"Insight of the TOP"

H.E. Mr. Mahendra Man Gurung

Secretary of Ministry of Information and Communications (MoIC), Nepal

At the occasion of APT Workshop for Disaster Management and Communications on 21-22 June in Nepal, we had an opportunity to interview H.E. Mr. Mahendra Man Gurung, the Secretary of MoIC about the current ICT policy stance and future perspective of Nepal government.

"**Do whatever we can**"

- How do you describe the policy agenda you are facing now as Nepali government?

Nepal is not an exception when you talk about ICT matters. ICT has been a necessity for daily life as well as for the development of the country. It is also considered as a working tool to provide services for many countries. Similarly, Nepal has also been using ICT in many sectors like government, private sector, and individuals. The trend of ICT has been so popular amongst the people using mobile, laptop, tablets and other electronics devices that the government cannot ignore its importance. The government of Nepal has come up with ICT policy more than 10 years ago. Recently as national strategy, it has also adopted Information and Technology policy and Broadband policy. Nepal is in the process of adapting itself into ICT era and we are implementing "paperless" concept at government offices as much as possible.

Nepal has worked as partners with large companies of developed countries and always has welcomed the foreign investments. There are policies for foreign investment like 'Industrial Policy and Industrial Act' and 'Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act' which include striking clauses like no foreign companies will be nationalized, the foreign companies can take their profit back and can always wish to close the company if they want and so on. Nepal also has 'IT Park' located in Banepa, 25km from the capital Kathmandu. So, in short, as policy agenda, I'd like to emphasize that Nepal is working on possible ways to benefit from ICT in order to develop our society.

- Besides whatever actions government may take, consumer behavior toward ICT changes so quickly. How do observe situation of consumer attitude toward ICT usages or other services in Nepal?

As I have described in my very beginning, the ICT has been a trend that Government cannot ignore. Nowadays, IoT is one of very good examples that is moving very quickly. Unfortunately, I think Nepal has not been able to fully utilize this advancement. For example, currently mobile development is growing fast in rural areas as well as urban ones, which has increased large opportunities in ICT industries. But this is not necessarily connected tangible development of society.

Consumer is one of the biggest driving forces for social development. For the better development of ICT or any other industries, we should consider three things for the consumers: First, '**affordability**'; it means that the application should be affordable for the consumers. Second, '**accessibility**'; it implies that consumers should be able to access it from everywhere. And finally, '**benefit**'; consumers, government or even private sectors are benefited using the application.

The next phase of ICT in Nepal will be mobile banking, financial services and other e-commerce market. Nowadays, mobile banking and telecommunication sector is taking up the market of Nepal. Therefore, recently Central Bank has given permit to 3 new banks for electronic banking services.

Another new activity is that the Government of Nepal and other private sectors has opened 'Community Information Sectors' in postal office, school, and hospital. There are more than 50 sectors in remote areas where free Wi-Fi has been setup. By this the people can easily access the internet in the remote areas.

In this connection, our Broadband policy is an important guideline, by which all the districts of Nepal will have broadband accessibility by 2018 and every office in the rural area will have broadband access by 2022. The use of ICT is widely seen in other ministries as well like Ministry of Education with e-learning and Ministry of Health with e-health and many others.

- While more and more people use ICT services, privacy and security as well as data protection are becoming urgent issues in many countries How about in Nepal?

Again, Nepal is not an exception. In addition, we have our own difficulties. Nepal is a developing country where one department must cover many sectors and issues while policy needs are becoming bigger. There are number of legislatives which protect privacy in Nepal. But with the use of mobile and tablet in ICT, we become to face new problems. There are some global companies which use big data to analysis the regular activities of people and use it for marketing

and other purpose. The data they use may also contain the data provided by our citizen, in such case the country does not have any control over it.

- The cross border data transaction issue, isn't it?

Yes. Couple of months back, we faced some problems related to data privacy. One public company had to issue ID for driving license. For this, it needed to generate the electronic ID where it put into their personal data. However, since the software they were using was hosted in other country, the data was automatically saved in another country. Later, one of clients went to Supreme Court claiming that his privacy has been bridged and his details are being saved in another country. Later, it was decided by Supreme Court that the data of citizen should not be manipulated in another country's database. From then, the government data is not manipulated in other countries, but now it is only limited to government companies. We still do not have any privacy protection for the data that are being generated by private companies and transfer across borders.

- This time, Nepali government kindly hosted APT meeting. We appreciate your hospitality. Is there any personal suggestion how APT should play a role in developing ICT and improve the functionality in Nepal?

First, we are grateful to APT as APT has always come up with many initiatives which have helped us to frame our policies. I would like to share my suggestion as policy maker, since we know policies should be translated into action. We can make network or forum on-line where we can share policy agenda, which will help us to share information as well as to gain knowledge among Members countries. It will be easy for us to discuss with other countries without physical appearance and if needed, the country can also replicate the policies according to their needs.

As we know, technologies change rapidly and the policies are to be improved according to the new changes. If we could be provided with the information about new trend and always be kept updated, then it would alert the policy maker to be adapted to those trends.

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[Editor's Note]
H.E. Mr. Gurung observes current situation in Nepal with cool head, what is happening, what is the urgent issue and what the government should do more. Behind his conversation, I could feel his passion streaming from his warm heart. (M. Kondo)