PRESS RELEASE

Forward looking Policies needed to spur Innovation

As the new State Minister of IT & Telecom takes up office, there are a few pressing policy issues that need to be dealt with immediately. It is hoped that a focus will be put on policies that support and enable businesses and provide safeguards for innovators and for users.

As the registered trade association representing the IT Sector, P@SHA extends its full support to the Minister and her team on matters pertaining to policy. First and foremost, we feel that it is essential that the Ministry work on removing barriers to innovation by looking into some of the most crucial policy issues that are facing Pakistan today:

The delay in the issuing of 3G/4G/LTE licenses by the previous government for instance has stood in the way of Pakistani innovators and users creating and adopting the latest mobile technologies and products. Pakistan is one of a handful of countries that is still living in the 2G world, said Naseer A. Akhtar, Chairman of P@SHA. We need to move forward.

The absence of Cyber Crime, Data Protection and Privacy legislation has kept a significant number of international organizations from sending their business to Pakistan. This needs to be attended to right away, said Akhtar. The legislation must however have multistakeholder input.

Knee-jerk reactions like blocking of essential internet sites and tools because of inappropriate content is hurting Pakistan's economy and its image as an investment destination. The current YouTube ban is one such example. Businesses use sites like YouTube for specialized training of employees, for market outreach and to launch innovative products to attract investment. Many companies rely of these sites not only for educational content but for generating revenue. Sites like the Four Quants' Finance Training Portal, UrduStudio.com, Coke Studio and Toffeetv.com are just a few such examples of the way YouTube is being used by local innovators and content producers. Khan Academy and international universities like Stanford, MIT and Harvard provide free courses on YouTube that upgrade the quality of human resource in this country.

P@SHA's President Jehan Ara wants to work with the Government on coming up with policies that are visionary and forward looking. "When we disapprove of content that is put up on certain platforms, the way to deal with it is to use the same platforms to present our own narrative rather than living in denial by blocking access to it and impacting our own growth."

Closure or blocking of any part of the internet is like a nail in the coffin for young people and entrepreneurial startups who depend on it for generating sales and revenues and promoting and marketing the products they have developed, she said. It also results in a loss of faith by local and international business in the effectiveness of using the Internet for business in Pakistan.

Closure of mobile services is another policy that needs to be looked at. Communication is a right guaranteed to us in the Constitution and many businesses now rely on mobile services to connect with customers, sales teams and vendors. Car tracking and emergency services are also affected during these closures, said Jehan Ara.

There is an Act that is pending approval by the Cabinet which, if passed, will impact business and community services - the Surveying & Mapping Act of Pakistan 2013. A number of the most innovative mobile and web based applications that use GPS and mapping technologies will be impacted if this Act is passed by Parliament. In accordance with this Act collection and analysis of location data will be a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment and a fine.

To enable a business environment that is conducive to innovation and accelerated growth, the government needs to come up with policies that are business-friendly. The team at P@SHA is ready and able to assist with the development of those policies, said Naseer Akhtar.

For further information, please contact:
The P@SHA Secretariat
+92-21-3541-8121

About P@SHA:

The Pakistan Software Houses Association for IT & ITES (P@SHA) is the only registered professional trade body representing the Information Technology and Business Process Outsourcing sector in Pakistan. It has 400+ registered member companies from across the country and has been in operation for the past 20 years. It's Board is elected each year by members of the Association. It's primary mandate is the growth and enablement of the tech sector locally and internationally.