Kerala Legislative Assembly Migrates Smoothly to Free Software

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When the Hon. Speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly made the announcement on 16 July 2014 that the KLA had transitioned to Free Software Platforms for its business, it represented a significant milestone for not only for the IT Department of the Niyamasabha, but also for ICFOSS, the Free Software Community and Free Software Enterprises in Kerala.

The Kerala Legislative Assembly (KLA) uses a significant amount of computing for its routine business, which is marked by large volumes of text, extreme time-sensitivity for completion of the work, and exacting requirements in layout and content. On an average day during the Assembly Session, over 500 pages of text—most of it in Malayalam—are entered by more than 80 operators from the 8 branches of KLA, laid out to the KLA standards, proofread, printed and produced in a book form before the end of the working hours. Given the fact that these records represent the formal record of the proceedings of the House, the importance of these documents cannot be understated.

The KLA Secretariat decided to transition its large workforce to Free Software platforms several months ago, in response to the policy of the Government of Kerala to move to Free Software. The move was accentuated by the withdrawal of support for Windows XP by the vendor, whereupon the GoK had brought out an order directing all departments to consider migration to Free Software.

KLA approached ICFOSS for technical support for this migration. The original request was for training users in GNU/Linux which was pre-loaded in the new PCs supplied to KLA. ICFOSS provided initial training to the users and then moved on to the larger task of transitioning the day-to-day business of KLA to FS platforms. For this, it used the services of Zyxware Technologies, an ICFOSS-empaneled company that provides different services in the Free Software domain. The transition took 3 months of work by a team to complete.

"Free Software migration of the Kerala Legislative Assembly was a prestigious project for ICFOSS. Despite several challenges—both technical, relating to the complexity, volume and speed, as well as human resource-related, such as retraining staff and re-engineering workflows—we were able to implement the transition well in time for the present Assembly Session. With this, we are confident that we can address migration challenges for any other Government Department", said Satish Babu, Director, ICFOSS.

"Many institutions and individuals resist migration to Free Software because of fear, uncertainty and doubt about the feasibility of such migration. Once there is a clear sense of direction, and a technology partner who understands the requirements, it is very much possible to implement this migration", said Sooraj Kenoth, IT Consultant from Zyxware Technologies, which oversaw the technology transition.

"Further, this achievement has been enabled by Malayalam computing tools provided by community initiatives like Swatantra Malayalam Computing (SMC) and the Libre Office Community.", he added.

"The major credit for this achievement goes to IT department at the Niyamasabha, who stuck to their decision to migrate despite all the difficulties en route. Their willingness, passion and to adopt the new system was remarkable.", said Thomas P. Thomas, CEO, Zyxware Technologies.

Earlier, in response to the Government Order directing Departments to move to Free Software, ICFOSS had come out with a handbook to be used by any department that wanted to migrate. In addition to its activities such as R & D, FOSS Human Resources Development, Advocacy and Pre-incubation services, ICFOSS has been also playing a significant role in developing computing tools and technologies for Malayalam computing on a variety of platforms from desktop PCs to SmartPhones and tablets.