Data Diplomacy: Emerging Contours by Amb. Shyam Saran

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Introduction

The Information and Communication Society of India (ICSI), New Delhi, organized the Second Prof. B. Guha Memorial Lecture on Data Diplomacy in virtual mode on 13th May 2022. In her opening address Dr Usha Mujoo Munshi, President of ICSI, appraised the speaker and audience on the ICSI mission and activities for the broad sections of the society. ICSI started its journey in November 2000 as a scientific society. ICSI is one of the signatories of the Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development. ICSI convene its activities by fulfilling some of its stated Aims and Objectives, including (a) to collect and disseminate relevant knowledge on information and communication; (b) to initiate projects, studies, surveys, data analysis and other allied activities on its own behalf or on behalf of other agencies; (c) to provide editorial and technical supports for the publication of print and electronic materials; (d) to impart training on information, communication and related areas and promote studies thereof; (e) to maintain liaison with similar national and international organizations; (f) to publish and distribute materials devoted to information, communication, and related areas; (g) to promote automation, networking, application of internet and advanced information and communication technologies; and (h) to associate with such programmes and activities as may be considered necessary and useful for promoting the Aims and Objects of the Society. ICSI carried out two research projects supported by the Research Council for History of Science at the Indian National Science Academy (INSA). Dr Munshi further informed the audience that ICSI's founder

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president Prof. B. Guha (1926-2019), was a teacher par extraordinary[1]. Late Prof. B. Guha, a Scientist at CSIR-Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (now CSIR-NIScPR) and later Professor and Head, the Department of Library and Information Science, Banaras Hindu University, is widely known for his many contributions in the disciplines of scientific documentation, library and information management. He passed away at the age of 92 in January 2019, and until his demise, he led a very active life, contributing tirelessly to the discipline till the last years of his life.

Prof. B Guha Memorial Lecture Series

ICSI launched the Prof. B Guha Memorial Lecture Series in 2020 to recognise his manifold contributions and keep Prof Guha's legacy and memories alive. The inaugural memorial lecture on "National Education Policy and its Implications on Higher Education in India" was delivered by Prof. V. Ramgopal Rao, Director, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, on 11th November 2020. The speaker of the 2nd Prof. B. Guha Memorial Lecture, Ambassador Shyam Saran is a career diplomat and former Foreign Secretary, the Government of India. He is presently the President of India International Centre, New Delhi. Amb. Saran began his lecture by introducing data diplomacy in a lucid manner, describing how the data-driven society emerged post-World War II.

Defining Data Diplomacy

Data Diplomacy deals with foreign policy formulation, and its execution. As the data may be a weapon, digital devices, tools, and communication systems may be considered as diplomacy systems. While we speak of data diplomacy in reality, big data impacts both foreign policy formulation, and its execution in the forms of diplomacy. As data diplomacy is a comparatively new subject, there are very few definitions available in the true sense.

In the 2015 AAAS Conference, a speaker Timothy Dye defines "Data diplomacy as an emerging construct that integrates concepts from data science, technology, and computing with social science, international relations, and diplomatic negotiation, and in some cases, offers a new diplomatic tool that facilitates global (and local) relationships" [2].

Working with Data Diplomacy

Data diplomacy got emboldened over time, more particularly in the post-cold war era, as access to information and knowledge-resources got strengthened, and internet-based products and services penetrated across the lengths and breads of the world. Many of the intergovernmental, multilateral and bilateral discourses and deliberations carried out on the issues of data governance, data sovereignty, data localization, data privacy, data exchanges, and data protection in the last three decades, where professional diplomats and other professionals got engaged in policy formulations and their executions. The intergovernmental forums such as the Internet Governance Forums (IGF), ICANN Policy Forums (IPF), Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APrIGF), and ITU Regional Development Forums have dealt with the above issues in detail and country-level commitments were also discussed with different stakeholders. These forums have ensured equitable participation and engagement with civil society actors. Over the years, the voices of the youths and women are also heard. The decision- makers and national-level negotiators agreed to work together to bring a participatory governance model for the internet and to mitigate challenges of data sovereignty, data security, and data privacy. However, some of the said challenges can be further addressed through the bilateral, trilateral, or multilateral negotiations and agreements.

Ensuring A Safe Cyberspace

Across the World, we also see increased instances of cyber-attacks, and more particularly state-sponsored cyber-attacks, to damage the critical information infrastructure of a country, or a military establishment, or an enterprise. The country's critical information infrastructure needs state-of-the-art information security, data protection, and data privacy principles and practices across the governmental, diplomatic, military and business enterprises. In an interconnected world, the collapse of one entity by a means of a data breach or cyber-attack incident can lead to collapse or near-collapse or severe loss of other entities as well. Thus, the data and science diplomats are relentlessly engaged in bilateral and multilateral negotiations and the preparation of policy instruments towards safeguarding cyberspace from rogue elements and ensuring the protection of vulnerable communities, such as children, women, indigenous and differently-abled people, from the cyber-harms. In the intergovernmental forums, the data and science diplomats are engaged with the public policymakers and subject matter experts to proceed further on matters related to information security, data protection, data privacy, data governance, data sovereignty, data localization, and data exchanges for implementing standardized protocols and practices across the regions and countries. Ever-increasing citizen participation through social media platforms is ensured in India and other countries when we provide them with a safe cyberspace and protect them from cyber-harms. Internet intermediaries should also play a responsible role to protect the common citizens and other entities in the digital environment. In India, these intermediaries are now covered under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

Audience Interactions

The Talk drew a number of questions and observations from the esteemed audience. The Q&A session was moderated by Dr Nabi Hasan, Chief Librarian at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. Amb. Saran discussed further how Indian embassies in different countries handle matters related to data and science diplomacy, even during the COVID-19-induced lockdowns around the world when the Indian diplomats ensured continuity of access to consular and diplomatic services. He also discussed how the world's largest technology enterprises can play vital roles in safeguarding diplomatic and personal data from cyber-attacks, and data breaches. He appraised the information and data science enthusiasts about the nuances of data diplomacy from the viewpoint of a career diplomat. The Second B Guha Memorial Lecture concluded with a vote of thanks offered by Dr Nabi Hasan.

References

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