Saturday, 16 January, 2016
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The Statesman
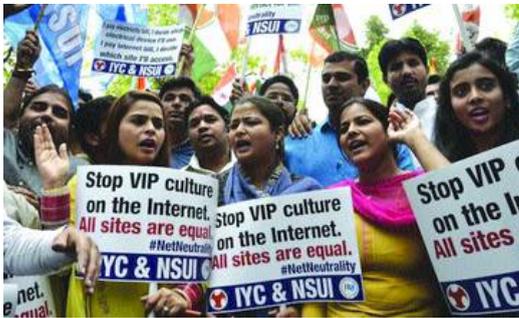## PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION

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Don't mess with internet

Saket Suman | 31 December, 2015

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The year 2015 may well be remembered for Prime Minister Modi's ambitious Digital India Campaign but along with dreams of a digitally-connected India erupted several underlying stumbling blocks. The most prominent among them was the net neutrality debate, which fired a movement on social media earlier this year.

Net neutrality is the principle that Internet service providers and governments should treat all data on the Internet equally, not discriminating or charging differentially by user, content, site, platform, application, type of attached equipment or mode of communication. Proponents often see net neutrality as an important component of an open Internet, where policies such as equal treatment of data and open web standards allow those on the Internet to easily communicate and conduct business without interference from a third party. In simple words, net neutrality means when a service provider sells you data they don't get to choose how the data is used. The idea is that the Internet Service Provider, from whom you buy your Internet pack, should not under any circumstance be able to control how exactly you use it. It is up to the consumer, how they wish to spend the data that they have bought from the Internet Service Provider. Recent moves by telcos to offer some apps for free to their users have outraged cyber activists. Critics are of the opinion that this will lead to the creation of two types of Internet - Free and Paid - which is aggressively against the idea of net neutrality. Telcos like Airtel, Reliance, Uninor, Idea and Tata Teleservices have several tie-ups in offering preferential access to a few apps.

Mark Zuckerberg's internet.org is in collaboration with Reliance Communications, clearly implying that only Reliance users will have the so-called "free access" to Facebook and a few other associated platforms. Social media enthusiasts have also claimed that internet.org is Facebook's tactic of increasing its user base rather than providing "free Internet" as it only allows access to certain websites. "Any service, which conflicts or restricts my choice as a user to visit any destination on the network, is in violation of the law of

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The Statesman: Don't mess with internet

the land and, therefore, is in violation of net neutrality. India needs to be very careful that it does not adopt these kind of schemes without looking into the legal gratifications," noted cyber law expert Pavan Duggal had earlier told The Statesman.

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