

World News

■ Ukrainian Parliament discusses an open source law

Although the Government of the Ukraine and Microsoft have reached an agreement about using Microsoft products both for common proposals and education, Linux is getting more popular. The reason: Microsoft products do not speak Ukrainian whereas Linux programs do.

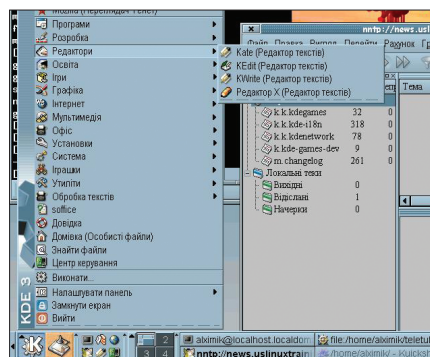
Although the Ukrainian translators group is smaller than the Russian one (it only has about 30 people in it), it has localised almost all everyday applications. Now the output from commandline programs can be set to appear in Ukrainian and, as a consequence, it appears flawlessly on KDE and GNOME too. One of the key applications is the spellchecker: The Ukrainian *aspell-uk* system is part of *ispell-uk* and as such works within OpenOffice and Emacs.

Unfortunately there are lots of jobs still to be done: dictionaries, good Unicode fonts, and good translated documentation are missing.

To increase the usage of open source software and attract new volunteers participating in its development, Borys Olijnyk, the famous Ukrainian writer and a member of parliament, suggested a law named "Using Open Formats and Free

Software in Government and Education Establishments" based on the EC programme about information and communication technologies "Europe 2002". Introducing his proposal, he wrote about experiences of Germany and France in this field, stressing the value of free and open source software in terms of national security, technological independence and national development.

If the "Verkhovna Rada" decides to vote in favor of the law, open source software will be deployed almost everywhere in the country. The preliminary discussion is expected to be finished by end of April, but unfortunately the parliament might be unpredictable. ■



■ It's not the Taiwanese price-level, Microsoft!

Squeezed between rampant software piracy of its own products on the one hand side, and the growing success of Linux and open source on the other, Microsoft handed over a copy of the Windows sourcecode to the Chinese government, following a similar agreement with The People's Republic's neighbor Taiwan.

Moreover, after an investigation by the Taiwanese Fair Trade Commission the American software giant agreed to cut prices to as low as 54.5 percent of the prices in May 2002, when the investigation was triggered by local newspapers reporting that Microsoft's products in Taiwan were much more expensive than elsewhere.

Commenting on the issue, the Taiwanese free software community points out that the problem with Microsoft products is not the price, but the missing freedom to freely exchange information. Specifically, they suggest that instead of focusing on the price issue, the government should demand that Microsoft makes public their proprietary file formats and the application programmer's interfaces (APIs).

It is rumored that some officials in the Ministry of Education got the message and started considering OpenOffice on Windows as an alternative for computer education. The higher officials, however, seem to largely remain ignorant of the real issue. ■

■ Free Software for Windows

First it was The Open CD, a collection of open source programs to run under Windows. Then came GNUWin. There could be debates over whether it's helpful to encourage free software to work on proprietary platforms like Microsoft's. The counter argument is that it could help letting people try out the quality of free and open source software, before asking them to make a big jump-over.

In India, a free software enthusiast and advocate by profession, Mahesh T Pai (paivakil@vsnl.net) quietly put together a CD of his own, called Swatanthra ("freedom"). First he had no big plans of distributing it. But after seeing the response, he's changing his mind. He's finalising it, and plans to soon make it available with different distribution outlets, including the LUG-based network and possibly also through those subcontinental networks selling low priced CDs (see Linux Magazine 29, p. 13). ■

■ Linux driven by bicycle

How do you surf the net when you live in a tropic jungle village without power supply and telephone access?

At least if you live in the Laotic village Ban Phon Kham, this spring might supply you with a solution to the problem how to find out about the current rice prices in the market city Hong Ho, 30 km away: The Jhai Foundation, a San Francisco based non-profit organisation driven by Vietnam war veterans and Americans of Laotic origin, recently installed the first prototype of a computer equipped with a 486 CPU, a LCD monitor and a wireless LAN card in the local schoolhouse. The machine runs Linux, of course with localized software, amongst them a voice over IP application. A relay station in Hong Ho provides connectivity with the internet and the telephone net.

The clou however, is the power source: an attached battery is loaded by muscle power. 15 minutes pedalling on a special stationary bicycle from the Indian manufacturer Rashtron Energy & Auto Ltd. provides the user with the energy to use the Jhai PC about half an hour. ■

<http://www.jhai.org/>

<http://www.ecozen.com/appg1.htm>

Indian-language solutions step forward

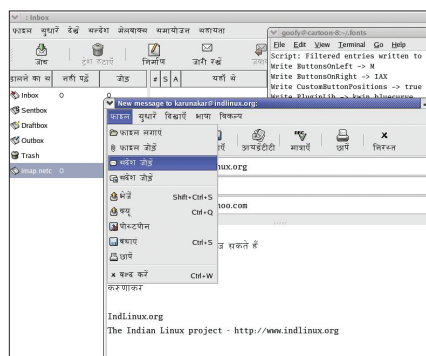
There are languages spoken by one-sixth of humanity – but hardly any computer works in them. One of the biggest problem with support for the languages of the Indian subcontinent so far seems to be the lack of coordination, parallel tracks.

Recently, IndicComputing network on Sourceforge (indic-computing-users@lists.sourceforge.net) has tried to increase the communication. Even more encouraging, some from the Unicode list began posting to Indian mailing lists recently.

Meanwhile, the IndLinux project working on an Indian language enabled Linux distribution has released IndLinux Hindi 0.37, codenamed Milan. It allows

Red Hat Linux 8.0 users to install a GNOME 2 desktop that speaks Hindi. A version for Mandrake 9.0 is currently in the making.

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/indlinux/>



Open source network for the Asia-Pacific region

Want to know more about open source projects in Asian languages? MIMOS Berhad, a research and development organisation focussing on information and communication technology that functions as an advisor to the Malaysian Government on technologies, policies and strategies, recently launched a new web portal, named the Asian open source centre (AsiaOSC). Apart from a very useful Wiki knowledgebase focussing on localization, the site, based on Postnuke, presents a message board as well as technical articles.

The news section – amongst others – features a very interesting and detailed report from the Asia Open Source Software Symposium held in Phuket,

Thailand from 3rd to 6th March. Its main goal was to help open source developers from the Asia-Pacific region to connect and exchange information.

One of the most surprising talks amongst the mainly technical presentations came from members of the United Nation Development Project (UNDP) introducing its center of excellence for open source, the International Open Source Network (IOSN). Its main aim is to promote open source solutions to achieve rapid and sustained economic and social development, mainly in the developing countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

<http://www.asiaosc.org/>

<http://opensource.mimos.my/>

<http://www.iosn.net/>

Happy New Year by Tux

Passengers walking on Taipei's busy Hsin-Kuang square find themselves greeted by Tux the penguin. This is at the



foot of the once-highest building in Taiwan's capital, located right across the street from the common station of the railroad system and the rapid transit system, the central transportation hub of northern Taiwan.

We can't tell how many people know what Linux is, but apparently many are impressed by the lovely figure, and some even stop to take pictures with it. It was set up some time around February 1st, the lunar new year. The sponsors include HP, Oracle, and Hsin-Kuang business group.