

India State to Dump Windows for Linux

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(AP) -- A southern Indian state plans to switch all school computers from Microsoft Windows to the free Linux operating system, an official said Thursday.

The changeover on computers used in some 12,500 high schools in the state of Kerala is set for Friday, and teachers are being trained on the new software, said the state's education minister, M.A. Baby.

The state is ruled by communist politicians and its top elected official, Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan, has long been a supporter of free software, railing against the dominance of Microsoft's Windows when he was a state legislator.

However, Baby insisted that the state government has no grudge against Microsoft specifically.

But Achuthanandan was keen to develop the state as a "free and open software systems destination," Baby told The Associated Press.

"It is our stated policy that only free software should be used for IT education in Kerala's schools. The government is introducing Linux based software as tools to teach various subjects," Baby told the Associated Press on Thursday.

The decision to switch to Linux came after free software guru Richard Stallman, founder of the open-source GNU software project, visited Kerala two weeks ago, and persuaded officials to discard proprietary software, such as Microsoft, at state-run schools, Baby said.

Despite the denials that Microsoft was the target, opposition leader M.A. Shahnawaz, of the Congress party, said he believed the decision was based on the communists' opposition to the software giant's products.

He cited the communists' opposition to a Microsoft-supported computer training program that the Congress party enacted in 2002 when it ruled the state.

"I think schools should be given the option to choose whether teachers are to be trained in Linux systems or Microsoft," Shahnawaz said.

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