

ON ITfC LETTERHEAD

To
The Hon'ble Secretary
IT and Communication Department
Government of Rajasthan

Subject: Specification of proprietary software in scheme for purchase of laptops for meritorious students

Dear Sir,

We read in the newspapers about your clarifications relating to the technical specifications in the tender regarding the purchase of laptops for meritorious students in Rajasthan. We think that some of your statements may have an unintended element of error and we would like to clarify the same, so that the noble intentions of the Government in designing this scheme can be met.

Firstly, there is a difference between using computers in an office and using computers for learning. In the latter case, we need to see it as an educational process and **educational principles and policies** need to drive the procurement and not the regular IT policies.

From an educational perspective, IT is to be seen as a curricular resource and like all curricular resources, it needs to allow the user/teacher/student to freely share and modify the same. Proprietary software prohibits such free sharing and modifying and hence is unsuited for students on educational grounds. Free and Open Source Software allows free sharing and modifying and hence is aligned to the educational principles. This is acknowledged by several policies on education, including the “**MHRD's National Policy on ICTs in School Education**”, which has been accepted by CIBE, the national body of which the Education Minister of Rajasthan is a member. Dr Vinod Raina, eminent educationist and member of the Central Advisory Board of Education, an advisory body to MHRD, said “*The decision of the Rajasthan Government violates the National Policy on ICT in School Education passed by the Central Advisory Board for Education.*”

The national policy says “*A software environment favouring a pedagogy of learning which promotes active learning, participatory and collaborative practices and sharing of knowledge is essential to nurture a creative society. Free and Open Source Software – operating system and software applications will be preferred in order to expand the range of learning, creation and sharing.*”

It is also not true that Linux is difficult to use, students learn it very easily and education is about learning. **Linux is used all over the world and medium to large states like Kerala, Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have used Linux successfully in their education programmes.** We work with thousands of teachers and students in Karnataka using Linux software and many feel that Linux is much easier to use than Windows. **That Linux is difficult to use is a propaganda of the proprietary software manufacturer who stands to gain crores of rupees on the basis of such false beliefs. However we would like you to consider if public funds be unnecessarily spent based on such false propaganda.**

Using FOSS will be of huge help to students in this programme for the following reasons

1. Hundreds of educational software can be installed along with Linux on the laptop, which will benefit students. Kerala and Karnataka are doing this for last many years and students

and teachers are hugely benefitting from this. **The tools include PDF editors (hence no need for Adobe Writer), mathematics, science, social science and language learning FOSS applications.** For a list of such free educational software applications, visit <http://public-software.in/PS-educational-tools> – all these tools are free to share and can be loaded into the Linux operating system by the vendor. These are all being used in Kerala and Karnataka for many years now.

2. **Linux is virus resistant.** This means the procurement can save crores by not choosing Windows. **More importantly it can spare students spending on annual virus fees, which would be a burden on them due to selection of Windows by your Government.**
3. **CDAC** is supporting education departments to install Linux and educational tools in schools and can also provide any help needed for your programme.

Eminent educationists across the country have written to the Education Minister and Chief Minister asking him to reconsider the decision, and the letter and our press release are enclosed with this letter.

In case you need any clarifications or further information, do let us know and we would be happy to help. We think that opting for FOSS in the place of proprietary software is necessary on pedagogical and economic grounds and to comply with national educational policy.

Yours Truly,

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Copy – Chief Minister, Government of Rajasthan

February 26th, 2013

Enclosed:

1. Letter to the Minister of Education, “Specification of specific proprietary software in the tender document for purchase of laptops”
2. Press release

These documents are also available on our website http://itforchange.net/Letter_Rajasthan_government_Laptop_purchase_feb2013