World News

■ Asian Countries to Unite in Open Source Effort

The lack of human resources, of technical as well as of financial support, a lack of awareness of the concepts – and the potential benefits – of Open Source software (OSS), and strong dependence on pirated and illegal software are the major bottlenecks when it comes to implementing OSS in most Asian countries.

But although difficult, adopting OSS has become the key IT policy in this part of the world. These were the conclusions drawn at the 4th Asia OSS Symposium (AOSS), which was held in Taipei, September 1-3, an event that brought together delegates from 18 Asian nations, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan, Mongolia, Myanmar, and Nepal.

Nearly 300 participants from governments, business, academics and the community shared their experiences in developing and implementing OSS. Among them was the Cambodia representative, Mr. Noy Shoung, who

emphasized the importance of Open Source in fighting software piracy: Since his country is re-enforcing its copyright and intellectual property rights law in support of the WTO scheme, he argued that pirated software would soon disappear. But as proprietary software is overpriced, the Cambodian government is supporting OSS.

Another familiar argument was raised by Mr. Muhammad Sayeedur Rahman from Bangladesh. He emphasized the fact that OSS was especially appealing to developing countries because it helped to close the technological divide that separated rich and poor nations.

While new arguments in favor of OSS support were rare, progress was actually made in practical terms: After three days of intensive discussions, representatives of all participating nations signed the Taipei Statement on OSS. In it they agree to collaborate on building an Asian repository (the relevant action plan will be drawn up at the next AOSS meeting in February 2005), improving the OSS human resource in Asia, promoting OSS standards for interoperability, and accelerating localization. Among other things, this means developing a standard Nepali font for Nepalese Open Source software.

Showcased by the conference, the local hosts, the Academia Sinica and the Taiwan National Information Infrastructure Enterprise Promotion Association, had invited 15 IT companies, including VIA Technologies Inc., Citron Network Inc., and Novell, to present their latest innovations, particularly from the field of embedded Linux systems. Their aim in doing so was to improve the mutual understanding between the OSS stakeholders (e.g. business and government participants).

Of course, the organizers were proud to point to Taiwan's thriving IT industry, but that was not all. Following Japan, Taiwan's "Creative Commons Licenses" were the second set of Creative Commons licenses to be launched in Asia. Creative Commons founder and chairman Lawrence Lessig gave a keynote speech to close the AOSS meeting and also chaired the launching ceremony. ■

http://www.asia-oss.org/
http://forge.iis.sinica.edu.tw/

■ Russia's Biggest Software Distributor Turns to Linux

Almost everybody living in the now independent states in the area of the former Soviet Union knows the popular accountancy software "1C", a product sold by Russia's market dominating software distributor 1C. Just like any other business-centered products marketed under the "1C" brand, it has been available for Microsoft operating systems only, effectively preventing more widespread use of Linus in businesses.

This problem isn't going to disappear overnight, but there are signs that a first

step has been made: In a recently signed agreement, Russian Linux distributor "ALT Linux" and "1C" agreed to cooperate on a new free software productivity suite for both Linux and Windows desktops, dubbed "Free Office". It is built around localized Open Office and Mozilla and available in two versions under the "1C:distribyutsiya" label. Additionally, ALT Linux's ready-to-use server solution for small and home offices, "ALT Linux 2.3 SOHO Server", and a new specialized network server distribution, "ASPLinux

Server II", will be available under this label, hopefully helping to widen the market for Linux solutions in businesses in the countries that emerged from the former USSR.

"ASPLinux Server II's" show-stopping feature is that it uses "Acronis True Image Server for Linux", a proprietary solution for disk-imaging, backup und disaster-recovery. ■

http://www.1c.ru/news/pressrelise.
jsp?id = 254
http://www.asplinux.ru/ru/pr/id,52914

■ Use Open Source, Arnie!

"Departments should […] implement open source alternatives where feasible", this is what the California Performance Review commission has advised action hero turned Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger. With an estimated debt of US$ 14 billion, the state is highly indebted, and the commission's task is to find out how to cut costs.

Quoting success stories of Open Source related savings within federal institutions, and of positive response to Linux, Apache and other Open Source solutions in mission critical applications (such as Amazon's Linux-based infrastructure), the commission asks state departments to "actively research and evaluate Open Source code alternatives prior to using the traditional procurement model for software". By doing so, the Californian Department of Transportation (Caltrans) managed to save nearly US$ 300,000, both in hardware and software for its new Linux-based identity and password management system. The positive experiences with Linux have convinced the department to actively search for further opportunities to deploy cost-cutting Open Source solutions. ■

http://www.report.cpr.ca.gov/cprrpt/ issrec/stops/it/so10.htm
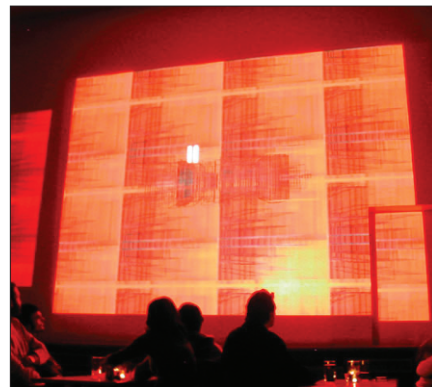
■ Hire a Cab with Linux!

When calling a cab in Scandinavia, make sure to choose a company that uses Linux to broker rides. It could save you valuable time. Six Scandinavian taxi companies, Norwegian Oslo Taxi and Rogaland Taxi, Swedish Taxi Stockholm, Denmark's Århus Taxi and 4X35, and Taxi Kurir, which operates throughout Scandinavia, have decided to deploy Alcatel's Linux-based OmniPCX Enterprise IP communication server, along with an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) solution by the same company.

The new system will mainly help customers who order a cab by phone from home or from the office (which is the usual way in Scandinavian countries) since the IVR will try to automatically locate the caller and to show the available cars in his or her vicinity on the PC screen in the cab operator's central office.

Whether the new system will bring relief during the notorious pre-Christmas party season, when party-goers in the Norwegian capital Oslo often have to wait for hours on the phone, still remains to be seen. Meanwhile their Swedish counterparts, Taxi Stockholm, claim to be capable of taking 28 percent more calls with their existing staff of 4200 at peak times. ■

■ Open Source in the Arts

People who present their work at Open Source related conferences are typically involved in the technical side of the game. "piKseL" gives artists and developers alike a forum: For the second time in succession, the Bergen Center of Electronic Arts (BEK) in Bergen/Norway plays host to a week-long gathering for all those using Open Source software for real-time processing of video and sound.

From October 29 to November 7 this year, "piKseL[04]" will feature both artistic and technical presentations, coding workshops and live performances,: Like "piKseL[03]" a year before, this year's event hopes to welcome a truly international audience. ■

http://www.piksel.no/

■ Airport Out, Linux In

If Berlin's legendary inner-city airport, Tempelhof, does close down at the end of October, as planned by the city's municipal government, it will be the end of an era. But same time, same place, this might mean the beginning of a new era of Open Source software in Berlin.

According to "Computerwoche" (a German computing weekly), the Berlin Tempelhof-Schöneberg district is considering migrating about 2000 desktops, and supporting servers, from Windows NT to Linux. The decision is financially motivated, and can be expected some time later this year.

It is extremely unlikely that the council will favor migrating to Windows XP. This would mean new hardware. The council is more likely to adopt a best-value scenario from a recent study on behalf of the joint IT coordination office for all 12 Berlin city districts, KoBIT. The best-case migration scenario for Tempelhof-Schöneberg reuses about 90 percent of the existing (4 to 5 year-old) PCs as Linux-based thin clients. This does not mean the end of the road for Windows in Tempelhof-Schöneberg, however, as the district will not be able to port the 60 Windows-specific applications it currently uses any any time in the near future.

It remains to be seen whether the other 11 Berlin city districts will follow suit. But one thing is for sure, says Tempelhof-Schöneberg's IT manager Manfred Piechowski, they are definitely interested. Whether the deeply indebted city of Berlin itself will look into adopting Linux is uncertain. In the past, Berlin's senate has always favored Microsoft solutions. ■

http://www.computerwoche.de/index. cfm?pageid = 254&type = detail&artid = 6 4834