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Microsoft Warns Asian Governments of Linux Lawsuits

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SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Microsoft Corp. warned Asian governments on Thursday they could face patent lawsuits for using the Linux (news - web sites) operating system instead of its Windows software.

The growing popularity of Linux -- an open-source software that is freely available on the Internet and easily modified by users -- is a threat to the global dominance of Microsoft's Windows.

Linux violates more than 228 patents, Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer said at the company's Asian Government Leaders Forum in Singapore. He did not provide any details on the alleged violations, which the Linux community disputes.

"Someday, for all countries that are entering the WTO (World Trade Organization (news - web sites)), somebody will come and look for money owing to the rights for that intellectual property," he added.

Software developer SCO Group Inc., which claims that Linux is based on its Unix (news - web sites) software, is suing companies including IBM.

Singapore's Ministry of Defense last month switched 20,000 personal computers to run on open-source software instead of the Microsoft operating platform.

Other governments in the region are also looking to use more open-source software. China, Japan and South Korea (news - web sites) this year agreed to jointly develop applications running on Linux.

The Chinese government, in particular, sees its reliance on Microsoft as a potential threat. Conspiracy buffs believe certain patches in the Windows code might give U.S. authorities the power to access Chinese networks and disable them, possibly during a war over Taiwan.
Ballmer said the security fears some governments had about using Microsoft software were overblown.

"We think our software is far more secure than open-source software. It is more secure because we stand behind it, we fixed it, because we built it. Nobody ever knows who built open-source software," he said.