

# GIS: FINDING MAINSTREAM

## Map India 2006

The 9th annual International Conference and Exhibition Map India was held from 30th January to 1st February 2006 at Taj Palace Hotel, Delhi. Over 1,200 people from 29 countries participated in the 3-day conference, the theme of which was “GIS: Finding Mainstream”™.

A total of 125 papers were presented during two plenary sessions, two keynote sessions, three application tracks, twelve technical sessions, one workshop, two user meetings and four Technology Shows. In conjunction with Map India, FIG Commission 7 held a parallel international conference on Enhancing Land Registration and Cadastre for Economic Growth in India (see FIG page GIM International, April 2006). Prior to the conference a two-day programme on GIS training took place attended by fifteen people. On the exhibition floor, thirty major international and national vendors in GIS, remote sensing, photogrammetry, GPS, satellite data and spatial data and hardware presented their products, services and solutions. Rolta India, ESRI and Bentley received best exhibitor awards.

### Inauguration

ICT has changed the manner in which the common man interacts, thinks and acts and ICT geo-information technologies will bring similar changes. The private and public sector all over the world are increasingly aware of the importance of geo-data and geo-information technology for urban and rural planning, for designing spatial changes and for performing business processes and supporting departmental processes. As a result, geo-information technologies have been gradually implanted within mainstream industries such as manufacturing, mining, agriculture and construction. During the inaugural session, seven speakers set the tone of the conference by describing their own perception of “finding mainstream”™ developments. Mr Kapil Sibal, Union Minister of Science and Technology and Ocean Development, for example, emphasised how ICT and GIS were key factors in operating business processes within a fast and networked environment. He recognised the value of GIS technology even for monitoring building construction in urban areas, and for identifying illegal structures. Dr Hans Hess, former CEO, Leica Geosystems, indicated that Google Earth and car navigation would have a profound influence on the way geo-information will be used in the near future.

### Sessions

During two plenary sessions, one focusing on technology and the other on applications, experts expressed their view on the future of geo-information technology. Joe Astroth, executive vice-president, Autodesk Location Services, said that GIS was leaving the back offices and desktop and slowly reaching the general public. Bhupinder Singh, managing director, Bentley South Asia, expounded his view on how GIS could be used in infrastructure, response to natural disaster, national security and real-time business demands. Prof. Josef Strobl, University of Salzburg, stressed that education was the key to feeding the market and bringing GIS to the general public. In order to cope with the challenges of going mainstream the GIS society should be built on three solid pillars: technology, business and education. Later, in a technology track session, Dr P. Nag, director of the National Atlas Thematic Mapping Organisation, stressed that universities should offer in-depth GIS courses in their curricula.

Mr Mike McGill, director of International Commercial Sales, Digital Globe, emphasised that continual growing demand for mapping on the part of end-users was not matched by the budgets allocated. This was a challenging issue, and one that the mapping community had to tackle.

During the keynote session on Enterprise GIS, Jim Farley, vice-president, Leica Geosystems, Geospatial Imaging showed that forms of imagery were intelligent and cost-effective tools for maintaining and updating corporate geo-data databases. Vikram D. Apte, principal executive officer, New Delhi Power Limited (NDPL) in India told his audience that the use of GIS became ornamental when data was not regularly updated.

During a technology track session, Mr Rajesh C. Mathur, president of ESRI India, emphasised the need for adopting a common data model and good practices amongst the various user organisations. He added that GIS was becoming more server-centric, network-centric and distributed. Large enterprises would eventually see the benefits of using such systems and discover the value of geo-data in all types of business.

An interesting paper on Insurance GIS, written by Dimpy Arora of Prasad Lingam, Symbiosis Institute of Geoinformatics, won a Best Student Papers award. Obviously, there is growing interest on the part of insurance companies in India for using GIS, an application already mature in developed countries.

### Concluding Remarks

The conference clearly demonstrated how geo-information technology was increasingly becoming a prerequisite for business and good governance. The need for geo-information will in many countries accelerate the process of providing geo-data in digital format. It will also

force government organisations to convert paper maps into digital format, and to establish programmes for updating already created databases at regular time intervals.

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