

## **Democratizing digital space, prelude to transform Kerala to a knowledge economy**

Pinarayi Vijayan

Chief Minister of Kerala

The government of Kerala has a vision and is committed to turn the same into a reality. Our vision is not a distant dream. But a time bound plan to realise the aims. We cannot wait long. Here and now we start our leap towards transforming Kerala into a knowledge economy. When we say this, it may appear to many that we are day dreaming or being Utopian. It is neither. We have a plan and we need suggestions and expertise to operationalize it. Our budget which was presented on January 15, 2021 had unveiled plans for transforming Kerala into a knowledge economy. When we say, Kerala has to become a destination for good quality higher education, if there are sceptics, they need to take a brief look at our history. They can see the pioneering efforts taken in making primary education universal. Our initiatives in the field of higher education have also a history of one and half century. We have initial comparative advantage like high literacy rates and basic technical skills in certain sectors. We need to start on this and build the base for a knowledge economy.

World is witnessing fast changes. Factories and assembling units, the face of the modern industry have given way to service sector and innovation induced production process. Internet and connectivity have brought about a sea change in the way we work and how work is being organised. One can stay connected and work in tandem with others from his home or any other place of his choice. Certain countries of the world have transformed themselves into knowledge economies and this knowledge diffused fast to other parts of the world. While saying this, I am not ignoring the inequalities of opportunities often called the digital divide, which impede the entry of many into the world of connectivity.

We fully appreciate the fact that the state has to provide the brick and mortar to build the bridge to cover the divide, which has closed the door of the digitalised world to many. The

government of Kerala has recognised access to internet as a citizen's right and is committed to provide free internet to the poor and at affordable rate to others through our project called K-FONE. We recognise that democratizing the digital space is the first step to transform our state into a knowledge economy. We want to encourage research in new and sunrise areas and transform them into innovations which will catalyse our economic growth. We propose to establish centres of excellence in various fields of learning and create an eco-system which will attract best of talents from all over the world. If we could achieve quality schooling, nothing can prevent us from upgrading the quality of our higher education and transform Kerala into a knowledge economy.

People who graduated from our institutions have become world famous. The list is long and I am not venturing into the exercise of citing names. The aim is to make Kerala a destination for quality higher education. I assure you that you have a government that cares for this. I look forward to your valuable suggestions in making our aim a reality in the shortest possible time. I am not elaborating any further. With utmost happiness I declare this meeting open. Thank you.