

## Summary Report

Conference on Future of the Digital Economy: Cross Currents in Emerging Regimes

**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019, **Venue:** Silver Oak Hall, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi

ICRIER and Data Catalyst Institute organized a one-day conference on 'Future of the Digital Economy: Cross Currents in Emerging Regimes'. The event saw a wide array of in-depth discussions on various aspects of the digital economy. The opening key note address was delivered by Secretary, Dept. of Telecommunications, Aruna Sundararajan. She highlighted the leap frog development and adoption of digital technologies in India but also noted the complex dilemmas that India now faces. The key reasons India has more at stake in its digital future are the current deficit of infrastructure, an enormous appetite for data and digital technologies, and the significant impact that digital technologies provide in growth and development of the economy. She stressed the importance of digital technologies as a great leveler and its important role in financial inclusion. She drew attention to the slew of policy measures being taken across different sectors by the relevant regulators and agencies. She further underlined the importance of addressing the tough questions on jobs, business models that undermine privacy, and finally, the security of the entire ecosystem.

Following the key note address, was a high level panel discussion between Ambassador Asoke Kumar Mukerji, Former Permanent Representative of India to the UN, Rajan Mathews, Director General, Cellular Operators Association of India, and Sanjeev Bikchandani, Co-Founder and Executive Vice Chairman, InfoEdge moderated by Rajat Kathuria, Director and CE of ICRIER. The panel's deliberations on the future of the digital economy began with international cooperation, global and regional trends, and the potential for a digital Silk Road initiative that aligned with the vision of the Asian Century. The Panelists also noted that the impact of technology and artificial intelligence on jobs is not always negative. Disruption also creates new opportunities and facilitates inclusion. It also discussed the need to revisit certain policies relating to the telecommunications infrastructure, issues of intellectual property, and participation in development of standards.

In the afternoon, the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Gopalakrishnan S. made a special address discussing the foundations of privacy in the digital economy, and the efforts of the government in developing a framework for data protection. He highlighted the effort that India is making to strike the right balance in nurturing the digital economy without undermining the free flow of data, economic growth and innovation and at the same time the new policy must not compromise on the privacy of users and citizens.

In the second half of the conference two separate panel discussions focused on specific issues such as data localization and encryption, and the challenges of identity and authentication in the digital economy. Deepak Maheshwari, Symantec's Director of Government Affairs, moderated

the panel discussing data localisation and encryption, which consisted of Madan Oberoi, Special Commissioner of Police (Special and Tech Cell), Delhi Police, Mudit Kapoor, Associate Professor of Economics at ISI, Ritesh Kumar Singh, Founder and Chief Economist, Indonomics Consulting Pvt. Ltd and Shahana Chatterji, Partner at Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co. The discussions noted that while access to data is a concern, it is a false assumption that law enforcement seeks to do away with encryption or compels localization of data. It reiterated the need to search for better policy alternatives, and more cooperation not only between law enforcement agencies but also between stakeholder groups. The panel further deliberated the costs of data localisation, and discussed the trade-offs that might take place in pursuit of localisation.

The final panel consisted of Apar Gupta, Executive Director, Internet Freedom Foundation, Smitha Krishna Prasad, Associate Director of the Centre for Communication Governance at NLU Delhi, Vaibhav Kakkar, Partner, L&L Law Offices and Wriju Ray, Chief Business Officer, IDfy and was moderated by Prasanto Roy, Senior Director at FTI Consulting. Its discussion was focused on the issue of identity and authentication in India's digital economy. It deliberated at length, the challenges thrown up in the adoption and usage of Aadhaar as a digital identity. It also noted that policy restrictions by RBI including the stringent KYC requirements have affected businesses adversely. However, the panel also noted that there are numerous alternatives to be explored for digital identity and authentication other than Aadhaar, and any future thinking on this would have to embed user privacy as a paramount concern. In closing, the Director and CE of ICRIER, and Executive Director of Data Catalyst Institute, Rajat Kathuria, and Peter Cherukuri respectively, stated that the event is only a beginning to the sustained dialogue and body of work that will be produced to inform debates, and build capacity in India on issues relating to the future of the digital economy.