

All eyes on Open Source in E-Governance

One of the main tracks on Day Two was the E-Governance Forum. Some of the panel discussions drew overwhelming crowds. The E-Governance Forum started with Dr Neeta Shah's keynote address.

Dr Neeta Shah, director—eGovernance, Gujarat Informatics Ltd (GIL), government of Gujarat, talked about how the state government had taken up an ambitious project, called 'eDatabank', completely based on open source software. This would integrate over 100 different department websites, including those related to *panchayats*, rural development, health and industry, on a single portal.

Dr Neeta Shah of Gujarat also spoke about INVITE—the Initiative to Nurture a Vibrant Information Technology Ecosystem. This collaborative effort of IBM and GIL aims to build a repository of e-governance solutions and make it freely available to government agencies, solution providers and academia. The project promotes cross-platform open source and open standards-based technologies. It involves students and faculty working on real world projects creating solutions or prototypes for local e-governance needs at various levels.

In the panel on national case-studies chaired by Sachin Dabir, head of Enterprise Sales at Red Hat, the conference listened to Raghunathan Srinivasan of NIC, Kerala, share

Power workshops

With many technology workshops to choose from, excited techies tried to maximise their learning opportunities. The technology workshops focused on latest technologies and techniques in open source – Linux, Ruby, AJAX, Eclipse, Derby, JDeveloper, security, content management, clustering, high-availability, groupware and building open source communities.

The IBM Linux Fest at the event received tremendous response from the attendees interested in getting hands-on training with Linux, DB2 & WebSphere Application Server. All workstations were stretched to capacity and instructor Harish Chauhan of IBM was well appreciated for training enthusiastic attendees on how to install and configure Linux (Red Hat Enterprise Linux & SUSE Linux), DB2 database server and WebSphere application server. The second workshop done by IBMer, Ankur Goyal, covered hands-on installation and configuration of Eclipse and Derby. This popular workshop helped attendees gain a

good understanding of the powerful Eclipse platform and of doing application development with the help of tools like Apache Derby (an open source database with a small footprint), JUnit (a unit testing tool), CVS (a popular version control package), ANT (a build tool) and Apache Tomcat (a free and open Java web server based on Apache).

Another popular workshop was on 'Motivating Open Source Contributors and Building Communities' by James Howison of Syracuse University. In an interactive session, Howison talked about how open source communities work, best practices to organise communities, and about what motivates open source contributors. Two workshops by Vamsee Kanakala of Viamentis on Ruby, AJAX, and RubyOnRails were popular with Ruby enthusiasts.

A workshop on Linux in the Enterprise, conducted by Tetra Information Services, was one of the highlights at LinuxAsia. The two-day workshop had four sessions—security, content management, groupware, and clustering



success stories of how open source software had been used in state e-governance projects. Kerala has been among the early adopters of OSS. He described rural programmes using LAMP (Linux/Apache/MySQL/PHP) technologies and mentioned treasury information management, election software and content management in Kendriya Vidyalaya Schools as examples of open source implementations which have resulted in enormous cost savings. Other key participants in the panel included Dr Neeta Shah of Gujarat, M R Rajagopalan of C-DAC Chennai, and Gopi Nath, head of consulting, public sector, HP India.

In his keynote address, Shri Prakash Kumar, IT Secretary of Delhi, offered to guide other states in emulating the successful e-governance initiatives of the government of Delhi. He also mentioned the need for the standardisation of basic processes and systems for data capture and citizen interaction, across the country, so that the states can share and optimise resources.

The international case studies panel of the E-Governance track, chaired by Mary Ann Fisher of IBM

and high availability. The security session covered topics such as network access control, firewalls and intrusion detection systems. The content management module covered how one could setup and use Zope/Plone to develop and manage an Internet server. The groupware session discussed deployment of various open source groupware solutions—to implement features such as shared calendaring, online forums, wikis, and trouble-ticketing for organisations. The session on clustering and high availability covered the Linux—HA (High Availability) project, and how to implement fail-over and HPC clusters. Attendees from top organisations such as CRIS, NPL, Matrix, Samtel, Nucleus Software, Mitsubishi, Bajaj Capital, BHEL, WIPRO, and C-DAC took advantage of these top-notch workshops. While the general consensus among those attending, was that the workshop sessions had been well designed, they felt more time was needed for each session to cover more technology in each category.

Looking ahead

“We must be free not because we claim freedom, but because we practise it.” Perhaps this was the essence of LinuxAsia 2006.

Just before the three-day show came to an end, we asked participants what they felt about LinuxAsia 2006. Some gave a thumbs-up to the event, and some had suggestions on how it could be improved.

Javed Tapia, president, Red Hat India, congratulated the team of LinuxAsia saying, “We saw an outstanding line-up of speakers from the Indian and international open source community.”

Ashit Panjwani, marketing director, Novell India, said

Global government services, included panelists from government and industry. Sri Lanka was represented by Prasanna Karunarathne, programme manager, ICT Agency of Sri Lanka. Although the country is a recent adopter of open source software, Karunarathne explained how the government was impressed with OSS's potential in rural Sri Lanka. He noted, “The relatively high cost of software has kept most of our citizens away from ICT, and free and open source software presents an alternate approach for acquiring software legally at a low cost, provided we are satisfied with the quality.”

Sivarama Krishnan, associate director, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC), elaborated on how his organisation has used OSS and reduced bandwidth consumption from 256 Kbps to a mere 6 Kbps. Advocating a pro-choice approach by governments, he said that it was wise to look at ‘governance’ rather than the ‘e’ part in e-governance. The issues raised at the e-governance forum served as eye-openers for many government officials. They found the day's sessions instrumental in getting closer to solutions and found inspiring examples to emulate.

the event gave him the chance to catch up with friends and like-minded people. “I am looking forward to coming here again. The event was nicely organised and was a great place to interact.”

Klaus Knopper, who had visited India for the first time, said that LinuxAsia was an enriching experience, summing it all with the words, “Great expo, great city, great people.” Knopper added, “All of the open source community is here together in a healthy environment. It is good to see that there is none of the bad effects of the politics in the open source community here in India.” He found himself most comfortable in a kurta pyjama.

Mary Ann Fisher, program executive, global government industry, IBM, revealed that she liked trying Indian clothes, and was taking some back home to the US.

“It was a soothing and comfortable event, just like enjoying an ice-cream,” complimented Ellen Carberry, vice president—Global Alliances, Red Hat AP. “I give ten-on-ten to LinuxAsia and look forward to coming back next year. It was all about exchanging ideas rather than selling products,” she added.

And so the third consecutive LinuxAsia drew to a close with a promise of working on the ideas that blossomed here. The community of OSS evangelists, students, industry leaders and learners, all resolved to strengthen their efforts to make open source cut through new dimensions.

Archis Gore, one of the many participants from Pune, summed it up best in his e-mail, “Seeing the event, my group has re-doubled its efforts towards our next project. And this time, we've boosted our ambitions even more, bringing together 200 developers to work in the next project, thanks to LinuxAsia.”

We'd just like to say, “May the source be with you.”