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It's been another interesting month, but then, the Linux community doesn't have many uninteresting months these days. Many of the LUGs have been following news as it happens. The obvious subjects are in there – Novell, Microsoft, open community letters from Ubuntu – but there were a variety of other topics I'll briefly address in this issue. I'll also introduce a new regular "LUG of the Month" feature, beginning with Bombay.

The next issue will focus on the year in reflection. Look for coverage of what happened in a LUG near you over the past 12 months.

LUG of the Month: Bombay Linux User Group

It's been a while since I wrote about Linux in India, though the recent news that the Indian government is seeking

Community Notes

BOMBAY LINUX

Jon Masters rounds up this month's happenings in the Linux User Group (LUG) community. **BY JON MASTERS**

to ban various forms of VoIP (including those used by Asterisk users who subscribe to foreign SIP gateway services) for, allegedly, tax reasons recently piqued my interest.

The idea that communications regulation should so overwhelmingly favor incumbent mega-corps over lower cost, high-value Internet-based providers would seem to be against consumer interests. I look forward to the backlash from the Indian Linux user community as they figure out how this affects private usage of Internet Asterisk gateways.

I first visited India back in 2005. I was in Bombay for a while en route to a wedding in a remote village in the north of the country. Of course, touristic endeavors can only retain your attention for so long. Curiosity got the better of me and, as usual, I wound up talking to the local Linux user community. I met some great folks out there – like Dinesh Shah, a local business manager who helps run a Linux anti-virus/anti-spam company as his day job while also keeping the local Linux User Group going in his spare time. The guy posts a large number of mails in reply to questions on the mailing list and generally is one of the good guys.

Catching up with the latest news from the past few months has seen a variety of topics being discussed. First, it is apparent that a large number of Embedded Linux companies are springing up in Bombay. I have seen several postings with job offers and training courses – including one covering some very specific aspects of RealTime (RT) Linux (not to be confused with the community efforts at an RT patchset) that suggested a lot of specialist knowledge now exists in the local marketplace. A number of members are interested in custom embedded projects, including one idea to retrofit public transportation with low cost Linux-based WiFi and other connectivity

options for the huge numbers of commuters traveling the city.

Linux users in Bombay, especially those who are doing contracting or working out of the growing number of coffeeshops, are interested in roaming around with Linux laptops. (Starbucks was just negotiating a deal with the incumbent TATA tea/coffee distributor when I was last there – but there are many other good, local alternatives available.) GPRS coverage is generally available for around 150 Rs per month (around US\$ 3), although that only affords a dial-up quality connection. Getting good broadband appears to be like making payments to the FSF in India – there's a little more to it than you might expect at first glance.

It is quite apparent that a large number of Indian Linux users are still installing ancient Linux distributions for the first, second, or third time on reasonably powerful kit – often with the result that performance is negatively impacted due to the much older software not supporting new features in modern machines. I would hope that increasingly greater access to high speed connectivity will address this issue in time, but for the moment, things don't seem to have moved on a great deal in the last year. There are still way too many people choosing to install Red Hat 9.0 rather than the latest Fedora or Ubuntu release, for example.

LUG News Summary

Here's a quick summary of what's been happening in some other LUGs over the last month. As always, the listing is pseudo-random. Some LUGs will appear much more often than others – if you would like me to mention your local Linux User Group (and they host discussions openly in either English or French) then I'd love to hear from you – drop me a line, and we'll see

about featuring your local group in a future issue.

Boston, MA

Discussion was pretty ordinary this month, mostly centering around practical topics – reading MS Access files, detecting disks (and garnering information therefrom), building binary drivers, that kind of thing. One longer thread discussed a “hack” attempt on a member’s machine and the resulting cleanup that was necessary. I know myself that I had to deal with reporting an attempted compromise this month and I know just how painful it can be to try to get through to an ISP that isn’t interested in taking your report seriously.

Your author gave a talk on Linux kernel portability at this month’s meeting. It’s hard to tell how well it was received, but I have gotten enough positive feedback that I’m going to run a practical hands on class at the next installfest. I also seem to have some interest in helping to setup a LUG portal for recordings of LUG events (not just for this single group), though it’s probably too early to see where that’s going just yet.

Brighton, UK

The group has semi-recently discussed topics ranging from cleaning hard disks (avoiding identity theft) to disabling USB (avoiding the penchant for abusing USB access) and Sun’s Project Blackbox, an attempt to produce a “datacenter in the shipping container.” As someone who recently shipped a large quantity of junk across the Atlantic, I just hope they travel well on the high seas.



Figure 1: I visited Bombay in 2005, where I got acquainted with the Bombay Linux User Group.



Figure 2: The New York LUG may not have turned out for this year’s Macy’s parade, but I did.

Brussels, Belgium

There has been a lot of discussion centering around the latest Ubuntu and apparent DNS problems for clients being installed with this distribution (though the “problem,” if it exists, is not being well defined). Other discussion included monitoring of web traffic for all the usual kinds of reasons.

Devon and Cornwall, UK

I don’t normally cover this LUG, but one discussion did grab my attention this month. DCGLUG was one of the only groups discussing a proposal on the Ubuntu mailing lists to host a Children In Need (an annual BBC Children’s Charity Telethon) installfest. Several groups around the UK did, in fact, host such events, although the precise amount of money raised is unclear.

New York, NY

This list is always entertaining. This month, aside from another discussion about top posting (replying to messages at the top, rather than at the bottom), there was a discussion about how best to join an Open Source project. To me, this doesn’t sound too hard – you pick something and get involved – but I guess not everyone knows what kinds of things they would like to work on before they have something to work on!

Portland, OR

A number of messages were devoted to discussing a device known as the Kill-A-Watt. These are on sale in drug stores and electrical retailers across the US (and presumably elsewhere) and can be used to obtain a – fairly accurate – measure of the power usage of various consumer electronics devices.

Certain Linux kernel developers are well known for using these devices to determine the actual amount of power use that will result from some of their energy savings-inspired choices. I certainly plan to pick one of these up and begin measuring my own household devices, machines, and various other gadgets to figure out which of them are the worst energy hogs. ■

LUG of the Month

Send a description of your LUG (along with some high-res images) to:
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