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Asian trio in deal to replace Windows

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 Special to CNET News.com

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Three North Asian countries are closer to signing a deal to codevelop an open-source operating system to replace Microsoft Windows, according to a Japanese news report.

The agreement is likely to be announced this week by Japanese Trade Minister Takeo Hiranuma at an economic ministers' meeting in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, the report in Japan news daily Nihon Keizai Shimbun said, quoting unnamed sources.

The deal is expected to bring together China, Japan and Korea in efforts to develop the software. Representatives from both private and government agencies will meet later this year to discuss the collaboration's terms, according to the report.

In Asia--as in other parts of the developed world--open-source software such as Linux has mostly marginal use in the data center, being used in smaller, noncritical file, print and e-mail servers.

It is likely that this new effort requires international cooperation, because it aims to develop open-source operating systems for nontraditional uses. Critical database and transaction servers at the core of the data center and the desktop PC are areas Unix and Windows operating systems respectively dominate.

The reliability, scalability and security of open-source platforms in critical servers are largely untested, though firms such as database software maker Oracle have been touting the suitability of their own versions of Linux for such tasks. On the desktop, user-friendliness and file-compatibility issues dominate, when companies consider moving away from Windows.

The move to **jointly develop a server operating system that's based on Linux** began in March with a meeting in Thailand of more than 100 software engineers from the three countries.

The group included representatives from universities and from regional companies like Sharp and Toshiba.

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All three countries already have thriving Linux software developer communities--especially for embedded Linux, the operating system used in devices such as television set-top boxes and industrial machines.

The three governments previously pledged to support open-source software, citing **security and cost concerns**. The current row over claims by The SCO Group that Linux **uses code lifted from SCO-owned Unix** does not seem to have dampened official enthusiasm for the platform, though the governments are expected to continue to closely monitor the situation. Japan this month **reaffirmed official support for the platform** and encouraged its industries to continue using it.

A recent survey by research firm **IDC** revealed that more than 50 percent of Asian servers run some flavor of Microsoft Windows. Although Linux is installed on only 6 percent of Asia-Pacific servers, it enjoyed the highest growth rate last year--more than double that of the next-fastest, Unix.

CNETAsia staff reported from Singapore.

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