

Linux Bangalore 2003

India is Coming

It's the largest Open Source event in the second-largest country on the planet, and it happens early each December in South Asia's most IT-savvy city, Bangalore. 2003 saw a growing but also more predictable "Linux Bangalore" show than the two years before. **BY FREDERICK NORONHA**

At a time when India's involvement with Free/Libre and Open Source Software (FLOSS) is growing fast, Linux Bangalore 2003 [1] was held from December 2-4. "We had some 1,500 participants. It was difficult to count. But going by the meals eaten, the total number of delegates, speakers and exhibitors exceeded that figure," this year's event coordinator Kartik N reported.

"There were more speakers than last year. Registration was faster. Our food counter worked well (except on the first day). One shortcoming, if you could call it that, was that there were too many talks," said Mahendra, himself a former coordinator of this event, which had the Government of India as its principal sponsor this time.

Atul Chitnis, an engineer of mixed Indo-German parentage and one of the high-profile Open Source business-evangelists here, was smug: "96 talks (over three days). I've been told that's some kind of a world record. At any point of

time, every one (of the five halls, with seating capacity of 60 to 750 seats) had some talk or other going on."

The audience was mainly comprised of programmers and students. In the absence of other national events of this size, Bangalore also pulls in FLOSS enthusiasts from other Indian states, including user-groups elsewhere in Karnataka, the tourist region of Goa, the former French colony of Pondicherry, India's southernmost province of Tamil Nadu, and even the northern parts of the country.

Talks, talks, talks

This year, the participation of high-profile foreign speakers seemed to be on the up. Speakers from overseas included the lively and jovial Miguel de Icaza (Mono/Ximian), Rasmus Lerdorf (PHP), Nat Friedman (Ximian), Jeremy Zawodny (MySQL/Yahoo), Bdale Garbee (Debian), and Harald Welte (iptables).

Former Netscape employee Sudhakar 'Thaths' Chandrashekhar, a co-founder of the Linux India movement [2], which helped network sporadic groups, was back from Kenya. A year of volunteering spent there - and this is unusual for most Indian youth - made for an interesting story.

Others have been trying to build alternatives or competition to the Bangalore show. Last year, GNU/Linux enthusiasts from the country's commercial center of Mumbai (Bombay) showed signs



Figure 1: Take your pick: A youngster takes a closer look at the program, which saw some 96 talks

of being upset with the short-shrift given to free software, the GNU project and the like, and toyed with the idea of having a conference of their own. But organizing anything of this gargantuan size is a huge effort. All the same, India's first Open Source magazine „Linux For You“, has just announced plans for an event called Linux Asia [3] to be held early 2004 in the national capital New Delhi.

In general, India's involvement with FLOSS is slowly making waves. Prominent at the venue was a statement by former-scientist turned Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam, talking about the potential of Open Source in India. Likewise, people of South Asian origin seem to be playing an increasing role in promoting FLOSS in as diverse parts of the globe as Singapore, Malaysia, the Middle East, London, and the rest of Europe (Rishab Aiyer Ghosh's FLOSS study has been widely noted in the Netherlands, while Niranjana Rajani [4] headed the team which studied the role of FLOSS in the developing world).

Hence, things look promising even if proprietary software is hitting back hard, by trying to capture large contracts in the governmental and educational sectors, in a country that could tilt the proprietary-versus-FLOSS debate decisively in one way or the other. ■



Figure 2: The Simplifier works and has now reached the market

INFO

- [1] Linux Bangalore 2003:
<http://linux-bangalore.org/2003>
- [2] Linux India: <http://www.linux-india.org/>
- [3] Linux Asia 2004:
<http://www.linuxasia2004.com/>
- [4] C. Martin: „Fits the World“,
Linux Magazine Issue 33, p84