

World News

■ Vietnam on the Road to Open Source

In late October, when the Silicon Valley daily newspaper, the "San Jose Mercury News", published a story about the Vietnamese government's plans to eliminate Microsoft software in an effort to bring down the piracy rate of more than 95 percent, the news immediately hit the international newswires.

The paper reported that this had happened in response to a trade agreement with the USA in 2001, and to the country's effort to join the World Trade Organisation by 2005.

In fact, the story itself wasn't as new as it seemed: As early as October 2002, Tran Luu Chuong, the IT adviser to the

Vietnam Ministry of Science and Technology, presented a ten-point Open Source policy for the country at the "Open Source: A Case for e-Government" conference in Washington, DC, arranged by the Information for Development program of the World Bank. The university professor and Unicode specialist had held a similar talk at the Asia Open Source Software Symposium, Phuket, Thailand, March 3-6 2003 (see Issue 30, p11).

In early summer 2003, the Vietnamese government formed an Open Source software task force with the aim of developing a master plan to start replacing proprietary software. A member of the Ho Chi Minh city Linux users group claims that this is probably a response to Microsoft's anti-piracy campaign which hit the country's largest bakery and an important banking systems company in May 2003. Still the government hasn't yet

decided which Open Source software exactly it will be introducing to state offices by 2005 at the latest.

One hot contender is Vietkey Linux, a commercially developed distribution based on Red Hat Linux that took five years to translate into Vietnamese. The latest version, 3.0, was launched in October. It is based on Red Hat Linux 8.0 and includes localized versions of KDE, Mozilla and OpenOffice.

<http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/7139304.htm>
http://h0lug.sourceforge.net/00.viet/flo@vnisbiz/02flohov/tl-chuong_infodev/html/
http://www.asiaosc.org/uploads/20030313_1/downloads/TranLuuChuong/Slide/html/
<http://h0lug.sourceforge.net/pn/print.php?sid=8>
http://linux.vietkey.net/Gioithieusanpham/Download/vietkey_linux/vietkey.iso



■ Malaysian Teachers Embrace Open Source

During the September break, a dozen teachers from nearly as many schools in Malaysia underwent a six-day intensive training course on basic Linux and Open Source software (OSS) tools as part of a national plan to promote Open Source technology to schools in the country.

In a pilot project sponsored by local businessman Datuk Siew Nim Chee, the Malaysian National Computer Confederation (MNCC) used the recent break to join forces with the Advanced Technology Studies Centre (atSC) to teach the teachers from 11 schools in the Klang Valley area how to run and use OSS, including the Open Office suite. The OSS for Schools (OSS/S) project hopes to get

these teachers to pass on their newly acquired skills to their students as part of computer club activities, using the training materials, slides and workbooks distributed at the course.

atSC's chief operating officer How Eng Keong told the ECT News Network, "This technology is reliable, easy to use and manage, secure and less expensive. On top of this, it can run on older machines, and schools do not have to constantly upgrade their hardware."

The genesis of the OSS/S can be traced to the OSS 101 Seminar and Workshop for school teachers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) organized by MNCC and atSC last December. "The

MNCC and atSC had received numerous requests from the public, particularly from schools, to provide Open Source seminars to teachers and students" said How.

atSC will be monitoring the teachers' progress and helping them implement OSS in their schools. atSC also plans to translate the training courseware into the Malay and Chinese languages so as to benefit all school communities in the country.

The continuity of the project, as well as its expansion to a national scale, will, however, depend crucially on sponsorship from local businesses and establishments.



■ Fresh Water Open Source

Representatives from 18 countries gathered at the second Asia OSS Symposium held in Singapore, November 3 to 4. Its aim was to share resources among Asian countries and to support IT innovations and economies.

Participants also discussed Linux coordination and standardization in preparation of the next meeting to be held in Tokyo in February. To illustrate the importance of free and Open Source software (F/OSS), Dr. Ho from the Academia Sinica in Taiwan compared human knowledge to water and went on to say that F/OSS provided the kind of flow needed to clear out the grime from a currently stagnant water tank. To continue this analogy, one could compare the symposium to an Open Source fountain capable of providing a continual flow of fresh water, in contrast to a closed source washtub with concrete plugs.

Though many Asian countries have shown a great deal of interest in hosting the next symposium, its initiators from Japan opted to leave this task to a multinational organisation. In so doing, they hope to create ideal conditions for the idea of sharing knowledge, human resources, hardware devices and software code among the symposium members to thrive in the long run. ■

■ Amsterdam Flirts with Open Source

Against all expectations, the adoption of Open Source within the Dutch government is making only gradual progress. So far, only a few initiatives have been forthcoming. But hope remains as the City of Amsterdam is evaluating OpenOffice on Red Hat Linux.

One major question needs to be answered: How easy would the transition be for the employees? To do this, 36 desktops have been connected to a Linux server, featuring Samba to integrate with other servers. The city will also be testing with MS Exchange integration.

If the evaluation works out, a transition to OpenOffice will soon follow; Linux will be deployed later. To draw media attention, this announcement was made the same day that Bill Gates hit town to fight Open Source. ■

■ Life Insurance Corporation of India Shifts to Linux

India's largest insurance company, the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), employing over a million agents, has abandoned SCO Unix in favor of Linux as the operating system for networking its branches throughout the country. The decision was taken after experiencing unspecified problems with the SCO Unix operating system.

According to R R Nair, Additional Zonal Manager, LIC, almost 75 percent of the corporation's branches have already shifted to Linux. All the branches in LIC's South Zone (comprising the States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry) completed the transition to Linux by July, while the other zones are currently in the process of doing so.

Previously, the life insurance company had installed more than 6000 SCO UnixWare 7 servers to manage its records and operations across the country. LIC used UnixWare 7 to link over 2000 branch offices, serving approximately 11.6 million customers. UnixWare 7 linked LIC's local area networks, metropolitan area networks, wide area networks and the interactive voice response system. These tasks will now be performed by a customized version of Linux supplied by a local vendor. ■

■ GNOME Conference to Norway

Any idea where Kristiansand is? Well, if not, and if you are a GNOME user or developer, it's worth digging out an atlas and looking up the south coast of Norway, because Kristiansand has been chosen to host next year's "GNOME Users and Developers European Conference", GUADEC for short.

From June 28 to 30 2004, Agder University College "Høgskolen i Agder" (with about 8000 students and faculties in three cities of the Agder region - Kristiansand, Grimstad and Arendal - one of the largest university colleges in Norway) together with local Linux user groups (see p92) and the national Unix users group NUUG hope to provide an atmosphere in which it is possible to "develop free software of at least equally good quality as proprietary software" as Mikael Snaprud of the faculty of technology in Grimstad puts it. Mikael is one of the driving forces behind free software development at the college.

After the successful Debian conference last July in Oslo (see Issue 35, p87), it looks like Norwegian Linux and free software proponents are trying hard to establish Norway's reputation for Open Source project conferences. ■

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

■ The World's First Arabic Linux Live-CD

The league of Linux Live CDs has a new member: Arabixx, an Arabized Morphix-clone hopes to attract new Linux users in the Arab world. October 19 the Arabeyes project announced the beta release 0.8 of its Linux system which will run from CD. Arabixx contains localized versions of GNOME, Mozilla and OpenOffice 1.1, and lots of other software packages like WINE and the new Gimp 1.3 which now supports Arabic.

Sponsored by the Saudi Linux Users Group, 5000 Arabixx-CDs were given away at the IT-fare Gitex in Dubai 19th

to 23th October. If you didn't grab a copy, don't worry, the ISO-image can be downloaded from Sourceforge. ■

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

http://sourceforge.net/project/showfiles.php?group_id=34866&release_id=1902

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