THE ✺ HINDU

Date:21/08/2003 URL: http://www.thehindu.com/2003/08/21/stories/2003082103640400.htm

Southern States - Tamil Nadu

TN to push for improving Unicode standards

By K. Ramachandran

CHENNAI Aug. 20. The Tamil Internet 2003 (TI2003) conference, beginning here on Friday, is expected to provide a forum for State officials to impress on the Unicode consortium to provide "more space for Tamil character codes" for improving the interchange of Tamil Text in the electronic and Internet media.

Organisers of TI2003 note that the number of characters defined for Tamil in the present Unicode standard is not enough to render the entire Tamil script in computers.

The State Government is a member of the Unicode Consortium, a non-profit organisation promoted by global IT giants, research organisations and universities. It develops and promotes the use of Unicode standards — a universal character encoding standard used for representation of text for computer processing. It provides a consistent way of encoding multilingual plain text for electronic text interchange.

The meet, to be inaugurated by the Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, at the Anna University, is hosted by the Tamil Nadu Government. Anna University, the Tamil Virtual University and the Kanithamizh Sangam (a forum of Tamil computing enthusiasts) have organised the deliberations, with support from the International Forum for Information Technology in Tamil. Tamil Internet conferences are promoted every year by the INFITT.

Although the focus of this year's meet is "IT for Education in Tamil," the organisers hope to address several pending issues on technology and application in Tamil, in IT-based education and language reform.

The TVU Director, M. Ponnavaikko, told *The Hindu* that the Unicode standard had over 65,000 slots for encoded characters in about 40 languages worldwide. But one-third of the slots still remained unassigned. Rendering Tamil script demanded the assigning of at least 320 slots to represent all characters in the language. Now only 128 slots were assigned to Tamil. "We are requesting for more space on 16 bit encoding level for all characters in Tamil."

The conference planning executive, M. Anto Peter, said the meeting would have 22 sessions. A total of 59 papers would be presented by 68 authors on different facets, mainly pertaining to IT education in Tamil, use of information learning technologies for teaching and learning Tamil. About a dozen experts from the United States, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Malaysia and Germany would, among others, present technical papers.