



The m-governance initiative will go a long way in ensuring transparency at the check-posts to the benefit of all traders getting their merchandise transported across the State's border.

Kerala is fully equipped to change over to the goods and services tax (GST) regime from the beginning of 2010-11, if the Union Government can work out a consensus on it among the States. E-filing and e-payment facilities, introduced earlier this year, will help Kerala ensure a smooth transition from the existing system to the new one. All that remained to be done in the State was put the officials through a round of training.

Being a state receiving bulk of the items for its consumption from other States, Kerala will benefit to a much larger extent by the GST system since it envisages transferring a portion of the tax collected at the manufacturing end to the State that consumes the goods. On the flipside the State will lose out on the purchase tax revenue, which will be too

minimal, from items such as rubber produced here and consumed by other States.

It is, however, unlikely that the GST regime can be introduced by the beginning of the coming financial year, since there are differences of opinion among the States about its broad format. The system basically aimed at doing away with several kinds of levies on goods and services, charged by the Union government and the State governments, and bringing them all together under a single new levy that will be shared by the governments. Kerala is of the view that the Union government should hand over excise and service taxes entirely to the States. The revenue from these sources now accounted for only 20 per cent of the Centre's tax receipts. The Finance Commission can work out a formula

to adjust the States' share of the Central taxes accordingly.

The Commercial Taxes Department is getting ready to launch by the second week of January a mobile phone based Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) to receive complaints and initiate action for the eradication of problems such as official harassment at the check-posts. This m-governance initiative will go a long way in ensuring transparency at the check-posts to the benefit of all traders getting their merchandise transported across the State's border. It will also help the department identify weak links at the check-posts and thereby initiate action to improve efficiency.

The IVRS system will enable an aggrieved trader to dial a toll-free number, which will be announced

Share for Welfare Measures



later, to register a complaint by mobile phone anytime during the day or night. The complaint can be presented in English, Malayalam, Tamil or Hindi. The system will recite the complaint back to the caller in his or her own voice and, on re-confirmation, provide the complainant a docket number.

The complaint will be transcribed at the call centre that will be operated under the system and transmitted by e-mail to the Deputy Commissioner having jurisdiction over the area from where the complaint has come from. The official will immediately look into the issue and post the details of the action taken on the department website. The complainant will receive the reply over SMS too. The complaint and the action taken report will be made available online to top officials of the department and also the Finance Minister on a daily, weekly and monthly basis for the purpose of monitoring the goings on in the field. Mob ME, a Techno park company operating in the field of mobile media and entertainment, has designed the IVRS for the Commercial Taxes Department.

A demonstration of the working of the system has already been done to the traders and officials who

attended a workshop recently. The system's launch is tentatively fixed for January. The government will thus ensure for the traders a transparent tax collection mechanism. At the same time, the government will not relax the measures it has been taking to prevent tax evasion.

A socially secure state

Government is thinking of enhancing welfare pensions. By enhancing and expanding welfare pensions, the Government intends to change Kerala into a socially secure state in every respect. The welfare pensions were increased twice after the Left Democratic Front Government had come to power. The earlier practice of leaving the pensions pending for months together had changed. But the government wants to do more and will give priority to further strengthening the welfare measures, of which the welfare pensions constituted only one of the elements.

The one month's pension for the aged should at least be sufficient enough to buy one month's rice. More social groups will be given rice at the rate of Rs.2. Public Distribution System will be strengthened.

Insurance coverage should be enhanced by expanding the health insurance scheme. The coverage of health insurance too will be extended to all the BPL families in the State. The government has also brought in a provision to enable the APL families to join the scheme on the payment of the insurance premium. Stress should be given to safeguard the mentally and physically challenged children.

Though the last budget declaration that pension would be given to those crossing sixty and were not entitled to any kind of pension schemes, could not be materialised. The absence of pension distribution schedule is the reason for this. It is decided to prepare a uniform pension schedule of the people availing any kind of pension in the State. We will demand the Centre to select Kerala as the first state to implement the unique identification number project introduced by the Central Government.

Welfare projects cannot be implemented by borrowing money. Non tax income should be enhanced. Rs.200 crore is expected to collect this time from selling sand from the reservoirs. If this becomes Rs.600 to Rs.700 crores, welfare schemes can be implemented without borrowing money. ■