

Minutes of 3rd Meeting of URLSD Forum

Date & Timings: June 08, 2002 (Saturday) from 0930 hours to 1900 hours
Venue: TRMU Meeting Room, House no 55, St# 1, F-6/3, Islamabad

Following Members of the Forum attended the meeting:

1. Dr. Muhammad Afzal, Coordinator URLSDF, Professor FFIMCS Rawalpindi
2. Dr. Qasim Bughio Chairman, Chairman Sindhi Language Authority
3. Dr. Sarmad Hussain Asst. Prof FAST-NU Lahore
4. Mr. Babar Sami Asstt Prof CS Dept, KU
5. Mr. Humayun Qureshi URLSDF Coordinator Karachi
6. Mr. Javed Naushahi. Representative of CSP
7. Mr. Bilal Muhammad Hashmi, Associate Professor, National University, Lahore
8. Mr. Aqeel Abbas Jafri, Representative of NLA , Islamabad

Following members could not attend the meeting:

1. Dr. Humayun Mushtaq Mian Chairman Punjab IT Board (regretted due to some important meeting)
2. Mr. Arif Hisam, CEO, PDMS
3. Mr. Asad K. Abbasi, Member of Scientific staff Cadabra, Canada
4. Dr. Syed Afaq Hussain, Professor GIK Institute Topi
5. Dr. Aftab Ahmad, Urdu Department National, University of Modern Languages
6. Dr. Ahmed Mirza Jamil, Chairman Elite Publishers Limited
7. Dr. Arshad Ali Director NUST Institute of Information Technology, Rawalpindi
8. Dr. G. A. Allana Former Chairman Sindhi Language Authority, Hyderabad
9. Dr. Mohammad Abid Khan Director and Professor FAST-National University, Peshawar
10. Dr. Khaver Zia, Director BeaconHouse Informatics, Lahore (regretted due to some personal commitments)
11. Dr. Nazir Ahmed Sangi Chairman Department of Computer Science & I.T Allama Iqbal Open University
12. Dr. Tariq Rehman, Professor of Linguistics & South Asian Studies National Institute of Pakistan Studies Quaid i Azam University, Islamabad
13. Mr. N. R. Liwal, Managing, Director Asiasoft
14. Mr. Saeed Ahmad, Joint Director, Pakistan Computer Bureau (regretted due to other official meetings)
15. Mr. Zia Hameed Toor, Lahore
16. Syed Raza Abbas Shah, Project Director Electronic Government Project IT Commission
17. Major Muhammad Tahir Alvi, representative from NADRA, Islamabad
18. Engr Tafseer Ahmad Khan Deputy Director (Electrical) Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (regretted for another conference at Karachi)
19. Mr. Mohsin A. Qazi, G. S, PASHA, representative PASHA

The meeting started with recitation of the Holy Quran. After the recitation the discussion on agenda items started:

Progress of URLSD forum

The meeting started by Dr. Afzal, Coordinator URLSDF, giving a brief overview of the activities if URLSDF so far. He reminded the members that in 1st meeting with Mr. Salman Ansari, Rs. 300 Million (to be approved) is at disposal of the URLSDF Forum and forum members should show keen interest in terms of initiation of projects. Dr. Afzal discussed about PC-1 of Lexicon for Speech and Language Applications for Urdu, with a budget of Rs. 38 Million approx, already initiated via TRMU and it is the only current PC-1. The coordinator of the Forum emphasizes the need to initiate more PC-1's with help of TRMU.

Review of Subcommittees progress

Character Set Subcommittee Report

Dr. Sarmad first discussed about the Character Set Committee meeting details that were conveyed to forum members, which was held on 6th Apr 2002 in FAST, Lahore. It was explained that some characters of Punjabi were not in Urdu character set so it should be treated differently. The sequence of Urdu characters is different from Punjabi and such sequence is yet to be defined. He demonstrated that six characters represents different shapes of Noon and needs to be standardized. He also discussed the Punjabi meeting details and explained that aerab were considered after the characters. As usual aerabs used for Urdu were listed and then discussed for additions or deletions. Though it was agreed that some of the aerab of Urdu are not used in Punjabi, e.g. Jazm, Ulta Pesh, do-zer and do-pesh, however, it was agreed to include all the aerabs below in the list to keep it compatible with Urdu and Arabic. The punctuation marks include: zabar, zer, pesh, jazm, noon-ghunna (chand), tashdeed, mad, khara-zabar, khari zer, ulta pesh, do zabar, do zer, do pesh. Dr. Sarmad concluded his subcommittee meeting by requesting all present experts in Punjabi meeting to advertise the findings to the Punjabi readership and requested for feedback for collation and decision.

Dr Sarmad also discussed about Sindhi meeting held on 20th April 2002 at KIIT Karachi. He explained about Sindhi meeting details to forum members and briefed the fact that list of all characters is in Unicode. This list, in addition to the list of punctuation, aerabs, numbers and other special symbols were discussed and their collating sequence was identified. The characters are listed in the required collating sequence, except that "alif-mad" which is included in the special characters (for Sindhi) comes after "alif" in the collating sequence. He clarified to participants that as far as the digits are concerned, both English and Sindhi digits should be included in the code page.

Keyboard Subcommittee Report

Keyboard committee progress was than discussed. Mr. Bilal Hashmi explained that there was not much of work being done regarding Urdu keyboard. He told the forum members that due to his personal problems, he may not be able to take lead role in heading keyboard committee. The forum unanimously requested Mr. Badar Sami to head Urdu Keyboard committee. Mr. Belal Muhammad Hashmi pointed out that enormous work has been done by NLA for formalizing the Urdu Typewriter and Tele-printer keyboards, and that can be used as basis for Urdu computer keyboard design and it'll provide a head-start to keyboard subcommittee. So, forum requested Mr. Aqeel Abbas Jafri to get this needed data from NLA and provide it to Mr. Badar Sami. It was also decided that Mr. Bilal Muhammad will provide the acquired data necessary for Urdu keyboard design research to Mr. Badar Sami at his earliest. to start research work on Urdu keyboard. Upon this Mr. Badar Sami requested that what mode of data collection is to be used e.g. in page, Urdu 98 etc as data are available in all modes. It was suggested that InPage should be used, as it is most commonly used package around. Mr. Humayun Qureshi raised a matter that which source of data collection should be used. It was unanimously decided that Newspapers, Books and office correspondence will be the three key sources of data collection. It was finalized that Mr. Badar Sami will head and work on Keyboard committee and forum suggested that two internees should be hired for the required research work, which Dr. Humayun Mina had volunteered on PITB expense.

Fonts Subcommittee Report

Fonts committee progress was than discussed. It was determined that not much being done on Font committee. It was also brought to the notice that Karachi University is willing to take up the font committee workload and offered to set up an office for such purpose. [Dr. Humayun Mian is currently heading the Fonts committee, so realizing his commitments Dr. Afzal talked to him on phone, and he ensured all possible technical support for the work, and emphasized that we must ensure that the committee will get the sufficient funding needed for quality research and he also supported the forums decision regarding change of Fonts subcommittee convener]. Forum decided that Dr. Ahmed Mirza Jamil to head the subcommittee. Mr. Bilal proposed that a workable open type font should be made preferably through the research conducted by proposed educational institutions i.e. Karachi University and OTF structure of Urdu is to be made. It was emphasized that leading experts of the discipline, CRULP and KU should all contribute and share their research experiences in this regard.

Standards Subcommittee Report

Standards committee progress was also not discussed, as no member of that committee was present in the meeting.

Forum unanimously decided on the input of Dr. Qasim that Terms of Reference of each committee should be made and finalized.

Subcommittees Deliverables and Deadlines

Dr. Afzal asked respective forum members of different committees to state Deliverables of their respective committees.

Dr. Sarmad desired to complete the character sets finalization work at a higher pace and that is possible forthcoming summer vacations. In next 3 months; Balochi & Pushto character set will be finalized.

Keyboard committee will do the Frequency Analysis of the character data that will be finalized by 15th August 2002 subject to the data availability, which Mr. Belal Muhammad confirmed that it would be made available by 15th July 2002. The draft version of Standard keyboard will be available by 15th October 2002.

Fonts and Standards committees deliverables are yet to be decided and will be communicated to the forum by respective subcommittee conveners.

State of PC-1s, funding, procedural difficulties and TReMU's facilitation

Forum members discussed the current state of PC-1 of Text to Speech and Lexical Development for Urdu and asked Ms. Momina about its necessary details. Ms. Momina explained that current status of existing PC-1 to all forum members. She told the whole Process of PC-1 initiation to its approval and how TReMU helps in the process of making PC-1s. She requested the forum members that more PC-1's should be initiated through TReMU.

Microsoft Conference (May 13, 2002, Islamabad) and finalized action items

Forum Members discussed the proceedings of Microsoft Conference held on May 13th 2002, Islamabad and reviewed the Microsoft's forwarded action items for localization group.

First, second and fifth point of action items were related to Dr. Humayun Mian, Dr. Khaver Zia and Dr. Arshad respectively but due to their non-availability in the meeting, the points were delayed until next meeting of URLSDF. Dr. Humayun Mian, told the meeting on telephone about his sent email to forum regarding input to his action points. This was read and displayed to the forum.

Third point related to Dr. Afzal and forum unanimously decided that a concept paper for exploring terminology for User Interface would be presented with help of NLA in next meeting.

Sixth action item related to Dr. Sarmad Hussain and Dr. Afzal and forum members discussed the proposal details and requested Dr. Sarmad Hussain to prepare the requisite report for circulation.

Last point of action items was related to the work of Urdu keyboard design that was already assigned to Mr. Badar Sami.

Reports on participation to International forum

There were two reports presented in front of the forum members on subject of participation to International forum.

AINC-Tunis April 15-17, 2002

Dr. Afzal presented the first report relating the attendance of AINC-Tunis conference. He briefed about the objectives and scope of Arabic Internet Names Consortium (AINC). It is sister organization of MINC – Multilingual Internet Names Consortium, a body implementing and propagating the use of non-English domain names and Internet/email addresses. AINC specifically concentrates on Arabic Script Based Languages (ASBLs). In the conference he presented on the Overview of Urdu Standardization effort and Standard Urdu Top Level Domain Names. Urdu perspective was very well appreciated by the AINC-Tunis audience and Arab and Persian speaking counterparts shared their works in this regards. These works have been passed on to National Language Authority for their translation into Urdu, so that our researchers can benefit from them.

42nd ISO/UNICODE Dublin Meeting May 20-22, 2002

Dr. Sarmad presented his report regarding Unicode/ISO Standards 42nd WG2 meeting held on May 20-22, 2002. He circulated two papers in this forum meeting giving details of 17 new character which have been added to the Unicode standard to close its gap with UZT 1.01. He remarked on the success of the trip in achieving the goals and establishing the contacts and urged continual participation on this forum by URLSDF. The detailed report will be circulated after few days to all members.

Committees (re-) structuring

Restructuring of committees was discussed in the forum meeting. A resolution was passed that there is need of an additional Urdu Internet Names Committee. Dr Afzal will head the committee and forum members can volunteer as resource persons to this committee.

It was decided that more active members to be added depending upon their work experience to the work force, but they cannot be introduced into to the forum straightaway, instead we can monitor their contribution thru their participation in local chapters and subcommittees.

It was also decided that three chapters be created at Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad to deal with regional issues. These chapters will meet monthly to keep members involved and will cause no additional expense to MoST.

Formulation of Subcommittees for ISO/JTC1 liaison

Forum is in contact with Pakistan Standards Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) which is the recognized body of International Standards Organization (ISO) in Pakistan. PSQCA has done a commendable work in making Pakistani National Standards by customizing ISO standards to Pakistani needs, but unfortunately for the lack of work force it could not do much on the standards for Information Technology. Dr Khakaan Hassan, Chairman, PSQCA, has repeatedly asked the Forum to help the authority by nominating Sub-Committees (SCs), similar to the SCs of Joint Technical Committee no 1, i.e JTC1 of ISO, which looks after IT areas. JTC1 has 18 SCs each working in a specialized area (see Annex - I). Later, PSQCA can send these SCs names to ISO/JTC1 to create their liaison with respective JTC1 SCs. Since these are specialized areas, so the heads of these SCs (preferably the forum members to keep ensured feedback and better control) can further co-opt members of high technical standing to their SCs, and pass on their finalized SCs to the forum by 30th June, 2002. List of Forum members and others who have volunteered for different SCs is enclosed in Annex-II.

Dr. Sarmad stated that our present structure of SCs is sufficient but work should be done actively. He added that there is also no need of addition of irrelevant sub-committees, and further committees might create administrative problems for the Forum. He recommended that each committee should establish links with relevant international groups and inform the coordinator. Standards committee will assist in this process. [I think we are getting myopic and trying to focus on a very small part, leaving the big 'whole' un-attended. Members should look at the SCs structure and feedback - Afzal].

Purging and replacement of non-contributing forum members

Forum discussed the purging and replacement of non-contributing forum members, as it is blocking other possibly more productive members and hindering the achievement of assignments. Further, this exercise for other task forces has improved their working environment.

Different options were discussed. Since, it is a voluntary work and all members were nominated by virtue of their expertise, research, contribution to Urdu and Regional Language cause, or by virtue of their employers'/organizations' relevance to Urdu, without realizing the nominees commitments and responsibilities. So it would be appreciated, if any one of us feels that he/she is unable to contribute to desired level and wants to leave, then please inform the Coordinator. [Currently there are 40+ members including the organizations who have yet not nominated their representatives. The attendance reflects the interest and one can well imagine the organizational load and wastage of resources especially for non-responding members.]

It was agreed that membership of all those members who remain absent and even don't respond to the meeting invitations, for three consecutive meetings, should be withdrawn. And in the following meeting his/her replacement by an active member be considered.

Inclusion of academically and technically competent members

Forum members can forward the names of academically and technically competent candidates, with the complete details of their contribution to the Urdu and Regional Languages cause. Before submitting their names to Mr Zeeshan their consent for the forum membership must be obtained.

Dr Sarmad proposed that a representative from Urdu Dictionary Board, Karachi must be included as an ex-officio member.

It was also decided that members having conflict of interest with a view of commercial interest should be avoided entry into the forum.

Conference on Computing of Pakistani Languages (mid next year)

Forum members approved Conference/exhibition on Computing of Pakistani languages that is to be organized next year. Dr. M. Qasim Bughio will prepare a conference plan document within next 15 working days and circulate it to the forum list for necessary input.

Prof Fateh Muhammad Malik, Chairman NLA has already committed to support such a conference. It was suggested that TReMU should also contribute its share to organize it. The plan document will be forwarded to Mr Salman Ansari, Advisor, to Minister MoST, for approval and commitment of MoST share to the conference.

Mr. Zeeshan Arshad, Project Analyst TReMU, after discussion with Project Manager, TReMU will give the necessary details and what possible help TReMU can render in this respect to Dr. Afzal.

Other Points

- a. Forum decided that research work regarding Urdu language be initiated and carried out at educational institutions that are capable of doing it. MoST grants or funding should be made available on merit & technical competence, irrespective these institutions are from public or private sectors.
- b. During the meeting, it was discussed that name of URLSD Forum be changed to a simpler, pronounceable and smaller name. For this suggestion members are invited.
- c. Forum decided that any proposal/project forwarded by any member on behalf of URLSDF have to be discussed at the Forum and after approval it should be forwarded.
- d. Mr. Badar Sami presented and explained 12 points document discussing the items for achievements of URLSDF objectives and its propagation. These included various incentives, seminars and conferences etc.
- e. Mr. Zeeshan circulated PC-1 mandatory requirements checklist to members of forum and briefed them about necessary items to be included before presenting any particular PC-1.
- f. Dr. Afzal praised the effort put by TReMU in making Telemedicine website and wanted present members to give input to develop similar site for URLSD Forum. Members agreed to provide the desired input for this much needed website. It was unanimously agreed that material and layout of the website will be provided by Mr. Humayun Qureshi to Mr. Abbas of TReMU for development of the website.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Muhammad Afzal concluded the meeting by appreciating forum member's efforts as well as TReMU employees while helping in arranging/organizing the meeting in a comfortable and friendly manner. Coordinator appreciated Mr. Zeeshan Arshad efforts for participating and setting in the meeting beyond formal official timings of TReMU.

The meeting ended with great zeal and commitment to submit more PC-1s for the promised areas of Urdu and Other Languages software development. Coordinator was confident that interested members will utilize the guidance and help available at TReMU in this regard.