

In Brief

Broadband Increasing Rapidly in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has recently experienced a major increase in the use of broadband services, according to Broadband Strategies Toolkit prepared by the World Bank infoDev. The report explores various factors that have contributed to Sri Lanka's broadband success, ranging from innovative business models to government investment in e-development services.

Sri Lanka's increase in broadband usage is primarily due to the high rate of adoption of third generation (3G) mobile technologies, such as HSPA and HSPA+ dongles and associated SIM cards. This trend is typical of many South Asian countries which do not have access to wide-spread copper last mile connectivity and therefore, are reliant on wireless networks to increase access, be it to simple voice or broadband services. Several factors have contributed to Sri Lanka's success in connecting its citizenry to the Internet via mobile broadband.

However, Sri Lanka needs to overcome several challenges if it is to continue to make broadband a truly mass-market product instead of the niche popularity it still enjoys. A key challenge is that of delivering product of adequate quality to consumers. Budget broadband models mean low cost and low prices, however they can also mean low quality. This is indeed the case with Sri Lankan broadband. However, the Sri Lanka mobile broadband performs better than Sri Lankan fixed broadband on various quality of service measures. When compared with the broadband of the developed world, Sri Lankan consumers get less value for their money. One reason for this inequality is false advertising (promising broadband speeds that are possible theoretically but not a reality), although a bigger issue is the infrastructure – in particular, bottlenecks in international connectivity due to high prices.

The other challenge for operators is to keep up their investments so as to move to the next technology cycle despite declining margins. When at least two mobile

operators have announced LTE network deployments, extending these upgrades beyond the population centers will prove challenging because of revenue and margin erosions due to intense competition.

Cloud Readiness Index Tracks Cloud Progress in Asia

The Asia Cloud Computing Association (ASIA Cloud) based in Hong Kong, has launched a "Cloud Readiness Index (www.asiacloud.org) designed to track the region's progress toward a complete spectrum of cloud computing-based infrastructure and services. By mapping the conditions and criteria required for successful implementation and uptake, the association aims to identify potential bottlenecks that could slow adoption and threaten Asia's digital future.

The Cloud Readiness Index analyzes 10 key attributes critical to the deployment and use of cloud computing technology across 14 different countries. That includes the region's acknowledged economic engine, China as well as Australia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

To further support the discussion, the association is also launching a Cloud Map on its website that will graphically illustrate the current state of the cloud debate – charting and analyzing the issues, the stakeholders and influencers and how the debate is developing.

According to Bernie Trudel, Chairman of the Asia Cloud Computing Association and Cloud CIO at Cisco APAC, the new index will be particularly relevant to governments as they are charged with creating the conditions for success – in their countries, around the region and across the globe. "National public policy makers are starting to understand the benefits of this new IT delivery model and how it can make their countries more competitive. However, they might not nec-

essarily yet understand the issues that underpin cloud computing, or the impact that policy decisions, such as data privacy or intellectual property protection, can have on the success or otherwise of cloud computing,” said Trudel.

The attributes that comprise the first release of the index include:

1. Regulatory conditions
2. International connectivity
3. Data protection policy
4. Broadband quality
5. Government prioritization
6. Power grid quality
7. Internet filtering
8. Business efficiency index
9. Global risk
10. ICT development

“Cloud computing is poised to help accelerate the momentum around trade and economic integration here in Asia. However, to realize this potential the region needs to harmonize the policy and regulatory frameworks to facilitate effective trade in digital information and services. It is therefore necessary to have active debate with an Asia focus. This is what Asia Cloud is aiming for in terms of its overall mission and with the Cloud Readiness Index,” said Per Dahlberg, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Association.

China has announced that it is set to invest US\$154 billion to develop cloud computing hubs. Although restrictive data protection laws are preventing the building of a global Cloud Computing Index in China, this investment will help the nation improve its index rating in the near future. The Index shows that a large number of cloud service providers are setting up data centers in Hong Kong making it the North Asia data hub. The South Korean government has also decided to invest US\$500 million in both public and private sector cloud initiatives, and intends to raise their investment to US\$2 billion by 2014.

Worldwide spending on cloud services is expected to reach US\$150 billion by 2014 and spending on cloud computing is predicted to reach 30%-40% percent of IT budgets by 2013. “The knowledge economy will fuel Asia’s future. The cloud is the next great “leveler.” A general purpose technology, it lowers the barriers to entry, reduces costs by converting cap-ex to op-ex, and allows flexibility for scale and deployment,” he said.

The impact of cloud computing is potentially huge. The Center for Economics and Business Research stats in a recent study that it will create 2.3 million new

jobs across Europe’s top five economies between 2010–2015. The World Economic Forum (WEF) says in its 2011 report that many believe the impact to become equal to or exceed that of mobile technologies.

The Asia Cloud working group that developed the Cloud Readiness Index believes it could well incubate innovation right across the region’s economy, especially to Asia’s massive SME sector.

“Cloud Computing offers significant opportunities for local industries. It attracts investments and overseas businesses and provides a significant boost to e-Government initiatives. Countries with the most insightful transparent and fair regulatory environments will be the most successful in capitalizing on this new opportunity,” said John Galligan, Vice Chairman of the Working Group and Regional Director, Internet Policy at Microsoft. He continued, “The indications for Asia are good but there is still room for action with a recent research report revealing that Asia is lagging behind the US and Europe in cloud adoption. Moreover, while larger Asian businesses are embracing cloud services, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are slow to embrace the cloud. There is a huge opportunity to help narrow this gap and Asia Cloud hopes that the new Cloud Readiness Index will help governments and businesses – large and small – to continue to capitalize on the opportunities that cloud computing offers,” he said.

Asia Cloud – Who We Are

“The numbers are stunning. The global market for cloud computing is growing at a compounded annual rate of 28%, from US\$47 billion dollars to anticipated \$126 billion in 2012. The research firm IDC estimates cloud computing in Asia outside of Japan will expand 40% every year until 2014, from US \$1.3 billion in 2010. Japan, currently the second largest IT market globally, is expected to grow US\$29.1 billion in 2015 according to Japan’s Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication.

Asia Cloud offers a very specific forum for stakeholders – hardware and software developers, carriers, enterprise users, policy makers and researchers – to collaborate on the requirements of the Asia market from within, with expertise born from local knowledge. Within Asia Cloud working groups address the most pressing issues. These include: public policy and regulation, security, taxation, and carrier issues.

Leaders of the Association and experts in several Asian countries are predicting that “governments across Asia will start paying particular attention to articulating how regulated industries can deploy cloud computing and develop a set of guidelines and a relevant security framework. In a news report in the Bangkok Post of December 12, 2011 states “a lack of privacy protection laws, risks from political violence and national disasters have seen Thailand rank a low 10th among 14 Asian countries and territories in the Cloud Readiness Index. Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines received the lowest rankings.

Malaysia to Launch Integrated Financial Management System

The Ministry of Finance of Malaysia was expected to fully implement the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) before the end of 2011. The director of the e-Procurement unit under the Ministry of Finance considers this to be another major ICT system based on online strategic reporting to facilitate effective decision-making by the top management.

One of the main features of the IFMS is the strategic dashboard that provides a multi-dimensional view of the current performance of the MOF’s strategic programs for top management review and intervention. This will be the first such initiative in Malaysia. The government has taken considerable actions to combat corruption by improving corporate governance in the financial management and procurement of public sector under the transformation program.

Among other projects of MOF is the National e-Tendering initiative which serves as the platform to process online works tenders under the Works Ministry. The system, which is currently in the pilot phase, will be automated to process all procurements under the works category.

MOF has also launched the MyProcurement portal that acts as the central repository system to record, archive and publish all tender activities which have been awarded by all ministries. These projects have resulted in an increased level of transparency by enabling the public to openly scrutinize all tender awards.

Open Government Initiatives Expand in the United States

The Obama Administration has been striving to lead the most open, efficient and accountable government in U.S. history. Over its first two years a number of initiatives have been launched under the “www.data.gov” website. The president has said that “information maintained by the Federal Government is a national asset.” Data.gov is a gateway to hundreds of thousands of agency data sets, sharing this national asset with everyone. Created as part of the President’s commitment to democratizing information, Data.gov makes economic, healthcare, environmental and other government information available on a single website, allowing the public to access raw data and use it in innovative ways.

In just one year, Data.gov has grown from 47 databases to more than 300,000. It also has spawned scores of innovative applications, For example, FlyOn-Time.us takes data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics and combines them with weather information and user-generated content about airline security lines – such as tweets from people waiting in those lines – to give travelers an accurate look at expected wait times and travel conditions.

Law.data.gov is a one-stop portal for agency legal materials, including agency rules, orders and other guidance. By assembling these resources in one place, individual citizens, small businesses and anyone else interested in understanding federal legal materials can now more easily gain access to information for a variety of uses.

Health.Data.gov is a community health data initiative supplying to the public with a growing array of online, easily accessible, downloadable health data. This is a one-stop resource to get considerable health related data, check out what innovators are doing with the data, and connect with the health community through forums.

Thailand Moves Towards Open Data

The government recently selected 14 agencies in 13 provinces to set up official information centers to pro-

vide public access to vast collections of official information.

Launched by the Office of the Official Information Commission, the project aims to encourage compliance with the Official Information Act which states that official information should be available for public inspection. According to an official statement, “The Government will promote and improve the people’s opportunity to extensively, fairly and promptly access public and official information with the use of information technology and the latest innovations, as well as promote the exchange of information between ASEAN media organizations and global mass media.

International Agreement on Green ICT Methodology

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has assessed the environmental impact of ICT and reached a broad agreement on “green ICT methodology.” (www.itu.int) It also agreed to produce a report on due diligence guidelines for conflict minerals supply and to study environmental protection and recycling solutions for batteries for mobile phones and other ICT devices.

Estimates of how much ICTs can reduce global emissions – and estimates of the emissions generated by the ICT sector itself, vary widely. due to the application of different measurements and methodologies. To ensure consistency between different approaches, the new methodology has been developed in cooperation with other standardization organizations such as ISO, IEC, ETSI, and ATIS. The new methodology is also aligned with the Digital Agenda of the European Commission.

ITU Secretary General Toure announced that “this methodology has been developed by ITU’s industry members. This will be an important in ensuring it gains wide acceptance by the world’s ICT industry. An internationally agreed methodology means estimates of the impact of ICTs on greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption will now have much greater credibility. It will also show just how significant a contribution ICTs can make by reducing global emissions in other sectors.”

New ITU work on “conflict minerals” will also begin in response to a request from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). ITU will make a survey of existing due diligence requirements and guidelines concerning

sources of conflict minerals (in particular, those that are smelted into tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold), as well as their use in conformity with recognized international treaties and national legislation, and other standardization initiatives.

New Zealand Opens National Cyber Security Center

The New Zealand Government has officially opened its National Cyber Security Center (NCSC) (www.ncsc.govt.nz) which will be charged with helping to defend government agencies and critical infrastructure providers against cyber threats. “The global threat from cyber intrusions is real and growing, and New Zealanders and the New Zealand economy are not immune,” stated Seven Joyce, Minister for Communications and Information Technology. “Cyber security is becoming increasingly important for New Zealanders, businesses and government. Cyber intrusions have the potential to impact on the reliability of critical infrastructure, government services and the economy.

The NCSC is a key part of New Zealand’s Cyber Security Strategy, which was released in June 2011 and builds on existing cyber security and information assurance capabilities to provide enhanced protection for government agencies. The three main initial functions of NCSC are to provide advice and support to help develop secure networks, detect and respond to sophisticated cyber threats, and coordinate and assist operational responses to major cyber events of national importance.

New Zealanders will benefit from enhanced protection of government data and services, and critical infrastructure, which will help to protect critical services, Minister Joyce noted.

India Aims for 600 Million Broadband Users by 2020

The government of India has unveiled a new national IT policy which seeks to achieve 600 million broadband connections in the country by 2020. The policy aims to

provide affordable and reliable broadband on demand by the year 2015 and to have 175 million broadband connections by 2017.

Communications Minister Shri Sibal indicated the policy has the vision of leveraging telecom infrastructure to provide all citizens and businesses, both in rural and urban landscape with digital opportunities. “The primary objective of the new policy is maximizing public good by making available affordable, reliable and secure telecommunication and broadband services across the entire country.”

The government likewise said it seeks to provide high speed and high quality broadband access to all village panchayats through optical fiber by 2014 and progressively to all villages in the country.

The Telecom Commission, the decision-making arm of the Department of Telecom, has already cleared the US\$4 billion project to provide broadband connectivity to all villages in the next three years. One of the major strategies proposed in the policy is to make efforts to recognize telecom and broadband connectivity as a basic necessity like education and health and work towards “Right to Broadband.”

Another proposal is to revise the existing broadband download speed of 256 Kbps to 2 Mbps by 2015 and make higher speeds of at least 100 Mbps available subsequently.

World Bank Launches e-Transform Knowledge Platform

The World Bank has supported more than 100 developing countries to reform their telecommunications and information and communications technology (ICT) sectors, helping to spur investment and modernization that in turn accelerates economic growth and poverty reduction. Loans and technical assistance from both the International Development Association (IDA) and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) have delivered results as diverse as connecting millions of people to cheaper telephone services in Afghanistan to helping residents of rural Nicaragua access the Internet for the first time.

Innovation, Technology and Transformation underscore the philosophy that: innovative uses of technology provide powerful tools to transform the way public

services are delivered to citizens and enhance accountability. The near-universal reach of mobile communications combined with interactive-mapping and social media empower citizens to communicate directly with Government and service providers. Conventional approaches to development often lack adequate mechanisms to incorporate citizen feedback. Creative uses of technology provide new opportunities to enable two-way information flows between Government and citizens enabling service providers to monitor and manage performance and improve service quality.

Building on this strong experience the World Bank recently announced establishment of the e-Transform Knowledge Platform. (www.worldbank.org/ict/strategy) The objectives of the platform are to improve the delivery and quality of public services and enhance accountability by leveraging innovation, knowledge and technology from social innovators, technology companies, innovative governments, and civil society. The platform will facilitate knowledge exchanges between practitioners at the country and global levels. The e-Transform Knowledge Platform has three components to support government policy makers, service providers and social entrepreneurs. These are (1) strategy and design, (2) applications, and (3) knowledge and learning.

Dubai Issues New Guidelines for Government Websites

The Dubai e-Government Department has released the 2011 edition of the Government Websites Guidelines (GWG) for Dubai’s government agencies. The new model and related guidelines for Dubai Government websites will set a new target and benchmarks for government to pursue in advancing e-Government. The overall objective of the guidelines is to enhance the customer experience in using government websites that result in increased customer satisfaction and higher usage.

The newly formulated GWG is based on a strategic Government Website Excellence Model (GWEM) which was developed internally by the Dubai e-Government Department and built around a customer focused concept and consists of 46 guidelines around accessibility, usability and design, content and policies.

Evaluations of Dubai government web sites and their compliance with the new GWG standards will be carried out every two years. (<http://www.deg.gov.ae>).