



Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui

Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication

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ICMA Pakistan: Please apprise us about the main role and functions of the IT Ministry?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: Let me start by reading out the Ministry's vision & Mission statement. Our vision is to “To become a strategic enabler for an accelerated digitalization eco system, aiming to expand knowledge based economy and spur socio economic growth” and our accompanying Mission statement is to “Improve Pakistani Citizen's quality of life and economic well-being by ensuring availability of accessible, affordable, reliable, universal and high quality ICT services.

Our mandate, keeping in mind the vision statement is:

- o Preparation of an overall integrated plan as well as formulation of policy for the development and improvement of Information Technology and Telecommunications, including related infrastructure, in Pakistan.
- o Co-ordination with the Provincial Governments, autonomous bodies, private sector, international organizations and foreign countries in respect of information technology and telecommunications and human resource development in the field of information technology and telecommunications.



A delegation of Research and Publications Committee of ICMA Pakistan, headed by Mr. Muhammad Yasin, Chairman and comprising Mr. Salman Haider and Syed Mubashir Ali, members called on the Federal Minister for IT & Telecom, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui at Islamabad and briefed him about ICMA Pakistan and its contribution towards corporate sector and national economy

- o Safeguard interest of Government of Pakistan in entities having public shares or government equity like PTCL, USF Co & IGNITE National Technology Fund.

Simply put our mandate can be summed up into four broad categories i.e. ICT Policy formulation, Planning & Legislation, Human Resource Development in the field of ICT, Promotion of ICT applications & standardization of software in GoP & Coordination on both National level and international front.

ICMA Pakistan: What is your vision about transforming the country into a knowledge and technological based economy?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: As we all know, Information technology or Digitalization has assumed a central role in the emerging dynamics of a knowledge society and knowledge economy. It is the key lever of economic development in this day & age. Pakistan, which has about 60% of its 200 million population in the 15 to 29 age group, represents an enormous human and knowledge capital. Pakistan has more than 5000 IT companies & call centers and the number is growing every year. Pakistan has more than 300,000 English-speaking IT professionals with expertise in current and emerging IT products and technologies. More than 20,000 IT graduates and engineers are being produced each year. These are all good trends however much more remains to be done.

The Government of Pakistan (GOP) continues to facilitate the IT industry through numerous sustainable development and accelerated digitization projects, research and innovation, software technology parks, international marketing, international certifications, internships and trainings.

The GOP has a holistic strategy for positioning Pakistan on the global outsourcing map, participation in international forums, organizing domestic conferences, scaling software technology

parks and facilitating certification (ISO 27001 and CMMI) programs.

We want to create a digital ecosystem with infrastructure and institutional frameworks for the rapid delivery of innovative digital services, applications and content. We need to understand the key pillars of a knowledge economy and learn from the experiences of those countries which have successfully transitioned or in the midst of it. As a government, we will need to take measures on encouraging the tech innovation and entrepreneurship, one of the key pillars of a knowledge economy. We as policy makers will have to respond to the current needs of advancing technologies and their capabilities.

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ICMA Pakistan: How would you rate the performance of Pakistan's IT sector, in particular IT Industry's exports during last five years?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: Indeed in the last few years, the sector has shown growth in both software exports as well as BPO market in the country. But having said that there is still a huge

untapped potential for country's IT and IT enabled Services (ITeS) Industry. Although the country's exports have doubled in the last few years to almost \$1b officially, I strongly believe we can easily take this figure to \$5B-\$10B in the next 4-5 years if government focuses on key intervention areas.

ICMA Pakistan: Can you pinpoint few major issues and challenges faced by the IT sector in Pakistan, especially in enhancing exports and what initiatives the IT Ministry is taking to resolve these issues?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: Basically I believe the key focus areas where government interventions can help are fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, Human resource development, resolving infrastructure issues, improving brand Pakistan across the globe and embarking on the digitalization initiatives in the country specifically in public sector so that local companies are given chance to grow and compete internationally. Let me explain in detail.

IT sector is an unregulated sector worldwide as opposed to telecom sector and same is the case in Pakistan. What the government can do is to facilitate the sector and provide it an enabling environment by incentivizing the sector, removing red tape and other hurdles for the IT companies to, which we commonly refer to as "ease of doing business" as well. The sector is still in nascent stages. Over taxation by tax authorities whether federal or provincial can hamper the growth. Foreign currency regime (both inward and outward remittances) also has a direct impact on the sector. We will have to make it easy for the IT companies to bring the money back to Pakistan and also be able to repatriate to fund offshore operations.

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When this Government took office, it was brought to the notice by IT Sector that number of challenges are currently being faced by IT entrepreneurs and software industry giants. Issues about tax related matters, infrastructure readiness and acknowledging the IT Sector as a potential revenue generating industry were some of the key highlights. Moreover, industry is facing number of issues like lack of quality IT human resource, market access and visa related matters. MoIT wants to fill industry-academia gap by improving ICT education quality. Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training & MoIT have already been tasked by Federal Cabinet to work on the issue together. MoIT will also work with relevant quarters to facilitate IT businessmen for visa matters.

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Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Federal Minister for IT & Telecom is glancing over the Sep-Oct 2018 issue of Management Accountant which was on theme of 'Economic Agenda for the New Government'

Government believes in working closely with all the relevant stakeholders to ensure that all voices are heard.

ICMA Pakistan: What steps IT Ministry is taking to upgrade Pakistan's digital infrastructure to bring it at par with advanced economies?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: Number of policy measures have been taken by MoIT and few are in pipeline. Digital Pakistan Policy 2018 is a well-crafted policy document which covers almost every stream of IT Sector in holistic terms. This policy document is also aligned with Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and talks about cross-sectoral National ICT agenda. MoIT is also working with Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Finance, State Bank of Pakistan and other key stakeholders for establishment of National E-Payment Gateway. E-commerce sector cannot boost to its full potential unless such enabling factors are worked on to ensure that we are technologically compatible with developed economies. MoIT, through Universal Service Fund, is also working to connect the unserved and underserved areas of the country. Through IGNITE we are enabling the young ICT graduates/entrepreneurs, so that no one is left behind in getting fruits of global digital revolution. We recently got approval for the central procurement plan for the entire Federal Government's e-readiness in terms of ICT infrastructure, a key element for digitization.

In addition to the above, several infrastructure intensive projects, aimed at proliferation of Broadband and Next Generation Mobile Services (NGMS) in unserved and underserved areas have been undertaken by the Universal Service Fund.

“MoIT can work with ICMA on digital financial inclusion initiative”

ICMA Pakistan: What is the role of IT Ministry in providing support and services to CPEC-related projects?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: Special Economic Zones in China Pakistan Economic Corridor is an excellent business opportunity not only for foreign investors, but domestic

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businesses as well. MoIT is working with BoI, Pakistan Software Houses Association and Pakistan Software Export Board to identify the potential for establishment of IT parks in these SEZs. Today, IT sector is not limited to IT companies and software houses only. Cross-sectoral IT enablement is opening new business avenues globally and with industrial growth in the country, IT sector will definitely get a boost as well. Same goes for the CPEC projects in the country as number of business avenues are expected to open up for IT sector as CPEC projects materialize.



Mr. Muhammad Yasin, Chairman, Research & Publications Committee is presenting a memento on behalf of ICMA Pakistan to the Federal Minister for IT & Telecom

Also, the Ministry of IT & Telecom, being the line Ministry of Special Communication Organization (SCO) for Public Sector Projects facilitated the roll out of Pak China Optic Fibre Project. Under this project, 820km of optic fibre has been laid from Khunjerab till Rawalpindi by SCO, thereby strengthening cross border link/international connectivity with China.

ICMA Pakistan: Block chain is currently becoming popular for government solutions. Is the IT Ministry talking any initiative to explore the use of block chain in government organizations and to invest in block chain infrastructure and training?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: Government is committed to explore all the latest technologies for development of ITes Sector. It is important to mention that Blockchain, Internet of things (IoTs), Artificial Intelligence and Fintech technologies are still evolving rapidly in developed economies as well, specifically when we talk about regulatory & policy interventions for these technologies. However, there is an absolute consensus globally for one aspect of these technologies, i.e. our social & economical future will be effected in-large and we can benefit from such technologies. Through our National Incubation Centers across the country, we are encouraging entrepreneurship in all these emerging technologies and through

our R&D funding mechanisms, we will now put more emphasis on funding those projects and ideas that utilize these latest technologies and have the potential to be truly innovative and disruptive

ICMA Pakistan: In what areas, do you think ICMA Pakistan and IT Ministry can join hands to promote use of technology in Pakistan?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: MoIT can work with ICMA on digital financial inclusion initiatives. Latest technological developments around the globe are helping developing economies to facilitate general public in number of ways. Such avenues should be explored and MoIT can get benefit of ICMA Pakistan's alumni network in this regard.

ICMA Pakistan: Do you think there is scope for associating management accountants in providing IT consultancy services to public sector organizations?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: There is an obvious role of management accountants and consultants in the expanding public sector IT domains. The big accounting firms can set up their specialty advisory and ambit services particularly in the cyber and network security areas to cater to this growing demand.

ICMA Pakistan: The current issue of ICMA Pakistan's official Journal is on the theme of 'Big Data Analytics and the Finance Professionals'. What message you would like to give to our students and members in this regard?

Dr. Khalid Maqbool: As you know, "Data is the new oil". Any organization, business enterprise and government cannot succeed unless the vast amount of raw data is converted into some structured big data and analyzed upon to improve their service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Similarly Artificial Intelligence, Fintech, Deep Learning and Blockchain, all these concepts cannot bring maximum benefit to governance unless we move towards the true sense of open data i.e. data can be freely used, re-used and re-distributed by anyone, and of-course with public data security concerns are well tackled. ICMA students and members should look towards these emerging opportunities and to work in bringing ease in financial matters of the citizens of Pakistan.

The Editorial Board thanks Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Federal Minister for Information Technology & Telecommunication for giving his exclusive interview for Management Accountant Journal.