

World News

■ Norwegian City Migrates

While schools in the Norwegian capital Oslo fight with the city bureaucrats for the right to use Linux (see Issue 41 p10), their counterparts in the country's second-biggest city, Bergen, won't have a choice: In June the city's IT department decided to migrate its central databases as well as the educational network from Windows and Unix-based systems to Linux in the course of 2004. Thus, 15,000 city clerks and the 100 local schools with 35,000 pupils and teachers will benefit from the new server infrastructure, which is to be set up by IBM and SuSE's mother-company Novell.

Sadly, Linux on the desktop, both in schools and at the city offices, will have to wait. Though the outcome of a first test run in schools was positive, there will be another one next year. The main problem here is special software that hasn't been ported to Linux yet.

What today looks like a fast move, actually started in 2001 when the city council demanded evaluation of alternatives to Windows.

■ Sudanese Airplanes and Students to be Guided by Linux

Being subject to US trade embargoes is not synonymous with being a US product-free zone: Like in other countries where embargoes apply, Microsoft and other major US software companies have a huge market share in Sudan – in form of pirated copies. Now that the embargo is expected to be lifted soon, the country's government is taking measures for the time after and offers orientation programs for ICT decision makers. Says Marc Lepage, Deputy Regional Coordinator ICT for The United Nations' development organization UNDP: "What I actually like about it, is the strategic planning ahead, that we so seldom see in developing countries."

Since neither private companies and organizations nor governmental institutions see it as a priority to pay and budget for ICT infrastructure, things look promising for Open Source solutions

■ A Matter for Philosophers

First it was about programming, then the economy entered, and finally the Open Source movement became a matter of interest for philosophers: In "Project Oekonux" their aim is to study the economic and political aspects of free software. From May 20 through 23, the Department of Philosophy at Vienna University played host to the 3rd Oekonux conference, the manifestation of an otherwise virtual project.

Interestingly enough, Project Oekonux was founded in Germany, a country famous for its philosophers from Kant and Leibniz through Marx to the Frankfurt School around Adorno and Habermas. This year's conference titled "Wealth by copyleft: Creativity in the digital age" was the first one held outside its country of origin, though it hasn't left the German-speaking sphere yet: Despite its English title, most of the 150 participants still came from Germany and Austria, and the strong German-speaking background was inconvenient to non-German speakers. But in defiance

of the language barrier, vigorous discussions took place during the conference, borne by a strong community feeling. Among the 35 presentations, talks about free hardware (e. g. Open Collector), free science (e. g. Wikipedia, the Open Archive Initiative, and Open Bandwidth projects such as BitTorrent or Open Spectrum), and social networking (e. g. Indymedia, Open Craft) were of particular interest. Nearly half of the speakers presented in English, backing the effort of the organizers around Oekonux founder Stefan Merten to internationalize the project, which is trying to bridge the language gap by developing an infrastructure for translation and forming a community of translators. ■

even if Microsoft and other companies were to establish sales agents shortly after the embargo ended. Furthermore, according to Hassan Baba, a technical advisor to the orientation program, the country has no lack of well qualified software developers, system and network specialists who prefer Linux, "and as the economical situation is developing positively and rapidly, many experts are migrating back to Sudan".

The first organization to take part in the program is Sudan's Civil Aviation Authority. Two of its departments, the RADAR data treatment and the communications department, are currently planning to make the move to Linux, and, at the end of the transition process, will run most of their applications under Linux. At the same time, engineers and administrators are being trained.

A second organization on the move is



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<http://www.oekonux-conference.org/>

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

the University of Khartoum's Faculty of Engineering. With the help of the scheme it intends to migrate the faculty's academic laboratories to Linux in order to have students do their application and system development projects using Open Source software. At the time of writing, actual planning had begun and the training programs had started.

Despite these promising beginnings, lack of money and resources might soon turn out to become an issue. Says Hassan Baba: "We're seeking foreign parties to support us technically and financially. For RHCE training programs and certificates we've been in contact with some Indian institutes, which offer courses and exams at affordable prices, but since airway tickets would be needed, we're still looking for alternative solutions. It's not very likely that people here will be willing to pay a lot for that." ■

Indic Localization Moves On

When India's President APJ Abdul Kalam in May 2003 criticised that "The most unfortunate thing is that India still seems to believe in proprietary solutions" and demanded that "Open Source software needs to be built which will be cost effective for the entire society", his speech was seen as a signal by many Open Source proponents. As a consequence, Indic localization is gradually generating more interest across the nation, and the level of coordination between the major groups who have taken the onus of guiding the emerging language teams in completion of their projects, has been intensified.

An example of this can be seen in the Assamese Localization Project Luit, which was founded in May 2004 and derives its name from an Assamese name for the Brahmaputra river. Using the same script as Bengali, Assamese has the distinct advantage of utilizing the already mature work of the Ankur Bangla Project (see Issue 42 p12). The group is being helped along by IndLinux (see Issue 43 p12) which has recently taken the initiative to bring out a regular newsletter aimed at updating subscribers on the status of Indic localization efforts.

The Luit project is on the lookout for volunteers who will take on the challenge of translating the strings for GNOME and KDE. Currently a preliminary font is in place and available for download from the project's homepage. With the initial bottleneck of rendering Indic scripts through Pango on the verge of being solved by Red Hat's Owen Taylor, other Indic localization groups will find it easy to release a print-enabled dis-

tribution of the Linux OS in their respective local language.

One of them would be the Free Software Localization Initiative for Malayalam, a Dravidian language, predominantly spoken in the South-Indian state of Kerala. It was initiated by the Free Software Foundation of India and helped at various stages by bodies like the Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP) of the UNDP, which appreciated the efforts towards providing a local language computing environment.

Believing that taking the project forward with a limited number of developers was making it "closed", the project took on a new form as Swatantra Malayalam Computing or SMC. This move enabled the team to develop and release a LiveCD based on Morphix (see picture). SMC has plans to create a complete Malayalam office suite consisting of OpenOffice, DTP software, an online dictionary and Malayalam optical character recognition software.

Sajith VK, one of the earliest members of the team, and Arun M from the Free Software Foundation of India say that "There are technical issues that are required to be solved before an enterprise scale deployment could be rolled out. However, we have managed to do some limited deployments of the technology and the feedback received has enriched the effort further."

With respect to localized office software, their Bengali counterparts already have gone a step further: Indranil Das Gupta, the project leader of the Bangla Native Language Team for OpenOffice, recently announced that "string translation is at 40 percent while the OpenOffice.org glossary is being updated for Bengali". The project aims to provide a complete Open Source office suite in Bengali and complement the localization effort of the Ankur Bangla Project.

But not everything is the work of unpaid volunteers: NeoLinux

Solutions, an Open Source company from Ranchi, the capital of the East-Indian state of Jharkhand, has released the NeoLinux Indic Component Suite, a PHP API for handling Indic language data in database-enabled web-sites and portals. The components run as embedded Web server extensions to existing PHP modules and offer a set of Javascript-based input methods. Apart from a Javascript enabled browser, no client side installation is required.

The software converts ISCII data to UTF-8 for rendering in a browser, converts UTF-8 input to ISCII, stores it in a MySQL or PostgreSQL database, and provides search/sort facilities. Currently support is available for ten Indian scripts and languages, namely Devanagari, Bengali, Gujarati, Gurmukhi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Assamese, Malayalam and Oriya.

- <http://luit.sourceforge.net/>
- <http://www.bengalinux.org/>
- <http://indlinux.org/wiki/index.php/NewsLetterIssue3>
- <http://www.keralaindustry.org/malayalam/>
- <http://smc.sarovar.org/>
- <http://bn.openoffice.org/>
- <http://neolinuxsolutions.com/products/>

Linux to Shuffle Parcels in China

In future, whenever Chinese people complain about parcels not reaching their destinations in time, soon Linux may be to blame. This is due to the fact that the Chinese package delivery service uses the postal service and rail transportation, of which the latter will soon be managed by a Linux infrastructure: As an outcome of a sales contract between the Chinese Ministry of Railways and the Japanese Linux distributor Turbolinux announced at the beginning of June, 14 railway offices, 230 train stations and more than 440 package delivery service facilities will be migrated in China.

In the end, almost 200 million parcels annually - accounting for about 95 percent of the total freight volume - will be handled by a high-availability system based on Turbolinux.

<http://www.turbolinux.com/>

