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Singapore: Grid Nation

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Singapore's Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) on Wednesday announced the formation of the National Grid Advisory Council (NGAC) to lead the business sector in adopting grid computing. The NGAC was part of a wider plan outlined yesterday to build a national grid infrastructure through a public-private sector effort involving government agencies, service providers and major vendors.

Giving the opening speech at GridAsia 2007, Leong Keng Thai, IDA deputy chief executive/director-general (telecoms), said that a "grid-powered nation" would require a concerted national effort and noted that the IDA had already been working with industry players such as Oracle, Sun Microsystems, Hewlett Packard and IBM on various initiatives.

"This national grid will realise utility computing and give commercial industries on-demand access to grids," he said. "It will bring high performance computing, software-as-a-service, and huge storage capabilities to businesses, especially SMEs who may otherwise not be able to afford them."

Grid computing, otherwise known as utility computing, is the use of shared computing resources that can be purchased on-demand – much like an electrical or water utility. It has been widely used for computational-intensive R&D projects but also by commercial sectors such as animation, with popular movies including the latest Shrek the Third making use of grid computing.

The NGAC, led by Richard Lim, chief executive of the Defence Science and Technology Agency, comprises 14 members representing users, service providers, academia, and government agencies facilitating grid adoption.

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Besides establishing the NGAC, Leong Keng noted that as of 1 April 2007 Singapore's National Grid Office (NGO) is now also part of IDA, which he said would spearhead efforts to increase industry adoption of grid computing, starting with key economic sectors such as digital media, life sciences, finance and banking, and manufacturing services.

The "National Grid" comes after the success of a trial, the National Grid Pilot Platform (NGPP), that was established in 2003 to provide computing resources free-of-charge to both the R&D community and businesses. Organisations had contributed their idle compute-resources on a goodwill basis to the NGPP. From an initial base of some 250 CPUs in 2003, the NGPP has grown to nearly 1,000 CPUs today.

The National Grid will now see a more concerted effort between the public and private sectors to realise on-demand, pay-per-use grids for enterprises, with more robust service level agreements (SLAs) than that of the NGPP.

Leong Keng also outlined some of the existing Singapore grid efforts in his opening address to GridAsia 2007 yesterday.

"Grid, though still a relatively young technology in the region, has shown good progress in revolutionising the way things are done in some of Singapore's key economic sectors," he said, pointing to the digital media sector, where a number of companies have completed commercial animation rendering projects using the utility-based remote rendering service by Frontline Technologies. Additionally, two SMEs, Omen Studios and TheContentCompany, had been able to undertake larger-scale animation projects and have successfully marketed their services in the UK and the US, he noted.

Meanwhile, a fully working digital media grid prototype has been jointly developed by Nanyang Technological University, the Institute of High Performance Computing, Singapore Management University and Hewlett Packard Labs as part of the Adaptive Enterprise@Singapore collaboration. Companies can leverage the prototype for on-demand rendering capabilities for their animation and 3D modeling work.

The prototype was being showcased at GridAsia this week.

The IDA deputy director-general also noted that PC grids in schools would open up high-performance computing to students and allow them to explore more complex



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digital media and life sciences projects. To date, efforts to establish PC Grids in several schools, such as Hwa Chong Junior College and Raffles Institution, have already started.

In the government sector, the National Library Board announced last year that it had archived more than 1000 web sites. "The conventional approach of using a single CPU would have taken them five months. This same archival was done within just seven days, using compute-capabilities from the National Grid Pilot Platform," he said.

Leong Keng also used his opening speech to announce the Singapore Grid Forum, which he claimed was the first such forum in Southeast Asia. Earlier this week it held a meeting in conjunction with the Open Grid Forum with regional countries keen on forming their own grid forums. "Through the Singapore Grid Forum, those keen on grid can find it easier to band together, exchange pointers, participate in grid computing activities, and explore collaboration opportunities," he said.

Internationally, Singapore will be leading member economies of APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) to collaborate on grid projects that will drive common areas of interest for APEC economies. These projects are expected to include using access grids to enhance distance-learning, harnessing data grids to facilitate the archiving of digital assets, and exploiting PC grids to enable the solving of common computational problems.

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