

From,

To,

The Honourable Chief Minister
Government of Karnataka
Vidhana Soudha,
Bangalore 560 001

Sir,

Sub: Opposition to the Letter of Intent with Microsoft

I am aware that the Karnataka Government has signed a Letter of Intent with Microsoft to implement e-governance and paper-less government offices in the state. Such an arrangement with a multinational corporation will only serve its purpose of establishing monopoly. In addition, it will also mean that the government has joined hands with attempts of multinationals to denigrate Kannada language. I hereby urge you to take action to immediately cancel the Letter.

Microsoft has a history of showing disrespect to Kannada language through its software. It has committed a series of blunders in Kannada utilities in its operating systems. First, it provided incorrect Kannada letters for Unicode standards in its operating system XP . Though these inaccuracies were pointed out by thousands of Kannada software engineers, Microsoft did not take up any corrective measures other than trying to push the issue under the carpet. Even when it released the new edition of its operating system Vista , it did not correct these blatant errors.

Also, many mistakes were found in the Kannada Language Interface Packs (LIP) of its operating systems. Microsoft is not aware of using language appropriately. It strings together different words in an absurd fashion and describes them as directions to perform different actions. These mistakes have been pointed out several times but the mistakes have remained. These mistakes were found in XP 's LIP also. The same mistakes are now found in Vista also. Many Kannada software engineers have spent considerable time and energy in pointing out the errors and have made efforts to make sure that correct Kannada language reaches consumers. Appallingly, Microsoft has refused to acknowledge the blunders and has retained all the mistakes.

Microsoft has already established monopoly in the computer market. As is customary of such monopolies, it is operating only from a business point of view and is not considering the perspective of its consumers. This attitude is best reflected in the way in which it has not taken into consideration the need to correct the mistakes.

In the Indian context, the government is the largest consumer of software. If the government, which has implemented Kannada as the official language, purchases Microsoft products, it would mean that the government has given its approval for all the mistakes. Microsoft 's Kannada would inadvertently become the state 's official language. In other words, the government would be perpetuating all the blunders committed by Microsoft and giving it official status. If, on implementation, the government terms the language as unfit for use in official use, bureaucrats, who desist from using Kannada software, would continue to correspond in English and use English for all official purposes. This would defeat the purpose of implementing Kannada as the official language. In the long run, this government would thereby gain posterity for single-handedly discrediting Kannada language.

Even from the business perspective, choosing Microsoft products is not a good decision. Microsoft 's business model is famously called lock-in. This lock-in model is notorious in more ways than one. Once a consumer uses Microsoft products for generating, collecting and processing data, the consumer cannot migrate to other software and has to spend considerable amounts of money for version upgrades. On similar lines, if this Letter of Intent is implemented, it is easy for Microsoft to keep the government in its stranglehold. The government, which generates collects, generates and analyses large quantum of data, will not only be able to transfer the data onto other operating systems but would also be spending substantial amount of taxpayer 's money on version upgrades. This would be akin to feeding Microsoft with taxpayer 's money, a grave injustice meted out to the public.

To prevent such a situation, the government should choose a software that allows data migration easily. Using Free/Libre and Open Source Software (FLOSS) would not only provide flexibility but also resolve the issue of monopoly. FLOSS provides a bouquet of services and at competitive prices. As FLOSS provides timely and appropriate alternatives, unnecessary expenditure on software upgrades can also be reduced. Due to all the reasons listed above, it would be prudent on the part of the government to immediately cancel the Letter of Intent with Microsoft. By canceling the Letter, the government would be sending a strong message against monopoly and also upholding free software. More importantly, it would protect Kannada language from being denigrated at the hands of multinationals.

Yours truly,

Copy:

1. Honourable Governor, Raj Bhavan, Bangalore
2. Secretaries, Departments of Information Technology, Bio-technology, and Science and Technology, Government of Karnataka.

Reference : <http://savekannada.googlepages.com>