
Meeting with the MCST Minister - Yaumiyya

Monday, 26.11.2018

Attendees

- Ministry of Communication Science and Technology Mr. Mohamed Maleeh Jamaal
- Representatives from the Ministry/NCIT
- Around 30 personnel from Maldives tech community

Agenda

Introductory meeting with the Minister to discuss the issues and concerns of the general IT industry in Maldives

1. Opening notes by the minister
2. Discussion of issues and concerns by the participants
3. Concluding notes by the minister

Discussion

Minister:

- Welcome notes
 - Currently in the process of undertaking administrative tasks in formulating the new Ministry office and hiring personnel
 - Hopes to work in close relations with the general tech community, and that the tech community will closely collaborate with the NCIT team
 - Plans for convening separate discussion/working groups for each topic/issue that needs to be addressed
 - National Data Center (NDC) and National Help Desk tasks currently ongoing
 - Needs close collaboration and support of the tech community in the execution and renovation tasks (related to ministry, NCIT, and industry in general)
 - Plans for the formation of the tech council. Members from various groups, youths and others expected to participate in this group as tech advisers
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Azhan (On Behalf of Maldives Digital Society):

- Lack of government level standards and frameworks for anything and everything IT related.
- Digital vaccination - Public awareness of IT related attacks, especially social engineering based ones
- Lack of local training facilities/opportunities for tech industry
- Lack of ICT Laws/Protocols, as Cyberbullying, Cyber laws
- Importance of infrastructure consolidation (like the NDC)
- Need for an Open Data Policy
- Means to address the concerns of everyday citizens. E.g. Payment gateway issues, mobile money, international financial instruments (Paypal, Google Wallet, etc)

Irfan (Robotics):

- Lack of opportunity for robotics for youth and enthusiasts. We must have the ability to develop things locally instead of outsourcing
- *Minister asked if previously collaborated with Faculty of Engineering regarding the matter* - Stated no, as their mandate is different than that of his vision
- Lack of facilities for enthusiasts. E.g. Precision cutting, parts acquisition
- Point is to avoid the limitations for anyone willing to pursue a career or interest in the robotics field

Jailam (Javaabu):

- Youth are tech savvy, but no opportunities to pursue monetized personal interests. I.e. No way to generate money from ones interests and hobbies. E.g. YouTube, Mobile App Stores
- Enthusiasts should have the facilities to broaden their target market not only to Maldivians but to outside as well
- Policy level limitations in Maldivians from using PayPal, PlayStore, App Store, Google Wallet and other international payment systems

Aiman (Aasanda):

- No option for monetization from activities/products
- Lack of awareness and overall hesitance of the general public to Payment Systems
- Electronic and online forms instead of paper based forms. More trustworthy and reliable in cases like Housing Ministry flat rounds
- Should avoid running between ministries for tasks such as birth registration and society registration

- Digital authentication system at government level for public using government facilities. Maybe improvements to e-faas system to facilitate this. Will allow for better communication between government institutions
- *Ministry personnel mentioned that e-faas system was originally designed for government internal use only but is now currently being redesigned by incorporating OpenID, and is currently in the testing phase.*
- Cloud based, API based services with the help of NDC consolidation.
- Boli font issue

Awwam:

- Being proactive instead of reactive in technological development. Open authentication can help with better and easier processing of government tasks
- Big companies (ISPs) having too much power and thereby undermining SMEs and startups.

Sarfaraz (BML):

- Banking policies does not align with other (third party/mobile money) payment systems, hence the disconnection between the two
- Banks business interest is profit
- People expressed worry regarding DNR registry hacking during Elections. Blockchain can alleviate this issue.
- *Minister personnel stated they are currently exploring and researching hyperledger technology to be used in DNR and similar scenarios*

Arushad (Javaabu):

- Lack of foreign study/education opportunities for tech industry. E.g. Scholarships. Most these opportunities are targeted for social sciences and related fields.
- Most countries invest substantially to R&D in tech, but not in Maldives. Needs more local based R&D in useful areas, example in Thaana, and other areas.
- Delays in government payments a hindrance to SMEs.

Minister:

- Will make a pool to address these issues. Separate pools to converse with the related parties in future projects.
- Needs more PR activities to connect more with the public



From Ministry Personnel:

- ICT fair was planned but delayed to mid 2019 due to election. The Boli font issue is a highlight of the planned fair.

Azhan:

- Our technological capacity should be developed to the point where, instead of people approaching government, the government should be approaching people regarding housing/flat and other needs, as Big Data Analysis should provide the government with the required information to make policy based decisions.

Aiman:

- Government should spend and focus more on R&D to achieve what Azhan said above.

Naail:

- Issue with the Boli font originated from copyright and licensing issues. Both Google and Microsoft extremely hesitant in using another font unless it has extremely clear cut licensing details, hence the difficulty in changing the font to something else.
- Reaffirm need to strengthen IP/copyright framework to accommodate this as pointed out by Irfan. Also important for SciTech R&D

Ismail (Dhiraagu):

- Maldives lacks Disaster Recovery (DR) facilities to properly recover from a major disaster. E.g. If DNR database has no backups, and is lost in a major disaster, no way to identify individuals legally after.

Arushad (Javaabu):

- Lack of standard/official list for anything, be it the list of all the islands in Maldives, all the officially recognized Dhivehi words.

Awwam:

- Policies should be formulated to make SMEs comply to a certain standard for managing their data.
- This will allow them to properly communicate and conduct business with big companies and these big companies who normally requires this level of compliance to information/data management.

Affan:

- Government should leverage open source and we are spending too much on proprietary products such as the Microsoft Office package.
- Should educate the public to explain the benefits and ease of open source and the criminal intent of pirated software to leverage the use of more open source products in Maldives

Sarfaraz (BML):

- Government official communications, including national secrets (such as e-mails) now go through foreign companies such as google and it should not be the case.
- Hosting services used by government institutions also tend to use foreign companies, and should be provided by NCIT instead.

Adam:

- Should create policies to enforce proper communication facilities embedded in building designs much like how there are policies that forces lifts and electricity cabling. Both Internet and CCTV cabling should be pre-installed (even if not used) in order to conform to the new policy.
- The “unlimited” internet in Maldives is not really limited and is currently a malpractice. Internet packages should work as advertised.

Aiman (Aasanda):

- There should be policies to mandate the availability of essential local services even if the customer exhausts their internet limits. For example, Utility payment services, other government services.
- Aasanda facilities even now disrupted due to exhaustion of data packages by clients in Islands (Pharmacies, Hospitals, etc)

Multiple Personnel:

- Routing between local ISPs happens outside Maldives and it should not be the case.
- All locally hosted services (especially government services) should be available even if one ISP has connectivity issues outside Maldives.

Minister:

- Nationwide Health Information System integration is a planned undertaking that is already on the way.

- In talks with STELCO to install a communications cable between Male and Hulhumale.

Musaid:

- Connectivity issue already limiting health facilities due to aforementioned issues.

Concluding Notes by the Minister:

- Currently 3 levels of tasks ongoing
- Open communication/PR between ministry (especially NCIT) and the public
- General public and the Private sector involvement should be present in the pools and working groups.
- Regular meetings with the Minister, as well as the the working groups should be facilitated.
- Requested everyone to work closely and assist the NCIT team at all times.
- Idea for a co-workspace is already on the way, by using their Annex building as a starting point.
- Opened for volunteers to participate the reform of NCIT and related sectors, as well and in the formulation of the new frameworks/standards
- Will provide a formal structure to allow us to participate in the ministry matters.

Actionable Items

1. Expression of interest for volunteering in the process of reforming of NCIT
2. Plans to conduct regular meetings once a month, official and unofficial
3. Formation of knowledge pools and working groups to advise the ministry
4. Formation of co-working spaces
5. Formally facilitate the public representatives to participate in ministry matters.