MESSAGE FROM HON’BLE MINISTER FOR FINANCE
Dr. T.M Thomas Isaac

I am very happy that the SPARK team is bringing out this e-News letter as part of its efforts to strengthen communication and relationship with the stakeholders at a time when Government is planning to develop next generation SPARK as a comprehensive Employee Management Information System. Strong communication and stakeholder relations, in fact, are vital to the effective implementation of any project.

SPARK has come a long way from its initial experimentation days in Finance Department during 2004-2005. The project that started with processing establishment salary bill of around 400 employees of Finance Department, now caters to the diverse human resource management requirements of 119 departments with an employee count of over seven lakh, including regular and temporary employees. It has also established digital process flow with Treasury and the office of the Accountant General. The current services of SPARK are chiefly centred in payroll and allied functions. Now it has been decided to add many major modules to support the administrative process flow and decision making. It will also go paperless to the extend maximum possible.

My humble request to all the stakeholders would to read this news letter regularly and provide your invaluable suggestions to the team behind this initiative for continuous improvement.

I thank and commend the effort and proactive approach displayed by all who have contributed to make the release of this e-News Letter possible.

Wishing all the best,

[Signature]

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Inaugural Issue
MESSAGE FROM PRINCIPAL SECRETARY (FINANCE)
Manoj Joshi IAS

Effectiveness and efficiency in human resource management is vital to good governance. It can be ensured a greater extent through e-Governance. SPARK has been conceptualized in recognition of this relation between good governance and e-governance.

Since its launch in 2005, SPARK has been gradually automating important functions relating to human resource management in government. Now it is getting prepared for the next phase development as a comprehensive Employee Management Information System. In Finance Department, we are always very keen to explore the possibilities of newer technologies in e-Governance. Therefore one could expect a lot of improvements in the next generation SPARK. I am grateful to SPARK implementation team in Finance Department and development team in NIC for taking up technological challenges and implementing it successfully.

We also realize the importance of strengthened communication between implementers and stakeholders in software development projects. This e-News Letter is an attempt in that direction. Through this news letter, Finance Department will be bringing to you updated information on SPARK implementation every month.

Wishing all the best,
The advent of information and communication technology (ICT) during the past two decades has revitalized every aspect of human life and engendered many transformations around the globe. The developments in ICT have also reflected in Government sector with e-governance initiatives. At present e-governance plays a major role in governance. It has dramatically enhanced the efficiency, effectiveness, accessibility and transparency of governance.

Being a forerunner of e-governance implementation in the country, Government of Kerala launched a flagship project called Service and Payroll Administrative Repository for Kerala (SPARK) in 2005 as a comprehensive employee management information system for the state. The project was piloted in Finance Department during 2004-05 before the state wide rollout.

Now the project provide its services to 5,42,220 regular and 1,60,279 temporary employees from 33199 offices under 119 departments. With respect to payroll and other benefits, an average of 21,06,213 bills are being processed yearly through the SPARK system.

Consultative process and planning are in progress to take SPARK to its next generation level of service delivery. In this phase entire HR activities in Government will be automated and analytical tools will be provided to Heads of Departments and other important functionaries for decision making.

Complete integration of SPARK with Treasury software and the office of the Accountant General will be carried out in 2018. It will make the sanctioning and release of entitlements, admission to Provident Fund, Advances from PF, Closure of PF etc as fast as like a core banking environment.

I also like to use this occasion to convey my sincere gratitude to all the employees who stood with us during software changes and switch over and supported us to further improve the system.
LATEST EVENTS

Presentation on Leave and Outstation Duty Management in Secretariat Durbar Hall

A presentation on the Leave and Outstation Duty Management modules in SPARK was conducted at the Secretariat Durbar Hall on February 1, 2018.

The presentation started with the introductory address by Sri. Biswanath Sinha IAS, Principal Secretary (General Administration). After the presentation participants got their doubts clarified. The Principal Secretary requested Secretariat Employees to update their basic data like mobile number, email, present address etc on SPARK. The leave management and outstation duty management modules will be implemented on a pilot basis in Government Secretariat from February 5th and 10th, 2018 respectively.

Majority of Secretariat employees attended the presentation that was conducted in two sessions.

The new modules were introduced by Sri. G. Jayakumar, Senior Technical Director (NIC) in charge of SPARK development.

Both the module are designed for secured and trouble-free usage. Employees can apply for leave and outstation duty either by logging on to the SPARK system using their user name and password or through a home page link using mobile OTP.

All kinds of leaves can be applied, recommended and approved through the system.

Once SPARK is integrated with the software of the Accountant General (Kerala), the entire process like relieving and joining reports, transfer of charge, issuance of slips by the office of the Accountant General etc would be made electronic. The integration work with the AG software is in progress and it is expected to be completed by April, 2018.

Sri. P. Anil Prasad, Chief Project Manager (SPARK), Sri. Girish Parakkat, Manager (SPARK), Smt. Sreeja, Principal System Analyst (NIC), Smt. Raji, System Analyst (NIC) were also present.
Towards Next Generation SPARK; Consultative workshop

The SPARK review meeting conducted by Hon'ble Minister for Finance on 27th November, 2017 has observed that SPARK is originally envisaged as a comprehensive Employee Management Information System and therefore advanced employee management modules, data analytical tools for decision makers, statements to individual employees etc are essential. Accordingly it was also decided to conduct a Technical Workshop to brain storm about a Next Generation SPARK.

As a preparatory step for the technical workshop, a consultative workshop with ten major departments was organized on 22nd January, 2018 at the Centre for Training in Financial Management (CTFM). The workshop was highly productive.

At the beginning of the workshop the purpose of the workshop and the framework for discussions were clearly detailed to the participants by the Manager (SPARK) and Chief Project Manager (SPARK). The basic purpose was a discussion on the next generation requirements in SPARK based on a review of existing features. The entire participants were divided into three groups to discuss the following topics.

1. Additional features required/improvements needed in SPARK for use by Heads of Departments and Supervisory Officers other than the DDOs and Establishment officers already authenticated in SPARK.
2. Additional features required/improvements needed in SPARK for use by DDOs and Establishment officers already authenticated in SPARK.
3. Additional features required/improvements needed in SPARK for use by Individual Users and General Suggestions on improvement.

Each Group was assigned with a Topic from the above to discuss for 45 minutes and consolidate the points of discussion for a plenary presentation. Each group was also given 20 minutes for plenary presentation and discussions thereon.

All the participants were very active in the group discussions and subsequent presentations. They generated an amazing list of modifications and additional features needed in the next generation SPARK. Following are few suggestions from the list:

1. Recruitment planning
2. Analysis of anticipated retirements
3. Budgeting of salary and other benefits
4. Establishing office hierarchy for all departments.
5. Option to carry out all HR activities in accordance with delegated administrative and financial powers of department officials etc

NIC’s SPARK development team comprising of Senior Technical Director, Principal System Analyst and System Analyst were also present during the workshop.

The consolidated suggestions from the workshop will be taken up for further technical discussions and preparing software and hardware architectural designs.
Training for Department Master Trainers (DMTs)

In order to conduct SPARK training across the state and to manage the system effectively, SPARK PMU requires employee participation from all departments. Accordingly it has been decided to engage department officials well versed in Government rules and ICT as SPARK DMT’s (Department Master Trainers) after providing them intensive training on SPARK. These DMTs will be responsible for providing training to SPARK users having various user privileges in their parent departments as well as other departments on demand.

Training becomes quite essential during staff rotation, new appointments, software changes including additions etc.

Recently SPARK PMU invited applications for DMTs and 76 employees applied for the same. A two day training workshop was conducted from 08/02/2018 to 09/02/2018 at Centre for Training in Financial Management (CTFM) for the applicants from Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Pathanamthitta districts. Twenty four employees participated at the workshop.

Participants were given training in SPARK by Sri. Sunil T.K., Master trainer, SPARK PMU. On the 2nd day afternoon a presentation on BIMS by Mr. Shine, Trainer, Treasury Department was also organized. The closing ceremony was attended by the officials from SPARK PMU.

Refresher Training

A refresher training for SPARK users from various departments was also conducted at CTFM from 15/2/2018 to 16/02/2018.
HELP DESK PROCEDURES We are at your service

Well organized systems are in place for facilitating SPARK implementation, providing runtime support, obtaining user feedbacks, develop and update the software. Finance Department implements SPARK through the SPARK Project Management Unit (PMU) functioning under it. SPARK software is developed by the Kerala Unit of National Informatics Centre (NIC).

The SPARK PMU is always very keen to extend its support to SPARK users in all departments as well as better the existing system based user feedback and its own in-house researches. The PMU provides remote and on-site supports through its well trained Master Trainers (MTs), Department Master Trainers (DMTs) and the SPARK Help Desks at District Treasuries. SPARK also has a regional helpdesk in Kannur district to support the northern districts.

Now let us see how various services are provided through SPARK Help Desks. Call, email, chat, direct visit to help desks and on-site support are the existing channels of support.

Call facility

Help through Telephone call is available on all working days from 9.30 am to 5.30 PM. The calls of SPARK users will be attended by a devoted team of experienced Master Trainers stationed at SPARK Project Management Unit. Apart from supporting the users in solving their issues, the Master Trainers also guide them through the best practices in using SPARK. When some issues cannot be solved through telephone call, the MTs obtain further details through email and provide necessary help. The help desk telephone number is (0471) 2579700
e-Mail

Perhaps, e-mail is the best option to forward applications, error reports, service requests that need supporting documents etc. E-mails have to be sent to info@spark.gov.in. Department officials are advised to send email requests from their official email IDs. The messages should be crisp and clear with supporting documents. After examining the email and attached documents, our expert MTs would provide required support and reply the emails with status of the request. The sender shall also be contacted over phone for further clarifications if any required.

Chat

SPARK PMU offers “SPARK LIVE CHAT” option for the SPARK users. Through this chat option users can directly connect with SPARK PMU and can communicate their issues with our expert Chat operators. SPARK LIVE CHAT option is enabled at SPARK login page itself, users can easily get connected with SPARK chat operators. Employees can access the Chat session by entering Name of the employee, PEN and mobile number registered in SPARK. As per users’ feedback, SPARK LIVE CHAT is very effective.

Direct visit to PMU and the Help Desks in the Districts

In rare cases where detailed discussions are required with supporting documents, the official users can also visit the helpdesks at SPARK PMU, District Treasuries and Regional desk in Kannur.

For effective and efficient solving of issues the processing officials themselves should visit the helpdesks with supporting documents.

To avoid overcrowding, there is a token system on ‘first come first serve‘ basis. However we encourage users to make use of the call, email and chat facility to avoid travels.
On-site support

During massive requirements of training in a single office in the event of opening new offices, general transfers etc wherein remote helpdesk support is found to be not sufficient, SPARK PMU sends Departmental Master Trainers to such offices to provide hands-on training.

QUEST; an in-house helpdesk software

An in-house software 'QUEST' has been developed by SPARK PMU to monitor the number of emails, guests, phone calls, chats and the type of queries received at SPARK Helpdesk. With the help of 'Quest' software, SPARK PMU can identify the frequent queries from the stakeholders and it helps in locating the SPARK modules which need modification. On examining the frequent queries, necessary changes or additions can be made in those modules to make it more users friendly. This also helps to record and quantify the number of queries answered by mail, chat and phone at the Help Desk by each person. This software also helps to identify the areas of expertise of each of the SPARK employees and it in turn enables the SPARK higher officials to assign duties to employees based on their area of expertise.

Vital Statistics of volume of transactions and the bills processed through SPARK

SPARK processes the salary, arrear, claim bills of all the state government establishments covering 119 Government Departments, and over 33190 offices spread across the State.

As per SPARK database records, 69730 salary bills, 16170 arrear bills (including DA arrear, Salary arrear and Pay revision arrear), 1506 other allowances bill and 46726 claim bills were processed through SPARK last month.
BEST PRACTICES For using SPARK

e-Governance has amazing capabilities to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, accessibility of any kind of service delivery. However the success of it is heavily depended on the right use by strictly following the user guidelines.

Training
The critical pre-requisite for using SPARK effectively is getting trained properly. Even after undergoing training users may have doubts once they start to use the system independently. All such doubts should be cleared from the experienced and authorised persons. For this purpose SPARK PMU maintains an extensive network of Master Trainers and Departmental Master Trainers. If you find difficulties in following the laid down procedures, the SAPRK PMU should be contacted immediately for formal fresh or refresher training.

Security of user names and passwords
Most e-Governance applications provide separate user name and password to individual users. Keeping the secrecy of it is vital. Any attempt to share own username and password with others or obtain someone else’s username and password is a very serious offence. Therefore SPARK usernames and passwords should not be shared with others including with colleagues.

Keeping user manuals ready for reference
Detailed user manual on all the available modules on SPARK can be accessed from the SPARK info website. Users can also download these user manuals to their computers and keep it there as a ready reference. Following the guidelines itself can make things very easy.

Updated employee data
Within a very short-time SPARK will be introducing digital Service Book. Therefore all the officials are advised to keep employee data always updated in SPARK. Also ensure that vital data like Aadhaar number, mobile number, email ID, contact address etc in respect of all employees are verified and entered into the system.

UPCOMING FEATURES

Finance Department is always committed to enhance the user experience and functions available in SPARK. Following new features are in the top priority list for implementation in immediate future.

E-Service Book
At present Establishment and DDO users in SPARK have to update the physical Service Book and SPARK service book separately. To avoid this duplication of work, a full-fledged digital service book module is being developed in SPARK so that the physical service book can be dispensed with in future. It will be piloted within two months. It will also make getting payslips from Accountant General, PF related procedures etc as fast as a core banking solution.

Digital Signature Implementation
From 2013 onwards, SPARK facilitates online submission of salary and claim bills to treasury. However, it was not able to stop the paper copy of the bill since the integration with the software of the office of the Accountant General was not complete, though AG’s office is already issuing digital payslips directly to SPARK. Now the integration work is nearing completion and hence electronic flow of data between SPARK and AG’s office is expected to be established in a full-fledged manner by April, 2018. As a pre-requisite for the same all the DDOs have to obtain digital signatures, because while sending data from SPARK to AG’s office system, it has to be digitally signed by the responsible departmental officials.

Arrangements for issuing DSC equipments to officials have been made in 2017 through KELTRON and around 30000 officials have obtained it already. In the case of Aided Schools, the Education Department officials are already suing DSC for authorising various claims. The remaining officers are advised to obtain the same without delay.
SPARK e-News Letter

Issue 1: February 2018
e-News Letter from Service and Payroll Administrative Repository for Kerala (SPARK)

ALWAYS WITH THE STAKEHOLDERS; Important software updates

Following are the recent major software updates.

1. **Leave Management Module** for managing the leave details of state government employees enrolled in SPARK system. Employees can apply for any type of leave through this on-line Leave Management Module. Currently it is being piloted in Government Secretariat. Please see the latest event section for details.

2. **Online Outstation duty intimation**: Employees on authorised outstation duty can intimate outstation duty details to their Reporting Officers through the option 'Outside intimation'. Any state government employee who has been enrolled in SPARK system (having PEN) can use this option. Similarly higher officials can approve the outstation duty requirements in advance using this module. Currently it is being piloted in Government Secretariat.

3. **Manual Bill Preparation Module** : SPARK enabled Manual Bill Preparation Module for generating SPARK bills for the period prior to 02/2011. Through this module, DDO can insert the eligible amount by selecting employee details and e-submit the bills to treasury based on the proceedings or order from a competent authority.

4. **Pay revision arrear Reprocessing option** for reprocessing the pay revision arrears of excluded employees, who had been excluded through 'Exclude Employee' option due to excess/ short drawal made in the 1st instalment pay revision arrear or by mistake.

5. **Terminal Surrender arrear (PR 2014) module** updated in SPARK for processing retired employees’ terminal surrender (PR 2014) arrear. In connection with that SPARK has enabled “Manually drawn terminal surrender” option for updating manually drawn terminal surrender details. If retired employee’s terminal surrender processed as non-SPARK bill, then manually drawn terminal surrender details should be updated through “Manually drawn terminal surrender” option for taking the PR arrears of terminal surrender.

*e-News letter circulated among the SPARK users by the Project Management Unit (SPARK), Finance Department, Government of Kerala. Please avoid printing of this document to protect environment.*
### RECENTLY ISSUED IMPORTANT CIRCULARS AND GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Following are the important Circulars and Government Orders with respect to the implementation and use of SPARK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circular No.</th>
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<th>Description</th>
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<td>09/2018/Fin</td>
<td>08/02/2018</td>
<td>General instructions for preparation of Bill in SPARK for the period prior to 2/2011 in the case of employees having PEN.</td>
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<tr>
<td>87/2017/Fin</td>
<td>06/12/2017</td>
<td>Finance Department - Updation of employee details in SPARK database:</td>
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<tr>
<td>77/2017/Fin</td>
<td>19/10/2017</td>
<td>Pay Revision arrears—Second installment—Directions to process the same in SPARK</td>
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This circular issued by Finance (IT-SF) Department, Government of Kerala, details the general instructions for the preparation of Bill in SPARK for the period prior to 2/2011 in the case of employees having PEN.

The currently implemented version of Manual bill preparation (Pre 2/2011), provides provision to enter the amount details (due drawn details) of the claim. System will not do any amount calculation for generating the bill. Instead, the user entered values will be displayed in SPARK generated bill. Hence the Arithmetic accuracy needs to be verified by Bill Signing / Approving authority. Salary/ Salary arrear /DA arrear Bills of employees (including Aided Institutions) with claim period prior to 2/2011 can be prepared through this option. No claims after 2/2011 can be processed through this module. Now onwards, no requests directly from DDO for permission to prefer manual bill / merging with regular salary based on non-Spark bills in the above cases will be entertained by SPARK PMU or Finance Department.

This circular instructs all the DDO’s to update the employee details in SPARK DB. The data fields mentioned in the circular are Aadhaar number, Name as in Aadhaar, Parent Department and Pension Sanctioning authority. These employee details need to be updated in SPARK DB as these details are required for taking Digital Signature certificate for DDO’s, employees’ medical insurance and online pension processing.

This GO give directions for taking second Installment of Pay Revision arrears (including terminal surrender arrear). The points mentioned in the GO are briefed as follows: The second installment can be drawn from the office from where the first installment had been drawn, the employees will be listed in SPARK accordingly. The employees, whose first installment is encashed alone will be listed in SPARK for second installment processing. This GO also stipulates the condition of erroneous drawl cases of first installment pay revision arrears. If excess or short drawl made in 1st instalment, then such cases should be excluded from 2nd instalment pay revision arrear bill generation using “Exclude employee(s)” option implemented in SPARK. User can exclude the erroneous cases (excess/short drawl of 1st instalment pay revision arrear) and proceed with other employees’ bill.