India's Role In The Global Internet Community

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Can India have the largest Internet users from having the largest TV viewers? The answer is YES, if the Government and its allied play their part well. There is a great potential waiting to be tapped. Several issues need to be addressed to make this happen. If we can manage to atleast address a few of them then we can be on the right track towards this goal. The most fundamental problem is the availability of Internet. Currently Internet access is expensive, requires a multimedia PC and a telephone line. Most heavy surfers would agree to the point that they require a dedicated telephone line for Internet connectivity and also run up a high telephone bill. The need of the hour is to have low cost Internet connectivity through other media's. To make Internet connectivity available at low cost it is necessary that private ISP (Internet Service Providers) should be immediately allowed.

Making toll free lines for Internet connectivity is also necessary. There is a danger of clogging up telephone circuits. A solution to that is making toll free lines available during non-peak hours. Several ISP's abroad charge for connectivity during the day and offer free connectivity during non-peak hours since during non-peak hours their infrastructure remains greatly under utilised. It is also necessary to promote Internet connectivity though various other media's such as Cable Modems, Web TV's, Internet connectivity through satellite connectivity or any other media which does not put pressure on our telecom infrastructure. By using technologies such as Web TV, Internet can reach homes, which do not have computers. Most homes have a Television and cable connectivity. These homes can go online without much cost involved. With privatisation it can also be expected that Internet will be available through all possible means. Getting e-mails on pagers or browsing the World Wide Web through cellular phones will no more be a dream. Some of these services are already available but the costs are prohibitively high.

Currently VSNL has to pay very high rates for Internet gateways. Since Internet traffic is going out of the country but hardly any traffic is coming back, the US ISP companies who provide India the gateways charge high rates. If we can have traffic coming into India then the gap between incoming and outgoing traffic can be reduced. This will bring down the cost of Internet Gateways and will reduce the cost of Internet connectivity. One of the ways of getting traffic into the country is by mirroring popular websites in India. Suppose you need to go to a US website to access information, you can instead go to the India mirror site and down information faster. This mirror site will be an exact replica of the US website. By doing this we are not only saving traffic from going out of the country but also preserving international bandwidth. The other option is to hosting websites in India rather than hosting them in the United States or elsewhere. The cost of hosting websites in India is currently very high, if this is reduced to a more realistic figures then we can expect several websites to come up.

We hardly have any websites in India languages. Currently most Internet sites are in English. It is necessary to have websites in Indian languages to break the language barrier, which currently exists. This will bring Internet to the masses and not just people who know English. With the currently technology is not at all difficult to setup Indian language websites. What is required is to have Indian representatives at the World Wide Web Consortium (www.w3.org) to develop and adopt standards for Indian languages. Currently all the Indian language websites develop their own fonts for different languages and before one goes to the Indian language section, it is necessary to download the respective font. If you have downloaded a Hindi font once, it is not necessary that you can surf all Hindi websites. Most likely you will have to download different fonts for different Hindi websites since they all use different fonts. If a standard is adopted then this can be avoided.

It is also essential to make Internet available to schools and colleges at very low rates or even free. History has shown that the growth of the Internet has been exponential because of the involvement of universities. These universities have not only contributed as a large user base but various bleeding edge technologies have emerged out of them. Providing such infrastructure to universities can definitely have a long-term benefit to the society. It will also induce the Internet culture to the students at an early age.

What we are talking above is no more a distant dream. The Prime Minister has setup a task force for Information Technology and Software Development. Internet related issues are on their agenda and are very important. We can definitely hope something to come out of this Task Force. ◆

Punjab Government To Introduce Intranet

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Following the successful launch of its website, the Punjab Government is actively working towards linking the State by Intranet in a phased manner. The first phase of the Intranet creation, expected to be completed in around four months, will involve linking the secretary-level officers of the State Government.

According to official sources, the State Government is in the process of preparing a detailed plan to put the entire State machinery on the Internet within the next few years.

Official sources told Web Vision that secretary-level Intranet would enable a secretary to link up with another secretary on any query and this would in effect cut down the response time tremendously. The current manual system, answering a query involves a lengthy process of the file winding its way through the maze of secretaries, their juniors and their personal assistants, besides the despatch departments to send files from one department to another.

Sources said that other phases of the Intranet expansion in the State were in the planning process and hence no details of those phases could be made available.

Simultaneously along with the Punjab Intranet creation the field offices of the state department of industries were being linked through another Intranet under a scheme floated by the Government of India.

They officials said the field offices of the industries department, the district industries centres (DIC's), were being linked by Intranet to enable faster flow of Industrial data. It is very vital for the development of the nation, first from the field offices to the headquarters of the State industries department in Chandigarh and further on to the relevant offices of the Government of India in New Delhi. The data would include surveys, among other things and give the latest complete picture of 'what is' and 'what is required to be done to boost the industrial growth in this state".

Sources said that the DICs would be linked to the Intranet in two phases. While the first phase would involve linking nine DICs and was expected to be completed by July '98, the second phase would involve linking the remaining eight DICs to the intranet and this would be done in the next financial year, 1999-2000. They added that the necessary hardware and software for the first phase of industries department Intranet had already been purchased. ◆

Netscape Announces New Netscape Communicator 4.5

☛...Continued from page 1

SMART BROWSING TO MAKE BROWSING EASIER

Netscape Smart Browsing, will allow Internet users to find information quickly and easily anywhere on the Net by seamlessly integrating a new generation of services, hosted by the Netscape Netcenter Portal site, with Netscape Communicator 4.5 client software. The initial phase of Smart Browsing will feature three core capabilities: Internet Keywords, What's Related and NetWatch.

Internet Keywords will allow users to access websites by typing regular words, or simple 'keywords', instead of specific Internet addresses directly into the Netscape Navigator location bar. What's Related will provide users with a dynamically generated list of links to information about companies, services and products that relate to the site that the user is visiting. NetWatch will provide a mechanism for screening Internet content based on two PICS-compliant rating systems, RSACi [www.rsac.org] and SafeSurf [www.safesurf.com].

HIGH PERFORMANCE MESSAGING

Netscape Messenger, Netscape's Internet mail client will have several improvements. Combining a new three pane interface and dozens of usability improvements with performance enhancements are planned for this new release. Users will benefit from better message management as all mail folders and newsgroups appear in a third folder pane. In addition, fast and accurate Pinpoint Addressing frees users from hunting for contacts in a separate address book or corporate directory while ensuring that mail goes to the right person. Netscape Messenger allows enterprises and Internet Service Providers (ISP's) to provide an IMAP and LDAP messaging solution with the rich features that users expect. Users can now take advantage of improved performance over a slow link,

folder sharing, multiple address books and read receipts. Also, migrating to Netscape Messenger from Eudora or Outlook Express is possible because Netscape Messenger will be equipped with integrated import utilities for mail and address books.

FLEXIBLE ROAMING ACCESS

Netscape Communicator 4.5 introduces flexible roaming support for laptop, PDA and multiple machine users so they can access their customized Communicator information at work, from the road or from home. For laptop users who travel, Communicator offers a great offline experience with one-step synchronization of IMAP messages and replication of corporate directories based on LDAP. Users who telecommute, share machines or roam between buildings at work can use Roaming Access to access their customised browsing and messaging environments from different computers. In addition, with Netscape Communicator 4.5 and Netscape Directory Server software, PalmPilot users can take their corporate directories as well as mail and personal address books on the road.

NETSCAPE COMMUNICATOR 4.5

Netscape Communicator 4.5 includes Netscape Navigator for Web browsing, Netscape Messenger for open email, Netscape Composer for Web-based word processing and Web pages, Netscape Calendar for enterprise group scheduling and AOL Instant Messenger for real-time chat. Netscape Mission Control Desktop enables enterprises to configure, centrally manage and update Communicator. The Netscape Client Customisation Kit enables ISP's and OEMs to customise and brand Communicator. Netscape Communicator 4.5 is supported on 12 platforms and available on 31 platforms. Netscape Communicator 4.5 will be available in beta on Windows, Macintosh and Unix operating environments from Netscape Netcenter next month. In addition, the Netscape Communicator 4.5 beta will include a Quality Feedback Agent designed to increase product quality by providing automatic feedback from beta testers. Netscape will continue to enhance the quality of Communicator and Navigator by making it easier for users to report issues to Netscape during the beta test cycle. ◆

Compiled by Prakash Advani

Picturesque Karnataka Goes Online

☛...Continued from page 1

WildLife Circuit lists out the wildlife sanctuaries situated in the area such as Bandipur, Biligiri, Kabini each of these gives details on the location, the best season to visit, animals and birds found here and more.

The option 'Choice Hotels International' gives details of 18 Major hotels in India like tariff, accommodation capacities, etc.

KSTDC conducted tours is an option that lists out the various tours conducted by the Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. Click the place of your interest and you get details about the tours. The same section also imparts information about Mauriya Group of Hotels run by the KSTDC.

An interesting option the 'Eco - tourism in Karnataka talks of the twinkling rivers, majestic wildlife and rich and diverse flora and fauna of the region. Jungle Lodges' first class living quarters and ethnic tented cottages, of wildlife safari, bird life, river rafting, organised treks and more.

There are options where you avail of discounts offered at the various hotels in the region and online booking is provided at the site.

Click on 'Take a heli-tour of Bangalore' and you get all the information you need about the famous Bangalore heli-rides which are conducted on Sundays by the Deccan Aviation.

This website is not connected with the Department of Tourism, Karnataka or the KSTDC or any other government department but is the most informative site covering tourist destinations in Karnataka. The site is a picturesque one and truly a treat for sore eyes. The website is developed by Padaki iNatt Value Pvt Ltd. A commendable job. ◆