perfect example of challenges and benefits of multi-stakeholder system of creating policies, as it showcased the importance of collaboration to reach a mutually beneficial solution.

A vote of thanks was delivered by Mr. Prateek Pathak, Volunteer, ISOC India Mumbai to Mr. Samiran Gupta, Mr. Subhashish Panigrahi, Chapter leaders of other ISOC chapters and all other participants.

The web recording of the webinar is available on <https://isoc.app.box.com/s/5lw7xa6ae2nq9a10qxfohdesezewze8its>