

## **The Internet We Want**

Recent events in India and abroad have resulted in renewed discussions related to threats to freedom of expression and the right to privacy on the Internet. In India, the deliberations have revolved around the misuse of provisions of the Information Technology Act, 2000 like Section 66A. The disclosures on mass secret surveillance programs in the US and other countries have raised questions about the violation of the right to privacy of netizens.

Freedom of expression of citizens on the Internet has been trampled by excessive police actions and slapping of provisions of the IT Act and IPC in frivolous cases. The central Government has issued guidelines with respect to arrests under Section 66A of the IT Act and these guidelines have been made mandatory by an interim order of the Supreme Court. However, the provision still remains in the statute and are being misused.

The Information Technology (Intermediaries Guidelines) Rules, 2011 have been criticised for its broad provisions and for forcing intermediaries to make adjudicatory decisions. The rules could also adversely affect new ventures in this area. In a country which prides itself on its “software revolution”, where millions of hopeful young aspirants are looking towards e-commerce as the next big thing, this could have a negative impact on the economy. It needs to be discussed as to whether “reasonable restrictions” and over zealous police men drive them away from this platform?

The proposed Central Monitoring System (CMS) raises questions about the right to privacy of citizens. The veil of secrecy over the programme has led to concerns about the system and have led to demands for adequate safeguards to protect citizens. The lack of a privacy legislation in India compounds these fears.

The time has now come to discuss the citizens' rights on the Internet and to talk about the Internet we want. Let us ask our representatives what they have in mind for the future of Internet in our country.