



Top Stories

UN: Guantanamo Bay should be closed



An 11-page report, critical of U.S. adherence to the 1984 U.N. Convention Against Torture, was released

following committee hearings held in Geneva earlier this month.

Apes and birds are able to plan ahead: psychologists



According to psychologists in Leipzig, Germany, apes and some birds are able to plan their actions ahead of time. Psychologists call the find "groundbreaking."

Featured story

Hurricanes through to Super 14 2006 Final



Hurricanes are through to the Super 14 2006 Final after a 16-14 win over the Waratahs, tonight in Wellington's Westpac Stadium.

Wikipedia Current Events

•The UN Committee Against Torture tells the United States it should close any secret prisons abroad and the Guantánamo Bay facility in Cuba, saying they violate international law.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Canadian National Post reports that a new law passed by the Iranian parliament obliges the country's non-Muslim religious minorities to wear distinctive markings: yellow ribbons for Jews, red for Christians and blue for Zoroastrians.
- According to the Associated Press, the report by National Post, quoting "Iranian expatriates living in Canada," has been denied by the Iranian legislators including the Jewish lawmaker Morris Motamed who told the AP: "Such a plan has never been proposed or discussed in parliament. Such news, which appeared abroad, is an insult to religious minorities here."
- Mullah Dadullah, reportedly a member of the Taliban's leadership council, has been reported as having been captured in Afghanistan.
- The United States Senate has voted on an amendment to an immigration reform bill which would "... to declare English as the national language of the United States", giving English an increased de jure capacity (in addition to a de facto one) as the official language within the country. The bill, S. 2611, has yet to be voted on in the Senate.
- The case of Khaled el-Masri, who says he was abducted and tortured by the CIA because he was mistaken for another person, is dismissed by a district court in

Wikipedia Current Events

- Alexandria, Virginia, as it would be a "grave risk" of damage to U.S. national security by exposing government secrets. The court rules that if the claims are true he "deserves a remedy" but this cannot be found in the court.
- Fijian opposition (Labour) led by Mahendra Chaudhry decides to join Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase's United Fiji Party to form a multi-party multi-ethnic cabinet.

UN: Guantanamo Bay should be closed

The United Nations Committee against Torture told the United States today that the US should close its detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba as well as disclose the existence of any secret prisons it operates.

The committee, made up of 10 independent experts has urged the Bush administration to put a stop to the use of torture or cruel treatment during the interrogation of terror suspects.

In an 11 page report, the committee said that the US should not detain anyone in a secret facility under its control. The committee also said that the US should disclose and investigate any such facilities. It is alleged that the US has a number of secret prisons where suspects are transported to and questioned using techniques which violate international human rights conventions.

Earlier this month, the US sent 30 officials to a torture committee hearing in Geneva. The delegation was criticised for failing to comment on questions relating to America's alleged secret prisons.

The committee ruled that there was evidence that US military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan had violated the rights of some detainees. The committee said that some of the US' techniques had resulted in the deaths of prisoners during the interrogation process. The committee further claimed that "vague" guidelines had led to abuse of detainees.

According to the Associated Press, John B. Bellinger III, a State Department legal advisor and participant during the hearings at Geneva, said of the recommendation to close the base that, "one, seems to be beyond their mandate; two, legally wrong to say that the existence of Guantanamo is a per se violation of the convention; and, three, a not very practical recommendation given that they say that it ought to be closed but that individuals can't be sent back to a large number of countries."

President Bush said previously on ARD German television that he wants to close the Guantanamo Bay detainment camp. According to White House spokesman Tony Snow, the President is waiting for the US Supreme Court to decide on the issue of whether the detainees would be tried by military tribunals, or in civilian courts.

Apes and birds are able to plan ahead: psychologists

According to psychologists in Leipzig, Germany, apes and some birds are able to plan their actions

ahead of time.

Psychologists Nicholas Mulcahy and Josep Call at Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology say that apes are able to save tools to use at a later time, that will assist them in retrieving food.

The results of the testing are "groundbreaking" and is "a starting point from which we can begin to reconstruct the evolution of the human mind. Apes and jays can also anticipate future needs by remembering past events, contradicting the notion that such cognitive behavior only emerged in hominids," said a psychologist University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, Thomas Suddendorf.

One aspect of the study is that "our extraordinary abilities of planning for the future did not evolve entirely de novo. Planning for future needs is not uniquely human," added Suddendorf.

An experiment was performed using bonobos and orangutans. The psychologists would place the apes in a room alone for five minutes. They each had a choice of six tools that would allow them to retrieve food and two that would not. The apes were allowed to look at and observe the tools, however; they were not allowed to handle them.

The apes were then taken to a room next door and allowed to take whatever tools they chose. They were then left in the room alone for at least one hour and a researcher would take all other tools out of the first room. The apes then returned to the first room where the food is, but it was not accessible unless they had the right tool to retrieve it.

After repeating the same test several times with each ape, researchers began to see that most apes would begin to use the right tool for the job. Researchers also received similar results even when the apes were left alone in a room overnight where they would sleep.

To make sure that the apes were not associating the tools with the food, they removed the food from the room, but would still give it to the apes if they used the right tool to retrieve it, but most of them would not bring the proper tools which researchers say confirm that the retrieval is a way of planning for the job.

In experiments using scrub jays found mostly in the western United States, at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, research by psychologists has shown that the birds, who usually hide their food to eat later, will hide it again if an enemy bird saw them do it the first time, unless the bird is dominant. The subordinate jay could however, fight the other for the food.

"These results suggest scrub jays remember who observed them make specific caches," said Joanna Dally who was involved in the study with the scrub jays.

"Together with recent evidence from scrub jays, our results suggest that future planning is not a uniquely human ability, thus contradicting the notion that it emerged in hominids only with the past 2.5 to 1.6 million years," said Mulcahy and Call in the study.

Elephants Dream: Free content 3D film released to the Internet

The 3D animated short film *Elephants Dream*, formerly known as *Orange Project*, was released to the Internet yesterday. The film is available under the Creative Commons Attribution License, allowing anyone to download, modify and distribute it. The 10-minute film has been called "the first open source movie" by NewsForge. Not only is the movie itself free content, even the computer files containing the 3D models used in the film are available under the same terms.

The project was first announced one year ago and was jointly produced by the Blender Foundation and the Netherlands Media Art Institute. The film tells the story of Emo and Proog, two men trapped inside a surreal machine world. Only freely available open source software was used to create the movie. Most of the work was done using Blender, a 3D modelling and rendering tool. The Blender Foundation is selling an extended edition on DVD which includes subtitles in 34 languages, a Making Of documentary, commentary tracks, and all files used to create the movie.

In spite of the successful completion of the project, the Blender Foundation "has no intention to grow or expand into a company or studio" according to the project website. "Instead, the Foundation aims at endorsing and supporting activities within (educational) institutes, universities and companies."

RAGGS debuts on Australia's Seven Network

New television stars in Australia, the RAGGS Kids Club Band started

as simply a mall touring promotion.

Airing on Australia's Seven Network weekdays at 9:00 am, the series features new songs, animated segments, and "letters from friends", as well as the music videos and concert scenes that the DVD releases focused on. Another noticeable change is the design of the costumed characters that star in the series, which now have larger heads, besides many other modifications.

Characters in the series include original members RAGGS, Trilby, Fido, B. Max (B. Maxwell Oliver) and Razzles. New to the series is Dumpster, an opinionated cat. The stars live together in a home, and learn to develop positive relationships with each other.

More concerts for the show will be filmed in September 2006. Producers are inviting fans to contact them, to be notified when the open tapings happen.

Created by RAGGS LLC Production, the series is co-produced with Southern Star Entertainment Pty Limited. RAGGS was created by former advertising executive Toni Steedman, who now manages RAGGS LLC full-time. Beginning as a promotional company managing mall's kids clubs, RAGGS expanded to a touring show, released CDS, a DVD, and a line of merchandise. The series' creator plans to have the show on the air in the United States, within the next few months. Sixty-five episodes were produced.

This certainly isn't the first time a fictional band has had a television series. The Archies, Josie and the Pussycats, The Banana Splits, and Alvin and the Chipmunks are all notable examples.

Indonesia hit by 6.1 magnitude earthquake

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), a strong magnitude 6.1 earthquake has been reported beneath the Molucca Sea in Indonesia at approximately 10:44 p.m. local time and hit approximately 120 miles off the country's Sulawesi Island.

The quake was recorded at 34 miles beneath the Earth's surface and there are no immediate reports of damage to buildings or injuries.

According to Dailin Wang of the Tsunami Warning Center in Ewa Beach, Hawaii, the quake was not powerful enough and did not require a tsunami warning to be issued.

In January, a magnitude 7.7 quake was reported beneath the Banda Sea 195 k.m. south of Ambon City. No tsunami was reported and no one was injured, but there were reports of some damage to buildings.

US General in Iraq Claims Employment can Undermine Insurgency

Lt. General Peter Chiarelli, the No. 2 ranking US general in Iraq, has made the assertion that providing jobs for the Iraqi people is key to ending the insurgency and stabilizing the country.

In a video teleconference with reporters at the Pentagon he said, "by creating jobs and opportunity, the Iraqi government would take away a major source of support for violent movements -- aimless, underemployed, young men who would otherwise rather be gainfully employed and supporting their families, but are laying IEDs, shooting RPGs and fighting Iraqi

security forces and the coalition because they lack alternatives... In areas where unemployment is the highest, as I go out and talk to people in those areas, and they tell me the one thing that you can do to lower the number of insurgencies is find jobs for the people. And we're committed to help both the Iraqi government and the PRTs as they go about the business of doing exactly that."

The General also said that the insurgents were taking advantage of political disputes within the Iraqi leadership as they are attempting to form an inclusive government.

Chiarelli's assertion is similar to a claim made by Lt. General John R. Vines in 2005 that insurgents often attack US forces out of a desire to earn money instead of ideology. Simple tasks, such as placing a bomb or mine, are often done in exchange for amounts as little as \$100 to \$150.

The estimated unemployment rate in Iraq for 2005 was 25-30%.

Opponents of the Bush administration's handling of the war say that Iraq's unemployment crisis is partially a result of decisions made by the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003 to disband the Iraqi army and purge the Iraqi civil service of high-ranking members of the Baath Party. Both of these moves led to an estimated 500,000 Iraqis losing their jobs, about one out of every ten Iraqi workers at the time.

Wellington Hurricanes in Super 14 rugby final match

Hurricanes are through to the Super 14 2006 Final after a 16-14 win over the Waratahs. The Hurricanes took an early lead in the opening moments of the game

with a Piri Weepu penalty and a couple of minutes later this was followed up with another penalty this time from David Holwell.

The Waratahs fought back, however, with Peter Hewat scoring a try in the 14th minute which he then failed to convert. He made amends seven minutes though when he converted a Waratahs penalty. Lome Fa'atau went over the line for the Hurricanes on the half-hour mark to put them up 13-8 and this is what the scoreline looked like going into half-time.

The second half began with the Hurricanes failing to take the lead they deserved and it was the Waratahs who started off the second half scoring when, in the 64th minute, the Hurricanes conceded a penalty which was converted by Hewat. This was followed by another penalty five minutes later which Hewat again dealt to putting the Waratah's up 14-13.

After the Waratahs were penalised from their scrum in the 72nd minute, Jimmy Gopperth scored a 50 metre penalty kick to put the Hurricanes back in front, 16-14. Try as they may, the Waratahs were unable to come back into the game.

The final is the first final the Hurricanes have ever qualified for, having been previously been defeated in three other semi-finals. The Hurricanes also earned the right to host the semi-final, which was the first ever played in Hurricanes territory, by beating the Waratahs a week earlier in Sydney, 19-14, in the final round.

The Hurricanes will now meet the winners of the Crusaders vs Bulls clash that will take place tomorrow night at Jade Stadium in

Christchurch, New Zealand. The Crusaders have been backed as "unbeatable" against the Bulls.

The game was Chris Whittaker's last for the Waratahs in Super 14 rugby, after he announced his retirement earlier this year.

The match was officiated by Jonathan Kaplan. It was the Waratahs 14th loss in the 15 Waratahs matches that Kaplan has been the referee.

Hawaii governor Lingle lobbies GOP for Akaka Bill passage

Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle wrote a letter to Republicans in the U.S. Senate urging passage of the controversial Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act (S. 147), commonly known as the Akaka Bill after Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii), its main proponent.

In a letter dated May 15, 2006 addressed to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, Lingle cited a recent report by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission that urged defeat of the measure on the grounds that it is racially based, calling it a "misguided action" and saying that it was based on a "grossly flawed understanding of the history of Hawaii and of the law itself."

Lingle cited the fact that Native Hawaiians were governed by their own leaders prior to Western contact, and that the U.S. itself recognized Hawaii as a sovereign nation and entered into treaties with it as far back as 1826. After the overthrow of the monarchy and Hawaii's subsequent annexation in 1900, the government of the former kingdom was "subordinated to the federal government," Lingle said, asserting that Native Hawaiians' relationship to the U.S. has been

political in nature rather than purely racial. She claims that this relationship was not adequately reflected in the Civil Rights Commission's report.

Opponents of the Akaka Bill have disputed the accuracy of Lingle's claims, as well as those of her Attorney General, Mark J. Bennett. They point out that throughout the Hawaiian Kingdom period, through the annexation of Hawaii and into statehood, no racial group in Hawaii ever had an exclusive government for their race alone, and that the Akaka Bill specifically creates a new government based on race, not on politics.

Attached to her letter was a three-page summary written by Hawaii Attorney General Mark Bennett, outlining the state government's criticisms of the CRC's report. Bennett said that the report reflected "a complete lack of understanding of this country's longstanding practice of dealing specially with its native peoples." Bennett also cited congressional precedent in legislation that compares the situation of Native Hawaiians to that of Native Americans. Bennett sums up the criticism by saying that there is "simply no legal or moral distinction between Native Hawaiians and American Indians or Alaska Natives, that would justify denying Native Hawaiians the same treatment other Native American groups in this country currently enjoy."

According to the Civil Rights Commission's report, a panel of experts briefed the commission on January 20, 2006; and public comment was solicited until March 21, 2006. The Commission noted that most of the comments received were in opposition to the legislation, and that while the

supporters "took great pains to analogize the situation of Native Hawaiians with those of Native Americans," many of the opponents argued, "in very personal terms, that the proposed legislation would be inconsistent with basic American principles of equality, traditional Hawaiian values, and their own personal ethics."

In the end, the Commission recommended against passage of S. 147 as reported out of committee, or any similar bill that "would discriminate on the basis of race or national origin and further subdivide the American people into discrete subgroups accorded varying degrees of privilege."

Two of the seven commission members reportedly rejected the conclusion and are expected to file formal dissents.

Frist had pledged to file a cloture motion before the Senate to bring the measure to a vote when the body returns from May recess. Should 60 of the 100 senators approve the cloture motion, a vote would occur after a maximum of 30 hours of debate. The bill, if approved by the Senate, would still need to pass the House by the end of the year.

State schools chief to appeal California High School Exit Exam ban to state high court

State schools Superintendent Jack O'Connell has his lawyers working "around the clock" to prepare to ask the State Supreme Court to overturn a lower court judge's ban on using the California State High School Exit Exam as a graduation requirement, he said today.

"In an effort to seek resolution of this issue as quickly as possible, I have asked my attorneys to

appeal directly to the California Supreme Court," said O'Connell in a prepared statement, "They are working around the clock to prepare those papers, and we expect to file within 24 to 30 hours. This is a remarkably fast turnaround for an appeal of a ruling that was made less than a week ago."

Most appeals of a Superior Court decision go to an appellate court first.

Last Friday, Alameda County Superior Court judge Robert Freedman ruled against maintaining the California High School Exit Exam as a condition of graduation for the class of 2006, saying that the law requiring high school students to pass the test is unconstitutional because economically and racially disadvantaged students weren't offered equal educations and therefore didn't have an equal chance to pass.

In his statement, O'Connell acknowledged that some students need more help than others, but said the test should stand, anyway: "We know that some students at some schools need extra attention to overcome challenges brought to the classroom and challenges within the schools they attend. We agree those students must have every option available to them to learn the skills on the exam. But I strongly disagree that the remedy for students still struggling to pass the exam is to simply hand them a diploma whether or not they have learned what they need to know."

Arturo J. Gonzalez, the San Francisco attorney who persuaded Freedman to stop the use of the test, told reporters that Freedman had ruled correctly and that the

state should give up and let the students graduate. "There is no basis for the Supreme Court to take diplomas away from 45,000 students who have passed all required courses," he said in an email exchange with the James Logan Courier. "To do that, they would have to find that Judge Freedman abused his discretion. Given the overwhelming evidence in support of his ruling, I do not think that any of the seven justices will find an abuse of discretion."

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said he supported O'Connell's bid to reinstate the test and would "put the full weight of my administration behind reinstating the California High School Exit Exam graduation requirement."

O'Connell, who wrote the law, wants the requirement to be enforced against this year's would-be graduates who haven't yet passed the test and so is set to ask the State Supreme Court to immediately stay Freedman's injunction to allow the state to withhold high school diplomas as originally planned.. At last count, the ruling affects about about 47,000 California Seniors, including about 70 from James Logan High School.

"The decision came as more than 1,100 California high schools prepare for graduation ceremonies," he said, "It created confusion and uncertainty not only for seniors in the class of 2006 but for juniors in the class of 2007."

Cynthia O'Brien, who oversees testing at James Logan High School, told The Courier she wants the confusion to end: "If the Exit Exam is going to go forward, then it needs to go forward. If not, then

it needs to be cancelled completely," she said last week.

"Many students now wonder whether they should enroll in summer school or plan to take a summer administration of the exit exam," he said, "Administrators and teachers are left wondering whether students who need the extra assistance will bother to enroll. And students who should be buckling down to learn the skills they need to succeed in college or the workplace have now been told they can get a diploma whether or not they have those skills.

"It is our responsibility to all of California's children, especially our disadvantaged and minority students, to equip them with the most basic skills they will need in college, in work and in life," said Schwarzenegger. "Postponing the exam graduation requirement will hurt our children in the long run by depriving us of the best tool we have to measure how well schools are doing their job."

He said he's budgeted more money to help students pass the test: "My 2006-07 budget will add \$7.7 million for three additional administration of the exam and we will also provide \$65 million this year to give students at risk of failing the exam the support they need to pass it."

The high court has 90 days to decide whether to hear O'Connell's appeal once it's filed, but could act more quickly if it chooses.

Two Australian car ferry operators caught drunk on the job

Two men operating a car transport ferry at Berowra Waters, New South Wales, Australia, North of Sydney have been charged with

operating a vessel with high range prescribed concentration of alcohol (PCA) according to police. The ferry crosses Berowra Creek between Bay Road and Berowra Waters Road, Berowra Waters and operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Police met the ferry at its Eastern terminal on Thursday at 7PM AEST after receiving a report from a passenger that the boom operator appeared to be drunk. Upon the ferry's arrival, police spoke with the boom operator and conducted an on-the-spot breath test. The man returned a positive blood-alcohol reading.

Police then spoke with the ferry's captain about his boom operator. The captain was also subjected to a breath test, which returned positive.

The pair were taken to Hornsby police station where they were required to undergo a further breath test. The test at the station returned a blood-alcohol reading of 0.17 for the boom operator and 0.15 for the captain. Both were more than seven times the legal limit of 0.02 for passenger vessels.

Even though the boom operator was not controlling the ferry, a person who is responsible for observing the safety of passengers is taken to have been operating the vessel under NSW law.

The pair will appear in Hornsby Local Court on a date to be set.

Record typhoon Chanchu batters south China

A powerful typhoon which killed 37 people in the Philippines has hit southern China. Typhoon Chanchu battered coastal Guangdong and Fujian provinces where an estimated 900,000 fled to safety.

With winds up to 170 kph, Chanchu is the strongest typhoon on record to enter the South China Sea in May.

Xinhua news agency said 11 people had died in China from the storm and four others were missing. The storm made landfall near Shantou in the northern tip of China's Guangdong province.

Xinhua reports that Chenchu slammed in Shantou City of Guangdong and continued northward bringing gale-force winds and rainstorms to the regions and triggering flooding, mountain torrents and landslides. Nearly 200 houses in north Shantou were flooded stranding more than 6,400 people.

Typhoons occur in the South China Sea every year between May and September.

Dee Caffari on last stretch of round-the-world sailing challenge

Briton Dee Caffari and her 72ft steel cutter Aviva are on the last part of their journey around the world. The former PE teacher from Hertfordshire is just 55 miles from becoming the first woman to sail around the world solo against the prevailing winds and currents.

Cholera outbreak hits Angola

A cholera epidemic in Angola has killed over 1,200 people in the past three months. The UN World Health Organization (WHO) says about 35,000 people are have fallen ill, half the victims in the capital of Luanda, where the first cases were detected in February.

The UN say the epidemic is Angola's worst cholera outbreak in almost two decades continues to rage on with 546 new cases and 31 deaths reported in the last 24

hours. A third of the victims are children under 5.

The medical charity Mangola, Medecines Sans Frontieres and the World Health Organisation say it is the worst outbreak recorded in the country. Spokesman for Medecines Sans Frontiere Richard Veerman said: "Angola is heading for its worst ever outbreak and the situation remains very bad in Angola," he said.

"It's very worrying, the official number of deaths countrywide is now more than 1,200, which is likely under-reported. Many people will be at home and die at home and have no possibility to come to one of our treatment centres."

Cholera, an acute intestinal disease caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*, causes copious, painless, watery diarrhoea that can quickly lead to severe dehydration and death if treatment, including rehydration, is not given promptly.

OpenSync Interview - syncing on the free desktop

This interview intends to provide some insight into OpenSync, an upcoming free unified data synchronization solution for free software desktops such as KDE, commonly used as part of the GNU/Linux operating system.

Basics

Hi Cornelius, Armin and Tobias. As you are now getting close to version 1.0 of OpenSync, which is expected to become the new synchronisation framework for KDE and other free desktops, we are quite interested in the merits it can provide for KDE users and for developers, as well as for the Open Source Community as a whole. So there's one key-

question before I move deeper into the details of OpenSync:

What does OpenSync accomplish, that noone did before?

Cornelius:

First of all it does its job of synchronizing data like addressbooks and calendars between desktop applications and mobile devices like PDAs and cell phones.

But the new thing about OpenSync is that it isn't tied to a particular device or a specific platform. It provides an extensible and modular framework which is easy to adopt for application developers and people implementing support for syncing with mobile devices. OpenSync is also independent of the desktop platform. It will be the common syncing backend for at least KDE and GNOME and other projects are likely to join. That means that the free desktop will have one common syncing solution. This is something really new.

How do the end-users profit from using syncing solutions which interface with OpenSync as framework?

Cornelius:

First, the users will be able to actually synchronize all their data. By using one common framework there won't be any "missing links", where one application can sync one set of devices and another application a different one. With OpenSync all applications can sync all devices.

Second, the users will get a consistent and common user interface for syncing across all applications and devices. This will be much simpler to use than the current incoherent collection of syncing programs you need if you

have more than the very basic needs.

How does OpenSync help developers with coding?

Cornelius:

It's a very flexible and well-designed framework which makes it quite easy for developers to add support for new devices and new types of data. It's also very easy to add support for OpenSync to applications.

The big achievement of OpenSync is that it hides all the gory details of syncing from the developers who work on applications and device support. That makes it possible for the developers to concentrate on their area of expertise without having to care what's going on behind the scenes.

I have written quite a lot of synchronization code in the past. Trust me, it's much better, if someone just takes care of it for you, and that's what OpenSync does.

Tobias:

Another point to mentioned is the python wrapper for opensync, so you are not bound to C or C++, but can develop plugins in a high level scripting language.

Why should producers of portable devices get involved with your team?

Cornelius:

OpenSync will be the one common syncing solution for the free desktop. That means there is a single point of contact for device manufacturers who want to add support for their devices. That's much more feasible than addressing all the different applications and solutions we had before. With OpenSync it hopefully

will become interesting for manufacturers to officially support Linux for their devices.

Do you also plan to support applications of OpenSync in proprietary systems like OSX and Windows?

Cornelius:

OpenSync is designed to be cross-platform, so it is able to run on other systems like Windows. How well this works is always a question of people actually using and developing for this system. As far as I know there isn't a real Windows community around OpenSync yet. But the technical foundation is there, so if there is somebody interested in working on a unified syncing solution on Windows, everybody is welcome to join the project.

What does your synchronisation framework do for KDE and for KitchenSync in particular?

Cornelius:

OpenSync replaces the KDE-specific synchronization frameworks we had before. Even in KDE we had several separate syncing implementations and with OpenSync we can get replace them with a common framework. We had a more generic syncing solution in KDE under development. This was quite similar from a design point of view to OpenSync, but it never got to the level of maturity we would have needed, because of lack of resources. As OpenSync fills this gap we are happy to be able to remove our old code and now concentrate on our core business.

Who, How and Why?

What was your personal reason for getting involved with OpenSync?

Cornelius:

I wrote a lot of synchronization code in the past, which mainly came from the time where I was maintaining KOrganizer and working on KAddressBook. But this always was driven by necessity and not passion. I wanted to have all my calendar and contact data in one place, but my main objective was to work on the applications and user interfaces handling the data and not on the underlying code synchronizing the data.

So when the OpenSync project was created I was very interested. At GUADEC in Stuttgart I met with Armin, the maintainer of OpenSync, and we talked about integrating OpenSync with KDE. Everything seemed to fit together quite well, so at Linuxtag the same year we had another meeting with some more KDE people. In the end we agreed to go with OpenSync and a couple of weeks later we met again in Nuernberg for three days of hacking and created the KDE frontend for OpenSync. In retrospect it was a very pleasant and straightforward process to get where we are now.

Armin:

My reason to get involved (or better to start) OpenSync was my involvement with its predecessor Multisync. I am working as a system administrator for a small consulting company and so I saw some problems when trying to find a synchronization solution for Linux.

At that point I joined the Multisync project to implement some plugins that I thought would be nice to have. After some time I became the maintainer of the project. But I was unhappy with some technical aspects of the project, especially the tight coupling between the syncing logic and the GUI, its dependencies on GNOME

libraries and its lack of flexibility.

Tobias:

Well, I have been a KDE PIM developer for several years now, so there was no way around getting in touch with synchronization and KitchenSync. Although I liked the idea of KitchenSync, I hated the code and the user interface [...]. So when we discussed to switch to OpenSync and reimplementing the user interface, I volunteered immediately.

Can you tell us a bit about your further plans and ideas?

Cornelius:

The next thing will be the 1.0 release of OpenSync. We will release KitchenSync as frontend in parallel.

Armin:

There are of course a lot of things on my todo and my wishlist for opensync. For the near future the most important step is the 1.0 release, of course, where we still have some missing features in OpenSync as well as in the plugins.

One thing I would really like to see is a thunderbird plugin for OpenSync. I use thunderbird personally and would really like to keep my contacts up to date with my cellular, but I was not yet able to find the time to implement it.

Tobias:

One thing that would really rock in future versions of OpenSync is an automatic hardware detection mechanism, so when you plugin your Palm or switch on your bluetooth device, OpenSync will create a synchronization group automatically and ask the user to start syncing. To bring OpenSync to the level of `_The Syncing Solution [tm]_` we must reduce

the necessary configuration to a minimum.

What was the most dire problem you had to face when creating OpenSync and how did you face it?

Cornelius:

Fortunately the problems which I personally would consider to be dire are solved by the implementation of OpenSync which is well hidden from the outside world and [they are] an area I didn't work on ;-)

Armin:

I guess that I am the right person to answer this question then :) The most complicated part of OpenSync is definitely the format conversion which is responsible for converting the format of one device to the format that another device understands.

There are a lot of subsystems in this format conversion which makes it so complex, like conversion path searching, comparing items, detection of mime types and last but not least the conversion itself. So this was a hard piece of work.

What was the greatest moment for you?

Cornelius:

I think the greatest moment was when, after three days of concentrated hacking, we had a first working version of the KDE frontend for OpenSync. This was at meeting at the SUSE offices in Nuernberg and we were able to successfully do a small presentation and demo to a group of interested SUSE people.

Armin:

I don't remember a distinct "greatest moment". But what is a really great feeling is to see that a project catches on, that other

people get involved, use the code you have written and improve it in ways that you haven't thought of initially.

Tobias:

Hmm, also hacking on OpenSync/KitcheSync is much fun in general, the greatest moment was when the new KitchenSync frontend synced two directories via OpenSync the first time. But it was also cool when we managed to get the IrMC plugin working again after porting it to OpenSync.

As we now know the worst problem you faced and your greatest moment, the only one missing is: What was your weirdest experience while working on OpenSync?

Cornelius:

Not directly related to OpenSync, but pretty weird was meeting a co-worker at the Amsterdam airport when returning from the last OpenSync meeting. I don't know how high the chance is to meet somebody you know on a big random airport not related at all to the places where you or the other person live, but it was quite surprising.

Tobias:

Since my favorite language is C++, I was always confused how people can use plain C for such a project, half the time you are busy with writing code for allocating/freeing memory areas. Nevertheless Armin did a great job and he is always a help for solving strange C problems :)

Devices and Programs

Now I'd like to move on to some more specific questions about current and planned abilities of OpenSync. As first, I've got a personal one:

I have an old iPod sitting around here. Can I or will I be able to use a program utilizing OpenSync to synchronize my calendars, contacts and music to it?

Cornelius:

I'm not aware of any iPod support for OpenSync up to now, but if it doesn't exist yet, why not write it? OpenSync makes this easy. This is a chance for everybody with the personal desire to sync one device or another to get involved.

Armin:

I don't think that there is iPod support yet for OpenSync. But it would definitely be possible to use OpenSync for this task. So if someone would like to implement an iPod plugin, I would be glad to help :)

Which other devices do you already support?

Cornelius:

At this time, OpenSync supports Palms, SyncML and IrMC capable devices.

Which programs already implement OpenSync and where can we check back to find new additions?

Cornelius:

On the application side there is support for Evolution [GNOME] and Kontact with KitchenSync [KDE] on the frontend side and the backend side and some more. I expect that further applications will adopt OpenSync once the 1.0 version is released.

Armin:

Besides kitchensync there already are a command line tool and a port of the multisync GUI. Aside from the GUIs, I would really like to see OpenSync being used in other applications as well. One

possibility for example would be to integrate OpenSync into Evolution to give users the possibility to synchronize their devices directly from this application. News can generally be found on the OpenSync web site www.opensync.org.

Technical Dive

So far for questions for users. I think it is time to give the developers something to devour, too. I'll keep this as a short twice-fold technical dive before coming to the takeoff question, even though I'm sure there's information for a double-volume book on technical subtleties.

As first dive: How did you integrate OpenSync in KitchenSync, viewed from the coding side?

Cornelius:

OpenSync provides a C interface. We wrapped this with a small C++ library and put KitchenSync on top. Due to the object oriented nature of the OpenSync interfaces this was quite easy. Recently I also started to write a D-Bus frontend for OpenSync. This also is a nice way to integrate OpenSync which provides a wide variety of options regarding programming languages and system configurations.

And for the second, deeper dive: Can you give us a quick outline of those inner workings of OpenSync, from the developers view, which make OpenSync especially viable for application in several different desktop environments?

Cornelius:

That's really a question for Armin. For those who are interested I would recommend to have a look at the OpenSync website. There is

a nice white paper about the internal structure and functionality of OpenSync.

Armin:

OpenSync consists of several parts:

First there is the plugin API which defines what functions a plugin has to implement so that OpenSync can `dlopen()` it. There are 2 types of plugins:

A sync plugin which can synchronize a certain device or application and which provides functions for the initialization, handling the connection to a device and reading and writing items. Then there is a format plugin which defines a format and how to convert, compare and detect it.

The next part is a set of helper functions which are provided to ease to programming of synchronization plugins. These helper functions include things like handling plugin config files, HashTables which can be used to detect changes in sets of items, functions to detect when a resync of devices is necessary etc. The syncing logic itself resides in the sync engine, which is a separate part. The sync engine is responsible for deciding when to call the connect function of a plugin, when to read or write from it. The engine also takes care of invoking the format conversion functions so that each plugin gets the items in its required format. If you want more information and details about the inner workings of OpenSync, you should really visit the opensync.org website or ask its developers.

Takeoff

To add some more spice for those of our readers, whose interest you just managed to spawn (or to skyrocket), please tell us where

they can get more information on the OpenSync Framework, how they can best meet and help you and how they can help improving sync-support for KDE by helping OpenSync.

Cornelius:

Again, the OpenSync web site is the right source for information. Regarding the KDE side, the kde-pim@kde.org mailing list is probably the right address. At the moment the most important help would be everything which gets the OpenSync 1.0 release done. [And even though] I already said it, it can't be repeated too often: OpenSync will be the one unified syncing solution for the free desktop. Cross-device, cross-platform, cross-desktop. It's the first time I feel well when thinking about syncing ;-).

Armin:

Regarding OpenSync, the best places to ask would be the opensync mailing lists at sourceforge or the #opensync irc channel on the freenode.net servers.

There are always a lot of things where we could need a helping hand and where we would be really glad to get some help. So everyone who is interested in OpenSync is welcome to join.

Many thanks for your time!

Cornelius:

Thanks for doing the interview. It's always fun to talk about OpenSync, because it's really the right thing.

Armin:

Thank you for taking your time and doing this interview. I really appreciate your help!

Tobias:

Thanks for your work. Publication

and marketing is something that is really missing in the open source community. We have nice software but nobody knows ;)

Further Information on OpenSync can be found on the OpenSync Website: www.opensync.org

This Interview was done by Arne Babenhauserheide in April 2006 via e-mail and KOffice on behalf of himself, the OpenSource Community, SpreadKDE.org and the Dot (dot.kde.org). It was first published on the Dot and is licensed under the cc-attribution-sharealike-license. A pdf-version with pictures can be found at [opensync-interview.pdf](#) (OpenDocument version: [opensync-interview.odt](#))

Today in History

325 - The First Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council of the Christian Church, was formally opened in present-day Iznik, Turkey.

1498 - Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived at Calicut, India.

1570 - Cartographer Abraham Ortelius issued the first modern atlas.

1862 - U.S. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act into law.

1927 - By the Treaty of Jedda, the United Kingdom recognized the sovereignty of King Ibn Saud in the Kingdoms of Hejaz and Nejd, which later merged to become the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

May 20 is Armed Forces Day in the United States (2006); National Day in Cameroon (1972), Independence Day in East Timor (2002)

Quote of the Day

"Love is like some fresh spring, first a stream and then a river, changing its aspect and its nature as it flows to plunge itself in some

boundless ocean, where restricted natures only find monotony, but where great souls are engulfed in endless contemplation."
~ Honoré de Balzac

Word of the Day

ctenophile; *n*

Definition

1. A lover of combs.

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