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Country Paper: Maldives

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BACKGROUND

Geography

The Maldives is an archipelago of about 1,192 low lying coral islands, spread over an area of 900,000 square kilometres in the Indian Ocean. A total population of about 270,000 resides in about 200 islands, with another 87 islands exclusively developed as tourist resort hotels. Population density across the country varies considerably, with only 6 islands of more than 3,000 inhabitants and nearly 70 islands with fewer than 500. A quarter of the population live on the island capital Male', which concentrates most of the facilities, services and opportunities. The de-centralisation away from Male' is hampered by lack of basic infrastructure and poorly developed inter island transportation system.

Given these challenges, government views the e-government initiative along with initiatives to develop an ICT enabled community as a cornerstone of its initiatives to narrow the digital divide, delivering a better quality of life to the people of the Maldives and to bring the facilities, services and opportunities to its people. With this regard, the government has initiated a number of projects including the e-government initiative called the Information Technology Development Project (ITDP) and the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Policy Formulation Project.

CURRENT SITUATION

ISP Providers

At present Dhiraagu Pte. Ltd., a privatized joint venture between the Government of Maldives (55%) and Cable & Wireless (45%) provides all telecommunications services, except Internet access.

Under the ISP project [“liberalizing the Internet Service Providers (ISP) in the Maldives”, executed by the Ministry of Communications Science and Technology and United National Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) supported by UNDP in 2002], a new local Service Provider was licensed to provide Internet Service to the Maldives, bringing in healthy competition to the internet market in the Maldives which immediately had the effect of lowering the cost of internet services in the country. It is believed that the successful liberalization of the mobile market would also result in lowering the cost of mobile charges and make mobile communication more affordable and accessible to the people of the Maldives especially the poor.

ICT Status

ICT is an extremely useful tool to contribute to meet the large divide that exist in the Maldives between Male’ and the Outer Atolls and also between Maldives and other more developed nations. Maldives seeks to maximize the benefits of ICT particularly in the fields of Good Governance, Poverty Reduction and Environmental Sustainability. The de-centralization away from Male’ is hampered by lack of basic infrastructure and poorly developed inter island transportation system.

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narrow the digital divide, delivering a better quality of life to the people of the Maldives and to bring the facilities, services and opportunities to its people. With this regard, the government has initiated a number of projects including the e-government initiative called the Information Technology Development Project (ITDP) and the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Policy Formulation Project. The infrastructure and the services of the e-government is in progress and would be in place in 2005/2006 time frame.

Internet Usage in Maldives

At present, internet access is available throughout the country, mainly in the form of dialup. Leased, ISDN and ADSL access is also available.

Internet was introduced in Maldives in 1996 and has since been expanding at a rapid pace. Mainly the expansion in terms of usage can only be seen in the capital although the service has been extended to provide universal access in Maldives. In addition to the capital cyber cafes for the public exist in the southern most and northern most atolls. The number of cyber cafes is on the increase throughout the country as more people are using the Internet. Although access is available the high costs of installation and usage limits the number of household users. The internet charges are higher than those in many developing countries.

NEED FOR CYBER-SECURITY

At present there is no cyber security law in Maldives. With limited resources and small manufacturing sector, the Maldives has few options for diversifying its economy and ICT seems one of the brightest. This is acknowledged in the various sector and national development plans and the draft ICT strategy which sees employment creation as one of the pillars of ICT mentioning areas such as e-government, e-tourism, e-fisheries and software parks. With the computer and the internet ruling our daily life, we need cyber-security that involves protecting that

information by preventing, detecting, and responding to attacks, as developing human resources take time and the cyber-security is a global issue and has to be tackled at this level.

CONCLUSION

Given the enormous importance of e-government, Internet-based communications and the use of cyberspace to control portions of our physical infrastructure, cyber security is critical. At present there is no cyber-law or cyber-security policy plan in Maldives. We need to ensure that future generations of network software and hardware are less vulnerable to an attack and can maintain critical operations even when compromised. Therefore it is of great importance to have a plan which depends on both public and private efforts to secure the many elements that comprise the national information infrastructure, including routers, switches, fiber-optic cables, and the interconnected computers.