

THE ASIAN AGE

Delhi | Mumbai | Kolkata | London

11:45 AM, Thursday Jan 15, 2015



an initiative of Deccan Chronicle

Horoscope Select your sign ▾

- Home
- India
- Metros
- International
- Business
- Opinion
- Sports
- Entertainment
- Life & Style
- Newsmakers
- Books
- E-Paper
- Science + Health
- Movies
- Movie Reviews
- Music
- Age on Sunday

Home » Age on Sunday » Cover Story

Internet ‘a basic human right’?

Dec 20, 2014 - Nandini D. Tripathy



[Share](#) [Tweet](#)

Share 0 Like [Sign Up to see what your friends like.](#)



(Photo: AP)

The Internet is one of the most significant developments in human history. Is the time ripe now to declare access to the Internet a basic human right?

“It’s time to recognise the Internet as a basic human right,” Tim Berners-Lee, the computer scientist credited with inventing the World Wide Web recently remarked as he unveiled the latest report tracing the Internet’s global impact put together by his World Wide Web Foundation. The statement has brought to the surface a question that has become the subject of international debate: should access to the Internet be declared a basic human right?

“The Internet has been the most significant development in human history after fire,” asserts cyber expert and lawyer Pavan Duggal as he outlines the importance of the Internet as a medium of communication.

“No other event after the discovery and use of fire has had greater impact on the evolution of mankind. Once such a boundary-less medium has been created and nurtured, it is essential that it be acknowledged as global heritage that belongs to mankind at large and not to any particular nation. Giving access to it, therefore, needs to be recognised as part of a basic human as well as fundamental right. Today, if you do not have access to the Internet, you will no longer be able to live life to its fullest possible extent. Neither would it be possible for you to have a well-informed dignified existence.

Pavan adds, “Whether it is access to communication, information or even social media, the Internet is now the basic architectural layer on which all these activities are based. There needs to be a legal recognition of a right to accessing it. Most countries do not have any specific legislations in this regard, but they do have general laws stipulating fundamental rights that are broad enough to incorporate such a right. And this assumes a far more paramount significance now, given that the world is already undergoing a mobile revolution. We have more mobiles than people on this planet and this number is constantly growing. More and more people are now accessing the Internet through their devices. So now, mobile web access presents yet another incentive or catalyst for legal recognition for the right to access to the Internet as a basic human right.”

Human rights advocate Pankaj Sinha agrees and adds that the reason for the said debate around whether or not access to the Internet should be declared a basic human right is the existence of two contradictory assessments of it, one that sees it as a positive source of knowledge and the other as a destructive mode of communication. He feels that the Internet’s primary importance lies as the former, a source of potentially limitless knowledge that no one should be denied. “Think about it, doesn’t every human mind have both aspects to it too: productive as well as destructive? It is up to an individual what he/she does with impulses of either kind. Similarly, what you take out of a medium like the Internet is also an individual phenomenon based on choices you make. We should see

Most Read | Most Commented | Most Emailed

[‘NDFB chief, commander both to blame’](#)

[Mauritius: Treasure Island](#)

[Supreme Court notifies in-house procedure to deal with errant judges](#)

[Do not fall for MLM, warns RBI](#)

[2015 in books](#)

[No ghar, so no ghar wapsi](#)

[PM Modi fulfils vow: PIO, OCI schemes merged](#)

No Articles Found

[A promise of change](#)

[PM Modi fulfils vow: PIO, OCI schemes merged](#)

[No ghar, so no ghar wapsi](#)

[Do not fall for MLM, warns RBI](#)

[‘All writers are thieves’](#)

[Remove all illegal shrines, says Bombay high court](#)

[Pak continues overnight firing along Line of Control; over 10,000 terrified villagers flee](#)

Columnists

A homage to the Indian Army



Shankar Roychowdhury

The Indian Army observes January 15 as Army Day every year to commemorate that day in 1949 when Lt. Gen. (later Field Marshal) K.M.

Time for a rethink?



S. Nihal Singh

What happened at the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo was condemnable without reserve and the world’s media, including in India, have risen in solidarity.

the Internet as a positive and convenient mode of communication since it can provide a lot of things to enable you to grow at several levels, with a simple click.

This is also why I feel that access to it really should be declared a basic human right," he argues and adds that such a right is of particular significance for persons with physical disabilities. He elaborates, "It is very important for persons with disabilities like deafness and blindness. Books are not available in Braille or audio easily in the physical world. For the orthopaedically handicapped, handling books and turning pages is a problem too. Technology, in this context, is particularly adaptable and accommodating. The information such people can have access to can be multiplied manifold through the Internet and they should most certainly have a right to that within a legal framework too."

IT professional and human rights activist Jayeeta Khaskel provides a slightly different view. She says, "There are two sides to the issue. There is of course the mind-numbing number of advantages Internet access can grant people, in terms of education, entrepreneurship, platforms of participation, global interaction and the likes. It is more important as an enabler of several other basic rights like the right to communication or expression or even peaceful assembly.

But for any legal framework to be adequately built around it there will also need to be several other issues taken into serious account, the most important being privacy and censorship. In our country, problem usually lies in the implementation aspect of any legal point. If Internet access is made a human right, it might simply be another in a long list of rights that exist in theory but don't translate into actuality. And with all the other rights on that list still to be looked at, I'm not sure what degree of priority can or should be given to something that more than half our country is not even familiar with or aware of, outside of metropolitan cities."

Post new comment

Your name: *

E-Mail Address: *

The content of this field is kept private and will not be shown publicly.

Comment: *

Input format

CAPTCHA

This question is for testing whether you are a human visitor and to prevent automated spam submissions.

Spam Prevention By



Save

Search

Home India Metros International Business Opinion Sports
Entertainment Life & Style Newsmakers Books E-Paper
Science + Health



About Us Contact Us Career Feedback

Copyright © 2011 The Asian Age. All rights reserved.