

Making Wikipedia popular, in Bengali

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The Bengali Wikipedia has finally found a foothold in the city with their first meet-up organised on Dec 11, upon the Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales' insistence. It is amazing to note that with more than 21,000 Bengali articles, with about 2,000 being rated as belonging to 'good quality', there are only 10 Bengali Wikipedians (contributors to Bengali Wikipedia), who log in daily to add their voluntary contribution to the world's largest encyclopaedia. Two of these, Jayanta Nath, civil engineer and Bengali Wikipedia administrator; and Arnab Dutta, a college student, are from Kolkata. The third is from Nadia apart from another six in Bangladesh and one from USA.

A small gathering of Wikipedia enthusiasts turned up for the meet-up, sharing facts and problems they face on Bengali Wikipedia. Currently, there are about 15,000 registered Bengali Wikipedians around the world, of whom 150 are active. "The existing Bengali



articles are not software translated, but are manually done by the contributors. But of the 21,000 articles, about 90% are either stubs, or erroneous, or not written from a neutral perspective," informs Indranil Das Gupta, founder, Kolkata Linux User Group, and English Wikipedia contributor.

According to the active users, there is a lack of awareness about what and how can people work on the Bengali Wikipedia. "The Malayalam



Wikipedia users, to spread their language's Wikipedia, used the medium of an offline CD comprising 500 good Malayalam articles. They distributed this CD to about 7,000-8,000 schools in Kerala with help of the government. Now, they have about 350 regular users, as against the mere eight-nine users they had prior to the awareness campaign," adds Indranil.

Bengali Wikipedians cannot replicate the same for want of a standard keyboard to be used for the Bengali font. "Unlike in Kerala, here we do not have any governmental initiative on pushing computer education in Bengali," informs Indranil. Such attention, to

one of the world's richest languages, is also, what the Wikipedians are trying to draw the attention to.

As of this day, the English Wikipedia has about 75,000 India-related articles. The volunteers are also trying to raise awareness on the fact that Wikipedia is trying to bring alive 'dead' languages like Sanskrit, Pali and Latin.

Finally, Indranil quashes the "validity" criticisms Wikipedia has against it. "Just because it is an Open Source Software (OSS), does not mean it cannot be trusted. People do not know that about 70 % of the world's websites, including Google, Gmail and Facebook are on OSS."