

MAP INDIA 2005 AND ISG CONFERENCE

Indian GI Actors Look to Grass-roots

The eighth in the series of annual Map India conferences was organised for the first time this year jointly with the Indian Society of Geomatics (ISG). The event took place in the Taj Palace Conference Centre in New Delhi, India from 7th to 9th February 2005 and attracted 1,300 visitors.

The guiding themes were for Map India 2005 – “Going Back to Basics”™ and for the Indian Society of Geomatics (ISG) – “Geomatics Technologies for Bridging the Digital Divide”™. These themes indicate a growing awareness amongst Indian geospatial actors that the results of their labour have to trickle down to potential geospatial information users at grass-root level. However, keynote speakers defined the word “basics”™ in a wide variety of terms.

Barrier Removal

The conference began with a minute’s silence in remembrance of the tsunami victims, as many participating countries were deeply affected by the December 2004 disaster. In his opening address, Indian Surveyor-General Dr Prithvish Nag emphasised a narrowing of the digital divide between his department and society at large. As a result, every state now has geospatial centres and new central points for large-scale mapping are being established countrywide to cater for all levels and regions of society. He urged the private sector to join government in setting up Indian SDI architecture. According to Mr Kapil Sibal, Minister of Science and Technology for the Government of India, the proposed Indian Government Mapping Policy, which will remove most security restrictions, will be announced soon; the law is now awaiting final Federal Government approval and the last required cabinet signatures. The announcement of this eagerly awaited major breakthrough was greeted with long and enthusiastic applause. The long crusade against existing geospatial data security restrictions run by the managing editor of *GIS India*, Mr G.S. Kumar and many who either openly or silently sided with him had finally been rewarded.

Canada and India

Ms Lucie Edwards, Honourable Canadian High Commissioner to India, opened the exhibition. Canadian scientific and corporate participation in Map India is always substantial and her presence confirmed this fact. In her address she reflected on how to present the advantages of geospatial sciences to the poor and elaborated the role geospatial information played in managing Canada’s natural resources, allowing monitoring of environmental protection and thus serving the grass-roots level. She also expressed the hope that a tsunami alarm system for the Indian Ocean, like that for the Pacific, would be developed in the near future. Many scientists, however, believe it will remain impossible to predict earthquakes. Dr Tad S. Murty, visiting scientist at the University of Manitoba, Canada and vice-president of the Tsunami Society, presented a comparison of tsunamis in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. He focused on the enormous human cost of the latest Indian Ocean tsunami and explained why tsunamis in the Pacific are less destructive. The margins of the Indian Ocean are much more heavily populated than are those of the Pacific Ocean rim, and the maximum tsunami travelling time in the Indian Ocean is ten hours, compared to 23 hours in the much larger Pacific Ocean. This allowed for more warning time to be given by a system installed in a location such as the Pacific. Dr Murty also dealt with the potential of GIS to provide information for coastal management, giving tangible examples of “going back to basics”™ in geospatial information management pertaining to the tsunami disaster.

Moving Upwards

One keynote speaker, Mr Mohan Reddy, founder and chairman of the Indian Infotech Enterprises Ltd in Hyderabad, told his audience how the Indian GIS industry as a whole was rapidly moving up the value-added chain. He described how this worked from the lowest form of data-centric work, via application-centred activities to providing total and final (geospatial) ICT solutions where Web-based GIS and geospatial modelling for telematics were the youngest additions. Mr Rajesh Kalra, executive vice-president of RMSI in Noida, Uttar Pradesh distinguished five basic areas for which solutions had to be found: GIS solutions, products, engineering and consulting firms, IT companies and end-user solutions. He questioned the wisdom of the philosophy of looking to the outside world for Indian geospatial solutions whilst capabilities for Research and Development are often perfectly available within India itself.

Parallel Sessions

Technical papers presented in five parallel sessions covered a wide variety of subjects:

- agriculture, including precision farming, soil suitability, crop estimation, land information systems, cadastral mapping and ground water modelling
- disaster management, including mapping coastal changes and tectonic activity in regions affected by the tsunami
- emerging applications, including Lidar and mobile data access
- environment planning

- forestry
- geology and mineral resources.

Further sessions addressed GPS, Health, Image Analysis, LIS, Marine GIS, Water Resources and the hot issue of Web GIS, for example, real-time Web-based GIS and remote sensing systems for particular applications like flood management and a Web GIS for environmental information (ENVIS). One special education workshop was conducted on e-Learning Environments for GIScience Education, and one on National Cadastral Survey & Mapping. Delegates also found interesting a number of seminars on Transportation, Urban Planning and Infrastructure.

ESRI Vision Seminar

The ESRI vision seminar, which generated huge positive feedback, aims at communicating to the GIS user-community GIS success stories and technological advances. A number of distinguished speakers delivered presentations. Dr Aniruddha Roy, product manager ESRI India spoke on "Distributed GIS and ArcGIS - The Road Ahead". Brig. Girish Kumar, Deputy Surveyor-General of India, Survey of India, Govt. of India delivered a paper entitled "Mapping: The Future". Prof. A. S. Arya, National Seismic Advisor, Govt. of India gave the address "Natural Hazards: the Tsunami". Dr Rajesh Gopal, Inspector-General of Forests, Govt. of India described the "Project Tiger" and, from the European Commission, Mr Juergen Stadel, co-director of the National Geographic Information Program (NGIIP), Nepal discussed "The development of NGII in Nepal".

Tsunami Posters

Poster sessions covered almost all geospatial fields and many were of high quality. A number dealt with the tsunami disaster, including Tsunami Surveillance System- A Global Necessity, delineating many of the usual data input sources but also ASTER data, space-based techniques for remote sensing of oceanic winds etc. Interesting new combinations, such as integrating GIS & nano-technology for monitoring air pollution, attracted attention.

Lively Exhibition

The forty participating exhibitors covered 1,800 square meters in four halls. All major GIS and remote sensing companies were present, including Autodesk, Bentley Systems, ERDAS India, ESRI India, ORBIMAGE, PCI Geomatics, Tata Infotech (MapInfo) and Trimble. Some smaller foreign companies were also present, including Airborne Laser Solutions of South Africa and DVP Geomatic Systems from Canada. Several companies displayed their range of sophisticated in and output devices. An interesting software newcomer was Gfk Macon from Germany, a possible partner in all fields of geo-marketing, offering worldwide postal and administrative maps with 4-digit postcodes for China and 6-digit postcodes for India. Some will have shared the feeling that geospatial marketing products have been strangely absent from this type of conference, which tend to be very technically oriented and to neglect geospatial applications. Gfk Macon proved itself to be a welcome exception here; perhaps now other similar companies will appear at future exhibitions. ESRI India won the Best Exhibitor Award.

Joint Event Success

The decision to organise Map India 2005 and Geomatics 2005 jointly for the first time allowed more delegates to attend. Although participants originated largely from India, many others came from countries on all continents. The Map India 2006 conference will be held 30th January to 2nd February 2006 at the same venue in New Delhi. In advance of this, the same organising committee is to run Map Asia 2005 in Jakarta, Indonesia from 22nd to 25th August 2005. This conference is also highly recommended for all interested in current rapid geospatial developments in Asia.

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