

Front Page

News: [ePaper](#) | [Front Page](#) | [National](#) | [Tamil Nadu](#) | [Andhra Pradesh](#) | [Karnataka](#) | [Kerala](#) | [New Delhi](#) | [Other States](#) | [International](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Business](#) | [Sport](#) | [Miscellaneous](#) | [Engagements](#) | [Advt:](#) [Retail Plus](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Obituary](#) |

[Front Page](#)



Government plans a range of mobile-based services

T. Ramachandran

20-odd pilot projects under active consideration

Mobme chosen

to help set up

the platform

Services likely to

be launched in

mid-December

KOCHI: From SMS alerts related to electricity and water bills to SSLC and entrance examination-related information, a whole new range of mobile phone-based services are being planned in the coming months, as the State has embarked on a major initiative to get its mobile governance infrastructure in place and scale up the services delivered to citizens through this channel.

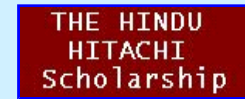
Though a few mobile-based services are already available or have been tried out, like Dr. SMS, under which users in eight districts of the State can get details of medical facilities and doctors available in a locality, they have not been big in scope. The current effort is aimed at creating a scalable platform with SMS gateways, Interactive Voice Response Systems and voice platforms, USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data) solutions, Bluetooth, GPRS (General Packet Radio Service) and 3G gateways for the delivery of a new range of such services involving several departments.

About 20-odd pilot projects are being considered, even as the IT Department and the Kerala State IT Mission are getting an M-governance strategy in place. The services are likely to be launched in phases from mid-December, with one new project being launched a week in the first four months. More services will be added in due course, say those associated with the project. A common short code 53 72 52 – the keys used to input the word 'KERALA' on the mobile keypad – is being proposed to access the services. Mobile services operators will play the key role in making them available to the end user.

The Kerala State IT Mission has already chosen a company, Mobme, to help set up the M-Governance Service Delivery Platform and prepare the strategy roadmap. "The main thing, more than the services, is to have a platform by which in future you can keep adding services one by one, whichever department wants to give it. Identifying these services is also part of the project," explained Principal Secretary, Information Technology, Ajay Kumar.

Initially, SMS services – both in English and Malayalam – will be launched, followed by interactive voice-based services. But the use of Malayalam for SMS will depend on whether the users' handset supports it or not. These services will come at a cost to users.

Besides, the setting up of a common portal will facilitate the use of SMS as an internal communication tool at the departmental level, improve efficiency and reduce costs as far as the government is concerned.



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- Canadian honour for actor Lisa Ray
- Lata Mangeshkar conferred highest French honour
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- Government plans a range of mobile-based services
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- Lakhvi's indictment to be challenged
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Archives

[Yesterday's Issue](#)
[Datewise](#)

Among the different pilot services planned, one set relates to examination and test information and results. SSLC, entrance examination and Kerala University results will be available on SMS. So will changes in examination dates and venues. Lottery results too will be available over the mobile phone. These are likely to be among the first series of services to be launched.

As far as bills are concerned, details of the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) and the Kerala Water Authority (KWA) bills, balance amount, due date as well as payment confirmation are proposed to be made available through SMS. Of these, the KSEB billing information relating to High Tension and Extra High Tension customers is likely to come first. In the long term, consumers should also be able to pay their bills using a mobile phone-based payment system.

Booking of tickets is also a service on the anvil for theatres under the Kerala State Film Development Corporation; one that may be extended to other theatres as well. The Finance department may offer a citizens relations management system, for instance, to deal with complaints made at check-posts.

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[Front Page](#)

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