Ray, a computer science engineer, has recenly graduated from NIT Hamirpur.

"When I first got a computer at home in early 1999, I was fascinated by the amount of creativity that it offered. That is how I got interested in software," he says.

He always had a tough time deciding the perfect structure for his music folder. "There were albums in media players, but I needed a way I could quickly browse the collection on the filesystem and play any random song using some lightweight player like XMMS or MPlayer," he says.

Ray was also looking for some interesting program that he could hack on with his limited knowledge of programming on the GNU/Linux systems. "Songanizer was the perfect answer. Basically, we both scratched each other's itch."

While a simple hack can achieve amazing results in the world of software, what is also impressive is the way youngsters from India are increasingly getting roped into the world of global Free Software projects.

Patrick Ohnewein was the original author of Songanizer, Juergen Kofler wrote a Python implementation of the Bash script and Ray is the maintainer. This software

Debarshi Ray

is aimed at those who have a tough time arranging their song directories and yet do not want those kitchen-sink-like media players. The reason being, although the more popular media players come with in-built collection managers, they all have a much higher memory footprint. Under the circumstances, Songanizer is the perfect tool that can partner with lightweight media players like XMMS, BMP or Mplayer.

"Even with an album in a media player, being able to view the songs in a file manager (say Nautilus or *ls* on the command line) is always helpful. Songanizer provides multiple hierarchical views of the same collection of songs, making it easier for users to sift through their collection," he adds. **END**

By: **Frederick Noronha.** *The author is a Goa-based freelance journalist, who writes on Free/Libre and Open Source Software. He has co-founded a voluntary, not-for-profit and unfunded group Bytesforall.org and can be reached at fred@bytesforall.org*

Tux Finds a Dragon Buddy

The tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has realised the many merits of OSS as it gears up for the information age. LFY chats up Pema Geyleg, head of the research division of Bhutan's Department of IT (DIT), to bring you these exclusive bytes.

What is it that brings happiness? As one ponders over this inescapable question, the words of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, fourth monarch of Bhutan, ring in my ears. When confronted with a question from a British journalist about the slow pace of progress in his country, King Wangchuck famously remarked that Gross National Happiness was more important that Gross National Product.

That was in 1987. Modern Bhutan is a hotbed of economic activity—a nation eager to make its mark in the emerging world order. Recently, the Indian media was awash with images of Bhutanese youngsters learning the ropes of the BPO industry. This is definitely no mean feat for a country that was introduced to television, as late as 1999. The nascent IT industry in Bhutan is also gearing up to grab a chunk of the outsourcing pie, and with its growth, the country is experiencing the benefits of FOSS, first hand.

As LFY struck up a conversation with Pema Geyleg, who heads the Research Division—DIT within Bhutan's ministry of Information and Communications, it became amply clear that open source technologies are playing a major role in the country's awakening to the digital era. Geyleg reveals that the bulk of the servers in Bhutan are Linux-powered, with Fedora and Debian being the distributions of choice. "These servers rely on open source applications like Apache, MySQL, Squid, Squirrel and Qmail," he elaborates.

The website of the Department of Information Technology, http://www.dit.gov.bt, is powered by PHP, MySQL and Ruby on Rails, all open source projects. Also on the cards is an OSS-powered digital library, which the department plans to roll out at http://e-bhutan.net.bt. Besides, almost all the desktop systems at the DIT have now been migrated to Debian Linux. The use of open source applications like Firefox and Thunderbird is being encouraged, wherever it is not possible to phase out Windows completely.

Over the years, one of the major achievements of the DIT

Pema Geyleg

helps bring down the TCO for IT solutions, offers greater security and encourages fair competition." Geyleg feels that for a country like Bhutan, saying, "No!" to proprietary software is a strategic decision. He says, "OSS/Linux nourishes the indigenous IT talent, enables technological self-reliance and conserves the Forex that would otherwise be spent on software imports."

Enumerating some of the roadblocks that the DIT encountered, Geyleg complains that the documentation for some open source projects leaves a lot to be desired. Setting up certain hardware like wireless and Bluetooth devices with Linux gave his team a hard time. "It is high time we had some out-of-the-box drivers to facilitate these tasks," he says. Further, the lack of technical resources trained in FOSS technologies in Bhutan, proved to be a problem as the team progressed with the project.

Geyleg feels that developing a well-thought out FOSS policy should be the first step of any migration project. "This policy must lay down a process for the migration, and suggest which components need to be deployed and in what order," he explains. Educational institutes, he believes, have a big role to play in popularising Free Software. He also emphasises the importance of localisation, and says it is possible to reach the masses only through their own language.

Linking FOSS to a higher sentiment of voluntary contribution, Geyleg shares that his involvement with the community has helped him meet people of diverse nationalities and values. "I really adore the OSS movement, since it motivates people to contribute their best without giving a thought to monetary gains," he adds. He's been in touch with a lot of open source developers from India, and urges them to carry on their good work. An ardent reader of LFY, he makes it a point to buy a copy whenever he is on a tour of Nepal or India.

Geyleg welcomes queries related to OSS adoption at pema.geyleg@gmail.com, but adds that he is pressed for time, and might not be able to respond to all e-mails. Sharing his vision for the future, he says his department is engaged in training people on open source technologies. "We are targeting five groups of users—government servants, private IT vendors, students, teachers, monks and general users— who will be trained over the next three years or so," he unveils. The DIT is also planning to implement a country-wide migration to FOSS, and to develop the localised editions of more OSS applications. Attempts are also being made to involve as many students as possible in these initiatives, so that the progress in the IT sphere is sustainable through indigenous expertise. And will that boost the GNH? Well, wish them luck and let the dragon decide!

has been the Dzongkha Localisation Project. Funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre, the project entails the development of a customised edition of Debian Linux in Dzongkha, the official language of Bhutan. Throughout this initiative, Sherubtse College [http://sherubtse.edu.bt] and the Dzongkha Development Commission have supported the DIT. Dzongkha Linux, as the distribution has been christened, comes complete with localised GNOME and popular OSS applications like OpenOffice.org, Mozilla Firefox and Thunderbird translated into the language.

The version 1.0 of the distribution was made available to the public in June 2006. Version 2.0, due for release in July 2007, will comprise two separate CDs—a live CD based on Morphix (Dzongkha Linux 2.0) and the installable Dzongkha Debian Linux based upon Etch, the latest stable release of Debian. The latest goodies from the project are available at http://dzongkha.sourceforge.net and http://e-bhutan.net.bt.

The three years spent on this localisation project convinced the DIT top brass that Linux had tremendous potential—both as a server, and desktop platform. Geyleg shares the credit with Tenzin Chhoeda, director—DIT, and Sangay Wangchuk, deputy director—DIT, who spearheaded the department's shift to OSS. Justifying their collective decision to embrace Tux as a long term buddy, Geyleg sums up its virtues with the ease of a seasoned analyst: "Linux

By: Samartha Vashishtha. *The author is a poet, intermittent journalist and open source enthusiast. An online anthology of his creative outpourings can be accessed at http://www.samartha.tk. For a living, he works as a Senior Technical Writer with HCL Technologies, Chennai.*