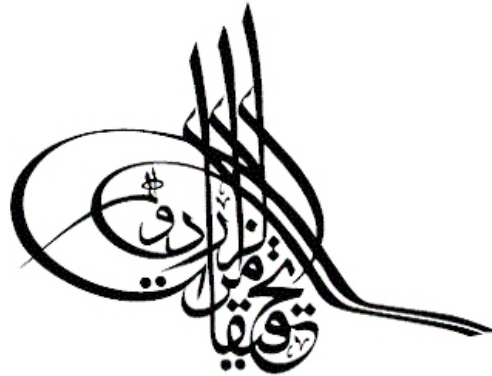


# **Report on Meetings with Microsoft at Dubai GITEX**

by

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## **Introduction**

Microsoft (Pakistan) recently extended invitation to URLSDF, MoST, to visit Dubai GITEX (IT exhibition) to meet with decision-makers of Microsoft products vis-à-vis localization of these products for Urdu, as these people were congregating for the event. After deliberations between the URLSDF coordinator and Microsoft (Pakistan), Dr. Sarmad Hussain was requested to attend on behalf of URLSDF. This report is being compiled to share the relevant details of the meeting which were subsequently held in Dubai.

## **Why Urdu Localization?**

Urdu is a widely spoken and used language. With more than 60 million speakers around the world ([www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)), Urdu holds a promising prospect for companies developing or localizing software for this language. One of the main reasons the current usage is low is because most of the people who read and write Urdu do not know English and are therefore incapable of using computers. Once the computing environment is localized, it will spread the usage of computers across this community of people at a very accelerated pace. Another reason for low usage has been absence of content published on the net in Urdu, because it has not been possible so far. Now, with the advent of Unicode and localization, we would see much more content and consequently much more usage of computers. In addition, efforts by Government of Pakistan to push for e-governance and general awareness and increasing usage of e-commerce will also spread the usage of technology in Urdu. Therefore, there is potentially a huge un-tapped market for Urdu software.

## **Meetings at GITEX**

There were two meetings which were held at Dubai GITEX, with Microsoft OFFICE team and WINDOWS team. The details of these meetings are given below.

Meeting with Anas (Andy) Abbar (Group Program Manager, US-OFF Complex Scripts PM) & Microsoft (Pakistan) Team

In this meeting Andy Abbar explained the Microsoft strategy for developing user - interfaces in various languages. He explained that before having a complete office version in a language (e.g. in English, Arabic, etc.) the localization for a language can be done at various levels, depending on the amount of investment Microsoft can make

(which eventually depends on potential return-on-investment). At this point Microsoft is interested in providing localization of Urdu on top of its MS OFFICE (English version) product. However, the localization cannot be done without the involvement of local government (for standards) and a third-party (for the development of Language Interface Pack, LIP). Andy Abbar also explained that Microsoft does not financially support development work by third-party, but does provide requisite development interface and limited technical support for this development. The third party must bear the cost of development itself, through the sponsorship of local government or some other mechanism. Normally this relationship with the third-party is developed for long-term and Microsoft prefers to keep only a single third party relationship, rather than get involved with many different parties. Microsoft may also sometimes provide timelines and limited quality assurance in addition to other help for the LIP developed.

Currently Microsoft requires translated glossary, keyboard layout, spell checker, thesaurus and English-Urdu dictionary. In the longer term they would also require Urdu Grammar Checker. However, they would not require any products which they do not supply within their English version of MS Office.

The attendees agreed that URLSDF will write to Microsoft again to urge them to make Urdu interface available in their office products, as this is a need for Pakistan.

Meeting with Bjorn Rettig (Group Manager, Windows International), Neil Powell (Group Manager - SPM, Windows International), Asim Hijazi (Microsoft, UAE) & Microsoft (Pakistan) Team

The Windows International team apprised of their current suspension of localization/LIP development activities until February 2003, as they are improving internal processes for localization. However, they re-iterated that the translation of glossary is required as the first and is the most urgent deliverable. They agreed to provide the glossary for translation in Urdu to URLSDF.

They explained that collation sequence, keyboard layout and character set definition is done by another groups and for that Cathy Wissink may be contacted (this contact was made by Dr. Sarmad Hussain at the ISO/Unicode conference at Dublin, Ireland, earlier this year).

On the request of Dr. Sarmad Hussain, the Windows International group agreed to provide at least the list of deliverables for LIP, so that estimation may be done on the extent of work and funding may be raised for it in the mean time. The development can start after Microsoft resumes their third-party development support in February next year.

Bjorn Rettig would provide the glossary and list of LIP deliverables.

### **Conclusion**

The meeting was very useful for the cause of Urdu localization of Microsoft products. This meeting also shows Microsoft's interest and commitment to work with URLSDF, MoST, to achieve this common goal. However, URLSDF and Government of Pakistan also need to support Microsoft in this development.