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New tool to help traders

Special Correspondent

Complaints via IVRS system

M-governance plan for transparency at check-posts

Trader can dial a toll-free number, register complaint

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: 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.

Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac on Tuesday said that this m-governance initiative would 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 would also help the department identify weak links at the check-posts and thereby initiate action to improve efficiency, he said.

Dr. Isaac was speaking at a workshop organised for explaining to the traders the proposed shift at the national level from the present system of taxation to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) system. The workshop was also for consultation between the traders and the Finance Department before the preparation of the next budget due in February 2010.

The IVRS system would enable an aggrieved trader to dial a toll-free number, which would be announced later, to register a complaint by mobile phone anytime during the day or night. The complaint could be presented in English, Malayalam, Tamil or Hindi.

The system would 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 would be transcribed at the call centre that would be operated under the system and transmitted by e-mail to the Deputy Commissioner having jurisdiction over the area from where the complaint had come from. The official would immediately look into the issue and post the details of the action taken on the department website.

The complainant would receive the reply over SMS too, Dr. Isaac said.

The complaint and the action taken report would 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.

MobME, a Technopark company operating in the field of mobile media and entertainment, had designed the IVRS for the Commercial Taxes Department.

The company's representatives gave a demonstration of the working of the system to the traders and officials who attended the workshop. The system's launch is tentatively fixed for January 11.

Dr. Isaac said the government would thus ensure for the traders a transparent tax collection mechanism. At the same time, the government would not relax the measures it had been taking to prevent tax evasion, he said.

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