Linux Bangalore 2002

On the Linux move

Take some 2000 Linux enthusiastic, place them in the region known as the Silicon Valley of South Asia, pepper it up with significant funding support – what you have is Linux Bangalore 2002.

Held in early-December for the second year, this event is shaping up into India's most ambitious Open Source event. In terms of numbers, nothings comes close to challenge it.

Still, for a sub-continent sized country of India's dimensions, a lot more could perhaps be done to rope in the real diversity of GNU/Linux.

"We have more talks per minute than many international conferences. It's a big thing … This year we tried our level best to keep the audiences out, and we failed again. We were about two times over-subscribed in terms of (seating) capacity," said Atul Chitnis, a key mover and decision-maker behind the event hosted by Bangalore's LUG.

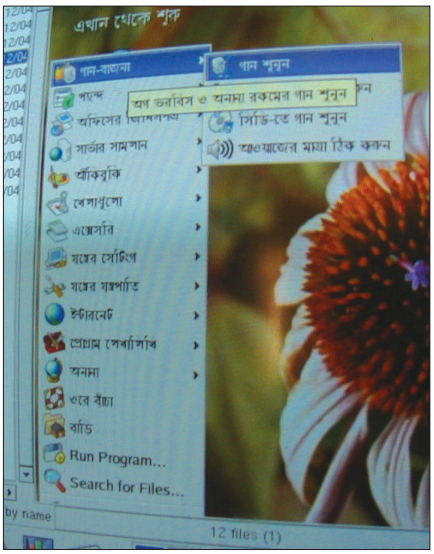

Figure 1: Indic computing solutions on the GNU/Linux front seem closer than ever

LB/2002's some 70-plus talks were drawing attention globally too. The website *http://linux-bangalore.org/2002/* had drawn some 100,000 hits. Most from outside the country.

Like last year, the meet drew in the numbers. Long queues were visible on Day One, a little shorter than last year's perhaps because the three-day event was priced at Rs 300 (£4, Euros 6) unlike the free-entry of the past.

It continued to get high-level corporate support. HP and IBM were the top corporate sponsors. "What really tickles me pink is that the Government of India (a sponsor this year) is saying, 'Hey guys, you are doing a good thing.'" added Chitnis.

Even Microsoft went there

One surprise speaker was Microsoft, speaking about their "shared source" alternatives. Organisers stressed that those representing the company were technical people, and hence questions about license-issues would not be taken.

Programmers from local software firms and students were in the majority. Most were duly impressed by the quality of speakers, and the information imparted in parallel sessions that sometimes went on in five halls simultaneously.

Tracks were available in development, sysadmins, users and the business sector, emerging issues, government and education, and kernel-related trends.

Sponsors also gave keynotes, ranging from the inspiring (for example Brij Sethi of HP's "preaching to achieve personal excellence" in an Open Source world) to the somewhat boring. Delhi-based 24-year-old Naba Kumar, who spoke on C programming under Linux, didn't fail to impress the youngsters in the crowd by what is possible at his age. Naba is a GNOME developer, and founder of the Anjuta project, an integrated development environment.

Other talks dealt with Qt programming, super-computing clusters, embedded Linux, e-governance, Linux in robotics, and much else. There were discussions on Indian language computing.

Figure 2: Affordable prices of GNU/Linux software is a reason for its popularity in a region like India

There was even a rock show at the end of the three-day meet, in a city where the younger generation is fast moving into the globalised culture of pizzas and pubs.

Local users predominated

In some ways, much more could have been done. Talks were largely by volunteers, meaning that a number of potential quality inputs went un-invited and overlooked. Despite its goals of being a national meet, some LUGs across India might have not learnt of it on time.

Besides, this is marketed strictly as an Open Source event, keeping proponents of the parallel Free Software movement – already incorporated as a company, and mainly active around the neighbouring state of Kerala – largely outside its activities.

"They could have at least shown the two potential paths (of Open Source *and* Free Software). Here, it was made out to be as if there is just one path available," said Mitul Limbani, the CTO of Enterux Solutions. Based in India's commercial capital of Mumbai, Enterux are consultants and solution providers for Free and Open Source-based systems.

"It's very well organised, except that on the first day there was too much pressure (long queues) for food. This event is better organised than many back home," said Israeli software expert in embedded solutions, Roi Hadar.

Anil Bajaj of Anil Electricals, from Bangalore's plush Mahatma Gandhi Road area, felt that the Bangalore user group was "not talking about giving free support", said Anil, who works in hardware: "We should create a community were support is available easily (at low cost or for free). Unless we have a revolution by our youth, things will not improve drastically". ■