

Internet by the people, for the people

NAVEED HAQ ON DIGITAL INCLUSION

MOHAMMAD KAWSAR UDDIN

Naveed Haq, Senior Director of infrastructure and connectivity at the Internet Society (ISOC), has dedicated his career to bridging the digital divide—especially in Asia-Pacific. From the mountainous trails of Nepal to the remote villages of Papua New Guinea, Haq's work exemplifies how inclusive and community-led innovation can transform lives. In an exclusive interview, he discusses ISOC's vision, the role of grassroots networks, and the future of digital inclusion.

Q: You've worked extensively across Asia-Pacific to improve infrastructure and connectivity. What have been some of the most rewarding or challenging experiences?
Naveed Haq: Establishing internet connectivity in remote or marginalised regions always demands passion, creativity, and community engagement. The most challenging projects are often the most fulfilling.

Three projects stand out. First, the Everest Community Network in Nepal. In partnership with the Nepal Internet Foundation and the Sherpa community, we built the world's highest community network in Khunde and Khumjung—villages just over 10km from Everest Base Camp. More than 1,500 Sherpas now have access to fibre internet, transforming opportunities in education, health and communication.

Second, the Maldives Internet Exchange Point (MVIIX). This began as a casual discussion between local ISPs and organisations like ISOC and APNIC. We supported training, planning and deployment to launch the country's first IXP, helping improve internet resilience and performance across this small island state.

Third, the Gabaspot Community Wi-Fi in Papua New Guinea. Gabagaba village previously had little to no access. With regulatory support and local leadership, we helped launch a community-run network that now connects around 5,000 people. Digital literacy, remote education, and job access have all improved. The project shows what's possible when policy and community align.

Q: As senior director of infrastructure and connectivity, what are your current focus areas?

Haq: Our 2030 Strategy is grounded in the belief that the internet should enrich people's lives and be a force for good. My priorities focus on expanding affordable, reliable and resilient access.

We're concentrating our IXP efforts on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). On the community connectivity front, we are focusing on indigenous peoples, displaced populations, and women-led social enterprises.

Q: How do you measure the real-world impact of infrastructure projects aimed at connecting the unconnected?

Haq: We use both qualitative and quantitative measures. But often, the most powerful indicators are the stories from the communities themselves. These stories show how local connectivity solutions can close digital gaps and transform lives—what we call “internet by



the people, for the people.”

Q: What emerging technologies do you see as key to bridging the digital divide over the next decade?

Haq: Advances in spectrum management—like TV white spaces and Wi-Fi 6—can greatly benefit underserved areas. Additionally, low-Earth orbit satellite networks are showing promise in offering affordable, resilient access to remote communities.

Q: How do policy and regulation support or hinder connectivity efforts in developing regions?

Haq: Many unconnected communities remain offline due to policy and market failures. Policymakers have a crucial role in fostering inclusive, enabling environments.

Traditional networks won't reach everyone. We need frameworks that allow diverse models to flourish—especially community-led ones. Imagine small villages receiving seed funding, training and support to launch their own networks. These communities can build sustainable businesses, keep costs low, and serve their neighbours—something large telecoms won't do.

We work with policymakers to help shape such inclusive strategies. It's not a technical issue—it's about vision and will.

Q: You've collaborated with many different communities and cultures. What strategies help foster inclusive partnerships?

Haq: Listening is key. Understanding each community's needs, culture, and context helps build trust and create solutions that stick. Success comes from community ownership, not external control.

There is no universal model. What works in Papua New Guinea may not work in Nepal. Our role is to facilitate, not dictate.

Q: What does a truly open internet mean to you in practice?

Haq: A truly open internet allows people to

connect, create, and communicate freely. But that openness is under threat—from both state and corporate actions that risk fragmenting the internet.

We advocate for an internet that remains global, secure and interoperable. Otherwise, we risk a future where the internet is no longer the shared, empowering space it is today.

Q: What role do local communities and grassroots organisations play in shaping digital inclusion efforts?

Haq: They are absolutely central. In many of our projects, grassroots organisations take the lead. For example, in Africa, some community network initiatives—like Aheri—have evolved into respected brands.

With the right policy environment, these organisations can build and manage networks that are locally relevant, sustainable, and impactful.

Q: What inspired your journey into internet infrastructure and policy?

Haq: I grew up in a rural Pakistani village without any internet access. In the late 1990s, during university, my father bought me a computer. We used a \$4 prepaid internet card that connected at 40 kilobits per second. It took minutes to load a Yahoo page—but that experience changed my life.

I started my career at the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, working on policy and regulation. In 2013, I joined the Internet Society. It has allowed me to merge community work with infrastructure and policy—something I'm deeply passionate about.

Q: How does ISOC support its members in building technological and policy capacity?

Haq: Our members and chapters are the driving force of ISOC. They take courses, host events, advocate for change, and connect with a global network of peers. We equip them with the tools and knowledge to lead efforts in their own communities.

Listening is key. Understanding each community's needs, culture, and context helps build trust and create solutions that stick. Success comes from community ownership, not external control.

JOBS SPOTLIGHT

International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT)
Lecturer, various departments
Deadline: July 14



Eligibility:
● Master's and 4-year Bachelor's degree with excellent results in all examinations.
Minimum experience: N/A

Eskeyef Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
Executive, Quality Control
Deadline: June 28



Eligibility:
● Post-graduation/graduation with very good academic records in Pharmacy/Chemistry/Biochemistry from a top-tier institution.
Minimum experience: Fresher/1-2 years

Child Health Research Foundation (CHRF)
Senior IT Officer
Deadline: July 16



Eligibility:
● BSc in Computer Science Engineering from any reputed university, with prior practical experience in the related field.
Minimum experience: 4-5 years

MetLife Bangladesh
Digital Support Associate
Deadline: June 29



Eligibility:
● Bachelor/Master's degree preferably in Business Administration/IT or any other related discipline.
Minimum experience: N/A

FOR MORE DETAILS AND THE APPLICATION LINKS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.



“What really matters is what you do with what you have.”
H. G. WELLS



THE BOSSMAN BY E. RAZA RONNY



AI cheating tool startup raises \$15 million in funding

NEXT STEP DESK

AI startup Cluely has secured \$15 million in seed funding led by Andreessen Horowitz (a16z), about two months after closing a \$5.3 million seed round. Founded by suspended Columbia University students Chungin “Roy” Lee and Neel Shanmugam, the startup’s core product is a “cheat on everything” AI assistant that operates discreetly in the background, analysing live audio and on-screen content to provide real-time support during meetings and customer calls.

In its official announcement, lead investor a16z praised the startup’s approach, noting Cluely’s rapid traction in enterprise sales

environments and early “meaningful consumer subscription revenue”.

The founders, both 21, were suspended from Columbia for developing ‘Interview Coder’ – an AI tool designed to help coders during technical interviews. Reports suggest that Lee’s controversial marketing tactics, including a viral video demonstrating how the AI could deceive a date about personal details, have fueled both the company’s growth and criticism.

Despite the controversies, a16z sees potential in what it describes as Cluely’s “proactive, multimodal AI assistants”, differentiating them from conventional note-taking applications. Cluely’s previous \$5.3 million seed round was co-led by Abstract Ventures and Susa Ventures.



Shareholders sue Apple for allegedly overhyping AI: report

NEXT STEP DESK

Apple is facing a proposed securities fraud class action lawsuit from shareholders who allege the company misled investors about the progress of its artificial intelligence (AI) integration, particularly within its Siri voice assistant, according to a recent report by Reuters. The complaint, filed on June 20 in San Francisco federal court, claims that the company’s statements about AI development resulted in significant financial losses for shareholders.

The lawsuit asserts that Apple downplayed the time required to implement advanced AI features, especially those unveiled at its 2024 Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC). According to the report,

shareholders claim the company led them to believe that AI would be a central component of its upcoming iPhone 16 lineup, following the announcement of ‘Apple Intelligence’ – a suite of features aimed at making Siri more powerful and user-friendly.

According to the complaint, Apple lacked a functioning prototype of the enhanced AI-powered Siri and had no reasonable basis to suggest the features would be ready in time for the iPhone 16 launch. The suit alleges that the reality began to surface on March 7, 2025, when Apple delayed key Siri updates until 2026. Shareholders argue that further concerns were confirmed during this year’s WWDC on June 9, when Apple’s AI developments failed to meet analyst expectations.

Former OpenAI CTO’s new startup now valued at \$10 billion: report

NEXT STEP DESK

OpenAI’s former chief technology officer Mira Murati has secured \$2 billion in seed funding for her new AI startup, Thinking Machines Lab, valuing the six-month-old company at \$10 billion, according to a recent report by Financial Times. The massive funding round marks one of Silicon Valley’s largest-ever seed investments.

As per the report, San Francisco-based Thinking Machines has not disclosed its specific product plans, instead leveraging Murati’s reputation as a key architect behind OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Dall-E to attract major backers. Andreessen

Horowitz led the investment, with participation from Sarah Guo’s Conviction Partners, sources familiar with the deal told Financial Times.

The 36-year-old Murati, who briefly served as OpenAI’s interim CEO during Sam Altman’s November 2023 ouster incident, has assembled a team of former OpenAI talent including co-founder John Schulman and several other executives. The funding comes with an unusual governance structure – Murati will retain board voting rights that outweigh all other directors combined, ensuring her final say on critical decisions, according to the report.