



How Important is it to have **Tux in a Turban and Dhoti?**



Venkatesh Hariharan (Venky), head—open source affairs, Red Hat India



Sandeep Menon, director Linux business, Novell West Asia



Mukul Mahajan, director, Tetra Information Services Pvt Ltd



Ashutosh Dhanesha, country manager—Linux, IBM India

Being die hard Indians, we all feel proud to see the 'Made in India' tag on just about anything. But what about distros? Don't we need this tag here too? We threw open this debate to the community...

The loads of requests for distros that *LINUX For You* receives everyday is testimony to the fact that Indian Linux fanatics love to try out new distros. But isn't it high time that India had a distro of her own? We tried to find out what people

in the industry feel about this issue.

Disparate views

The top-shots from two of the biggest Linux and open source companies in the world— Red Hat and Novell—stressed more on the need for localisation and changing India's

current position into that of a net giver to the open source community, rather than giving a clear answer to the core question. The important point is that both Red Hat and Novell have the community and commercial versions of their distros available in India, and these are really popular

among the enterprise and SOHO users.

Venkatesh Hariharan (Venky), head—open source affairs, Red Hat India, compares the soul of the open source community with the concept of *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is my family). “The need of the hour is to increase India’s contribution to the global community and to localise critical open source software to Indian languages. Many Indian open source contributors, particularly those involved in localisation, already work with global open source organisations like Pango, GNOME, KDE and OpenOffice, and contribute code, translations and bug fixes to the global open source community. Such ‘upstream’ contributions must be encouraged so that we can be seen as leaders in open source and not just a country that downloads and uses OSS,” says Venky.

For Sandeep Menon, director Linux business, Novell West Asia, the issue is not about an ‘Indian’ distribution. “The question is about the need for localisation—the need for Linux as well as accompanying tools and packages to be available in Indian languages. That is the critical requirement if Linux is to help increase the IT penetration in India,” asserts Menon.

Looking from a ‘neutral’ player’s perspective, we approached Mukul

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY AN INDIAN DISTRO?

An Indian distro can be defined as a customised distro for Indians, in their local languages. As Sandeep Menon, director Linux business, Novell West Asia, states, “If SUSE Linux is available 100 per cent in Hindi, Marathi, Tamil or Bengali... would you not call it an ‘Indian’ version of the distro?”

From another perspective, Indian distros can also be those brought out by Indian companies.

Mahajan, director, Tetra Information Services Pvt Ltd. He seems pretty clear in his view about the sustainability of an Indian distro. Tetra is a leading consultancy firm in the field of Linux and open source, and according to Mahajan, there is scope for an Indian distro to thrive in the current market.

Touching upon the need

Though the general opinion on the issue seems in favour of an Indian distro, all major ‘supporters’ could not clearly articulate the actual need of such a distro. Mahajan did try and sum up the prerequisites and the ‘must haves’ for sustenance of an Indian distro, when he said, “When distros like Red Hat and Novell are able to generate so many eyeballs, and other international distros are entering the market, it is the right time for somebody to come up with an Indian distro. But the distro should have a larger perspective and sufficient investment capability in both R&D and marketing to generate good brand equity, so as to be able to

gain sufficient market share.”

Mahajan also underlined the need for a good support system behind this distro. “The Indian government, or some major IT players like Infosys or TCS, should be ready to support and fund such an initiative,” he reaffirmed.

A clear mandate...at last

Ashutosh Dhanesha, country manager-Linux, IBM India, has a clear view on the subject. “We do not need an Indian Linux distro,” states Dhanesha. “There are already good distros available—both free and commercial. It would rather make more sense to build more solutions for Linux. Instead of investing resources on creating one more distro, it would be better if there are more kernel contributions from India.”

So do we have a definite verdict?

The answer, unfortunately, is ‘No!’ The idea of an Indian distro seems secondary in the minds of industry leaders. The bigger issues according to them are localisation and improving India’s place in the global open source community. What emerged from this discussion was a need to work on improving Linux and open source penetration in India. There are innumerable important solutions that are still not available on the Linux platform, and of course, not to forget the need for localisation. Perhaps the best way would be to mobilise geeks and non-geeks alike to come within the open source ambit. Distros would follow naturally... what’s your bet? 

**By: Atul Goel and Sujata Banerjee,
LFY Bureau**

WHAT THE ‘BOARD’ SAYS

Here are a few responses to this topic, posted on LFY’s bulletin board: Yes, an Indian distro would be a cool idea, provided it takes into consideration the following points:

- Most Indian users are still bandwidth-starved, so the distro must provide all the necessary packages for playing multimedia formats (video and audio) and also other packages that Indian users expect as ‘factory loaded.’
- Similarly, it would be great if the distro includes diallers for popular Internet service providers (like cyberoam, Sify, etc.)
- Most important, proper channels/mediums must be used to inform people about a friendly distro, as India is a land of tech-ignorant people and they need to be well-informed about Linux and open source.

—posted by ‘Pat’

Yes, definitely! I would love to see Tux in Indian dhotis and turbans.

—posted by ‘abi’