

## Summary of discussions for the month of April 2007

With the growing emergence of Wiki on the Internet in recent times, and its increasing threat to replace traditional means of getting information, it is bound to ignite strong for and against emotions. We have an interesting debate among our readers going on this month. This will provide fascinating perspectives on wikispace. Read this and other debates below in the summary of discussions on the dynamic BytesForAll readers list.

## Sixty years of e-Governance in India

**Our reader Dr. D.C. Mishra is compiling a book on sixty years of e-Governance in India.**

He therefore asked fellow readers to contribute in the form of resources on the said topic. Resources were sorted in the form of insights, photographs of early computers, anecdotes, experiences with working with FACIT and other calculators etc. Dr. Mishra defines e-Governance as the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in governance. Read the post at [http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/bytesforall\\_readers/message/10025](http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/bytesforall_readers/message/10025).

Dr. Mishra further takes the cut off date for governance as 1947, when India attained independence. And the cut off date for e-Governance as 1956 when a digital computer was first installed at the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkatta. He has also defined three phases for e-Governance in India: Phase I (1947-1984): Informatics-based e-Government. Phase II (1984-1995): Personal Computer (PC)-based e-Government and Phase III (1995-2007): Web-based e-Government. The invitation to send in views was responded by another reader Satish Jha, with the following comments: "The periods defined in the phases of e-Governance look like a long stretch. The PC came in 1984. The Web appeared globally in 1995 and it did not start any governance process until much later. Punch cards, FACIT calculators were more used by academicians, researchers or surveying bodies that needed to crunch large amounts of data." According to Jha, this cannot be called 'governance' and certainly not 'e-Governance'. We did not have e-Governance since 1947; things in bits and pieces do not make for a holistic approach. Jha also said that 'Informatics' as we understand it now, is the movement of data across an electronic spectrum and not on paper.

Dr. Mishra replied to these with the following: "The e-Governance cutoff period from 1947 to date cannot be called a stretch, as technology in some form or the other has always been used in governance. Read an excellent paper by Subramaniam (2005, 2006) who provides 100-year perspective on e-Governance from 1880-1980!"

According to Dr. Mishra, 'Informatics' is neither the flow of information nor computing power but the end result. Mishra says that 'process of number crunching by various bodies can certainly be called 'governance'. Take the various censuses conducted. The data collected forms the bedrock of India' planning and decision-making process. Without database governance is unthinkable, than

be it a paper database. As far as a bits and pieces of e-Governance not making a holistic e-Government; when do we say that a government is an e-Government? Is it when 5 percent, 10 percent, 50 percent, 80 percent is computerised? By those standards, not even 50 percent of government in today, India is computerised. So do we say e-Governance is non-existent even today? That was an interesting debate.

## Gov IT Wiki

One of our readers Dr. D.C. Mishra informed the readers about a thought proposed by him some time back, and that was 'How to make use of wiki technology in e-Government if the public sector is constrained by resources as it is'. He was happy to inform that a thought that seemed a challenge before had indeed crystallised and a 'Government wiki' had been launched in March 2007 in the U.S.A. The name of the wiki is GovIT wiki, [http://www.govitwiki.com/w/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://www.govitwiki.com/w/index.php?title=Main_Page)

This post drew some interesting comments from our other readers. Satish Jha, said that it was important to understand how people access, search, use and present information. Wiki and google may be changing the way people search documents. Whether it really helps depends on the way wiki is used. Even with technology like wiki available, government will organise information in its own way, completely defeating the very purpose of wiki. It is the classic case of Encyclopedia Britannica. Is it really used for what it is meant? It surely made a good showpiece.

Federick Noronha of Bytes for all, queried whether wikis were about searching for information, or creating it collaboratively from bottom up? Ridhi Dcruz of Bytes for all opined that, the success of a wiki was its ability to get people as participants on the Web and not just passive users as in the case of e-Mail and chat. The further success of wiki does depend on people rather than technology, as they are the ones who create content. It is important that people create useful content rather than something irrelevant, for the usefulness of wiki to continue. Vickram Crishna observed that the challenge while using wikispace was not to wait for someone else to organise, but to apply technological constructs to enable one to find the data one is seeking from the huge river that is wiki. And hence, the thought that wiki is like a showpiece encyclopedia does not arise. Wiki also cannot be dismissed as worthless since it is a collaborative space and even if its sometimes vandalised by irrelevant information (are not so many other things as well), it only takes a few days to clean the house as there are enough people on the Net interested in doing so. Thank God! The problem will arise when there are less interested people and the cleaning takes longer.

Then no amount of 'laws' and 'authority' will fix that problem. D.C. Mishra added another dimension to the debate saying, wikispace has contributions from all and sundry; non-specialists and self-styled specialists. As a result wiki is bland and self-opinionated. People have come to trust wiki, like an innocent tourist asking for directions on the street. But is it really trustworthy after all the arbitrary editing?



<http://lgrc.lga.gov.ph/wikilimages/0/05/Opacinstall.png>

Wiki really has stopped growing and has reached its peak. Vickram was of the strong view that when we fall into human trappings of growth and peak, we abandon our power of critical examination. Information needs to be held outside these trappings, only then can it be absorbed and understood as knowledge. Wikipedia is timely even what if it is authoritative (because of a few self styled experts).

Wiki works on the 'Open' model, and so far there may not be a better model to organise information into knowledge. D.C. Mishra, who started this debate, had the last word. The need for GovIT Wiki was because of information overload and in a way information denial. Ideally an e-Citizen should be able to deal with an e-Government all on her/his own. But we know through experience that government rules regarding a citizen are complex and need sorting out. That is when GovIT wiki comes into picture, hoping that future e-Governance public services will deliver better services.

## Poetry in programming

There was a post by Shahidul KK Shuvra on whether there are poetic elements in writing computer programmes. According to the post, poets and computer programmers are similar in the sense they create something unique. They are absent minded and engrossed always in their areas of interest, in the case of the poet, its writing poetry, and in the case of programmers, its writing programmes. As a result many a times their social and family lives suffer. Einstein said, "Imagination is more powerful than knowledge". Mathematics and poetry are media to express connotation of a brilliant mind's visualisation. Algorithm is a fundamental element in making programming language. And imagination is needed before formulating a programme. If the next century has no time for poetry, than the spirit of poems will be found in math-based programmes. Computer languages may well become the elements for expressing the human imagination instead of spoken languages.

This post received the following reactions from our readers. Anannya Guha of IGNOU, said that there is no doubt that creativity

existed only in the realms of art, poetry, writing or music. However in the modern era, administrators can be creative, so can computer programmers. But we must not forget that the computer and the Internet are a means to an end and not the means themselves. Why is blogging and web publishing so popular? It is because they are a means for one's creative aspirations.

## Other events

### Pune to be the first wireless city in India

Pune will be the first city, to become completely wire less; even before the Government of India's is much-awaited spectrum policy was announced. Called Unwiring Pune, this project will enable people to access the Internet from anywhere in the city, without a cable, through their laptops or personal digital assistants (PDAs).

Source: <http://www.siliconindia.com/shownews/35490>

### Pakistan joins Creative Commons network

Soon after the launch of the CreativeCommons.org project in India, neighbouring Pakistan has joined the bandwagon too. Discussions over this issue came up in Lahore-Pakistan recently, during a 2-Day workshop titled 'Towards an Open Information Society in Pakistan' jointly organised by Bellanet-Bellasap and Bytesforall Network Pakistan in collaboration with South Asia Partnership-PK, SAP-Nepal and SAP-International.

Source: [http://www.sapnepal.org.np/wiki/OIS\\_PK/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://www.sapnepal.org.np/wiki/OIS_PK/index.php?title=Main_Page)

### Ubuntu comes to Bangladesh

Ubuntu Bangladesh organised a workshop at East West University, titled 'Linux for Home Users'. 108 undergraduate and graduate level students from 9 departments participated on this day long workshop, where various issues of FOSS and Ubuntu Linux were discussed.

Source: [http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/bytesforall\\_readers/message/10040](http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/bytesforall_readers/message/10040)

### Mysore is Wi-Fi hotspot

This city with its old-world charm has outstripped other techno-savvy cities in the country, including the capital of Karnataka that is something of a Silicon Valley, to become a wholesale Wi-Fi 'hotspot' for wireless Internet connectivity the first of its kind in the country. Wi-Fi is short for wireless fidelity. ■

Source: [http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/bytesforall\\_readers/message/10026](http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/bytesforall_readers/message/10026)

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