
ICANN85 Mumbai | CF – Welcome Ceremony
Monday, March 9, 2026 – 9:00 to 10:15 IST

MODERATOR Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Samiran Gupta, Vice President, Stakeholder Engagement and Managing Director of Asia-Pacific.

SAMIRAN GUPTA Namaste and welcome. Welcome to ICANN85 here in Mumbai. I am Samiran Gupta, Vice President, Stakeholder Engagement and Managing Director, Asia-Pacific. For those who live in India, Mumbai can be many things. For some, it is the maximum city where people pursue their dreams, and for others, it's the home of Indian cinema and the performing arts, and yet for others, it's the home of cricket.

Mumbai is also considered the corporate capital of India. This is where two stock exchanges, a commodities exchange, a bullion exchange, thrive alongside traditional brick-and-mortar businesses, e-commerce, fintech companies, startups, and banks. And ICANN public meeting is back in India after almost a decade. ICANN57 was held in Hyderabad in November 2016, and in the decade since, we have seen so much of India's phenomenal growth and the digitalization story play out.

Note: The following is the output resulting from transcribing an audio file into a word/text document. Although the transcription is largely accurate, in some cases may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages and grammatical corrections. It is posted as an aid to the original audio file but should not be treated as an authoritative record.

The numbers tell the story. More than a billion internet users, a global leader in IPv6 adoption, strong support for the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance, and a vibrant, growing youth community. The ICANN85 Community Forum, which kicked off on 7th March is where stakeholders in the ICANN multi-stakeholder community will discuss, debate, and hopefully resolve the issues that impact how the internet serves everyone in this room and beyond.

ICANN85 is also significant as it comes just after the WSIS+20 review at the United Nations and just weeks before the next round of the new gTLD program that opens on 30th April. The agenda for ICANN85 covers these and several other topics of interest, including domain name abuse and the next round of the gTLD programs.

Now, let me first take a moment to pause and thank our hosts. We are here today because of the kind support ICANN has received from our host, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the Government of Maharashtra, the National Internet Exchange of India, in association with ISPAI, the Internet Service Providers Association of India. Thank you once again for your vital support.

To tell us more, let me call to stage Ms. Tripti Sinha, Chair of the ICANN board of directors to take us through the next segment of the opening ceremony. Tripti, the stage is yours.

TRIPTI SINHA

Thank you. Namaste. ICANN on Mumbai [foreign language - 00:04:38]. Welcome to ICANN85 and welcome to Mumbai. It is a true pleasure to see so many of you here in person and I would also like to extend a warm welcome to those joining us virtually from around the globe.

To our dedicated community volunteers, the ICANN organization team and our gracious hosts and partners here in India, thank you for your outstanding commitment, coordination, and effort in bringing this community together.

Your work ensures that our meeting remains open, accessible, and capable of achieving meaningful and lasting impact. And with its grand scale, modern technology, and meticulous attention to detail, the Jio World Convention Center, coupled with its warmth and hospitality, is the perfect venue for ICANN85.

A special thank you to Mr. S. Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and Chairman of NIXI, Mr. Rajesh Aggarwal, Chief Secretary, State of Maharashtra, and Dr. Devesh Tyagi, CEO of NIXI.

We gather today against a backdrop of profound difficulty and unrest in the world. Pain, suffering, and conflict are touching the lives of so many, and none of us are entirely removed from that reality, whether the impact is felt closely or from a distance. Some of you navigated disruptions to your travel plans, and your

commitment to being here is sincerely appreciated. To those joining online despite the inconvenience of differing time zones and cancelled travel, your dedication does not go unnoticed.

While it is nearly impossible to fully set aside the weight of current events, I ask that we come together in this space with respect, open minds, and a shared sense of purpose. The work that unites us here matters, and it deserves our full and genuine attention. At the same time, our hearts remain with all those who are bearing the heaviest burdens of these troubled times.

Born and primarily raised in India, with Maharashtra as the state of my birth, coming together here is deeply personal to me. With a cultural heritage stretching back over 5,000 years, India is home to one of the oldest and most diverse civilizations. Today, it is not only the world's largest democracy, but also home to an extraordinary 1.46 billion people, a staggering statement to its scale and significance on the world stage.

India is a country of many. Many languages, many faiths, many cultures, many traditions, many cuisines, many celebrations, and many ways of belonging.

A beloved Hindi proverb captures this extraordinary regional richness perfectly. [foreign language - 00:07:56]. It means the taste of water changes every mile and the language every four miles. And yet through all this magnificent diversity, India has mastered

something rare and remarkable, the art of finding common ground without ever demanding conformity.

Its strength is inseparable from its vibrancy, from the dynamic chaos and collision of people, traditions, and ideas that continuously meet, merge, and give rise to something enduring and greater than themselves.

Being here reaffirms a deep conviction about our global community. We are at our very best when we show up for one another, listen with intention, and remain genuinely curious about perspectives we do not yet share.

Mahatma Gandhi captured the spirit with timeless grace. Quote, our ability to reach unity and diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization, unquote. Those words are not merely a reflection on India. They are a challenge and an inspiration for every one of us.

Three years ago, I stood before you and declared that ICANN was at an inflection point. The world had just fought its way through a global pandemic, and in the darkness of lockdown, the internet emerged as our lifeline, the pulse of global communication and commerce.

That defining moment awakened the world to the extraordinary power of digital infrastructure and the idea of internet sovereignty took center stage in conversations across nations. It became clear that all of us had a vital role to play, crafting policies and solutions

bold enough to lift communities everywhere, while keeping the global internet whole and connected. That call to action has not diminished. If anything, it has grown more urgent.

Recent times have reminded us once again that the internet, the connective force binding our shared future together, is now on the cusp of an even greater transformation, driven by Artificial Intelligence that is rapidly rewriting the rules of what is possible. And as this profound shift unfolds, the world grows more complex and at times more divided, which is precisely why the internet's stability and integrity matter more deeply now than ever before.

Today, that original call rings louder and truer than ever. It asks us to be steady and disciplined in how we work, transparent and accountable in how we decide, and unwavering in our commitment to an internet that is secure, stable, and reflective of the diverse humanity it serves.

We have a busy and important week ahead. I want to briefly touch on a few key areas among the many on our agenda, where your engagement and participation have and will make a meaningful difference.

We reached an important milestone in December with the conclusion of the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society. Through the WSIS+20 outcome document, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance, recognized the technical community as a

distinct stakeholder group and made the Internet Governance Forum a permanent forum within the United Nations system.

The outcome document reinforces the legitimacy of how this community works, open participation, shared responsibility, and decision-making that benefits from technical expertise, lived experience, and diverse stakeholder input. Thank you to those who have contributed to this joint effort. I look forward to seeing your voices shape the upcoming ITU Plenipotentiary Conference.

A second major focus is the opening of the 2026 round of the New Generic Top-Level Domains Program. Many of you have invested years of work in getting us to this point, and the Board is receiving updates on readiness to open the application window on the 30th of April to process applications and to assist those who are planning to apply and participate in different ways.

While the details and developments will be discussed throughout the week, I would like to emphasize why the progress on the 2026 round matters. It is an opportunity to encourage competition and enhance the utility of the domain name system, support innovation, and help ensure that the internet's naming system continues to reflect the diversity of the world it serves.

For regions and communities with linguistic and cultural richness, including here in India, the stakes are real and the potential impact is significant. I encourage you to attend sessions on the 2026 round

so that you may act as champions of the program in your home regions and networks when it launches this year.

A third area is our ongoing work to strengthen accountability and transparency. The Review of Reviews is developing an initial design for what a refreshed ICANN Reviews system could look like. This will be the focus of discussions here at ICANN85, and I encourage you to attend and contribute.

Reviews are central to retaining the confidence and trust placed in us. Through honest evaluation of what works and what does not, and a commitment to continuous improvement, ICANN remains an organization trusted to deliver on its mission.

Gathering here in Mumbai gives our work at ICANN a context that is both meaningful and inspiring. This extraordinary city was born from the merging of the Seven Islands of Bombay, transformed over time into one thriving unified place through determination and the strength of human connection. In a powerful sense, that is exactly what we are striving to do here.

These topics and the many other complex issues on our agenda this week will be explored and debated through our multi-stakeholder process, working together towards balanced solutions that are both principled and workable. But our boldest plans mean little without the community voices that shape and sustain them.

The Board and the organization continuously navigate the complex balance of priorities, resources, and long-term sustainability and it is your input that helps us find the right path forward.

Through public comment, community consultations, and the rich conversations that will unfold this week, your engagement breathes life into ICANN, keeping it focused, relevant, and fully capable of delivering on its promise for years to come.

As the week begins, my ask is simple. Bring your knowledge, your ideas, your willingness to listen and your patience. Raise the hard questions, but trust in each other's good intentions. When you disagree, seek understanding rather than division and always return to the shared purpose that unites us here. One world. One internet.

That spirit finds its most beautiful expression in the ancient Sanskrit saying, [foreign language - 00:15:52], meaning the world is one family. It reflects India's deep and enduring tradition of inclusivity, a timeless reminder that despite our many differences in language, faith and culture, we are all interconnected and we all share a common humanity.

The ICANN Board is grateful for your time, your dedication, and your continued willingness to work across differences. ICANN85, [foreign language - 00:16:21]. Namaste. May ICANN85 be successful and impactful. Thank you.

I now invite ICANN's President and CEO, Kurtis Lindquist, to the stage for his remarks.

KURTIS LINDQVIST

Good morning, good afternoon, and if you are joining us from the other side of the date line, hello from tomorrow, and welcome to ICANN85. It's great to be here in Mumbai, and I want to start by thanking Mr. S. Krishnan, the Secretary of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, and Chairman of our host, NIXI, Mr. Rajesh Aggarwal, Chief Secretary of the State of Maharashtra, and Dr. Devesh Tyagi, the CEO of NIXI, for making this meeting possible and being here with us today.

Thank you also to the community volunteers and the ICANN organization team for making this week possible. It's great to see so many of you here in person alongside everyone joining remotely. Some of you may have had to change your plans and are no longer able to attend in person and I'm grateful that we're still able to have you here at this meeting remotely.

It is times like this that highlight how important robust remote participation is. The safety and security of our community and staff is of utmost importance. For those of you here in person today, our team is continuing to closely monitor the situation and will provide updates as needed. Our travel vendor, AmTrav, is also available to assist our funded travelers with any changes or updates that they may need to make resulting from any new disruptions.

Tripti has set the stage for the week. We have a full agenda, real milestones coming up, and a community that invests an enormous amount of time and expertise into getting this right. The best way to respect that effort is to be clear about what we are aiming to accomplish here in Mumbai, what has progressed since our last meeting and what we need to do next to keep the work moving.

My focus this week is very practical, I want us to leave Mumbai with a meaningful progress on the work the community has prioritized, and with momentum on the milestones that are coming next. That means being direct about where execution is strong and being equally direct about where it needs to improve, and then we make decisions that help us advance.

Over the past year, the organization put more structure around our operations. We've clearly clarified our objectives and metrics to measure our efforts. We have been clearer about what we are trying to achieve and we have been more disciplined about tracking progress against it.

This is not reporting for the sake of reporting. It is a way to build trust through delivery and a way to make it easier for the community to understand what is moving forward, what is slowing down and why, but also to help us set shared priorities for our work.

We set ourselves specific objectives and we achieve what we set out to do. This builds confidence that we can take on complex work

and deliver against it. It also sets a higher standard for what comes next, which is exactly what we should expect of ourselves.

One area that mindset is embedded is in the progress and the Review of Reviews Tripti mentioned. This is central to continuous improvement. If we want the community effort to translate into impact, we need the reviews that are fit for purpose, proportionate and focus on outcomes.

As Tripti also noted, the WSIS+20 review concluded with an outcome that reaffirmed the multistakeholder model and made the IGF a permanent forum. This is a positive signal for the entire internet ecosystem. Yet we must remember that the work does not stop with the document. There will be more work ahead as the discussion comes into the next phase, including the Plenipotentiary cycle, where we explore long-term support and funding for the IGF. I encourage everyone to stay engaged in this important and open process.

We are working on establishing an enforceable timeline for urgent requests for non-public gTLD registration data. The Board has been following this closely and will be meeting with the Generic Names Supporting Organization Council and the Government Advisory Committee to discuss the next steps.

In parallel, ICANN org has been participating in community discussions on an authentication mechanism to better understand the available technology and features the community would like to

see and how this work can move forward in an open and transparent way.

We believe that continued engagement, including with law enforcement entities that have practical experience with authentication, will help inform requirements and next steps. We appreciate the willingness of agencies to share their experiences transparently and we welcome continued community input as this work moves forward.

Looking ahead, one of the biggest priorities is the opening of the Next Round. We are moving from planning into execution. Execution only works when the process is predictable and transparent.

ICANN org's focus is on ensuring that we have the systems and operational capacity required to open the application window and process applications in a fair and consistent way. That is a responsibility for us. Opening the window is not enough if the surrounding systems and support do not work as intended for a diverse set of applicants.

We have already seen a significant interest through the Applicant Support Program, for which we have received 74 applications from across the world. That interest is meaningful because it reflects real demand for practical pathways to participate.

This brings me to your commitment I want to highlight today, because it speaks directly to trust in the policy process. Two weeks

ago, we published a public-facing overview of where policy initiatives stand, both in development and implementation. This is designed to make it easier for you to see what is moving, what is blocked, and what needs attention and then we can all together learn from that over time.

This focus on transparency connects to how I approach my role. I have been ICANN's President and CEO for exactly one year and three months today. People told me that the second year of any presidency is when changes really start to show, including the grey hairs. I may have a small advantage there with my inherited Scandinavian hair, so any evidence might be easy to miss.

Inside the organization though, the changes are easier to see and they are the ones I care most about. One of the most important is stronger culture of measurement, as I alluded to earlier.

We are tracking objectives and key results so we can talk about outcomes with clarity and adjust when something is not working. This is not just about bureaucracy. It is about being honest with ourselves and with the community about progress, priorities, and what we will do different next.

I also want to touch briefly on organizational footing. We are in a healthy financial position and we are focused on maintaining stability while investing in the capabilities we need to deliver on the mission. Stability is not the goal in itself. Stability allows us to

execute well, improve continuously and support the community's work in a sustainable way.

I thank everyone at ICANN org for their hard work and dedication, for embracing change, for being willing and eager to improve how we work, for focusing on our collaboration with the community. We've made significant steps and it's a privilege to lead a team of mission-driven, talented and passionate professionals that we have.

Adding to that team, I'm delighted to announce the appointment of Gino Marliani as ICANN's Senior Vice President of Global Human Resources. Gino will officially join ICANN on the 16th of March and will be based in Los Angeles.

He's a seasoned Global Human Resources Executive with more than two decades of experience leading people, culture, and organizational strategy across multinational organizations. He's a thoughtful leader who blends strong business acumen with high emotional intelligence and we look forward to him bringing his HR experience and leadership to ICANN org.

There is one more area I must address because it's on the top of mind of many of you and where the community expects leadership. We at org are seeing increased reporting and more follow-up and stronger attention on domain name system abuse.

During this meeting, we will begin work on the first of the two new policy development processes or PDPs. They are intended to help

combat DNS abuse by proactively pivoting during investigations of domains linked to malicious actors and making registration of malicious domain names more difficult.

These are practical mechanisms and they need to be approached with evidence and a clear focus on outcomes. If we want meaningful progress, we must maintain momentum and urgency without losing discipline and we must stay grounded in what is workable and enforceable.

For those newer to ICANN, I will add one more thing, do not underestimate the value of your perspective and do not hesitate to contribute. The community works best when we combine deep experience with fresh eyes, and when we bring more people into the work, especially from regions that have not always been in the center of these conversations.

For those who have lost count of the meetings they've attended, continue to bring your years of expertise to the table. Keep an eye out for those who are newer and encourage them to participate.

So, whether this is your first meeting or close to your 85th meeting, thank you for being here and thank you for what you bring to this community. I look forward to the week ahead and to the progress we will make together here in Mumbai. And now I will hand back to Samiran. Thank you

SAMIRAN GUPTA

Thank you, Kurtis. The Maharashtra State Government has been extremely supportive of ICANN85. Now let me call on Mr. Rajesh Aggarwal, Chief Secretary of the Government of Maharashtra, to the stage for his opening remarks. Mr. Aggarwal, please.

RAJESH AGGARWAL

[foreign language - 00:27:51] Distinguished guests from around the world, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our Mumbai, the city of dreams, the city which never sleeps.

I started in Marathi because at ICANN we know the internet, the world, and now the new world of AI is multilingual. Thank you, ICANN that apart from .in we have 15 IDNs .bharat. These 15 scripts cover all our 22 official languages. In the country we have more than 2,000 dialects and languages, but 22 are official.

So good morning, namaste. It's my profound honor as Chief Secretary of Maharashtra to welcome you all to ICANN85 community forum here. Mumbai is a vibrant city. Samran and Tripti have already told you about it being the financial and commerce capital of the country. Apart from that, it is headquarters of about two major religions. Which are India's two major religions? Cinema and cricket.

Crucially, Maharashtra, and especially the Mumbai metropolitan region, we host more than half of India's data centers, and the gap is going to increase in the next two to three years.

Yes, our state is the backbone of the country's digital infrastructure, and it totally aligns with ICANN's mission of fostering a stable, secure, and unified global internet. So, when you talk about India, Mumbai is going to be the hub of that. If data is the oil, then Mumbai is India's refinery for that.

So, when you are in Mumbai, please do enjoy Mumbai. From the iconic gateway of India to bursting streets of Kolhata, the city blends colonial heritage with futuristic skyscrapers and housing about 20 million dreamers who make the city thrive.

And the best is yet to come. Second Mumbai, Third Mumbai, Fourth Mumbai, they are rising in front of our eyes. Navi Mumbai is already a very smart city hub. It is becoming a global agile city with seven international universities already coming in.

We have Atal Setu, please do find time to go towards that side. Atal Setu, which is a 22-kilometer sea bridge, brand new international airport in Navi Mumbai, and massive infrastructure coming up.

Mumbai 3, which is beyond Navi Mumbai, we are building a lot of tech parks, innovation clusters, green initiatives. And Mumbai 4, which is coming up north, it will be global leader in logistics and digital governance. So, we are creating infrastructure where ideas flourish and economies soar.

This brings me to the greatest opportunity of all. Maharashtra invites you, researchers, innovators, investors and visionaries, to make this your home. Work here and with a talent pool of millions,

skilled in IT, engineering and digital sciences. Research here in our world-renowned institutions and collaborative hubs, partnering with global tech giants.

Invest here. We are forward-looking policies with a visionary political leadership and show high returns in a secure environment. And please do live here, in a state that offers everything from pristine beaches of Konkan to the cultural riches of Pune, all the while enjoying India's most cosmopolitan lifestyle.

As we look forward to discussions of ICANN85, tackling domain name systems, new gTLDs, internet governance, and global collaboration, let us remember that events like this are bridges to a more inclusive digital world.

Maharashtra is proud to host you. Thank you for choosing Mumbai. Let's make this forum not just a meeting of minds, but a launchpad for the internet's next chapter. [foreign language - 00:32:50]. Thank you.

SAMIRAN GUPTA

Thank you, Mr. Aggarwal. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology is where India's digital leap has been imagined and implemented out of. Whether it's the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, the Semiconductor Manufacturing Policy, or Internet Governance, METI is where these policies and action plans are developed.

NIXI is India's country code registry for .in and .bharat in 15 local scripts. Today, NIXI has over 4 million registered users of .in and .bharat top-level domains. It is now my proud privilege and honor to invite Mr. S. Krishnan to the stage. Mr. Krishnan is the Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, and the Chairperson of NIXI. Mr. Krishnan, sir.

S. KRISHNAN

My good friend and colleague and the host for this entire event, Shri Rajesh Aggarwal, the Chief Secretary of Maharashtra, Ms. Tripti Sinha, the Chairman of ICANN, Chairperson of ICANN, Mr. Kurtis Lindquist, President and CEO of ICANN org, members of the Board of ICANN, delegates from across the world, let me first welcome you to India.

This is the third time that India is hosting ICANN ever since ICANN57 in Hyderabad. Many changes since then and we are extremely happy to have you with us here again in Mumbai, in this iconic city as Rajesh already described it and at this wonderful venue.

India is honored to host this community forum at a time when the internet has become indispensable to economies, governance, innovation, and everyday life across the world. And the governance of internet also needs to evolve from a time when it was more a voluntary effort of trying to get more people to join, to a time when it is dictated by enlightened self-interest, of all the interests that it needs to protect of all of its participants.

It's become more and more universal, and it needs to work for all of us. And that is the spirit in which I'm sure the discussions over this week will proceed. You have a heavy agenda, many of those are covered in this industry work.

We meet at a time when certain parts of the world are navigating complex geopolitical developments. In such circumstances, the resilience and reach of the internet have enabled this meeting to proceed seamlessly in a hybrid format, ensuring broad participation from across regions.

We deeply appreciate those joining virtually and we extend special gratitude to participants who have traveled to Mumbai despite the prevailing uncertainties. Your presence reflects the strength and continued support for the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance.

As our Honorable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has often reminded us, global challenges demand that global action must match global ambition. In a deeply interconnected digital world, this responsibility is especially relevant in the stewardship of the internet's core infrastructure.

Today, the internet is no longer merely a technical network, but has evolved into critical global infrastructure, powering commerce, public services, knowledge exchange, and innovation. As digital adoption deepens, ensuring a safer, resilient, open, stable,

interoperable, inclusive and trustworthy internet becomes equally important.

Over the past decade, since ICANN57 was held in Hyderabad, India has undertaken a transformative digital transformation at population scale. Guided by the vision of Viksit Bharat that has developed India by 2047, the 100th anniversary of India's independence, digital infrastructure has become central to national development.

India's digital public infrastructure has been built open, interoperable, secure and affordable by design, spanning digital identity, instant payments, digital documentation, health, education, digital service delivery, and citizen empowerment.

When so much has been done to actually get people in, I think it is incumbent on us to protect their interests going forward. This journey is not about scale alone, it is about ensuring that technology reaches the last mile and empowers the last person, which is Mahatma Gandhi's vision.

Building on this foundation, India is also advancing global cooperation on emerging technologies. Very recently, just two weeks ago, India hosted the world's largest AI summit, the India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. Delegations from over 100 countries and 20 international organizations participated in the summit. More than 400,000 people also attended the summit on the five days.

The summit focused on advancing frameworks for responsible, resilient, and inclusive AI adoption at the global level. And the inclusion of this effort and the fact that it was cutting across everybody is underlined by the fact that the Declaration, the New Delhi Declaration, was endorsed by 92 countries, including all the major countries in the world, including people who had either not attended the earlier summits or had not signed up to the Declaration on previous occasions.

The Declaration advances cooperation across key pillars such as democratizing AI resources, building secure and trusted AI ecosystems, strengthening human capital, and promoting AI for social empowerment. Global initiatives such as the AI Impact Commons and Trusted AI Commons will further support responsible and equitable AI adoption across the world.

India is also simultaneously expanding sovereign AI computer infrastructure with tens and thousands of GPUs. And interestingly, the infrastructure on which AI depends is also the same infrastructure which will make internet much more resilient in terms of data centers and all the other facilities that are needed.

Through trusted digital infrastructure and widespread connectivity, millions of individuals, startups, small businesses are now participating meaningfully in India's digital ecosystem.

One of the challenges which was discussed in the summit was also how the physical infrastructure of the internet in terms of connectivity, people getting connected to the net, making sure that

compute infrastructure is available, is critical for further growth, critical for technology adoption across the world, which is what sets, I think in some ways, the critical elements of what needs to happen in this week here in ICANN85.

India also sees itself as a bridge between developed and developing digital ecosystems, advocating greater participation from underserved regions while strengthening global technical cooperation. The global digital governance landscape has entered a new phase with the adoption of the WSIS+20 Review Process Outcome Document on 17 December 2025 at the High-Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly.

This marked a transition from deliberation to implementation, reaffirming a development-oriented multi-stakeholder framework for global digital cooperation. India has consistently emphasized during the WSIS+20 process that internet governance must remain global and multi-stakeholder in nature with full participation of governments, the private sector, civil society, the technology community, and academia.

This principle reaffirmed in the outcome document, aligns closely with ICANN's foundational model and its recognized role within the WSIS ecosystem. As implementation advances, coherence across digital governance processes, including evolving global digital compact discussions will be essential to avoid duplication and to strengthen impact.

As we convene at ICANN85, this meeting represents a continuation of the global commitment reaffirmed during the WSIS+20 review process to preserve a unified, secure and development-enabling internet.

And we've, of course, in India, done our best, both through METI and NIXI, to expand the outreach of the internet in the country and to strengthen the core internet infrastructure. And further, I think the critical thing is to make sure that more and more people are able to participate through capacity building and building newer participants and enabling them becomes an important part of what we will do in the days to come.

And I trust that in ICANN85, the community will deliberate on some of the key technical and policy related issues and some of these issues will include subjects like the who is accuracy improvements, operationalization of a 24-hour timeline for urgent requests which come up from time to time, alignment between mandatory timelines and voluntary systems, the future of various elements of the architecture which are there, and a mandatory registrar participation in centralized disclosure systems.

Many of these are very crucial for keeping the internet secure and safe for newer generations of users. Of course, we look forward to the new gTLD program, the 2026 round implementation, which is imminent, and I'm sure that this is something which will result in greater spread of the internet and its greater acceptance.

Mandatory reporting of DNS abuse complaints, something which the CEO already raised, is again a critical item which India would be concerned with. And all of these are areas which we really look forward to engage over the coming days, and I'm sure at the end of this process we will reaffirm our commitment to an open, secure, interoperable and trusted internet.

Demonstrating meaningful progress on technical policy issues in ICANN is essential. Ensuring visible and effective outcomes will help reinforce confidence amongst governments and stakeholders in the ability of the multi-stakeholder framework to address emerging challenges in a responsive manner.

As we deliberate over the coming days, let us reaffirm our collective commitment to ensuring that digital progress bridges, divides, empowers societies, and reinforces human dignity.

Whether you're joining us here in Mumbai or participating from across the world, we hope that ICANN85 reflects the resilience, inclusivity, and collaborative spirit that defines the global internet community.

In India, we believe in the spirit of Atithi Devo Bhava, the guest is akin to God. As you participate in ICANN85, we invite you to also experience India's culture and hospitality. We are honored to host you here in Mumbai and look forward to productive discussions and meaningful outcomes. Thank you.

SAMIRAN GUPTA

Thank you, Mr. Krishnan. And now it's my pleasure to invite and welcome Mr. Jia-Rong Low, Director General of the Asia-Pacific Network Information Center, APNIC, and representing the Address Supporting Organization. Jia-Rong, please.

JIA-RONG LOW

Good morning, everybody. My name is Jia-Rong. I'm the Director General of APNIC and I'm here addressing all of you today in the capacity as the Chair of the NRO Executive Council. Kurtis, this is also my second year since joining APNIC and I hope I don't have more grey hair.

Anyway, the topic of my speech today is that which binds us. And in accordance with ICANN's unspoken *modus operandi*, I have already used acronyms. I gave two acronyms. APNIC is an RIR and I'm here in the capacity of the NRO. I'll elaborate on these for those who are not familiar.

RIRs are Regional Internet Registries. There are five of us covering five regions. ARIN, LACNIC, RIPE NCC, AFRINIC, and APNIC. RIRs are member-based organizations that allocate internet number resources, which are IP addresses and autonomous system numbers, or ASMs.

Like our sister organizations, ICANN and the IETF, we are internet governance organizations governed by the multi-stakeholder model. The RIR community in each region makes policy on how number resources are allocated.

Our job is to allocate number resources to anyone who wants to run a network according to these community-developed policies. This helps ensure an open internet, which the RIRs have supported and have been an essential part of since our establishment, some of which predate ICANN. Our job is that of technical coordination and we do not own the IP addresses which are allocated to us by IANA.

Since we are in India, I'll talk about India's internet growth. India has crossed 1 billion internet users since late 2025. I think that deserves an applause.

Now, when I first joined this industry in 2013, you may find that I'm a familiar face because I helped ICANN establish its Asia-Pacific office at the time, India had about 200 million internet users Circa 2013. The first few years of this period saw over 100 million new internet users join the internet per year in India. This was phenomenal growth.

APNIC's allocation of Internet Number Resources in India, together with our partner, the National Internet Exchange of India, or NIXI, who is also our local host for this ICANN meeting, has kept pace with the growth of India's network, which supports the number of internet users they have today. Globally, there are many such success stories, and the RIRs have played our part in supporting the growth and development of the internet through the stewardship and allocation of number resources.

Now the other acronym I used was the NRO, which is the Number Resource Organization. The NRO is a cooperative body comprising

the five RIRs. The NRO coordinates global internet number policies through the NRO Number Council, which at ICANN serves as the ASO, Address Supporting Organization, Address Council, the ASO AC. We are a part of ICANN's SO and AC structure. This is why ICANN has two Ns, names and numbers.

Global Internet Number Policies, that of IANA's number resource allocation to the RIRs, require consensus across all five RIR communities and are ratified by the ICANN Board. As part of ICANN's governance structure, the ASO AC nominates two seats to the ICANN Board and also a member to the NOMCOM.

The ASO has been relatively quiet at ICANN, partly because we haven't had to update any global policies in recent years. However, for the past two years, we have been a lot more active. Many of you would have heard about ICP-2 or the RIR governance document. The ASO has a number of sessions on this topic here in this meeting and we are targeting to finalize the RIR governance documents by the end of the year.

ICP-2, or Internet Coordination Policy 2, is an important foundational document which defines the criteria for recognizing and evaluating RIRs. This is now a 25-year-old document. It was developed by the ASO AC with the assistance of the then-existing RIRs and accepted by the ICANN Board in 2001. The global landscape today, however, is very different.

Over the past few years, AFRINIC's situation raised the attention of stakeholders, not just in Africa, but all over the world, towards the

resilience, governance, and accountability of the global RIR system.

While each RIR is an independent legal entity with its own processes and governance, all RIRs are collectively responsible for the Internet Number Registry System. If one of us fails, the entire system fails, and the global internet suffers.

This ties back to the theme of my speech, that which binds us. Again, since we are in India, I'd like to quote the Indian Minister of Communications, Jyotiraditya Scindia.

At an event last year, Minister Scindia talked about India building the world's largest digital highway. And one remark he made stood out, broadband for the Indian citizen it's a constitutional commitment, not a commodity. That resonated very strongly with me.

The internet for our community is not a commodity. It is our mission, our commitment, our life. We believe together in maintaining and safeguarding an open, secure, unified internet.

Now the Chief Secretary of Maharashtra shared Mumbai's two religions. I think in our community here, internet is our community's religion. And this faith is what binds us, because I do believe, like many of you here, that the internet is probably mankind's best invention in modern history. And if it breaks, we may never be able to put it back together again.

So now we, the RIRs, have identified challenges and vulnerabilities in the system. And to address them we've started this process, the output of which will be the RIR governance document.

While we have recognized these challenges and want to enhance our accountability for the benefit of the global internet, this needs someone outside the RIRs to play an impartial role.

For us, the logical choice is ICANN, as the body that already partners us to coordinate the internet's unique identifier system. This is an opportunity to further strengthen our partnership and coordination. It does give ICANN more responsibility, and the implementation of the RIR governance documents will not come without extra costs, but the cost of doing nothing would be far greater.

What emerges, though, will be a more robust Internet Number Registry system, underpinned by strengthened coordination and partnership between the RIRs and ICANN, not just the organizations, but our communities as one.

What emerges will be a more secure, stable, and unified internet. The numbering community talks about ICANN's second N as a silent N, but with the updated RIR governance documents, we may need to pronounce ICANN as ICANN just so to emphasize the two Ns. Thank you very much.

SAMIRAN GUPTA

Thank you, Jia-Rong. And now it's time to present the ICANN Community Excellence Awards. And for this, let me call back to the stage Tripti Sinha and Kurtis Lindquist. I also request the Community Excellence Award selection panel to join Tripti and Kurtis on stage as well.

Mr. Ram Mohan, as the representative of the selection panel, Ram, please share with us more about the ICANN Community Excellence Award and the decision that the selection panel has made for this award. Ram.

RAM MOHAN

Thank you, Samiran. [foreign language - 00:57:19], namaste, and good morning. I'm Ram Mohan, and I have the distinct pleasure and honor of representing the selection panel for the 2026 ICANN Community Excellence Award. Since 2014, this award has recognized something extraordinary. Community members whose ability to find consensus-driven solutions that advance ICANN's multi-stakeholder model and achieve impact.

It is a recognition by the community for the community. It honors those who do the hard, often invisible work of building trust, bridging differences, and finding consensus when consensus feels out of reach. That work is the foundation of ICANN itself. Our panel, representing the full breadth of our SOs and ACs, spent months reviewing an exceptional group of nominees. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my fellow panelists standing behind

me and watching online for their time and dedication in selecting this year's recipient.

We weren't simply looking for participation. We were looking for leadership that changes outcomes. We were looking for a catalyst. And this year, friends, the catalyst was unmistakable. For her proactive leadership, her empathy in complex challenges, and her unwavering commitment to the multi-stakeholder model, the panel is proud to present the 2026 Community Excellence Award to our friend and colleague, Amrita Choudhury.

Amrita's impact reflects a rare combination of foresight and inclusivity. For nearly two decades, she has worked to ensure that global internet policy is not shaped only by those already at the table, but also by those still finding their way to it.

During the IANA stewardship transition, Amrita didn't wait for a seat at the table. She built the table. She organized the first national consultations in India, bringing government, civil society and technical stakeholders into one dialogue for the very first time.

As the chair of APRALO, she has mastered the art of continuity through innovation. She honors long-standing relationships while actively bringing new diverse voices into our ecosystem. She proves that consensus is not about compromise, it is about understanding. Her leadership reminds us that the strength of this model lies not in process, but in people.

Amrita, your work reminds us that the internet is only as resilient as the community that governs it. In a community powered almost entirely by volunteers, contributions like yours shape our future. Because of you, this community is stronger.

Friends, please join me in a final round of applause for our 2026 recipient, Amrita Choudhury. Amrita, I request you to stay back and please. Yes, we are ready for you.

AMRITA CHOUDHURY

Thank you so much everyone. I did prepare a speech, but one bowled me over, making me a superwoman here. So, thank you to the ICANN community for this honor and recognition. It is a privilege for me and thank you to the selection committee and to those who nominated me, you know who you are.

My journey to IG, Internet Governance, again acronym, and ICANN would not have been possible without the support and guidance of numerous community members and mentors, both who are within ICANN and beyond, who actually nudged me, encouraged and guided me over the years.

This community has given me a lot of friends, many of you who are here or online, helped me learn, encouraged me to participate and share my views from the developing country perspective. It has taught me to respect diverse cultures, and perspectives.

The opportunities I got to engage here have been transformative for me and I believe others too should have access to similar

opportunities and mentorship and this is the belief which motivates me.

The internet is for everyone, even a new user coming from the remotest part of my country or any other country. The way we use it and benefit from it, they also should get the similar opportunity.

And therefore, to ensure that the internet remains open, secure, resilient and equitable for all, it is essential that all the voices are heard and the diverse perspectives are considered when decisions are made and that is why practicing the multi-stakeholder model in the truest form is important to preserve these practices and to ensure that we have nuanced policies.

Thank you once again for this recognition and for this privilege. And I'm honored to be a part of this extraordinary community. Thank you.

SAMIRAN GUPTA

We are in the last segment of the ICANN85 Welcome Ceremony, but it's not over yet. We are going to conclude with a spectacular dance performance called Samanvai.

As the ICANN multi-stakeholder community comes together in Mumbai, Samanvai depicts the coming together of six classical dance forms. Choreographed by award-winning Mohiniyattam exponent Jayaprabha Menon, and the classical dance forms being depicted today include Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattam, Odissi, Manipuri, and Kathak.

The dance performance begins with the invocation to Lord Ganesha, with a prayer to remove all obstacles, and then captures the spirit, and of renewal and rejuvenation, depicting the seasons of monsoon and spring. Enjoy the performance and the rest of the ICANN85 meeting.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]