

"Insight of the TOP"

H.E. Mr. Austin Fernando

Chairman of Telecommunications
Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka

At the occasion of the 17th APT Policy Regulatory Forum (PRF-17) on 24-26 July in Sri Lanka, we had a chance to interview H.E. Mr. Austin Fernando, the Chairman of TRCSL about the current ICT policy stance and future perspective of Sri Lanka government.

“ICT, a key factor to modernize the country”



1) What's the vision and mission towards ICT future for Sri Lanka?

The vision of ICT for Sri Lanka is to modernize all sectors of system which will suit the economic demand of the country. While speaking of the mission of the country in the field of ICT, I can say that our organization, Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC), is a regulatory body and there are other agencies who have responsibilities in different aspects of ICT including Ministry of Telecommunications, Telecommunication corporation (Sri Lanka Telecom) and TRCSL. In together, our

mission is to keep up with the technology as we grow up. Of course there are many challenges we are facing while dealing to widen our vision. One of the major challenges we face is lack of resource, expert and technology. For example, TRCSL is still need to convert all our analog system to digital. Even though we set a target to digitalize our system and society, it is not so easy to implement as imagine.

In my view, the other issues in Sri Lanka which we need to consider is about implementation of ICT services in sectors like agriculture, plantation, fishing, service, trade, farmer etc. In our current situation we are not capable to do them right now. All the related Ministries in these fields face the same major constrain – lack of resources. Even if when we have experts in the respective fields, there may be lack of finance resource, which makes us inefficient for the competitive business and face the investor's needs. In that sense, consolidated master plan is important for implementation of ICT national targets. Another challenge we face is different views from different sectors, such as government sector, private sector, as well as political sector. So it is important to establish a shared view and plan for the development of ICT in Sri Lanka.



2) What about the connectivity on telecoms in Sri Lanka and current issue you are facing?

After years of economic growth and population expansion, Sri Lanka's telecoms and IT sectors face increasing demand for a wider range of services. With a dedicated government ensuring that the activities of the country's ICT institutions are aligned with national objectives and connecting research and development with industry requirements, the country is on the right path in having a good pair of hands at the ICT helm. This is underscored by the digital economy's growth, which is in turn enabled by Sri Lanka's excellent access to undersea cables and a new cable system that is significantly speeding up the country's connectivity.



3) From the consumer side using the ICT, how do you observe situation of consumer attitude toward ICT usages or other services?

In Sri Lanka, like other countries, there are large number of website operating companies as well as social medias like YouTube and Facebook. In terms of attitude toward ICT usage, people are getting more and more depending on ICT services. In that sense, these have a strong influence in the society mainly to the youths. For instance, recently we observed an influence of social media during the presidential election. It brought many professional and youth together, which was one of the main reasons for the victory

during election. As we know, we also face many problems due to ICT, so it comes with both pros and cons.

4) Is there any personal suggestion how APT can play important role and improve the functionality in Sri Lanka?

As Asia pacific region is expected to grow rapidly, the work and role of APT will become more important and it is necessary for APT to implement regional voice and demand. One of examples is the APT's response for capacity building and training program. As I mentioned, human resource with an appropriate capacity for ICT is a key factor for implementing ICT plan in this country. I believe that APT's plan formulates a good coordination among members country's concerns and reflects different interests as much as possible. I also think it is necessary to provide platforms to share international cooperation on the issues like policy-regulatory framework, connectivity, cyber threat etc. I wish APT act as a prominent coordinator in the coming future.

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(M. Kondo)

