

World News

■ Colombian software libre conference series started

Spotlight on for the Columbian free software communities and their plans of an entire series of local Linux conferences, the “Conferencias Linuxeras Colombianas” (CLiC). The first of them took place at the University of Manizales in Western Colombia August 2nd 2003, and 65 Linuxers came to learn more about topics ranging from intrusion detection to free mobile telephony or Linux and NetBSD on the Dreamcast console.

Unlike bigger conferences, this one did not boast about celebrity speakers – as the conference language was Spanish, local Linuxers had an advantage: the nine speakers came from the country’s bigger cities such as Cali, Bogotá, and Medellín, which will play host to the 3rd conference in this series October 4th (the 2nd one took place in Villavicencio a week after the Manizales event). ■

www.scolombia.org/eventos/clic.php

■ Linux summer in Russia and the Ukraine

It does not happen too often that the Ukraine gets the upper hand over its big neighbor Russia. Hence, Ukrainian Linuxers are extremely proud of recent Linux counter (<http://counter.li.org/>) results: The Ukraine has more registered Linux users per one million citizens than Russia: 14 vs. 13.

Maybe this is why the Russian Linux distributor ASP Linux announced a special Ukrainian version of ASP Linux 9, code-named “Ural” for the Ukrainian market. However, the difference between the Russian and the Ukrainian version is minimal: just one extra CDROM containing a database of Ukrainian laws and legislative acts.

The pricetag depends on the edition: for the Deluxe Edition (11 CDs including commercial software like Sun’s StarOffice and demo-versions of Opera’s webbrowser or Stalker’s CommuniGate Pro mailserver) the company charges about 45 Euros, for the Standard (6 CDs) and the Express Edition (3 CDs) 22 and 8 Euros, respectively.

At the same time the Zaporozhye based company “Business Computer Service” released a new version of a “native” Ukrainian Linux distribution: Blin v1.3 CD cache Edition which is very

similar to the famous Knoppix CD. The image is no bigger than 36 MB and can be downloaded free of charge; it runs on PCs with 64 MB memory or more. The



entire, multimedia-aware system is kept in memory while the CD driver may be used as the user wishes. Apart from typical Linux workstation software like Mozilla, AbiWord, SSH or GCC, it contains thin clients to work with Microsoft’s Windows Terminal Server.

Meanwhile many developers of the Russian ALT Linux distribution took part in the 5th annual “Linux Fest” in the woods of the Kaluga region in Russia. Altogether approximately 220 Linuxers from the two neighboring countries gathered there to hack and exchange

■ European software patents soon legal?

When UK’s Arlene McCarthy failed to change the date of a vote on European software patents in a way that would prevent her fellow members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from revising the matter carefully, this left the time until the important September 1st/2nd meeting for the “Foundation for a Free Information Infrastructure” (FFII) to convince MEPs not to vote in favor of software patents. Things, however, look bad: In a committee vote it seemed that the proposal might actually make it and will then legalize more than 30,000 patents, that under current regulation shouldn’t have been granted in the first place. ■

knowledge in round table discussions on July 25th to 27th.

And there are other signs of Linux taking off in this region: Users new (and not so new) to Linux may find it helpful to hear that the Russian IT-portal CITForum.ru recently incorporated all Linux howtos for which Russian translations exist.

As OpenOffice is gradually superseding Microsoft Office in Russia and the Ukraine, the Ukrainian company Microsell (<http://www.microsell.com.ua/>), an iForce-partner of Sun Microsystems, is trying to push StarOffice 6.0 into the Russian and Ukrainian market: educational institutions are entitled to licenses free of charge. Unfortunately, only a Russian

interface is available which restricts its (unofficial) usage in the Ukraine to the Eastern part of the country, were the Russian language is spoken more commonly than Ukrainian. ■

<http://www.asplinux.ru/en/>

<http://blin.zp.ua/>

<http://www.blin-distro.com/download/>

<http://www.altlinux.ru/>

<http://lrn.ru/index.php?module=linuxfest>

<http://www.citforum.ru/>

[operating_systems/linux/HOWTO/](http://www.staroffice.com.ua/)

<http://www.staroffice.com.ua/>

■ Afghan civil servants learn Linux

Overcoming the digital divide isn't an easy task, especially not in Afghanistan where at a time when the Internet and the PC were conquering large parts of the world, the Taliban rulers restricted all formal education. To provide technical and semi-technical staff at the Kabul ministries with required IT knowledge, in July the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) offered a one-week workshop on Linux at one of their IT training centers. Together with their two trainers of Nepal and Afghan nationality

12 selected participants, mostly from the Ministry of Communications took their first steps into the Linux world using Red Hat 9.0.

“We covered the basics, and a few services like httpd, sendmail ... We wanted to move to more advanced things like PHP Nuke, but we ran out of time.”, UNDP ICT Programme Manager Marc Lepage reports. “We will probably offer a more advanced workshop soon.” Following courses on network basics, website design, and Windows 2000 Server, the

workshop was the fourth in a series supporting the inter-government network that at present connects six ministries (there are 12 more to come).

The lack of localized software is a special challenge: neither GNOME nor KDE are available in the local languages Pashto and Dari (Windows is no better), and command of the English language is quite poor. Says Marc: “We are trying to put a translation team together. The problem is coordination and time.” ■

<http://www.undp.org.af/>

■ Dutch banking with Linux

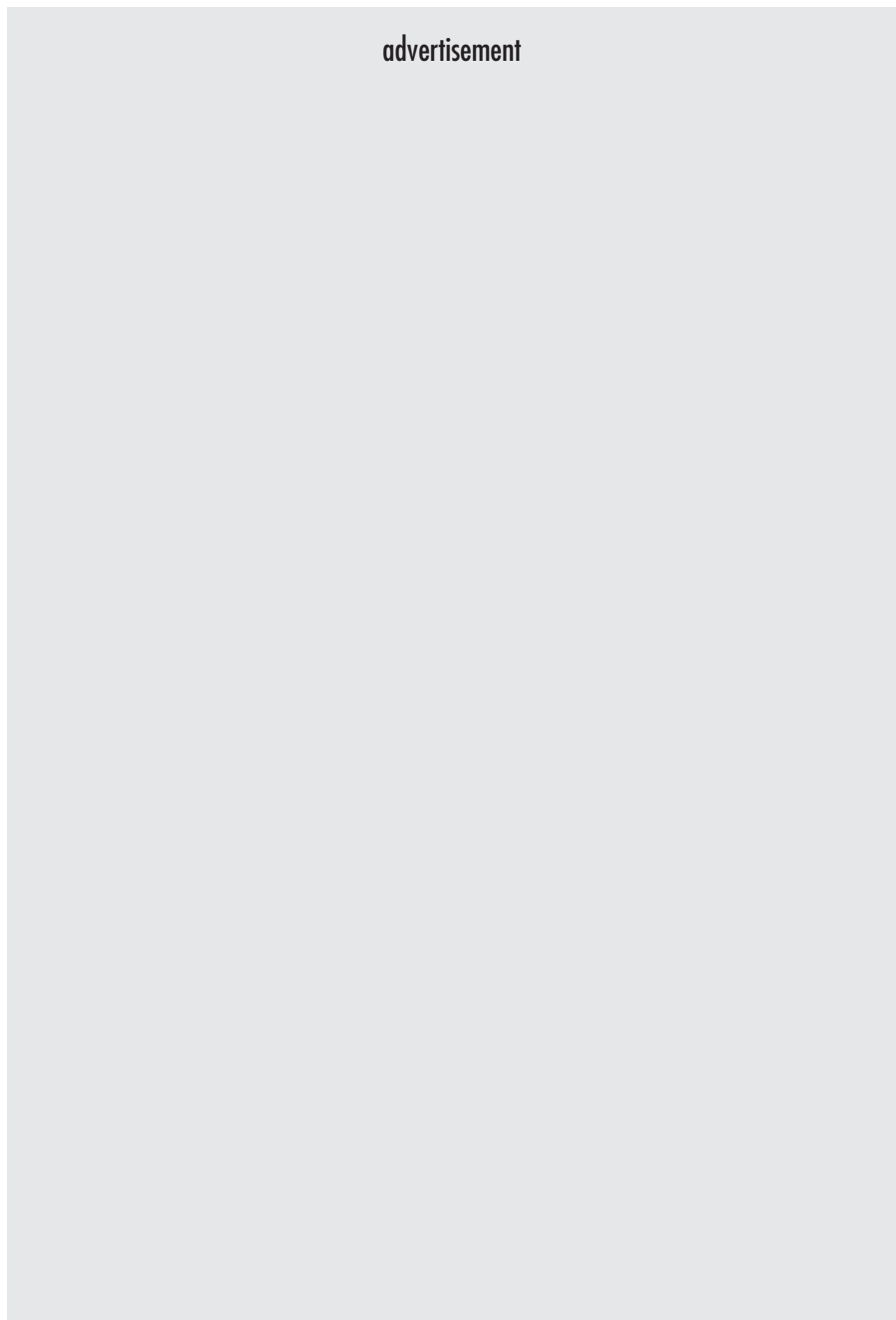
When the Postbank, the biggest Dutch bank with 7.5 million consumer accounts, introduced online banking without realizing that there are more browsers in use than just certain versions of Microsoft's Internet Explorer, this blindness outraged the Dutch Linux community.

Promptly a petition was started, media attention was drawn and an alternative website was built to proxy the bank and Linux computers. This secure banking vulnerability combined with mounting pressure forced the company to start a new project that would offer support for Mozilla and Konqueror on Red Hat and Knoppix. Says Postbank-spokesman Klaas Dirk Bruintjes: “We noticed that the community was larger than anticipated and was very persistent ... We decided to overhaul our system and expand it for Linux as well.”

The community's reaction was very positive, and the site soon proved capable of supporting other versions of Linux (and alternative Windows) browsers.

This action is not unique, since last year the Dutch Railways were forced to open their website for non-Microsoft users within days of its introduction. Back then three coders built a proxy in less than a day, proving that the timetable could be made W3C-standards compliant.

Obviously, activities like these do make quite an impact: The Dutch tax-office indicated that it will be quite happy to start supporting Linux, if figures of more than 50,000 users can be substantiated. ■



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