

The official remarks from Dr.C.Chandramouli, Secretary to the Government, Information Technology Department, Government of Tamil Nadu.

At the outset the Government of Tamil Nadu appreciates the fact that a sub committee has been constituted to look into the concerns regarding Tamil language encoding and commends the UNICODE Consortium for convening a meeting of this sub committee at Chennai. This is a good augury.

Tamil is the official language of the State of Tamil Nadu, India. The State Government is in the process of digitizing millions of records in Tamil as part of its e-Governance effort. Such a massive undertaking requires careful consideration of the encoding system. Several points emerge in this regard. Firstly, the system should be error free; secondly, it should be efficient; thirdly, it should be unambiguous; fourthly, the outcomes from the system should stand the test of legality and finally it should allow ease of use. The system should also stand the test of time and ensure document integrity. Such considerations play a strong role in considering an all character encoding for Tamil language computing.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has been working towards formulating an all character encoding since the Tamil Net '99 conference. The all character encoding scheme has been put through various tests since 2000. Since the results were encouraging, the Government has initiated the process for considering TACE-16 as the State standard for Tamil encoding.

To ensure the usage of TACE-16 in different applications and to obtain the views of the Tamil Diaspora this encoding was put in the Private User Area of Unicode. The comments received were discussed in a conference held in September 2006 at Chennai. The conference recommended that TACE-16 be rigorously tested in applications like publishing, e-governance, browsing and natural language processing. Accepting the consensus arrived at in this Conference, a task force of experts was formed under the Chairmanship of Dr. M. Ananadkrishnan. The Task Force has met 13 times so far.

The Government of Tamil Nadu along with representatives from the Government of India also appraised the UNICODE consortium of the concerns regarding Tamil language computing and the steps initiated in this regard during its Meeting in May 2007. It is heartening that the UNICODE consortium has constituted a sub committee to look into these concerns in greater depth.

The final report of the expert committee is keenly awaited by the Government of Tamil Nadu. The preliminary results of the various tests that have been conducted are encouraging and the Government is committed to evolve a more error free, efficient and legally sustainable standard for Tamil Language computing. Given that Tamil is also the official language of several other Nations like Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, and Mauritius and that Tamils reside in over 90 countries of the world, the Government is keen to ascertain the views of all stake holders. For this purpose, an international conference is proposed to be conducted in 2008. Thereafter, steps will be taken to adopt a new standard for Tamil language. Efforts will also be undertaken to convince the international domain registry to support the new encoding standard for Tamil. The Government is aware that a change would entail a number of teething problems. However the Government is willing to chalk out a suitable migration strategy that would ease the transition.

The Government is keen to find an acceptable solution to the long lasting problem and welcomes all initiatives towards this end.

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