

Sunil Abraham  
Executive Director  
The Centre for Internet and Society  
Bangalore

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Dear Sunil,

**Re: Brief Report of My Visit to CIS February 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity of the visit. Your generosity is very much appreciated.

I now write a brief report based on the programme you have drawn up for me. Again, thank you for it; you have indeed put a lot of thought into it.

Here are my thoughts based on my interactions with you and the staff. Please do take them as incomplete preliminary drafts, very much subject to change and amendments.

**Mission of CIS**

I have had a very good series of discussions with your researchers, full-time and adjunct. If not for the threat of disruption from government intervention into funding, your Centre would be growing from strength to strength in a virtuous spiral upwards. Research work is such that good work attracts good researchers, which attracts good research projects, which attracts good researchers.

Good policy research centres outside of an academic environment should have three missions:

1. Research, which is self-explanatory
2. Policy advocacy, which can be from lobbying to awareness-raising among government officials to the occasional commentary in influential newspapers and magazines, and
3. Service, which can include public lectures and seminars.

My strong impression is that CIS is doing all three, albeit in varying degrees. I was impressed in fact with the number of seminars held in the week I was there. Besides mine, there were two others. Many university departments with a larger headcount do not have that many seminars even.

The seminars are important in setting the culture for research, in getting researchers to be in the “research frame of mind” and in getting others outside of the group to visit the Centre and thereby see the work being done.

The policy advocacy is also strong. The Centre works on impactful issues and has a focus on research with a policy change in mind.

It is against this backdrop that I offer the following ideas for exploration of possible collaborations.

## **Possible Collaborations**

### **1. Publication in (more) Academic Journals**

As discussed, one of the goals of CIS is to publish in quality peer-reviewed academic journals.

To so publish, two criteria are essential: the ideas being discussed in the article are new (novel) and contribute to theory (as opposed to merely fact finding) and the research method used in study upon which the article is based is conceptually sound. (The third criterion of good writing is taken for granted.)

On the first criterion of novelty and contribution to theory, there are clear areas where academic publication is possible. For example, in Accountability and IP, deep and fundamental questions (eg models of accountability, accountability of civil society, IP law vs competition law) are being asked. These fundamental questions are areas that academic journals would like to publish. Similarly, there are areas such as data protection where the Centre is at the cutting edge of questions.

Not all areas lend themselves so easily to answering academic questions. To that end, some of the papers written as policy reports will need to be tweaked to meet the interest of journal editors.

Publishing in academic journals therefore require:

- Adjustment of the research question. The questions have to be reframed into conceptual ones so as to appeal to academic journals. This means adapting the reports not merely in style but also in rewriting.
- The research method also needs to be more specified.
- Many of the top-tier journals want to see an Internal Review Board of Ethics. Although most if not all the work the CIS does would not violate IRB norms, nevertheless, a number of journal editors, especially of top journals, want to see an IRB process. For CIS, three reviewers, one from CIS and two external, could suffice as the IRB.

### **2. Collaboration Possibilities**

Besides, academic publishing, there appears to be great potential for collaboration with academic institutions in research projects themselves. These possibilities will need to be explored further.

- Privacy/Data Protection

A cross-national study of data protection regimes in Asia—particularly ASEAN, which has seen a flurry of such laws passed in the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia—may be helpful for India in designing its own comprehensive data protection regime. Thailand and Indonesia are discussing similar laws. Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan already have such provisions. These countries offer an alternative to the EU's position on data protection as most of the Asian regimes do not apply data protection to the government but only to business. The different models also imply different compliance costs. It would be useful to study the various regimes for lessons learnt and with a view to adopting the one that is most appropriate for India.

- Internet Governance and other policy issues in the digital space

The policy arena in the digital space provides fertile ground for collaboration with many others working on the same issue.

### Going Forward

There are some possible areas that I may be able to contribute.

- I would be pleased to return to CIS for a training session on writing for academic journals. There are some tricks of the trade in such publishing that I would be pleased to share.
- I am open to possible collaboration in larger scale research projects where my presence as a member of the team would be a value-add. I am thinking in particular of projects of donors from Japan or the Asian Development Bank or similar entities with interests across Asia.

Again, thank you for your generosity. I look forward to our next meeting.

Regards,



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Singapore