

A Parallel Net – Is it a Possibility?

I toyed with several ideas for writing this column. Budget blues like FBT on ESOPs and MAT, fourth dimension, the central theme of a book *Incredibly Believable*,

about it and that is what is happening and the newspaper columns and television channels are innately debating these issues. As to the Fourth Dimension hypothesis of Sunny Satin— a

filtrations by the governments. But the national governments do not have any control over the backbone, which remains to be in the exclusive realm of the US Government.

However, there is a growing demand for democratization of the network or putting it under shared control so that countries can jointly pass regulations and rules governing the net. On the one side, there is a growing demand from countries like India, China and Brazil to increasingly democratize the system, US is not very enthused to give them a cakewalk. The US has not yielded much ground, though there are a few UN-sponsored resolutions to bring Internet under joint control. I perceive this issue will be hotly debated in the coming years more intensely than the WTO matters at the international forums. Finally, a body might emerge that will be vested with the regulation— a body similar to the World Bank. I need not have to dwell on where the control levers of that body will be lying. It is anybody's guess.

My purpose of treating this subject is somewhat different. Can another company develop a parallel net; say, outside the US in countries like India and China. The possibility is there. I do not know whether such network will get the compliance certificate from the Patents offices. But what I am sure is that the network of such enormity and users cannot come in the near future. The reasons are not far to seek. The users or the nationals should feel the critical need for developing such a huge network. To compel them to go for such enormous works, they should be terribly disadvantaged by the existing system or should feel exploited by the monopoly being enjoyed by the present owners. It is in the interest of ICANN that the net users, be it individuals or nation-states, should not carry such impressions to commit their money and resources to develop a parallel system.

Now, let us scan through the Internet scenario in India. According to the published sources, there are 11.62 million e-mail users in India. Of that, 2.4 million use the net for e-commerce, 7.5 million chat on the net, 4.5 million do online

banking and 9.2 million people hunt for jobs online. Since 2000, India's cyber population has grown seven times as against China's above four times. And yet, our net using population forms only one per cent of the total population. We can very well imagine the frequency of India's net usage if 10 per cent of the population starts using it. I feel that we are going to get into that trajectory, given the fact that computer education has become compulsory in our schools. Every student, who passes out the matriculation or even lower grades than that, is going to be computer-savvy. I imagine that by 2020, we have close-to 250 million net users, more than the population of many countries at that time. And still, that number will grow since that many users will constitute only less than 25 per cent of the population.

Are we really gearing up ourselves to meet this huge requirement? Even now, our perspective plans for IT dwells on PC penetration, thefts, cyber crimes, regulatory bodies, legislations, etc. We have to go much beyond these paradigms. We have to build backbones of our own for carrying forward our cyber dominance. The other day, I read a news item datelined Washington. As many as 40 lawmakers led by a Democratic majority leader Harry Reid and a Republican minority leader Mitch McConnell have introduced the legislation called COMPETES'—

Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education and Science Act to maintain technological superiority of the US. Though it is a private members' Bill, it speaks of its proactive nature and alertness. We have to introspect whether we are moving towards such grandeur efforts. Our National Informatics Centre (NIC) still spends most of the time to develop and maintain the websites of the Ministries and the Government outfits. I sincerely believe that they should vacate these peripheral works to the private agencies and get themselves imbued in the fundamental works such as creating parallel nets and even stronger platforms than the Internet. That only can take us forward in IT or even to maintain our headstart vis-a-vis with other countries. Nothing is impossible! ■



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written by Dr Sunny Satin, a futurologist and hypnotist blended into one – that I just finished reading scored through my mind. No doubt, these are live issues that have to be dealt now, particularly FBT and MAT, since they are subjects that are immediately concerning business enterprises, including that of mine. I feel that the Indian IT companies, particularly those in the lower layer of existence, do not have the strength to absorb the impact of these taxes. I tried to weigh the importance of these themes and felt that these have to be written, but somehow or the other I decided against it. I thought that enough has been written about the Budget issues and, most importantly, I am imbued with a feeling that I should not use my columns to pontificate upon things that are immediately affecting me. I do not want to use this column to espouse my agenda and my problems. Let others write

fellow Indian but settled in the US, I shall delve on this issue on a later date.

For most of the people initiated into Internet and using one of the most powerful IT platforms, may not know the growing politics building around it. Who owns and who controls and who regulates this global network, which has transformed the way we communicate, the way we do business, the way to banking and the way we entertain and educate ourselves? A private entity called ICANN (International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) has the control over it under the watchful eyes of the US Department of Commerce and other government agencies. Yet, it provides equitable access to all. That adds to the reach of the network. But the cyber liberty of the net users is subject to controls, regulations and, sometimes, ideological