



Linux Manipur

- Free as in freedom -

As we enjoy great advantages from the inventions of others,
we should be glad of an opportunity to serve others by any invention
of ours; and this we should do freely and generously.
--Benjamin Franklin, (1791)



What is Linux Manipur?

Linux Manipur is a virtual organisation, where main interaction is done via the internet. Primary aim is to make awareness of Linux or Free* and Open Source Software in Manipur and the North East, help and guide the students and computer users, share knowledge, discuss technical problems etc.

It's a not-for-profit group, and by not-for-profit it does not mean we are an NGO or something of its kind; we get no funds. Whatever we do, putting in our time, energy and money, we are not doing it for any profitable business. We do it for the love of freedom (of software), ethics, sharing, excellence... and most of all for the love of Manipur, doing things in little ways we can.

There is no physical office or staff. We got together as a group voluntarily about two years ago, striving to spread technical knowledge, raising awareness about the need to spread knowledge. There are about 200 people connected via our mailing list**. There is no boss or president of that sort in this group; everybody in the group came forward on their own voluntarily; for any work or activity anybody who takes the initiative takes the lead with some general opinions from the core team for crucial decisions. About 20 people who are scattered across the country and abroad, and about 5 people who are based in Imphal form the core team of this group. Anyone who is active and takes initiatives becomes a part of the core team. In the past in Imphal, we have conducted free workshops, seminars and installation demos. Among the members who reside across the globe we exchange technical knowledge, we help each other in technical problems, we share knowledge.

We are now trying to reach out to the newer generation of Manipur from the hills and valley alike, who are living on the razor's edge - somewhere in between their world of hopes/dreams and the state of our homeland which is getting paralysed in every front; to show them what Computers and Linux is all about, and guide them whenever they need us.

** **Free software** is a **matter of liberty, not price**. To understand the concept, you should think of **free** as in **free speech**, not as **in free beer**.*

*** **Linux Manipur Mailing List** – a list of e-mail addresses of people identified by a single name, such as linux-manipur@yahoogroups.com. When an e-mail message is sent to the mailing list name, it is automatically forwarded to all the addresses in the list. Mailing lists are an easy way for people to share professional and technical information: hackers often set up ad hoc mailing lists so that they can collaborate on a single piece of programming. It is also possible to join mailing lists devoted to special topics and social and leisure interests.*

What is Linux?

The awareness of Linux in Manipur is discouragingly low.

To make it simple, let's put it this way. Whenever we put on the computer in our offices or homes, we see the screen displaying "Windows". That's what is called as the "operating system"; it is a bunch of programs that are needed to run the computer (i.e. the hardware). Windows and other operating systems like Mac OS, AIX, HP-UX etc are examples of what is called as 'proprietary software'. In proprietary software, the product knowledge or the source code (program instructions in their original form) is not given to the user, and the user should also pay license fees to use them.

The licenses for proprietary software are designed to take away our freedom to share and change it, the license fees are also very costly, and to use without license is a criminal offence. The user is at the hands of proprietary software vendors. By contrast, the licenses of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) are intended to guarantee our freedom to share and change free software - to make sure the software is free for all its users.

The hurdle we have to cross in Manipur is 'ignorance', a lot of people don't know about Free and Open Source Software. 'GNU/Linux' or popularly known as just 'Linux' is a prominent example of FOSS.

Linux is a product of the Internet era. In contrast to proprietary operating systems, like Windows which have been developed by highly paid programmers employed at corporations, Linux has been developed virtually by an informal, world-wide network of unpaid (but highly skilled and motivated) volunteers who communicate via the internet, for the love of sharing, for the love of technical excellence.

Some few things that everybody should know about Linux are:

1. It is free software; anybody can download it from the internet. Or buy the CD for some hundred rupees, or borrow it from friends and make copies of it, and install it on any number of computers without any limitation. For Microsoft's Windows you have to pay about Rs 4000/- as license fees to install it in one single computer. You may say you got for it free of cost from friends and shops that sell pirated CDs, but in the eye of the law you are a criminal, since their licenses don't allow you to do that.
2. The source code (the programs) is available and anybody can modify it to suit their needs. This serves the most important ethics of programming - sharing of the source code, rather than hiding it.
3. It is more powerful, more secured, more reliable, more stable.
4. Non Quantitative Issues:
 - a) Freedom from control by another
 - b) Protection from licensing litigations
 - c) Flexibility
 - d) Social/Moral/Ethical Issues Innovation

To the Schools/Colleges

School/College is where people come to learn. They should opt for Linux, which is economical and superior in many ways. Most of all, the open access to the source code gives the students the opportunity to study how computers really work rather than to just learn how to use them.

Students should:

1. at least, be given the opportunity to see how their new tools work.
2. be given the opportunity to examine the inner workings of software.
3. be given the opportunity to extend the functions of their tools, where they see or imagine possibilities.
4. not be held back by locking the toolbox of the Information Age
5. not be told that they must:
 - a) not peer inside
 - b) not try to discover how it works
 - c) not share their tools with others
 - d) not use their tools without paying money to the software overlords, under penalty and punishment of law.

To the University/Boards/Authorities

Many educators are convinced that it is far more important for students to study computer science fundamentals than to practice specific applications. One reason is that computer science fundamentals will still be valid many years from now, whereas the specific application programs, especially the proprietary ones that do not conform to industry-wide standards, are constantly changing and those currently in use will likely become obsolete in a few years time. It is high time that our authorities include GNU/Linux in the syllabus of schools and colleges of Manipur.

Special note to the students

Don't do tablets/drugs; don't go for CBZ bikes, instead get yourself a cheap computer, even if it's a used and outdated one. Install Linux, do lots of self teaching, slog the night, make your feet wet, and shoot us mails if any problem arises. Don't be scared, think that your computer is just a toy and you are playing it. If your school/college is shut down, if the bandhs are frequent, don't loose your spirit, you can learn lots without sitting in the classroom. The source code is with you, you can do wonders with it. Welcome to the Matrix, Welcome to the world of Free and Open Source Software.

Please visit our site www.linux-manipur.org, please feel free to ask for help/support/guidance by joining our mailing list at <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/linux-manipur/> or by just sending a mail to linux-manipur-subscribe@yahoogroups.com