

TAMIL INTERNET 2004

INFITTS' 7TH ANNUAL INTERANTIONAL CONFERENCE

11 & 12 December 2004
Singapore

The Singapore Communiqué

The International Forum for Information Technology in Tamil (INFITT) held its seventh annual international conference, Tamil Internet 2004, on December 11 and 12, 2004 in Singapore. The series began in Singapore in 1997 and this is the third time Singapore is hosting this conference. Singapore was asked to host the conference on short notice – less than five months - and the Singapore Organizing Committee (SOC) under the leadership of Mr Arun Mahizhnan, delivered the conference on schedule. INFITT records its deep appreciation to SOC and the other two committees – the International Organising Committee (IOC) under the leadership of Mr Muthu Nedumaran and the Conference Programme Committee (CPC) under the leadership of Dr K Kalyanasundaram – which together helped organise this conference.



Pic 1. Mr Muthu Nedumaran, Chair, INFITT (third from left) giving the opening address at Tamil Internet 2004

Others in picture: (L to R) Mr Arun Mahizhnan, A/P Tan Tin Wee, Prof M Anandakrishnan, Prof V Sankaranarayanan, Dr K Kalyanasundaram

International Participation & Sponsorship

More than 60 expert delegates from countries such as India, Germany, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and USA participated in the conference. Representatives from various premier IT related institutions such as Anna University, Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), ICTA of Sri Lanka, Indian Institute of Science, Indian Institute of Information Technology, Tamil Virtual University, University of Pennsylvania, and National University of Singapore contributed to the deliberations of the conference. The conference also had the support of the leaders of IT industry such as Microsoft, Maxell, and Oracle as well as the Singapore government support through the Infocomm Development Authority and the Tamil Internet Steering committee, and several other local sponsors. INFITT wishes to thank all of them for their attendance and kind support.

Alternate Model

This conference has offered an alternate model for INFITT's annual Tamil Internet Conference (TIC). Many of the earlier TICs had three hubs -- Conference, Business and Community hubs -- in order to provide interfaces for the IT experts, the business community and the public at large. Many of the TICs also had parallel sessions on multiple tracks. But Tamil Internet 2004 experimented with a new single-track format entirely focused on technical issues and it enabled extensive and in-depth discussions on those issues. The broad consensus at the end of the conference was that this was a successful experiment and could be used as an additional model for future TICs.



Pic 2. TI2004 delegates in discussion

Conference Programme

“Tamil IT for Tomorrows” was the core theme of Tamil Internet 2004. It had seven sessions under the headings of *Tools for Tamil Computing, Mobile Devices, Application Software, E-Learning, Speech Technology, Tamil Internet and Tamil Unicode*. Altogether 21 technical papers were presented in these seven sessions and three special guest speakers also addressed the conference. The conference papers were produced in CD, folder and book forms for the conference participants and are also now available from the INFITT Secretariat.

The conference inaugural session was unusual in the sense it had no participation by any political leaders as it was earlier decided that this new format should be confined to the focus of the conference, which was the discussion of technical issues. Therefore, it featured only welcome and introductory remarks by the Chair of INFITT and Chair of IOC, Mr Muthu Nedumaran, the Chair of SOC, Mr Arun Mahizhnan, and the Chair of CPC, Dr Kalyanasundaram. The session also included, as in the past, the INFITT Executive Director’s annual report for the benefit of the conference participants. In addition, this year there were two other unusual features at the inaugural session. First, there was a special message for the conference from the President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, a distinct honour for the conference. He not only passed on his good wishes for the conference but also specifically suggested Tamil search engines and internet application architecture as two key areas for the consideration of the conference participants. The second feature was the INFITT resolution that expressed its deep concern over the decision of the University of Cologne on the closure of the Institute of Indology and Tamil Studies.

The inaugural session also recorded the condolences of INFITT on the demise of three Tamil IT enthusiasts -- Dr Tamizhkudimagan and Dr Pakkrisamy, both from Tamil Nadu, and Mr Ramalingam Shanmugalingam from Canada.

On the first evening of the conference, a special event was held by Bharathiyarnet.com to introduce the newly established website to celebrate and propagate the work of the great Tamil poet Bharathi.

On the second evening, the conference closed with a concluding session and a briefing for the media. INFITT also held its members meeting at the end of the conference.



Pic 3. Presentation on Mobile Devices
(L to R) Mr S Baskaran, Mr D Sivaraj, Dr A G Ramakrishnan, Mr Niranjayan

New Initiatives

Tamil Internet 2004 discussed many new directions and initiatives as well some of the previous concerns such as the standard key board for Tamil and the migration to Unicode. Following are some of the most important conclusions and initiatives that emerged from those deliberations:

Tamil in Mobile Devices

Three approaches were discussed in the conference on using the keypads of mobile telephones for inputting Tamil messages and there was a call for some convergence in these approaches. This is an indication of the amount of work done by various groups in this area. Tamil in mobile devices is well on its way to becoming a reality very soon.

Tamil E-Commerce

Tamil based application software for an on-line book shop was demonstrated in the conference and it is expected that it would become a prototype for various other vending organisations in the web. Developed by using open source codes, this would lead to the development and localisation of various other models.

Tamil E-Books

Digitizing Tamil texts and books received a great impetus. Prof. N. Balakrishnan, of Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, a key member of the team that is leading the movement to digitising a million books in India as requested by the President of India, has offered free software, expertise and high power scanners to digitise Tamil books. Many delegates have expressed keen interest in the project.

Tamil Speech Corpus

The conference concluded that there was a clear need for a large speech corpus that would help mobile telephony and speech recognition technology and urged relevant institutions to initiate multilateral efforts to build up such a corpus.

Other

Conference deliberations have also indicted new directions for better transliteration tools and tools for migration from one encoding to another.

The conference concluded that there was no need to revise the current standard Tamil99 keyboard for popular use. However, it recognised that the specifications can be improved from time to time based on end-user feedback.

The conference could not come to any firm conclusion on the need for an alternate 16 bit scheme to Tamil Unicode, though a whole session was devoted to this topic. It was decided that further discussions were needed on this subject.