

Knowledge based vision for the future of Kerala

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Precisely eight days back, we saw a historic budget been unveiled in the legislative assembly hall. It is actually painting a vision for the future of Kerala before us. This vision is focused on the theme of knowledge economy, Kerala attaining the kind of heights and position on the international map as the frontier place for knowledge economy.

My thoughts go back to the budget speech wherein I really find that the ingredients of the knowledge economy are beautifully captured. Currently, knowledge economy is a very overused word and is underachieved as well. One of the things that has baffled me about the idea of knowledge economy is that there is no starting point and no ending point. When do we start becoming a knowledge economy and when do we end becoming a knowledge economy? That is a million dollar question and I don't think there is a very definite specific answer, at least in the limited readings that I have done. Therefore, I come to this inference that the whole idea of knowledge economy is a moving target. The target keeps moving and as a society, you got to keep on addressing that transition and dynamically pursue it.

Now in the last few budgets, I would say, you could clearly see that the state has taken some very important steps to finally arrive at a conclusion in this budget 2021-22 that it is time for the state to make this big leap.

Looking at the literature, we can find that Kerala is approaching close to the necessary condition to move towards knowledge economy. Most of the knowledge economy transitions, we find in states, in regions and in economies, where the service sector is a predominant part of the domestic product. And here we have exactly achieved that. The other one is the society that promotes a learning culture. And I can say in Kerala, probably one of the thing that stands out is it's questioning mind, it's discerning mind, it's very insightful mind that the

society in Kerala as such can collectively boast of. The third element is about the society that is willing to make significant investments in higher education. The fourth ingredient I would say is, what is the level of evolution of connectivity in terms of internet connectivity, in terms of telephone connectivity that characterizes the society. I think on all these four ingredients, we are at a stage wherein we will be soon achieving the degree of necessary conditions.

Now, at this juncture, assume a scenario where we would not have focused on knowledge economy. Kerala at some point in time, like any other society, will become a knowledge society. So what this budget, actually does is to compress the gestation period for this big leap and that is where the tricky part comes. It is not an easy job. After the budget was announced, a few of us have been meeting and deliberating about what is the next step.

We are particularly happy that our efforts in the last three years are bringing in innovation in several spheres. We have now about 1000-1500 students selected for their innovative projects. We have a couple of social projects which are happening in various districts of Kerala. We have some innovation programs for the differently abled children, and we have about 20 very high-tech emerging technology initiatives and innovations, that's going on. Perhaps one of the reasons why the Honourable Finance Minister chose K-DISC as a coordinating agency for bringing in the various aspects of skill, or meeting skill deficiencies and improving the skill base of the state perhaps comes out from this recognition. The K-DISC that we are going to get transformed into is going to be chaired by the Honourable Chief Minister, it will comprise of very key ministers of the Council, and it will have the Vice-Chairman of the planning board, the Vice-Chancellors of the universities and the directors and the CEOs of the key skill or research institutions of the state.

Now, over the last eight days I would say me and my colleagues have been trying to find out the appropriate design for a skill portal that will essentially focus not only on conventional skills, but on what are the things that we need to clearly address in when we plan for the transition of the state into a knowledge economy. One of the mandates that the Honourable Chief Minister has given us in the meeting is that we have got to hit the road running and we got to start and launch this program in the first or the second week of February. We are gearing towards organizing a very generic skill platform without getting ourselves logged into rigidities or into specificities, so that the platform can grow organically, interact with the thousands of institutions and local communities in Kerala and probably, be one of the first decentralized skill platforms in the world. That is the aim that we have set for ourselves now.

K.M.ABRAHAM

I am confident and sure that the deliberations of this seminar will be of great and of invaluable strength.

Thank you very much. I wish the seminar all success. Thank you.