

Inaugural Address of the Hon'ble Chief Minister on the occasion of the International Meet on Transnational Education at Mascot Hotel, Thiruvananthapuram on 03/01/2014.

I am delighted to inaugurate this Meet of distinguished scholars and academic administrators from many parts of the world, who have gathered here today to discuss matters of common interest regarding trans-national education. I compliment the Kerala State Higher Education Council on this timely initiative. I welcome you to the State of Kerala.

Kerala is known for its achievements in the field of education. We were the first State in India to achieve total literacy and we still lead in this field. We have the best student-teacher ratio in the country. Every village in our State has schools for primary and secondary education. This was made possible by the farsightedness of the rulers of our State, who invested in education over an extended period of time.

Kerala also leads in other quality of life indices. We have reduced child and maternal mortality and a higher expectancy of life at birth. These are also results of improving education of women. A large number of Keralites are living and working outside Kerala and remitting money home and contributing to our economic well-being and welfare. This is also an offshoot of our investment in education.

Yet, with all these achievements, when it comes to higher education, our facilities do not match the best in the country. Kerala is not well known as a destination for top end research except in a few areas. This is partly because we

focused our attention on making both basic and higher education accessible to all, thus failing in achieving quality and creating institutions of excellence. We do not have an IIT in the State and this, too has been a sore point.

I am, however, happy to say that Keralites have not lagged behind in the field of higher education. The best educational institutions seek out our best brains, be it in India or abroad and now we have a large community of highly qualified professionals from Kerala working around the world.

It is in this context that we are having another look at our strategy for higher education. We need to step up our effort to improve the quality of higher education in Kerala and produce centers of excellence in higher education.

Our vision for a future Kerala is that of a knowledge driven economy, be it in services, manufacturing or even agriculture. Only in such a high tech, high value-adding, knowledge-based economy we can achieve the twin objectives of economic growth and preservation of our environment. Only such a growth can be sustainable.

For this we need to give an opportunity for our youngsters to seek top quality higher education here in Kerala. Some ten years ago, thousands of youngsters used to go outside our State to seek a bachelor degree in engineering. By effective policy action, we have created enough educational institutions in Kerala so that there is no need for our students to go out. It is time that we did the same to research institutions too.

We would like to make Kerala a destination for quality higher education for students not just from all over India, but even from outside. We have all the right ingredients to make it happen – a peaceful and secular society, moderate climate and good infrastructure for basic education. Our basic education is not only good value for money but has also produced high quality engineers and scientists.

In our blue print for the future, we have identified six areas for concentrated effort – Infrastructure, Use of technology, Teacher training, Research, Autonomy and Internationalization. We have taken initiatives in each of these areas. A major decision we have taken recently is to recommend academic autonomy to a number of colleges for the first time in Kerala.

The emerging trends in transnational education offer us an excellent opportunity to catch up on the quality of higher education. A combination of globalization and technology is transforming the academic world by making best quality curriculum and training available to students all over the world almost free. We have all the ingredients in place to make transnational education a force to upgrade our higher education.

The fact that our State Higher Education Council is the first among the country to organize a special session, that too an International Meet, goes to show that we are switched on to the latest developments in the academic world. The conclusions of your deliberations will set the background for policy making not just in Kerala, but all over India.

My government is committed to provide all support to the academic players in the State to make a quantum leap in the quality of higher education in Kerala.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you fruitful deliberations in the next three days. I am looking forward to the outcome of these deliberations, which I am sure, will be very useful for the Government.

I wish you all a very happy new year.

Jai Hind.