EDIT O RIAL

Success@1000 Days

Thousand successful days, Implementing Futuristic Projects, Kerala is being rated as Top among the States in the country; it sums up the performance of the UDF government that has completed 1000 days of responsible governance. Close to three years now, the UDF Government under the leadership of Oommen Chandy in Kerala is moving ahead with cherished aspirations and commitment that defines the political as well administrative set-up of the State. So far, the path-breaking initiatives, welfare measures and projects of this government, some of which are at various stages of implementation, have also redefined Kerala's stature among the Indian states. These days, Kerala is reckoned as an upcoming model State in India and finds space in discussions and seminars in various forums at the national and international level.

The flagship projects of the State such as Kochi Metro, Kannur International Airport, SmartCity, Vizhinjam International Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport and Monorail are progressing in a time-bound

1000 Days of UDF Government

manner. The efforts of the government are now being backed by a refreshing work culture that hopes for nothing less than appreciable growth and development of the State.

It is a fact that in the last few years, there has been a spurt in entrepreneurship activity in Kerala. Start-up ventures are coming up all over Kerala. The youth of Kerala are now taking up the mantle of being job creators rather than job seekers. The situation has also led to a host of innovative business concepts and creation of new intellectual property in the State.

For instance, the SV Square project of the government intends to provide the brightest student entrepreneurs, the exposure to renowned entrepreneurial culture of the Silicon Valley, enabling them to become successful back home. In the wake of the completion of 1000 days, Kerala Calling is coming out with the cover story on the next global hub of innovation; that is our own Kerala

Mini Antony IAS
Editor in Chief

Kerala *Calling*

For youngsters pursuing IT dreams anywhere in the world, Silicon Valley is the promised land.
A peep into that that fairyland, no matter for what brief a period, is the cherished dream of any IT whiz kid.

CURRENT

By orienting the benefit of public expenditure to the low income groups and by centring the revenue mobilization on the rich the Finance Minister proved to have walked the talk of his toiling class theory.

COVER STORY

Responsible Tourism model in Kumarakom, is truly a unique concept which links the host community with the hospitality industry and government departments, a perfect model for empowerment and development of the host community in the village through the implementation of sustainable eco-friendly tourism.

TOURISM

FEATURE

കണ്ണൂർ അന്താരാഷ്ട്ര വിമാനത്താവളത്തി
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A K Antony Opens Work on Kannur Airport

Union Defence Minister A K Antony inaugurated the work on the first phase of the Kannur Airport project at a festive function held at Moorkanparamba, the project site. "The airport will solve the backwardness of north Malabar, which remains the most backward area in the state. Presently, Kerala is ready for development and once we expedite infrastructure development, it could overtake any other states in the country. The Kannur International Airport project was a result of the combined effort of all, irrespective of party lines. If such unanimous efforts were made in every development project, the state could really go a long way", the Union Minister said.

More NoRKA advisory panels to be set up

The State government will form more Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NoRKA) advisory committees in Gulf countries for the benefit of the expatriate community, Minister for Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NoRKA) K.C. Joseph said. The decision to set up regional advisory committees was taken after the government took note of the services rendered by other advisory committees in Gulf countries, he said.

"During the Nitaqat implementation phase, they played a vital role in helping those affected. The committees provided support by making workers understand the guidelines to be followed to overcome legal tangles. The State government also planned to open Gulf chapters of the Malayalam Mission to train youngsters in the language. The decision was taken following requests from the Malayali community in the Gulf who wanted the new generation to be adept at Malayalam, the Minister said.

The government was going ahead with the implementation of a comprehensive rehabilitation package for Gulf-returnees. As the government cannot provide jobs to all, the focus will be on encouraging self-employment ventures with government subsidy. The government has received 19,000 applications from Gulf-returnees, expressing willingness to start small-scale ventures. Of this, we have processed 1,000 applications and the selected 157 persons, working in Gulf countries as drivers, will get 10 per cent government subsidy for the purchase of cabs to operate taxi services. The State's budgetary allocation of Rs.50 crore for the rehabilitation of Gulf returnees was laudable. Team of officials has been designated to ensure the fruitful disbursement of this fund after looking into the proposals," the Minister added.

Thiruvananthapuram bags Union government award

The capital city has been selected as the 'best city' in the State for its implementation of various schemes of the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. President Pranab Mukherjee presented the award to Minister for Health V.S. Sivakumar and Mayor K. Chandrika. The city was selected for the award for its efforts in community mobilisation and for using cost-effective technologies in the housing sector under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission. Union Minister for Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation Girija Vyas was the chief guest.

Thampanoor Bus Terminal Opened

"This monumental complex has become the face of the capital city. The transport corporation is not a profit-oriented service and functions for the welfare of people. The government promises all kinds of support for the KSRTC to emerge from the current financial crisis function in a time-bound and efficient manner," Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said while inaugurating the much-awaited KSRTC Central Bus Terminal at Thampanoor. The Rs 65-crore building project was executed under the BOT concept by Kerala Transport Development Finance Corporation (KTDFC) for the KSRTC. The total expense of the project was Rs 240 crore including the cost of the land and construction cost, added the Chief Minister.

Health Minister V S Sivakumar flagged off

the first bus service from the newly built terminal, an Ernakulam Super Deluxe bus. Power and Railways Minister Aryadan Mohammed handed over the first commercial area at the function. The function was chaired by Transport Minister Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan. "This is a

proud moment for KSRTC. Efforts will be given to complete other projects, including the one at Enchakkal. Work will commence soon after the paperwork is over and the project gets clearance. The transport corporation has plans for developing alternative methods to find more revenue. Discussions are being held on launching a parcel and courier service by the KSRTC, the Minister added.

The bus bay will have the facility for 25 buses to start from there simultaneously. There is facility for rainwater harvesting with a capacity of 3.75 lakh litres of water. Waiting rooms, modern toilets, police aid posts and security cameras will also be arranged taking into account the security and comfort of women also.

'More Women Power in Police Force Soon'

'Nirbhaya Keralam, Surakshitha Keralam', the government's ambitious programme to ensure safety of citizens, especially women and children, will be implemented with the participation of Kudumbashree workers, Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala said. Speaking at the valedictory of the two-day seminar on 'Empowering Women Cops' organised the state police, he said the programme would be launched by Union Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde in February.

"The women representation in the police force would be enhanced soon. The government aims to increase the current 5.6 percent of women representation in the state police to 10 percent in two years and to 25 percent by five years. The government will also make the Sub-Inspector recruitment open for men and women. A special recruitment drive will be held to appoint 1,000 civil police officers and 250 Sub-Inspectors soon," the Home Minister said.

More Financial Assistance to Coir Sector

"The coir industry plays a major role in the development of rural areas in the state and a lot of people depend on this sector for their livelihood. More financial assistance should be given to this sector to encourage young entrepreneurs and workers," Minister for Revenue and Coir, Adoor Prakash has said.

The government is committed to improving the industry. "Coir exports from Kerala have touched Rs. 1,150 crore this year from Rs.1,000 crore last year. It shows that the policies formulated and implemented by the government have started to deliver results. We have been successful in finding new markets across the world for our coir products. This year, for the first time, we are exporting a consignment of coir products to Kazakhstan from Kochi," the Minister added.

Kerala Campaign Against Cancer launched

Chief minister Oommen Chandy launched the Kerala Campaign against Cancer. "The state has made progress in the field of cancer prevention and treatment. The state has launched several schemes to provide free cancer treatment to patients. The new scheme being launched by the government would ensure cancer detection at early stages, besides treatment for all. A door-to-door survey will also be conducted to detect the stages of cancer, the CM said.

Health minister V S Sivakumar said the state is well-equipped to treat the mounting number of cancer cases. Cases are increasing in the state when compared to previous years. Breast cancer, ovarian cancer and oral cancer are the three most common cases found in Kerala. If detected at the initial stage, these cancers can be completely cured. Hence the new scheme will focus on this. Steps would be taken to ensure more facilities in the homoeo department to provide cancer treatment, the Minister added.

Air Kerala Dream a Reality Soon

Air Kerala will soon be a reality as Civil Aviation Minister Ajit Singh has agreed to consider lifting of the criteria of five years' domestic experience in airline operations and ownership of 20 aircraft, Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said while inaugurating the construction work of the Rs. 800-crore 15 lakh sq ft international terminal work at Cochin International airport. "Air Kerala is a Rs. 1,000-crore project that the CIAL is envisioning for future development and the government is committed to supporting them.

As planned by the CIAL, a ring road around the airport connecting all panchayats would be made. Bottlenecks, including certain break-off points, would be rectified soon. The state government is forging ahead with the concept of four international airports in the state, and with the starting of the work of Kannur airport, the idea will be turned into reality, CM said. Minister for Fisheries, Port and Airport, K Babu presided over the function. Solar power production of the airport as part of making CIAL a green project was inaugurated by Industries Minister P K Kunhalikutty. Finance Minister K M Mani, inaugurated the 52,000 sq ft state-of-the-art dutyfree warehouse. PWD Minister V K Ebrahim Kunju inaugurated CIAL Gold Academy while Food and Civil Supplies Minister Anoop Jacob inaugurated Integrated Airport Management System for making the airport paperless, another endeavour into green venture.

Kerala's Infrastructure is Expanding: P K Kunhalikutty

"Our infrastructure is expanding. A Technology Innovation Zone is being set up in Kochi, and ICT technology centres are proposed in every district. With the completion of ongoing works at various IT parks across the state, the IT infrastructure of the state will be enhanced drastically in the coming years which would attract massive investments," said IT Minister P K Kunhalikutty during the dedication of Technopark Phase III.

Technopark provides direct employment to more than 45,000 professionals. Over 1.5 lakh people get benefited indirectly. In the next one year, Tata Consultancy Services will add 10,000 employees; Infosys, 4000; and UST Global, 8,000. This will help boost export revenues from Technopark which touched Rs. 4,500 crore during the last year. The last two years, the government has taken steps to handhold IT companies and focused on providing global exposure to SME companies, the Minister said.

M K Sanu awarded Ezhuthachan Puraskaram

Literary critic M K Sanu, popularly known as Sanu Mash, was awarded state's highest literary honour Ezhuthachan Puraskaram 2013. Chief Minister Oomen Chandy presented the award to M K Sanu. The award carries a citation and a purse of Rs 1.5 lakh.

"The contributions of personalities like M K Sanu has enriched Malayalam. Sanu mash has made distinctive contributions to literary field like criticism and biography. Ezhuthachan Puraskaram is a worthy recognition for him," the Chief Minister said. Culture Minister K C Joseph presided over the function.

Literature, basically, is about giving voice to the unexpressed emotions of human beings. Literature unveils the frozen sadness buried deep inside minds and the role of critic is to identify it in a literary work," said M K Sanu.

Efforts On to Make Kerala a Fully Digital State

The state is making all efforts to become 100 per cent digital state in the near future. The state implemented many prestigious initiatives in the past like e-district, e-tendering, Aadhaar enrolment etc and most of the departments have already embraced e-governance in one form or the other to achieve this ambitious target, Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said while inaugurating the 17th National Conference on e-Governance at Kochi.

He added that the government is moving ahead with the implementation of e-office in order to bring in more administrative effectiveness and transparency. "The state government is committed to ensure that the benefits of various strategic initiatives of the governments such as the Right to Information Act, direct beneficiary transfer of scholarships and subsidies, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Right to Service Act etc reach the right beneficiaries on time in a hassle-free manner. Akshaya Centres play a pivotal role in disseminating various government services and schemes to the needy. Kerala was one of the first states to implement the online RTI facilities for the public under e-district project," the Chief Minister added.

Sutharyakeralam turns 100

Development package for coastal areas

Formalities for the construction of houses for 7,500 fish workers' families will be completed by February 15, Fisheries Minister K. Babu said. The State would implement a comprehensive development package for the coastal regions of the district, said the Minister after inaugurating three new small-industrial units under the second phase of the Sustainable Poverty Alleviation and Reformation of the Sea-belt Area of Marad (Sparsam) project.

The State would finalise housing schemes wherein fish workers would get land as well. Local bodies could be approached to find land for the construction of flats for them. The government was aware of the lack of adequate living spaces for fish workers in the district, especially in places such as Vellayil and Marad in the Beypore area. The Sparsam project, rolled out some years ago to soothe the communal tensions in Marad by creating self-employment opportunities for local women, had floundered due to severe financial crunch. Three of the units had been closed down and its machinery idling. The new units would deal with a variety of enterprises - from ornamental fish farming to soap and candle manufacturing. This would send a positive signal among the members of the community, the Minister added.

By orienting the benefit of public expenditure to the low income groups and by centring the revenue mobilization on the rich the Finance Minister proved to have walked the talk of his toiling class theory.

The Finance Mini

The 12th budget presented by Finance Minister K.M. Mani in the Assembly on the 24th January lays stress on improving primary sector productivity, welfare of farmers, enhancing the entrepreneurial talents and employability of the youth and health facilities spotlighting the less privileged classes. The Finance Minister has presented the budget in the backdrop of lowest rate of economic growth of the country over the last one decade, revenue receipts falling below expectations, growing revenue expenditure and the impending parliament election. Though many expected that the budget would be full of pacifiers and sops and with no tax proposals to woo the voters, the Finance Minister was successful in maintaining the mystery of the climax. Proving him to be for the business of growth and welfare, criticisms fell feeble on the additional revenue mobilization through tax rate hike.

Cheer to the Agricultural Sector

Though agriculture is the livelihood of majority of the people, its contribution to state's economy has been decreasing gradually for the last many years. It has been a good theme for politicians, poets, so called social activists, environmentalists and a plethora of still others for ludicrously much ado for no end result. Alas! Lo, K M Mani scores. During the last five years, the cost of fertilizers, agricultural equipments, wages to labour have almost doubled. But Agriculture production and price of agricultural products have not increased commensurately. Moreover, the climatic changes and lack of support from financial institutions, forced the farmers to leave this sector.

In Kerala, 96 percent of the farmers are cultivating in small holdings of land having area less than one hectare.

12th Budget

ster's day

Issues in the sector can be solved only by ensuring increased production using modern agricultural techniques. A leap in the agricultural sector can be achieved only by making available the benefits of advanced technology to all farmers. With this aim a scheme for converting Kerala as a high-tech agricultural State by providing sufficient support for training and extension for hi-tech farming methods was announced in the budget.

Under this scheme, Master Hi-tech Agricultural Trainer's training will be provided at state level to selected Agricultural graduates and Botany graduates, by utilizing the services of the experts in national level institutions including the Swaminathan Foundation and with the service of such trainers, district level training will be given assuring availability of two to four trainers in each local body. Subsequently free training will be given to all farmers in the state who are interested in hi-tech farming with the help of local self government institutions, krishi bhavans, financial institutions including co-operative banks and rural development offices. Interest free advance upto 5 lakhs with the support of financial institutions will be provided to such trained farmers to undertake hi-tech farming.

The agricultural produces from hi-tech farms will be marketed through the State Horticulture Corporation. Krishi bhavans will provide required training, estimates for construction and management of Green Houses to selected farmers/organizations. Benefits such

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as loan upto 90 percent of the project cost, 25 percent subsidy, free electricity, building tax relaxation, all assistance through Agri Cards etc are promised for the promotion of hi-tech agriculture in the state. The Finance Minister walked the talk by earmarking Rs 200 crore for the purpose.

Income guarantee to Farmers

The government would foot 90 per cent of the premium for the income guarantee scheme covering 25 major crops. An amount of Rs.50 crore had been allocated for the scheme targeting farmers holding up to 2 hectares of land. K M Mani said the insurance scheme would ensure fair returns for famers. Agriculture production sector can be revitalized only by creating an environment which ensures that farmers are getting fair returns against the actual cost of production.

A sum of Rs.964.82 crore was allocated for production, procurement, and distribution of crops as well as agricultural research. Another proposal is to give free laptops to all girl students, who secure admission to professional courses, belonging to BPL families and those having agricultural land below one hector or paddy farm below 2.5 hectors. Another major proposal is to set up small scale food processing units to manufacture value-added products from crops such as jackfruit, mango, and tuber crops. The Minister said this would generate new jobs, contribute to food security, and avoid wastage of farm produce. Training and financial assistance

would be provided under the Entrepreneurship Development Mission.

The agriculture production of Kerala accounts for about 16 percent of our actual requirements. An attempt is seen initiated in the budget to reduce the extent of the deficit of food products by promoting food crops including paddy, tuber crops, fruits and vegetables by encouraging the local bodies to take more initiatives through production and distribution of high yielding seed and seedlings, food processing industries, tissue culture etc. If the local bodies utilize more than 15 percent of their plan outlay for agricultural development, matching grant equal to the amount spent over 15 would be incentivized.

Measures with the help of local bodies to make high yielding seeds and seedlings available at affordable cost to farmers according to local requirements is another vital announcement in the budget. At least one high yield seed/seedling production unit will be started in each Block Panchayath. This scheme will be implemented through selected farmers with the help of Kudumbasree/Janasree/Grihasree and Employment Guarantee Scheme. It will be supervised by the Committee formed under krishi bhavan. Rs.15 crore has been allocated for the project.

Market intervention

The Budget promised farmers that the government would intervene in the market to ensure fair price in the event of a downturn leading to a crash in price. Rs.50 crore was allocated for the purpose. Global Agri Meet to be held in Kochi to attract investments in agriculture and food processing an initiative to introduce the 'Made in Kerala — Safe to Eat' brand as a premium label marketed in association with the Confederation of Indian Industry, initiatives of the state government to contract tie up with the Railways and shipping companies for an ambitious scheme to market coconut, banana, and pineapple crops throughout India and the Middle East, special package for arecanut farmers in Kasaragod, proposal for the setting up of agri malls with Central assistance.

Along with measures for increasing agricultural production and productivity, better marketing facilities are also required for the development in Agricultural Sector. Despite the presence of many agencies, the marketing of agricultural produce is yet to gain strength. Taking cue from MILMA, at least one agricultural co-operative society will be formed in each development block area as a first phase to market agricultural produce benefitting farmers and consumers. Interest free loan upto 5 lakh on personal surety of members, will be provided for three years to procure and market agricultural produce. Full interest subsidy will be given for prompt repayment. An amount of Rs 10 crore was set apart for the purpose.

Water Rich Kerala

The Finance Minister may have to be appreciated for his visionary measure for undertaking the water conservation program for without water not only agriculture but the very existence is in peril. Despite Kerala being a state with highest rainfall, due to our peculiar topography of high land, midland and coastal region, over 96 percent of the rain water flows to the sea within hours. Due to this, the hill area as well as the coastal zone is equally experiencing scarcity of water during non rainy seasons. More than half of the population of the state does not have access to public water supply system. Water borne diseases and epidemics still create problems in

the State. In order to resolve this issue, arrangements have to be made for water conservation. The scheme announced in the budget provides for financial assistance upto 50 per cent of the project cost to the Local Self Government Institutions and to the individuals for constructing check dams in the rivers, streams and canals. It also envisages access to technology for ensuring purity of water to the common people, steps for awareness creation about the need for hygiene water and water borne diseases. Rs 100 crore was provided for this scheme in the budget.

Encouragement to small scale food processing industries through special training and financial assistance, loan waiver in the event of death of the head of family, laptop to the girl children of small farmers who secure admission for professional courses, award for agriculture based industries, subsidy for vertical farming, global agri-meet, plan to develop centres of excellence for development of horticulture, floriculture, dairying and piggery in association with Central Government and the Government of Netherlands are some of the announcements in the budget for the promotion of agriculture in the state.

Education and Employability

Social and development expenditure got a boost in the budget. The second highest emphasis was seen given for the promotion of education and employability. Rs. 13713.5 crore was set apart for education sector for the coming year. It is Rs. 3182.48 crore higher than the allocation for the previous year. The far cry about the education especially higher education of the state is about its quality and ineffectiveness for making the youth employable. The budget appears to have assigned due emphasis to address this issue both in terms of resources and innovative schemes.

For the promotion of entrepreneurship talents among students at school level and students from degree to research level three awards each at district and state level were instituted. It includes cash award, certificates, further training facilities under the self entrepreneurship programme, loan facilities and grace marks. Individuals as well as groups of 5 students are eligible for the award. The Finance Minister deserves to be admired for encouraging the young talents to think beyond paid jobs in the corporate, public sector or abroad.

Though appears to be innocent the new scheme for generation of skills for the youth by setting apart one percent of the total budget provision for employment generation schemes remains to be path breaking and innovative. Its impact is going to be felt only in due course. The youth of Kerala will remember K M Mani for his unswerving and inventive ideas and schemes for talent creation and employment generation.

Growth with Employment

The income and opportunities in the traditional labour have been coming due to cost escalation, meltdown in the market share, inadequate financial support etc. A new programme is envisioned in the budget to make loan facilities at concessional cost available to them through banks including co-operative sector. Rs 10 crore was set apart for the scheme.

Presently, about 500 services in Government departments and agencies can now be accessed through designated web portals and Akshaya centers. It is proposed in the budget to make available 400 more services through the electronic mode during the next year. In addition, e-file system would also be introduced in government offices with a view to improve efficiency and transparency in governance. This programme is

expected to generate about 10000 new employment opportunities in the State.

More than 2 lakh small scale industrial units are there in Kerala now and new units start at an average rate of 15percent every year. The growth of this sector is of vital importance for State's economic growth and for the creation of employment. With a view to simplifying the procedural formalities for starting new small scale industrial units, the budget proposes to introduce a system by which necessary approval will be made available on the strength of self certification.

Another area of promising potential for employment is tourism sector. More than a crore tourists are visiting Kerala every year. As per the latest figures, this sector generates an income over Rs. 20,000 crore and provides employment for about 10 lakh people. But the growth of this sector also stands affected owing to the economic slowdown as well as low infrastructural facilities. Rs 40 crore was allotted for the promotion of tourism sector in the current budget. Earmarking Rs. 50 crore to develop six prominent tourist locales in the State including Fort Kochi has revived the hope of better days for the heritage locale which is now in a pitiable condition.

Gender Fresh

In continuation of the self entrepreneurship programme announced earlier another scheme to enhance the employment prospects of women entrepreneurs was announced in the current budget. Benefits under the scheme will be available to the individual, groups and organizations of women. It envisions free training, stipend, financial assistance upto 80 percent of project cost through bank loans with a moratorium period of six months and 75percent interest subsidy, managerial subsidy of 2 percent for the first 5 years, concessions

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for advertisement of products, marketing assistance for the products etc. With a view to promote student entrepreneurship, 5 percent grace mark was also asserted. Rs 10 crore was earmarked for the scheme.

It is welcome shift to acknowledge that Kerala is far behind other states in India in the field of skilling the government Sector. In order to fill the gap a new residential Industrial Training Institute was proposed to set up at Kozhikode. A technical training centre in the PPP mode was put forward at Thiruvananthapuram under the aegis of Kerala Skills Excellence Academy for imparting training and technical knowledge in the field of Aviation and related skills. Recommendation is also available to initiate a skill development centre with emphasis on 3 D techniques and fibre optics. Rs 20 crore is earmarked for this end.

Infrastructure

Mini civil stations at Kattakada and Idukki, additional block for civil station at Konni, bypasses at Edava and Varkala and a flyover at Kottayam figure among the projects sanctioned for the Public Works Department that has been allocated Rs. 883.10 crore in the budget. The Rs. 5,337-crore Kochi metro rail got a boost when the Budget declared waiving of Rs.250 crore the project would have incurred as contract tax. Long-pending road, bridge and flyover projects in Ernakulam, however, did not find mention in the Budget.

Though the Budget did not specifically earmark funds for flyovers, the Public Works Department (PWD) hopes to get funds from State government's Rs.10,000-crore Sustainable and Planned Effort to Ensure Development of Infrastructure (SPEED) programme announced a year ago. Rs. 17.32 crore has been set apart to modernise KSRTC bus depots and workshops, and to build new bus stations and garages.

Stakeholders welcomed the announcement of a feasibility study on transporting hazardous bulk cargo such as LPG, ammonia and chemicals through the State's waterways since they are at present transported through narrow, accident-prone roads. Setting apart Rs. 98.69 crore for ports development would give a fillip to development of minor ports.

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Health for less privileged

The total budget allocation for health sector was enhanced to 5110.39 crore from 3643.84 crore in the last year, an increase of 40 percent. The Finance Minister made it clear that his priority is to make better health care facilities available to all at affordable costs. The thrust offered to health insurance programmes and for creating facilities at public health sector are unprecedentedly high and extensive. However, the cost of the same would definitely impinge on the fiscal health of the exchequer. One of the programmes announced in the budget this sector is health insurance for all small farmers in the state.

Government have already provided free Health Insurance to people who are in the BPL category. The budget now proposes to extend this benefit to all small scale farmers who possess agricultural land below 2 hectares. 50 percent of the cost will be borne by the public exchequer. Rs 50 crore was provided for this scheme. It will be implemented through the Insurance Department of the State Government.

Push for Cancer Care

The emergence of cancer as a major health problem in the State found a mention in budget. Creating awareness about cancer and facilities for its early detection and treatment were listed as a priority for the government in 2014-15. Extending cancer detection facilities to all districts and engaging a team of specially trained doctors and nurses in all districts for early diagnosis and treatment will be a major priority. Rs.10 crore was set aside for the initiative's preliminary phase. Awareness programmes will be taken up in every panchayat with help of local bodies, health workers, and Accredited Social Health Activists. Medical camps will be arranged in all panchayats. Initiating treatment for those detected with cancer, continued care, and rehabilitation of patients will be taken up in stages. The Regional Cancer Centre gets an annual grant of Rs.40.45 crore, and an allocation of Rs.18 crore for facilities for early diagnosis of cancer.

For children

Arogyakiranam scheme, launched by the State government last year, offering free treatment to all children till

the age of 18 years in government hospitals, without APL/BPL divide, will get going this year, for which the Finance Minister has allocated Rs.10 crore. Diseases of children not covered under the Rashtriya Bal Suraksha Karyakram, a Central scheme, will be treated under Arogyakiranam.

Infertility treatment facilities will be set up in all government medical colleges in the State. The allocation for this is Rs.10 crore, including Central share. By mentioning the need for anti-rabies awareness creation in the budget and setting aside Rs.1 crore the Finance Minister could give a message about the looming menace. The move to upgrade all major district and general hospitals in the state to meet the quality standards set by the Kerala Accredited Standard for Health (KASH) is of course a daring move.

Infection prevention and control activities in the hospitals in the State will be taken up under the initiative, Cleaning of Hospitals and Infection Prevention Scheme (CHIPS). Bio-medical wings will be started in all government medical colleges, for which Rs.3 crore has been allocated. The proposal to take over the liabilities of educational expenses upto higher secondary level of all orphan children below ten years of age is good but it would be best if it is extended to the age of at least up to the age of 18. Financial aid to the critically ill and bed ridden patients of families with annual income not exceeding Rs one lakh is another socially committed measure from the Finance Minister.

Equanimity of equity

Along with implementing an e-payment facility for motor vehicle tax for already-registered vehicles, the Finance Minister announced changes to simplify and modify the procedures for collecting the tax from various classes of motor vehicles to mobilise additional resources. The e-payment facility will ease the hardship faced by vehicle owners in visiting the offices and lessen the burden of commission levied by banks on demand drafts. But 12 per cent interest would be levied, along with the additional tax, from motor vehicles which fail to pay tax for more than six months. The interest levied shall not exceed the principal and an amount of Rs. 1 crore was anticipated from it. The department officials will be empowered to auction vehicles seized for non-payment of motor vehicle tax if the tax arrears and additional tax are not paid within a specified time.

The government has come up with a one-time tax for new motor cabs, tourist motor cabs and luxury taxis to mobilise an additional income of Rs. 80 crore in the forthcoming financial year. Taxis with engines of cubic capacity of 1,500 litres or more will be treated as luxury taxis — those already registered will have to pay Rs. 15,000 as quarterly tax and newly registered, a one-time tax. A lumpsum tax for five years has been mooted for goods vehicles having registered laden weight up to 3,000 kg without any enhancement in the prevailing rate of tax. From this, the government expects Rs. 116 crore as income.

The budget has proposed to double the rates of building and luxury taxes as part of efforts to mobilise additional revenue. The building tax was being revised after 17 years and doubling the rate was expected to earn Rs.70 crore. To help the low income groups and the primary sector dwellers, residential buildings with an area of 1,00 sq.m and other buildings up to 50 sq.m would be exempted from building tax. Buildings housing cattle-rearing units, poultry units and piggeries would also be exempted.

The Budget has proposed to increase the fair value of land. Since the fair value fixed eight years ago was much less than the market prices, the rules would be amended to increase it. The monthly income schemes similar to chit funds being conducted by cooperative banks and societies would be brought under the purview of the Kerala Stamp Act. A stamp duty of Rs.100 per person would be levied on all agreements made between banks and societies with investors. The stamp duty rates for all sale deeds registered in the panchayat, municipality and corporation limits would be unified at 5 per cent, 6 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively.

Lottery until recently was synonymous to bribe, cheating, corruption and what not. But with a Manian touch the income from lotteries in 2014-15 is expected to increase from Rs. 3,750 crore in the current year to Rs. 5,500 crore in the next financial year. The face value of the four weekly lottery tickets will be increased from Rs. 20 to Rs. 30 and that of two weekly lotteries from Rs. 40 to Rs. 50. A revision in the prize structure has been proposed. But by setting apart the net revenue from one more weekly lottery for the Karunya Benevolent Fund the Finance Minister could bring silence among the Opposition. By orienting the benefit of public expenditure to the low income groups and by centring the revenue mobilization on the rich KM Mani proved to have walked the talk of his toiling class theory on the one side and set quick fix on the lips of his critics. ■

The writer is Director, Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation, Thiruvananthapuram

The next gl of

F or the past few decades, Kerala was always seen just as a training ground for skilled professionals and talented people as they went to greener pastures in search of a better life and work. But in the last few years, there has been a sprout in entrepreneurship activity in the State resulting in hundreds, if not thousands, of startups coming up all across Kerala. This entrepreneurial activity is led by the freshers and students who are taking up the mantle of being job creators rather than being job seekers. This has also led to a host of innovations and new intellectual property being developed in the State.

The Kerala Government is also supporting entrepreneurs and innovators through various initiatives. The recent Kerala Budget for the year 2014-15 presented by the Finance Minister, K M Mani has several proposals to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation. He has also announced the allocation of a good amount of money and resources for such activity.

One such initiative of the Government is the SV Square project - the Startup Village to Silicon Valley project. SV square was officially rolled out by the Kochi based Startup Village in January, 2013. The objective of the initiative is to provide the brightest student entrepreneurs the exposure to the renowned entrepreneurial culture of the Silicon Valley and eventually enable them replicate the success back home.

For youngsters pursuing IT dreams anywhere in the world, Silicon Valley is the promised land. A peep into that fairyland, no matter for what brief a period, is the cherished dream of any IT whiz kid. No wonder the five student entrepreneurs incubating their companies at the Kochi Startup Village are still to come to grips with the excitement of spending a couple of weeks at the Valley. It feels like

obal hub
INNOVATION

For youngsters pursuing IT dreams anywhere in the world, Silicon Valley is the promised land. A peep into that fairyland, no matter for what brief a period, is the cherished dream of any IT whiz kid.

a dream for the youngsters from which they don't want to wake up.

For, never in his wildest of dreams did Aravind Sanjeev think that his dream company Scully Helmets would be operating out of one bench and four chairs at Silicon Valley in California. For friend and fellow entrepreneur Vijith Padmanabhan, the fact that the multi-billion mobile app company Evernote has expressed interest in associating with his modest Dolojo Labs is yet to sink in. Fellow entrepreneurs Akash Mathew, Nithin George Charuvila, and Jibin Jose still get

goose-bumps on thinking of having met their icons and legendary Silicon Valley figures like Orkut Buyukkokten and Ron Conway.

Arvind, Jibin, Vijith, Akash and Nithin were the first five winners of the maiden annual SV Square (Startup Village to Silicon Valley) project of the Kerala government. They flew to Silicon Valley in California for a first-hand experience of the cradle of global technology revolution, courtesy the Government of Kerala offering an all-expenses paid trip to the Silicon Valley. They were selected
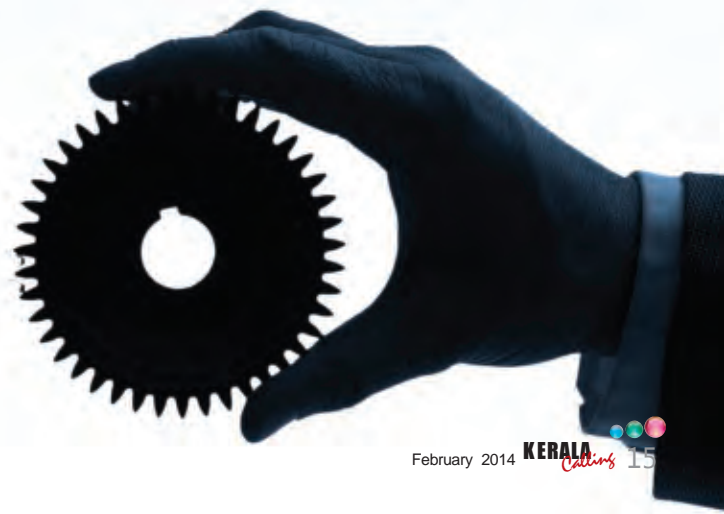
from nearly 1,270 applicants.

The first half of the programme consisted of site visits to some of the world's foremost technology product companies such as Google to experience their work culture and function. The young men also met and talked to iconic tech entrepreneurs.

During the second week, they got one-to-one time with at least five select mentors in their field of activity - including venture capitalists and entrepreneurs who, like them, started off very young - to help them take their companies global. The five were also able to take part in activities of their interest and weekend events that take place regularly in the Silicon Valley.

For these five student entrepreneurs, the two-week long dream trip to the Silicon valley seems to have opened up a world of professional opportunities besides inculcating in them the belief that they could soon convert Kerala in to a cradle of global technology revolution along the lines of Silicon Valley.

According to Aravind Sanjeev, the founder of ARS Devices, who passed out from the Toc H Institute of Science and Technology last year, "Watching my dream company Scully Helmets operating out of a narrow space in the valley was an all together different experience. I was happy as we also work in a similar style out of the Kochi Startup Village. The trip instilled the confidence that students in Kerala could also re-write the rules and become successful entrepreneurs".

Vijith Padmanabhan, who co-founded Dolojo Labs when he was 19, pointed out that Evernote, a billion-dollar mobile app operator, has evinced keen interest in partnering with his startup firm. The youngster's company develops applications to help people connect and interact online, personally, socially and economically.

Nithin George Charuvila, co-founder & CEO of QPlay Tech, said that they could visit renowned companies like Google, Dropbox and Facebook as part of the Silicon Valley trip. "We could not also forget walking nearby the residence of Facebook founder Mark Zuckeburg and interacting with Orkut Buyukkokten, the founder of Orkut. "I feel strongly that young entrepreneurs here can do it bigger and better than what's happening in the Valley".

Akash Mathew, CEO & co-founder of CIED Technologies, who graduated from the Rajagiri Engineering College in Ernakulam, said that the trip helped them in opening up the second leg of funding for their various start-up initiatives. "We could hold discussions with renowned companies most of which are headed by Indians on how to mobilize funds for companies in the Startup Village," he said.

Jibin Jose, co-founder of QEdge Code Studios and a final year B. Tech Computer Science student of TIST, said that young entrepreneurs here could revolutionise the start up culture once they are able to get the infrastructure available in the Silicon valley here in three to four years. With Chief Minister Shri Oommen Chandy's assurance that government would provide all help to start-up initiatives, we are confident that more and more students would emerge as entrepreneurs soon".

And this promise has been delivered in the Budget allocations for the next financial year. But are these announcements just enough to support and sustain innovation by these entrepreneurs? How do we make sure such announcements don't just remain on paper?

In January this year, Finance Minister, Shri K M Mani had disclosed that the Kerala Financial Corporation (KFC), a public sector enterprise of Kerala Government, was in the process of launching a venture capital fund for providing need-based funding for startups and this will be managed by a professional body. He was speaking at a function in Thiruvananthapuram to mark the diamond jubilee celebrations of KFC.

The Finance Minister added that KFC had already begun funding such projects at the Technopark based Technology Incubation Centre (T-TBI), Start-Up Village, Kochi, and professional and institution-based incubation centres under the Kerala State Entrepreneurship Development Mission (KSEDM) through which as many as 3,000 entrepreneurs have been trained and 165 start-ups have been launched. The Corporation was also supporting innovative projects being set up under the guidance of the Coconut Development Board, Spices Board, Rubber Board, and Coir Board.

According to Kerala Governor Shri Nikhil Kumar, Kerala Financial Corporation (KFC) has a key role to play in strengthening and stabilising the industrial sector in Kerala by providing affordable credit while at the same time bringing down non-performing assets.

"KFC was instrumental in promoting start-ups, inviting investment and ensuring credit flow to micro, small and medium enterprises. KFC has been providing loans at low interest rates for entrepreneurs, small and medium enterprises in a hassle-free manner, and thus, played a major role in supporting industrial sector which would in due course create employment and eradicate poverty in the State", he added.

Earlier, a one day workshop on the theme 'Innovation-led and Technology-intensive Entrepreneurship: The Way Ahead for Kerala', organised by Kerala Financial Corporation in Thiruvananthapuram as a part of its Diamond Jubilee celebrations, has deliberated on innovations and technologies that drive modern day entrepreneurs, and how the new generation start ups function.

Prof. Anil K Gupta, Member of National Innovation Council, emphasized the need to create an innovation relay in the country and to move from the incubation model of supporting entrepreneurs to the sanctuary model. "There was a need to create common working spaces for entrepreneurs, and also micro venture finance and innovation venture fund to promote new enterprises. Conditions in Kerala are conducive for innovation growth and entrepreneurs should focus not just on technology innovation but also social and

cultural innovation", he added.

According to Jose Cyriac, Chairman of Kerala State Innovation Council, innovation is the key to growth and it should lead entrepreneurship but it need not be technology intensive. He called upon the entrepreneurs to focus on innovation in traditional industries and service delivery. The State Government has several initiatives to promote entrepreneurship and encourage entrepreneurs and said that a lot of innovation can happen in Kerala.

KFC has conducted a similar workshop in Kozhikode also, with sessions on 'Issues in Innovations, Technology and Entrepreneurship'; 'Innovations and Technologies for Social Entrepreneurship' and 'Understanding the world of Startups'. More than 700 professional college students, prospective entrepreneurs, eminent practitioners, academicians and experts from across Kerala have attended these workshops.

Meanwhile, the Government has announced other initiatives to boost entrepreneurship like setting up a seed support scheme for early stage investments to help new entrepreneurs and to make sure that no start-up with a potentially great and innovative idea will have to suffer for funding. This will also strengthen the State's objective under the new IT policy to nurture one product start-up a day, with the target of at least 3,000 companies by 2020.

The setting up of a state-of-the-art Kerala State Technology Innovation Zone (KSTIZ) at the Kinfra HiTech Park in Kalamassery near Kochi is another step in this direction. India's first telecom business incubator, Startup Village, is currently located there. The new hub will have a built up space of 500,000 sq feet with all facilities required for a world class innovation ecosystem and will nurture start-up companies across a number of sectors including IT and biotechnology.

ENGAGE CHALLENGE CONNECT INSPIRE

The Kerala Technology Innovation Zone has been allocated Rs.25 crores in this budget.

In an ambitious plan, 10,000 Raspberry Pi computers will be distributed to school students and an amount of Rs.4 crore has been set apart for this. Another Rs.2 crore will be spent on Startup Kits for top 100 teams in colleges. All this means that entrepreneurship and innovation is bound to grow in leaps and bounds in Kerala.

In another initiative, the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) has opened its innovation zone within the Startup Village to improve the energy situation in the State by exploring new ideas and developing cutting edge technologies. Inaugurating the zone, Minister for Power, Shri Aryadan Mohammad, had said that the new technology solutions to be developed at the Startup Village will benefit the KSEB to improve its efficiency in all areas of its operations.

Already 15 students have come up with technological ideas to associate with the KSEB innovation zone and their selection process will be handled by the KSEB officials in association with the Startup Village technocrats. The innovation zone, powered by the KSEB would accommodate nearly 100 young entrepreneurs to incubate their ideas. This is a landmark in the development of an innovation ecosystem in the country.

The zone, in a space of 2,500 sq ft, trains people in the skills required to launch businesses in and around the energy sector. Apart from the operational funding, KSEB will also extend technical and non-technical support while Startup Village will develop, own and execute the programme.

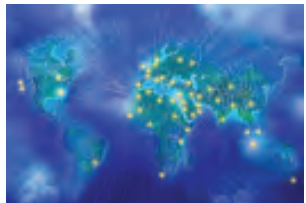The innovation zone is working in line with the National Electrical Mobility Mission 2020.

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The zone gives practical exposure to entrepreneurs to work together with KSEB to find out industry problems faced by the power sector, develop indigenous technology solutions and utilize the domain expertise of KSEB to build home-grown solutions, which can then be deployed in other States and countries.

This is a classic example of how the industry can partner with entrepreneurs to develop innovative solutions which will be a win-win situation for all parties involved. More than that, this also marks the evolution of Kerala as a global hub of innovation. Kerala's success in fostering innovations has been the result of sustained efforts to build up a responsive ecosystem. The environment for innovations can be achieved by nurturing a culture of innovation in schools and colleges and showcasing the success of young innovators.

India has a long tradition of innovation, right from the time of the Vedas and Vedic mathematics. India and especially Kerala, has the potential to become a global hub of innovation. Ideas have the power to transform dreams to reality. As India's iconic former President, Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam said, "Innovation opens up new vistas of knowledge and new dimensions to our imagination to make everyday life more meaningful and richer in depth and content". ■

The writer is Editor of Kerala IT News

TOP 10 @ 1000

Now approaching its fourth year in power, the UDF Government led by Chief Minister Oommen Chandy had a relatively smooth beginning. In the first year after coming to power, the government ushered in a slew of welfare and development programmes, some of them unique and others futuristic; all having the potential to catapult Kerala into a higher level of growth, welfare and development.

The UDF Government that came to power in Kerala on 18 May 2011, without wasting any time, began to move things in the right direction. The government's sense of urgency in taking decisions and the pace of implementing them started sending positive signals to the people of Kerala.

Now approaching its fourth year in power, the UDF Government led by Chief Minister Oommen Chandy had a relatively smooth beginning. In the first year after coming to power, the government ushered in a slew of welfare and development programmes, some of them unique and others futuristic; all having the potential to catapult Kerala into a higher level of growth, welfare and development.

Though perturbed by incidents that had personal as well as political ramifications, the resolve of the government saw projects and initiatives seeing the daylight, some of which have already started making a difference for the better in the Kerala society. As the UDF Government completes 1000 days in Kerala, if we are to glance through a select ten of its projects/ programmes, it is evident that the government has backed their words with action and the momentum attained.

LNG Terminal, Kochi

After eight years of waiting, we now have the Petronet LNG Kochi terminal fully

commissioned. Recently dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, this receiving, storage and re-gasification terminal will meet the increasing demand of natural gas that drives power, petrochemicals and fertilizer units in the southern States of India. Domestic consumers of liquefied natural gas will also benefit from this terminal.

Kochi Metro

Since 2004, an ambitious thought has been looming over Kochiites; especially over the commuters of Kerala's commercial capital. A metro rail system for Kochi has since moved on from a mere thought to brisk and visible mode on the urban terra firma of Kochi. Two rail over- bridges have been completed and the running length extended up to Tripunithura. Not just, Kochiites, but the whole of Kerala is looking forward to 2015 when metro rail transforms the travel woes of this city into oblivion.

Kannur Airport

The air-space of Kerala would become busier with the completion of the Kannur International Airport, which is the fourth one in the State. Coming up on a 2000-acre land at Mattanur in Kannur District of Kerala, the project has already received the environmental clearance from the Union government. With a runway of 3050 m and a terminal area of 50,000 sq m and about 39,000 aircraft movements per annum, the Kannur International Airport is bound to give a prominent place for

Kerala on the world aviation map. Work would commence in full swing by April this year, so as to meet the deadline of December 2015.

Vizhinjam International Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport

Set to become a transnational commercial hub for South Asia, the work on Vizhinjam International Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport after securing environmental clearance from the Union government and inviting global tender, is fast

The poor and the needy cannot be left behind as Kerala emerges as a model State in the country. And this was precisely the earnest intentions of the UDF Government when it launched the Zero Landless Scheme on 30th September 2013.

enhanced the IT footprint of Kerala.

Zero-Landless Programme

A shelter of one's own, but where to pitch it has been the question for many. In Kerala, the UDF Government's focus is not just confined to projects and programmes that can ensure high economic growth; but also on welfare measures. The poor and the needy cannot be left behind as Kerala emerges as a model State in the country. And this was precisely the earnest intentions of the UDF Government when it launched the Zero Landless Scheme on 30th September 2013. In the first phase of the scheme, allotment of three cents of land has begun and by 2015 one lakh families comprising weaker sections like the physically challenged, widows and the poor will benefit. The programme saw the district of Kannur becoming the first zero landless district in India.

Sruthi Tharangam

The UDF Government's policy to reach out to sections of people who deserve a touch of solace was one of the highlights of its nearly three years of governance in Kerala. The Cochlear Implantation Scheme called Sruthi Tharangam launched in September 2012 came as a big boon for children below three years old with impaired hearing and speech. So

approaching the top-gear mode for starting the construction works.

The port, by virtue of its location enjoys minimal littoral drift along the coast, resulting in negligible maintenance dredging; proximity to international shipping route; natural water depth of more than 20 m within a nautical mile from the coast and links to national / regional road, rail network and can meet the needs of the west and eastern coasts of India. It is an ocean of opportunities that await the country at Vizhinjam.

Technopark Thiruvananthapuram

With Chief Minister Oommen Chandy recently inaugurating the third phase of Technopark in Thiruvanantha-puram, Kerala has become home to India's largest and the greenest IT Park. With the addition of the twin-towers, Technopark now has a total built-up area of 72 lakh sq ft. The campus on a 333-acre land now has 285 companies. The latest development in terms of space and presence of offices at Technopark has literally

far, more than 200 children have undergone surgery as per this scheme that provides Rs 5 lakh for each case. With an annual target of 50 surgeries, Sruthi Tharangam is making waves as a benevolent thought of a government that cares.

Student Entrepreneurship Programme

If we want our youth to

incubation centres that came up in different parts of Kerala. They stand to benefit 20 per cent relaxation in attendance and 4 per cent grace mark. Nearly 1400 applications for start-up ventures have been received; 450 ventures have already become functional.

Ticket to Health and Welfare

Translating innovative and creative thoughts into rewarding

proceedings of which would be given as assistance for the marriage of girls from financially poor background. This shows us how thinking out of the box can really make a difference.

SmartCity

For a State that is getting smarter by the day, the SmartCity Project coming up in Kochi would

If these Ten @ Thousand can realize the dreams of a million in Kerala; imagine what rest of the projects / programmes can do to Kerala in the next decade or two.

Kerala is witnessing a government and governance that are not sitting pretty on promises. On the contrary, honouring those promises has become the order of
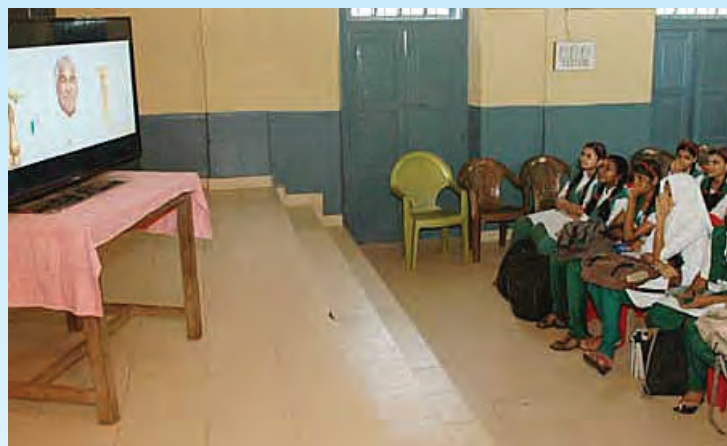
If we want our youth to translate their business ideas into reality, we should provide them with a playground to practice what they believe in. And it is indeed heartening that the incumbent government of Kerala has done it for the youth of the State.

translate their business ideas into reality, we should provide them with a playground to practice what they believe in. And it is indeed heartening that the incumbent government of Kerala has done it for the youth of the State.

Through a move, for the first time in India, the government of Kerala introduced the Student Entrepreneurship Programme in 2012. In no time the young entrepreneurs, still going through their university studies flocked to the technology business

and growth-oriented realities has been the hallmark of the UDF Government, ever since it came to power in 2012. One such initiative that shot to immense popularity was making use of the lottery ticket proceedings for meeting the treatment expense of the poor and the needy. So far a sum of Rs 286 crores had been raised from the sale of Karunya lottery of the State government to benefit 27,275 people. The latest to join this ticket to health and welfare initiative was Mangalaya lottery, the

transform Kerala into a leading IT hub of the nation. The work on 6.5 lakh sq ft, Phase 1 of SmartCity is progressing as per schedule. Accord has also been reached by SmartCity with its business partners to construct a 30 lakh sq ft building. The project that started in 2005, though lost its sheen after a year, picked up momentum with the UDF government engaging all stakeholders and clearing the hurdles for a determined take off, when the Director Board cleared the master plan in April 2013.

the day. The trend has been set in motion and there are clear indications that the people of Kerala do not want to let go this momentum. Because they now realize that it is hard to emerge like a phoenix from the ashes of never-ending dreams and shattered hopes, which they had been subject to, till a few years ago.■

Kerala has always been famous for its global outlook. As long ago as 200 BCE, the Roman Senator Pliny the Elder is said to have complained that Rome's imperial treasury was being emptied because of the demand for Tellicherry pepper. More recently, Kerala's skilled workers have been supplying the world's skill needs ranging from construction workers to nurses to lab technicians to workers in high end tech jobs.

Today's diaspora of Keralites across the world and particularly the state's skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) and elsewhere sends back huge remittances, which play a significant part in sustaining Kerala's economy and feed its high cost high wage structure. But tomorrow's global labour market may see shifting trends, needs and locations, and there is a need to forecast these opportunities and plan for these emerging skills requirements.

Keralites have always been good at identifying opportunities for work abroad. Note their early migration to Singapore and Malaya in the 1940s, to pan-India focus in the 1950s, and to the worldwide market for nursing services, and then on to the emerging countries of the Persian Gulf in the 1970s. In view of the global shifting of skill needs and locations, a similar broad shift in focus in skills may currently become necessary.

Thus over the last few years, Keralites have become in-demand skilled professionals globally with their skills in demand in many vocational and technical areas. However with the geography of skills and work and the capabilities in demand quickly changing, to be winners in the new globalized era, the present skills education system in the state has to be upgraded.

In the last decade and half, Kerala's first generation entrepreneurs have transformed their home grown brands into household names globally. From highly innovative brands in tourism to brands in consumer goods like stabilizers and umbrellas to brands in finance and banking, brands from Kerala have gone viral all over India and the world. More recently a breed of twenty-nothing tech entrepreneurs have given new meaning to entrepreneurship, with technology driven start-ups giving a fresh lease to techno parks, info parks etc., themselves the products of Kerala's new entrepreneurship revolution. The criticism that one used to hear once upon a time, that Kerala can only produce workers, not

> Keralites have always been good at identifying opportunities for work abroad. Note their early migration to Singapore and Malaya in the 1940s, to pan-India focus in the 1950s, and to the worldwide market for nursing services, and then on to the emerging countries of the Persian Gulf in the 1970s.

Nypunyam
Making Kerala a Global Skills Destination

entrepreneurs, or that if it did, those entrepreneurs can succeed only outside Kerala, has now been shattered as a myth.

Building upon these strengths, the Government of Kerala has embarked on a visionary initiative to transform Kerala into tomorrow's Global Skills Destination. Capitalizing upon the global Malayali's new unabashed self-confidence, the Government is preparing to transform the State's skills scenario radically and provide a new generation of skilled and employment ready workers to the world.

Foreseeing the growing demand for the Gen-Next skilled workers around the world, Kerala is positioning itself to supply the world's future skill demand through training ready-to-employ skilled workers for tomorrow's global skill needs. With its eye on the growing global skill demand and particularly the

demand in the neighboring GCC, where two international events, the Dubai Expo and the Doha Asian games are scheduled in 2020, the state is embarking on an initiative to make Kerala a hub for skills development. The initiative will focus on developing a modern skills training infrastructure across the state lined to global industry needs while focusing on improved teaching methods, curriculum development, trainers training, soft skills development etc.

Under the guidance of the Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, the Labour Minister Shibu Baby John is thus positioning the Departments of Labour and Rehabilitation and the Department of Training to prepare skilled young people in sectors ranging from aviation technology to handlooms. The initiative has appropriately been named Nypunyam.

Nypunyam is a compre-

hensive attempt to completely revamp the skills training scenario in the state adopting a skills training regime that is linked to industry and placements. It will create in the state a large number of ready to employ skilled personnel with very high employability quotient and linked to placements. A two day international skills summit on Nypunyam was held at Thiruvananthapuram on 20 and 21st January 2014. It became the first international summit on *Skills* that was ever held in Kerala. It was also the first time ever that any international summit was held by the Department of Labour and Employment.

The scheme Nypunyam included an intensive six month preparatory phase that preceded the international summit when a series of well attended Road-shows were held and invitations to industry and business houses and other private players for

submitting Expression of Interest to set up Centres of Excellence in government Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) where industry ready skills training will be provided in the skills that their industry or business needs. Over the next few months and years, Nypunyam will follow up the ideas that emerged at the Summit and ensure that quality skills development infrastructure is built up in the state that would rejuvenate Kerala's strength in skills.

Many times, skills training in our ITIs are too theoretical and not industry driven nor demand responsive. Nypunyam seeks to change this by linking industry and business closely to it. Towards this, the state government is encouraging private players to set up Centres of Excellence to train our young in various skills or establish Industrial Tie-ups through a

Nishagandi Fest 2014

Foreseeing the growing demand for the Gen-Next skilled workers around the world, Kerala is positioning itself to supply the world's future skill demand through training ready-to-employ skilled workers for tomorrow's global skill needs.

Public Private Partnership (PPP) Model in government Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). The strategy is to attract private investors in the area of skills development by making available on rent (without transfer of ownership) land and building (shell structure only) in the government's 77 ITIs to industrial and business houses and entrepreneurs (who have a proven track record and requisite qualifications) for setting up Centres of Excellence (CoE) or Industrial Tie-ups for training highly skilled young workers in the sectors where there is a global skill need. These skill sectors would include the traditional sectors for which Kerala is already well known such as nurses, automobile mechanics, construction workers, security services, hospitality workers etc. to high end specialized sectors such as aviation technology.

A call for Expression of Interest (EoI) made ahead of the Nypunyam International Summit and which closed on 31st January received a record number of nearly 170 proposals. If even a fifth of these EoIs are realized into Skills Development projects, the Nypunyam summit would have produced sustainable results that could revolutionize skills development in the state.

Nypunyam will also focus on the development of soft skills, particularly on communication skills. Young workers from the state are extremely good at technical skills but are often seen to be lacking in soft skills. For example, their English and language skills are often bad and they are unable to interact in a pleasant manner the work place, with customers, the public, supervisors etc. This can be a disadvantage when working aboard. In the hospitality industry where pleasant behaviour, the ability to smile, the ability to communicate and respond pleasantly, and the ability to use polite English count a great deal, such a weakness is often debilitating. It will concentrate on the development of soft skills amongst its areas of focus.

Nypunyam would direct attention to reviving Kerala's ancient skills such in handloom and coir sectors and in such niche traditional skills as the making of the famous Aranmula Mirrors (*Aranmula Kannadi*). It would try and focus on upgrading the curriculum in our skills training institutes which unfortunately lags far behind global technology change. On the one hand, with the advancement of e-learning, our ITIs have already made a beginning with e-class rooms. On the other hand there is been an ongoing explosion in e-learning across the world. These include e-courses known as Massively Open Online Courses or MOOCs. In the area of skills, MOOCs is yet to take off, particularly in Kerala. Nypunyam will give seek to encourage MOOCs in skills development areas.

Nypunyam will also try and focus is on providing skills to the physically challenged, who can be a highly productive skilled work force. Thus Nypunyam would try and bring focus on providing skills training to visually and physically challenge and the hearing challenged etc. It will try and reorient existing attitudes and thinking on skills in the state, including the feeling that a lot of land is required to set up a training infrastructure or a Centre of Excellence (CoE) in skills. The idea that a Skills Institutes or CoEs can be built vertically in small pieces of land will be attempted to be pushed forward to maximize the outcomes from the land available with ITIs.

Changing such a mindset may not be as difficult as it may seem. If people in Kerala who 15 or 20 years ago would not stay in the second storey of a two storied house, are today happily living on the 20th, 30th or even 40th floors of high rise apartment blocks, our youngsters can certainly learn their skills on the 8th or the 12th floor high rise Centre of Excellence or ITI. A conscious

effort is being made to utilize the minimum land to maximum extent for providing skills development, with Think Vertical being encouraged.

Nypunyam will seek to develop entrepreneurs among our skilled workers. Skilled workers need not have to be working in one else's establishment. They can themselves be highly successful entrepreneurs providing jobs to many others like them. Thus EDP training will be one of the areas of focus of Nypunyam. The state already has some excellent initiative in this direction with Ammachi Labs, a wing of Amrita

scale when it comes to skills training. Our ITIs continues to be a place where one or two thousand trainees are provided training in a dozen skills. It is to be seen if very large multi skills training centres where many thousands of young people can be trained on very many different skills can be a successful model of skill development in the state.

Nypunyam will most crucially seek to change social attitudes towards skilled work. Skilled work is looked down upon by society. In the caste structure of work, skilled work occupies the lowest position. This has to change if bright young people

where skilled young people are given the high social status, we need to completely overhaul our attitude towards skills as a career. Young ones should be encouraged to think of skills as career as they think of a career of a Engineer or a Doctor. With increasing income from a skill job career, such social standing of skilled jobs as a career is also like to improve.

The Additional Skills Acquisition Programme (ASAP) of the Department of Higher Education of the state government which has already reached over 15,000 young Plus Two and under-graduate level college students in the state can

Nypunyam is a game changer. But of course there are challenges ahead in realizing its objectives. No one and least of all the decision makers in government believe that translating these ideas into action would be easy. Conscious of the possible difficulties ahead and keen on lying down proper procedures for fast track approval of the Expressions of Interest (EoIs) received under Nypunyam, the government have set up an Empowered Committee which supported by a Technical Committee will expeditiously screen all EoIs received and approve the eligible ones.

What was most heartening

Viswa Peetham in Amruthpuri providing EDP training to skilled women to enable them to set up enterprises. Such initiatives will be encouraged so that Kerala's skilled youth can begin a new generation of startup in skills. It will also try and concentrate on modern and niche areas of skills development. Aviation technology has already been identified as one such modern niche for skills development. Other areas could include 3D manufacturing, fibre optics etc.

Kerala has not yet experimented with economies of

Many times, skills training in our ITIs are too theoretical and not industry driven nor demand responsive. Nypunyam seeks to change this by linking industry and business closely to it.

take to skills as a career as a first choice and not as happens now, as a last resort. By launching campaigns on social media, TV Radio, newspapers, media, blogs and cinema with the themes

provide that vital link between academic education and skills education. The ASAP can also drive a change in the attitude of youngsters and their parents towards skills as a career.

in the Nypunyam initiative so far has been the overwhelming response that it has received not only from Kerala, but from all over India and abroad. Not only the attendance at the International Summit, but the technical quality of the proposals received as well as the wealth of ideas that Nypunyam generated, gives confidence that just as much as Kerala is today a Global Tourist Destination, Kerala will soon become a Global Skills Destination.■

The writer is Advisor to the Minister of Labour and Rehabilitation

Kumarakom model
positioned Kerala Tourism on pinnacle

Kerala famed as global super brand in tourism is India's benchmarking destination due to its continuous success in tourism development through launching innovative products and services. Kerala is traditionally known for its breath taking natural splendors, vast and varied cultural heritage, endless peace and innovative tourism products. Besides this it is also trusted for its transparent quality control systems, eco-friendly practices and sustainable approaches for developing the tourism sector through host community participation.

Long term success of tourism depends upon the quality of natural environment because tourists always prefer to visit those destinations which offer unique, serene and exotic attractions. Kumarakom is such a serene backwater tourism destination which is famed all over the world for its unique responsible tourism initiatives. Eco–tourism destinations can ensure long term growth and success only if they are following sound environmental guidelines and regulations for environmental conservation and protection. Since the environment is the core resource of tourism and keeping in view the present situation and the future demands of the industry the state had already been promoting responsible eco-tourism activities right from the beginning of last decade itself.

UNWTO Award

Kerala Tourism is always known for its innovative initiatives especially when it comes to responsible tourism. Kumarakom the famed backwater tourism hotspot made Kerala Tourism proud by winning the prestigious UNWTO awards for its Responsible Tourism initiatives. It was for the first time

that India won such grand recognition through Kumarakom responsible Tourism model which walked away with the top honours at the annual United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Awards for Excellence and Innovation in Tourism presented on January 22 in Madrid.

In its biggest international recognition to date, Kerala Tourism has won the UNWTO Ulysses Award for Innovation in Public Policy and Governance, the highest honour given to government bodies for shaping global tourism policies through innovative initiatives. The State faced tough competition from other contenders in the Public Policy and Governance category. The award was instituted in 2003 by UNWTO - the agency for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. Awards are given to those exceptional projects that are in line with the

UNWTO's code of Ethics for Tourism and standards set in the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Responsible Tourism

Responsible Tourism practices are gaining momentum all over the world as they find solutions and encourage host community, tourism entrepreneurs and visitors to take responsibility for the changes necessary to make tourism more sustainable and viable in the long run. As per 2002 Cape Town declaration on responsible tourism in destinations Responsible Tourism is defined as a form of tourism 'that creates better places for people to live in and better places to visit'. Responsible Tourism initiatives all over the world have succeeded in creating awareness on how tourism can act as a mechanism for the socio-economic development of the host community through conservation of natural and

cultural resources. In order to make tourism responsible it should be based on the principles of carrying capacity and sustainability.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. More countries are introducing, promoting responsible tourism activities and ventures as it enables planned tourism development with minimal impact on the sensitive eco systems.

Besides Kumarakom the other Responsible Tourism (RT) destinations in the state are Kovalam, Thekkady and Wayanad. Among them Kumarakom model launched during 2008 evolved as the most

successful model for responsible tourism initiatives and was honored by Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India. This unique initiative is based on public-private partnership (PPP) model with the active involvement of the host community, creating jobs locally which would improve the standard of living of members of the host community and preserve culture and ethos through sustainable tourism practices.

A brief account of responsible tourism activities successfully implemented in Kumarakom responsible tourism model includes - Fallow land cultivation and enhanced agricultural production, Fish Farms and Lotus Cultivation, Establishing linkages with hotel industry and enhancing demand for local produces, Development of Souvenir Industry, Developing Community based Tourism Products, Promotion of Local Art Forms and Culture, Promotion of

Cultural Tourism and Ethnic Cuisine, Social Awareness Campaign and Tourist Management, Protection of Environment, Energy Saving Measures, Comprehensive Resource Mapping, Maintaining Destination Labor Directory etc.

Responsible Tourism model in Kumarakom, is truly a unique concept which links the host community with the hospitality industry and government departments, a perfect model for empowerment and development of the host community in the village through the implementation of sustainable eco-friendly tourism.

Kumarakom is one among the two RT models being monitored by the World Tourism Organization. UNWTO representatives visited the destination last year and conducted a field visit to see the RT initiatives after the news of the Kumarakom model reached the UN Secretary General. The Kumarakom initiative had earlier won the National Award for Best Rural Tourism Project during March last year and the PATA Grand Award under the Environment category.

This UNWTO award is truly recognition for the unique efforts taken by the tourism stakeholders in implementing a unique responsible tourism model. But at the same time the model will have to sustain its performance and move ahead strongly as the expectations of global travelers and competitions from other responsible destinations will be very high.

Why Kumarakom Responsible Tourism Model become successful?

During 2008, Kerala Tourism launched four responsible tourism (RT) models in the state and among them Kumarakom model turned out to be the most successful & distinctive initiative. The success is due to numerous factors such as - it benefitted the host community

Responsible Tourism model in Kumarakom, is truly a unique concept which links the host community with the hospitality industry and government departments, a perfect model for empowerment and development of the host community in the village through the implementation of sustainable eco-friendly tourism.

in all aspects, attractions, activities and packages offered are truly based on the natural, cultural and heritage resources of the region, involves effective measures for environment conservation, it generated high amount of tourist satisfaction which tempts them to visit again and created employment opportunities for host communities of varying levels ranging from skilled to professional.

Major players involved in this successful initiative are the Department of Tourism, Kumarakom grama panchayath, Kudumbashree, District Tourism Promotion Council, Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS), players of the local hospitality industry and the departments of agriculture and health. The model clearly shows that the future of tourism lies in initiatives taken at the grass-root level. The novel mantra in the field

of destination development in Kumarakom is that the "quality of a destination" has to be defined by the "quality of life of the host community". There is a growing awareness among the villagers that responsible tourism is an apt tool for socio-economic development. The industry partners have understood and appreciated the value to involve the local community in the tourism plan for the sustenance of the destination and their business.

Dr Harold Goodwin, the pioneer who introduced the International conference on Responsible Tourism, inspected Kumarakom Responsible Tourism model last year and commented that it is the finest example for responsible tourism initiatives all over the globe because it proved that it can advance the life style and earnings of the host community through environment conservation and sustainable tourism practices.

RT model demonstrated how tourism business can be done effectively

The prime focus of this model has been on benefiting local communities by enabling them to engage more successfully with the tourism industry because that was the priority decided upon by the Kumarakom panchayath. Effectively local people set the priorities and delivered 100% for making their village a better place to live in through eco-friendly tourism practices. The government of Kerala's vision to develop tourism through this unique initiative is worth mentioning which had made this village globally popular. The village enterprises and self help groups are regularly supplying local produce to the hotels, providing village tours, selling handicrafts and running local cafes and restaurants. More than 2,000 people have benefited directly from the Kumarakom RT initiative in the past three years. They include 650 women from 28 Kudumbashree units, 450 farmers, 500 homestead farmers, 75 artistes, 21 people involved in the production and sale of souvenirs and about 100 persons roped in for the village life experience packages.

But what is perhaps the most impressive thing about this Responsible Tourism programme is the determination of the stakeholders to learn from success and failures and to improve the practices so that there are more successful initiatives. Coconut Lagoon Heritage Hotel is one of the CGH Earth Experience Hotels which demonstrates how much a hotel can contribute to making a better place for people to live in and a great place for people to visit. This innovative practice should definitely be extended to other panchayaths in the state too which could make a significant contribution to making them better places to live in and visit by the tourist.

Advantages of RT model

The RT model linked effectively the host community with the tourism and hospitality industry. As part of the RT environmental initiative, Kumarakom bird sanctuary was declared as a plastic-free zone, checked backwater pollution in and around Kumarakom with the help of the host community, taken steps for mangrove plantation, protection and promoted organic farming. Campaigning for green practices in the hospitality sector is one of the RT's environmental intervention programmes. The community based tourism packages such as a day with the farmers and beyond backwaters is part of the Village life experiences. The Village Life Experience (VLE) package is the most successful package introduced as part of the Kumarakom RT model. The focus of the VLE packages is to open up the immense resources of both natural as well as cultural heritage directly and indirectly associated with the livelihood activities, cultural activities, traditional art and crafts of the communities living at the destinations. As part of this package, guests are taken in a country boat to see locals engaged in different activities such as working in the paddy fields, fishing and weaving coconut palm fronds and screw pine.

As part of the economic responsibility it helped several micro enterprises, handicraft units, organic vegetable farms, fish and lotus ponds. Linkages to the hospitality industry such as hotels and resorts were created which increased the demand for local products and services on a regular basis. Woman self help groups preferably Kudumbasree were major beneficiaries of the initiative. Apart from Kudumbashree groups, Karshaka Samithis (farmers' groups) were newly formed and encouraged for homestead farming. A total of 168 acres of land which was left unused with the advent of tourism in Kumarakom has now been used for agriculture. Fish culture is also being promoted here in association with the Grama Panchayath.

The RT model has also contributed to the development of infrastructure including a drinking water scheme and lighting on most of the streets. The issue of non availability of land for cultivation was sorted out by the RT project team through discussions with land owners to get the land on lease. Local art and cultural troupes were formed in order to provide effective training and to promote it. The model also enabled the host community to be aware of the negative impacts of tourism such as child labour, prostitution, drug addiction, crime and alcoholism. Above all responsible tourism raised the community's identity and confidence as well as social esteem apart from raising their income on a continuous basis.

Responsible tourism initiatives in Kumarakom proved that it is undoubtedly a perfect approach to conserve and save the precious natural, cultural and heritage resources through planned tourism activities. The Kumarakom model had gone a long way ahead of other RT destinations and now it is the ideal time to extend this successful model to other regions of the state with the whole hearted support and co-operation of host community, local bodies & Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's). The global responsible tourism destination tag and the receipt of prestigious UNWTO award will surely advance the responsible tourism initiatives in the state to a higher level and helps to entice more tourists to Kumarakom in particular and Kerala in general. Let us hope for the best…! ∎

The writer is Lecturer in Tourism, School of Tourism Studies, MG University, Kottayam

National Theatre Fest 2014

Natyahemantham

Kottayam district is all set to host the prestigious National Theatre Festival 2014. The six day drama fest, organized by the Information & Public Relations Department, will be held from February 13 to 18. A variety of 11 dramas, selected from different parts of the country, including those from Asssam, Bengal, Rajasthan, Maharastra and Karnataka will be staged in the festival.

The curtain of the 13th National Theatre Festival will go up with a grand cultural procession at Kottayam town. The festival will be inaugurated by K.C. Joseph, Minister for Rural Development, Culture and I&PRD on 13th February at 4.30 pm at Indraprastha Auditorium. Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan, Minister for Forest and Transport will preside over the function. Kavalam Narayana Panicker will deliver the keynote address. Government Chief Whip PC George will be the Chief Guest.

Making the festival more meaningful and transparent, an expert committee was constituted for the selection of dramas. The committee under the chairmanship of renowned playwright and director Kavalam Narayana Panicker made screening and selected the plays, which will defenitly be a feast to the theatre aspirants. Noted theatre personalities P. Balachandran, T.M. Abraham, Joshi Mathew and Dr. Raja Warriar were the other members of the selection committee. Another notable change brought this time by the Director of Information and Public Relations and Festival Director Mini Antony IAS is that a troupe participated a year may not be eligible for the next year consecutively, thereby giving a chance to other entrants.

Face to Face with play directors, conducted by Dr. V C Haris and Dr. Raja Warriar, and Seminars, conducted by T.M.Abraham and Joshi Mathew, will be held at DC Books Auditorium. Theatre film screening by P N Kesavan Namboothiri will also be held as part of the festival. Renowned theatre personalities will be honoured in the festival.

The writer is Cultural Development Officer, I & PRD

SCHEDULE			
13.02.2014	6.30 PM	Dalan(Marati)	Natak Company, Pune
14.02.2014	5.30 PM	Oorubhangam(Bengali)	Kasba Arghya, Kolkotta
	7.30 PM	Punarjani(Malayalam)	Nireeksha Women's Theatre, Trivandrum
15.02.2014	5.30 PM	My father-My Mom(Rajasthani)	Perafin, Kota, Rajasthan
	7.30 PM	Sathyam Parayunna Kallan, Charandas Chor(Malayalam)	Aksharakala, Tvm
16.02.2014	5.30 PM	Mrigaya(Assamese)	Purbaranga, Guwahati, Assam
	7.30 PM	Kathapathrangalum Pangeduthavarum (Malayalam)	Vilappil Vision, Mumbai
17.02.2014	5.30 PM	Soodra Thapaswi(Kannada)	Rangayana, Mysore
	7.30 PM	Beegum Panikkar(Malayalam)	Theatre Reperatory, FACS Sanskrit University, Kalady
18.02.2014	5.30 PM	Madhyama Vyayoga(Hindi)	Natyakulam, Jaipur
	7.30 PM	Macbeth(Malayalam)	Kalidasa Kala Kendram, Kollam.

International Conference on Deepening Democracy
ICODD 2014
Thiruvananthapuram Jan. 19-21

Infusing energy into
Democratic De

A three-day international conference titled 'International Conference on Deepening Democracy' (ICODD) organised by Local Self Government Department helps infuse energy into the democratic decentralisation process. The conference, which held in Thiruvananthapuram, under 16 technical sessions on various themes witnessed coming together of experts on decentralised planning and local governance from across the globe. The representatives of local self government institutions in Kerala participated actively in the deliberations. The three-day conference took stock of the decentralisation experiments in the country and abroad and emphasised the significance of a strategy to carry forward the theory and practice of decentralisation and participatory democracy.

ICODD was inaugurated by Dr Mihir Shah, Member, Planning Commission. In the inagurual speech Dr. Mihir Shah said that deepening of democracy and inclusive growth should go hand in hand to achieve quality in delivery of services at the grassroot level. All development programmes in the 12th Five-Year Plan were envisaged in a participatory mode and women had a significant role to play in it. Only when people are engaged in participatory democracy at the grassroots level, the outcome will be radically different. Not just the passing of legislation, but a strong social and financial backing from the government is necessary for the success of any development initiative. The country has witnessed many developmental programmes in the last decade under the UPA government like RTI Act, Food Security Act, Rural Employment Guarantee Act and so on, Mihir Shah said.

Kerala is facing the second generation challenges in decentralised governance, said Dr. M K Muneer, Minister for Panchayats and Social Justice while chairing the plenary session. Waste management, quality of service delivery, health sector, issues of the aged, and house construction are key challenges facing the local governance system in the State. The Grama Panchayats should attain self-sufficiency through effective resource mobilisation. The functional efficiency of panchayats could be increased through empowerment of Gramasabhas, the Minister added.

Prof. M A Oommen, who introduced the theme at the plenary session said Kerala's decentralised planning is

centralisation

different from the rest of India. Kerala initiated institutional reforms and moved ahead early to devolve powers, responsibilities, and funds to local governments. Deepening democracy means making democracy relevant for the people's lives. Strong political will to decentralise together with efforts towards converting every ward into Gramasabha for articulating people's preferences

and evolving a methodology through learning by doing exercise in the initial years laid the foundations for participatory planning in Kerala. It gave the powerful lesson that democracy is more than balloting. But deepening democracy is a continuous quest with considerable instrumental value for justice and freedom, Prof. Oommen said.

K C Sivaramakrishnan, Professor, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, said decentralisation is humanisation. Reluctance and inhibition in accepting local governance still remained in many parts of India, he pointed out. Dr T M Thomas Isaac, MLA spoke about the strides made in primary education and healthcare sectors in Kerala through local

governance. He said that his hope lies in Kudumbashree and empowering it is the only sustainable method of improving Gramasabha. Prof. Patrick Heller and S M Vijayanand IAS also participated in the session.

In the special session based on the Role of State Election Commission in Local Governance, Dr M K Muneer, said the Government of Kerala

intends to give more powers to the State Election Commission. The Minister pointed out that among the Indian States, State Election Commission in Kerala enjoys the maximum powers and rights including that of judicial powers. He said that Kerala bestowed the State Election Commissioner with the powers of a High Court Judge. Dr M K Muneer suggested that the State Governments should cooperate with steps taken by the State Election Commissions to strengthen the Gramasabhas.

Remakanth Reddy, State Election Commissioner, Andhra Pradesh presided over the session. S M Vijayanand, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, E K Bharat Bhushan, Chief Secretary, James Varghese, Principal Secretary, Local Self Government Department, and Nalini Netto, Chief Electoral Officer, Kerala were among the speakers. State Election Commissioners from Tamil Nadu, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Puducherry, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal attended the day-long session.

The session on Transparency and Accountability was attended by Aruna Roy, Founder of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), Rajasthan and former member, National Advisory Council. According to her for deepening democracy, it is necessary for people to understand the real meaning of governance. In the 21st century people should acquire power to question government officials for the proper delivery of services. Accountability is the second level of process which accompanies people's understanding of how government mechanism works. It is inevitable that the Panchayat must work as a team between people and government to put constitutional equality into practice, she said.

Aruna Roy said that the growth of Kerala amazed her. In fact, the scenario is very different here, she pointed out reminding that people have been killed for asking information in States like Maharashtra and Rajasthan. This questions the real methodology needed to implement real affective governance. India is the only country in the world which recognises the right to work, as evident in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NGNREGA). Rural citizens are the steering pillars of democracy. Yet the issue of 60 per cent of people that constitutes rural areas even after six decades of Indian independence remains worse. We have to look at this matter with concern, Aruna Roy concluded.

John Samuel, Global Advisor UNDP Governance Centre, Oslo, said accountability was mainly concerned with power relationship. Therefore distribution of power attains supreme stature in delivering justice. It is important that to whom the Government is really open? Whether to people or to the multinational companies? Deepening democracy involves a five-stage mechanism, viz. Democratisation of Institution, Democratisation of knowledge, Democratisation of Technology, Democratisation of Finance, and Democratisation of Power. Nikhil Dey, well known activist from Rajasthan remarked that many of the democratic debates happened in India have local origins. In fact, RTI could not have been a reality had the people in Rajasthan did not fight for 40 days and nights, toiling their life in danger. It was rather surprising that people in Kerala did not use the help of RTI as a tool in order to deepen democracy into a much wider level, he said.

Mani Shankar Aiyar, former Union Minister for Panchayati

Raj, said the Indian Economy have been booming over the course of years, but the local level planning remained at a dismal level. He was delivering special address on the session on Upliftment of the marginalised and planning, organised under ICODD. We know how to improve local governance, but we are not implementing them at the bottom level. Our Constitutional framework has put forth enough measures to protect the autonomy of different administrative tiers. It is time that people's involvement in district level planning needs to be widened for deepening the democracy. What requires is the collective and constructive functioning of administrators with more realisation on ground realities, he added. Mani Shankar Aiyar released the book prepared by KILA, Decentralisation and Development, by handing over a copy to Dr M K Muneer.

P Sainath, the Rural Affairs Editor of The Hindu said that neoliberalism can undermine democracy severely. Growing inequality is the biggest problem faced by India. Centralisation of the solution and decentralisation of problem is what is happening in Indian scenario, he said while delivering the keynote address at the session on 'Inclusion of Excluded'. He narrated the issues that people of Andhra Pradesh, Gurgaon, and Jharkhand were facing due to the corporate interferences on their land and resources. During the past 20 years, millions of people left their homes and they include backward communities, children, and women Water crisis is another major problem that India is facing coupled with the decrease in the farming community, Sainath added.

The valedictory session was inaugurated by Chief Minister Oommen Chandy. In his address, the CM said, "Kerala had become the focal point of experiments in deepening democracy owing to its egalitarian society. The devolution of funds has helped Panchayati raj institutions become more self sufficient. Decentralised and centralised planning is required to ensure that duplication and wastage of resources are avoided.

The Chief Minister pointed out that e-governance is the future of fostering local governance in the State. Efforts should be made to devise innovative tools to ensure people-friendly governance. Strengthening democracy required increased public participation and Kerala had been a pioneer in this. Democracy is meaningful only when the problems of the people were resolved, added the CM.

Delivering the valedictory address Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister for Rural Development, said that Indian democracy had become financially unsustainable. All governments and political parties should bear the responsibility for this. Kerala's record of women's representation in the political framework has been poor in spite of the achievements in women's empowerment and gender equality. A periodic review and rejuvenation of democratic institutions in the country is a must. Democracy can never be taken for granted and the answer to our weakness is more democracy, the Union Minister added.■

The writer is Communication Specialist, KLGSDP, Tvm

Oldest Cancer Revealed

Scientists at the University of Cambridge have sequenced the genome of the world's oldest continuously surviving cancer, a transmissible genital cancer that affects dogs. This cancer, which causes ugly genital tumours in dogs around the world, first arose in a single dog that lived about 11,000 years ago. The cancer survived after the death of this dog by the transfer of its cancer cells to other dogs during mating.

The genome of this 11,000-year-old cancer carries about two million mutations – many more mutations than are found in most human cancers, the majority of which have between 1,000 and 5,000 mutations. This has proved that, given the right conditions, cancers can continue to survive for more than 10,000 years despite the accumulation of millions of mutations. The genome of the transmissible dog cancer still harbours the genetic variants of the individual dog that first gave rise to the cancer 11,000 years ago.

Transmissible dog cancer is a common disease found in dogs around the world today. The genome sequence has helped scientists to further understand how this disease has spread. It is very rare for cancer cells to leave the bodies of their original hosts and to spread to other individuals. Studying the evolution of this ancient cancer can help to understand factors driving cancer evolution more generally.

Colour of Roofs Important

Looking strictly at the economic costs and benefits of three different roof types—black, white and green, researchers have found that white roofs are the most cost-effective over a 50-year time span. White roofs win based not purely on economic factors. The study analyzes 22 commercial flat roof projects in the United States in which two or more roof types were considered. The researchers conducted a 50-year life cycle cost analysis, assuming a 20-year service life for white and black roofs and a 40-year service life for green roofs.

A green roof, often called vegetated roofs or rooftop gardens, has become an increasingly popular choice for aesthetic and environmental reasons. Rooftop

PINs in the Future Involve Shapes and Colors

ATM PINs usually consist of a series of numbers chosen by the customer. However given that they are only numbers and that there is a disturbing amount of people who choose really bad passwords, someone could easily figure out the ATM PIN. A company called TRI-PIN has developed a new system which make it much harder for someone to figure out the PIN, simply because in addition to numbers, this system will utilize colors and shapes as well, thus adding on to the numerous possibilities which only a computer will probably be able to figure out.

It may take a while to run all the different permutations. According to the company, "A user chooses a PIN with a combination of numbers, colours and shapes; for example: 3, square, pink, flag. Each time that the user has to input their pin, the colours and symbols randomly change position on the TRI-PIN keypad, so you're never pressing the same sequence of keys. This might work better with a touch screen display rather than physical keys.

Space Dust Comes with Water

Researchers from various universities in U.S have discovered that interplanetary dust particles (IDPs) could deliver water and organics to the Earth and other terrestrial planets. Interplanetary dust, which comes from comets, asteroids, and leftover debris from the birth of the solar system, continually rains down on the Earth and other Solar System bodies. These particles are bombarded by solar wind, predominantly hydrogen ions. This ion bombardment knocks the atoms out of order in the silicate mineral crystal and leaves behind oxygen that is more available to react with hydrogen to create water molecules.
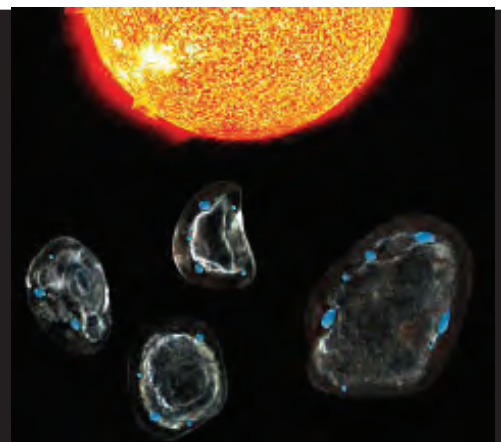
gardens provide storm water management, an appreciable benefit in cities with sewage overflow issues, while helping to cool the roof's surface as well as the air. However, unlike white roofs, green roofs do not offset climate change. White roofs are more reflective than green roofs, reflecting roughly three times more sunlight back into the atmosphere and therefore absorbing less sunlight at earth's surface.

By absorbing less sunlight than either green or black roofs, white roofs offset a portion of the warming effect from greenhouse gas emissions.

Doing an economic analysis scientists found that white roofs are three times more effective at countering climate change than green roofs. Black roofs pose a major health risk in cities that see high temperatures in the summer. The research team concludes

that governments have a role to ban or phase out the use of black or dark roofs, at least in warm climates, because they pose a large negative health risk

Music therapy Effective on Young Cancer Patients

A new study has found that adolescents and young adults undergoing cancer treatment gain coping skills and resilience-related outcomes when they participate in a therapeutic music process that includes writing song lyrics and producing videos. Such music therapy interventions can provide essential psychosocial support to help young patients positively adjust to cancer.

The researchers' Therapeutic Music Video intervention was designed to help adolescents and young adults explore and express thoughts and emotions about their disease and treatment that might otherwise go unspoken. Through the

creative process of writing song lyrics and producing videos, a music therapist offers structure and support to help patients reflect on their experiences and identify what is important to them, such as their spirituality,

family, and relationships with peers and healthcare providers. As they move through phases of the intervention—including sound recordings, collecting video images, and storyboarding—patients have opportunities to

involve family, friends, and healthcare providers in their project, maintaining those important connections during treatment and encouraging communication.

For the study, 113 patients aged 11 to 24 years who were undergoing stem cell transplant treatments for cancer were randomized to be part of a Therapeutic Music Video intervention group or to be part of a control group that received audio books. Participants completed six sessions over three weeks. After the intervention, the Therapeutic Music Video group reported significantly better courageous coping.

Implications of this work are potentially huge: Airless bodies in space such as asteroids and the Moon, with universal silicate minerals, are constantly being exposed to solar wind irradiation that can generate water. In fact, this mechanism of water formation would help explain remotely sensed

data of the Moon, and possibly explains the source of water ice in permanently shadowed regions of the Moon.

The idea that solar wind irradiation might produce water-species has been around, but whether it actually does produce water has been debated. The reasons for the uncertainty are that the amount of water produced is small and it is localised in very thin rims on the surfaces of silicate minerals so that older analytical techniques were unable to confirm the presence of water.

Dr. JAYAKUMARI T R

What can the

In a world encountering severe environmental changes and depletion of natural resources, it is imperative to identify alternative reserves that are environment friendly and sustainable. The scientific community has spotted out one and that is bamboo, the largest grass. To promote and support the exploitation of the potentials

It encourages people to:

- plant a bamboo,
- talk bamboo,
- build with bamboo,
- sing with bamboo,
- wear bamboo,
- eat bamboo,
- feed bamboo,
- breathe bamboo,
- or simply walk among the

Supposed to have originated in the Asian continent, the bamboos include over 1200 species in more than 90 genera. With an enormous diversity from small grass-like, ground cover forms measuring only a few inches to giants as high as 100ft or often more, from yearly blooming ones to monocarpic forms that flower only once at the end of their life after 6-10 decades, from fast spreading running types to non spreading clumpers, from those thriving in hot, humid tropics to cold hardy types that can tolerate a temperature as low as -200C.

of bamboo through information exchange and development of partnerships and alliances around the world, World Bamboo Organization (WBO) was established in 1992. Consisting of individuals, commercial business people, non-profit associations, institutions, and allied trade corporations, the WBO coordinates the communication regarding the environmental, socio economic, biological, and cultural aspects of bamboos between different countries and organizations.

bamboo and feel good on WBD to do something good for the Earth.

Why bamboos?

The fastest growing grasses on earth, the bamboos, supposed to have originated 40-50 million years ago, much before the Dinosaurs began to wander on earth are now the focus of attention of plant lovers, environmentalists and scientists all over the globe. Substituting themselves to plastics, wood and a good lot of industrial and other raw materials, they are

environment friendly and sustainable.

Supposed to have originated in the Asian continent, the bamboos include over 1200 species in more than 90 genera, with an enormous diversity from small grass-like, ground cover forms measuring only a few inches to giants as high as 100ft or often more, from yearly blooming ones to monocarpic forms that flower only once at the end of their life after 6-10 decades, from fast spreading running types to non spreading clumpers, from those thriving in hot, humid tropics to cold hardy types that can tolerate a temperature as low as -200C. The diversity in growth pattern, colour, texture etc. is also remarkable. Belonging to the grass family Poaceae or Gramineae, these tree-like perennials flourish well in almost all climates and soils except in Europe.

Besides their uses as building material and food, bamboos have been used all over the world for

making tools, furniture, weapons etc. since time immemorial. In Kerala, they were made use of in different ways: made into ladders to climb trees especially the tall coconut palms and jacks here; into long poles to pluck fruits from high trees, to make rafts for water transport and/or fishing, to row country boats and rafts, to build temporary or semi permanent sheds, conference halls etc., the hollow internodes were used for cooking food and storing honey, to make baskets, mats, carpets etc... They are often cultivated solely for the sprouts which are nutritious delicacies. Probably, they formed the first living fences to home compounds with their multiple branches and lush green foliage forming a dense screen. Short ornamental varieties make excellent materials for hedges and topiary. Its graceful habit enhances the charm of gardens and hence is a common feature in landscaping. In many Asian cultures, it is also revered as a symbol of strength,

Bamboos Do?

resilience, and serenity.

Amazing environmental benefits

Bamboos have been in use in thousands of different ways. But their contribution towards sustainable development is far more superior.

Ecofriendly substitute for modern construction materials

Bamboos with their unique

furniture. It can even enter into the making of bicycles, skateboards and helmets.

Fast renewable

With a rate of growth as high as up to 4ft per day, bamboos can be harvested in 3-5 years as against 25 -50 years or eve more required for other timber trees.

Sustainable

Sending up of new shoots every year by the rhizomes helps the bamboo cluster sustain

bamboos saves forest trees and thus helps to preserve them. Planting of bamboos on a mass basis has been suggested to reverse the effects of global warming in just 6 years, at the same time providing a renewable source of food and wood.

Purifies air and reduces greenhouse effect

Bamboos produce 30% more oxygen than an equivalent no. of

the soil, thus reducing soil erosion and enhancing soil preservation. Bamboo clusters also serve as windbreaks in open slopes.

Resists earthquake

The flexibility, strength and elasticity of the lightweight bamboos have been identified to resist earthquakes. As they can sway back and forth, houses made of bamboos have been found to persist even after

structural and chemical composition have higher tensile strength than steel and many of its alloys, higher compressive strength than many mixtures of concrete and higher strength-to-weight ratio than graphite, and that even at affordable prices to form the best construction substitute. It can be used in reinforced concretes instead of iron rods; and can replace wood in flooring, building posts, walls, fencing, paneling, plywood and

without the need for replanting after every harvest and its harvest does not cause any soil erosion or other environment upsets.

Purely organic

Growing themselves naturally without pesticides, chemical fertilizers and even irrigation, bamboos are one among the purest organic products available.

Saves forest trees

Substitution of wood by

trees thus purifying the atmosphere and removes more carbon dioxide for photosynthesis, thus reducing this greenhouse gas in the air.

Forms a natural barrier and an efficient windbreak

The extensive hard root system binds soil particles together and reduces surface run-off during heavy rains while the spreading canopy prevents raindrops from directly hitting

earthquakes of magnitude as high as 9.0 in the Richter scale.

Versatality

Bamboos can grow in any soil, any climate and any terrain, thus proving themselves to be capable in restoration of wastelands.

With all the aforesaid potentials, doesn't the Bamboo deserve a much better status? ■

The writer is Associate Professor of Botany, Govt. College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram

A virtual contradiction explicit in the basic conceptualization of the evolution of Malayalam language in connection with the great Sangham period is not even identified by some scholars, whose arguments aimed to establish the antiquity of Malayalam language leave various questions to be answered. For example, in spite of an important position held by the Chera rulers in the Sangham polity, culture and social fabric, no attempts have been made to trace their linguistic affinities and to make postulations on the evolution of Cherattamil on that ground. The people of Tamil nadu being the descendents of the Cholas and the Pandyas, even if the main stream society deviated from the secular traditions and socio-cultural environment reflected in the Sangham poetry by sixth and seventh century A.D, they were very keen in ascertaining their claim on the heritage of the Sangham Age and on Tolkappiyam, that deals with the grammar of Old / Sangham Tamil as well as the ideals of thraivarnika (three upper classes) literature of Tamizhakam.

The life and the language of the common folk and the popular literature (iyal Tamil and drama Tamil) of that time were totally excluded from the Sangham literature and Tholkappiyam. Leelatilakam, which is known as the first grammatical and ideological work of the Manipravaala (Malayalam-Sanskrit mixture) literature in Malayalam, follows not only the form and structure of Tolkappiyam, but reflects also the socio-cultural trends of the upper class society (traivarnikas) of Kerala in the fourteenth century A.D, and the lexical and morpho-phonemic changes occurred in the Manipravaala language, which is a coherent mix of the Kerala bhaasha words known as Tamil and of the Sanskrit words. It resulted in the total absence of the dialects of Tamizhakam and of the styles, words and phrases of the colloquial of that period, in Sangham poetry.

Though Tolkappiyam represents the aristocratic language, ideals and values of that period, it is not as blind as Sangham poetry to the folk lexicon and culture. The poetic language applied by some of the Sangham poets like, Auvayaar, Erichilar Madalar Mathurai Kumaranar, Erukkattoor Thayankannanar, Avoor Moolam kizhar, Arachil kizhar, Mochi keeranaar, Perunthalai Chathanar and Mudamochiyaar closely resemble the eco-linguistic system of Malayalam language. The language of some of the poems of Paranar also reflects the same. It means that, in the poetic languages of the eulogies of a group of poets who were more close to Cheras, infiltrated the Cherattamil (the spoken language of the Chera country), and being the grammatical forms, structures and syntax of Cherattamil and of Paandya-Chozhattamils mostly remain the same, those word-compositions and structural patterns seem to be characteristic of Cherattamil, which is generally known as Koduntamil.

As Cherattamil was a territorially identified branch of Koduntamil used in the speech only, it naturally lacked any kind of written forms. Folk literature also is unwritten. But, 'tishai chol'(local words) is recognized by Tolkappiyam (9. 400) and it makes a wide category with in the vocabulary of the Sangham poetry. A large group of poems representing the Cherattamil forms can easily be classified separately in the Sangham poetry.

It is needless to ascertain the role of Chera country or its rulers or their importance among the Tamizhaka Moovendars (Tamizhaka trios, who bear Crowns).The one and only King who is independently mentioned in Tolkappiyam is the Chera king

Cheras in
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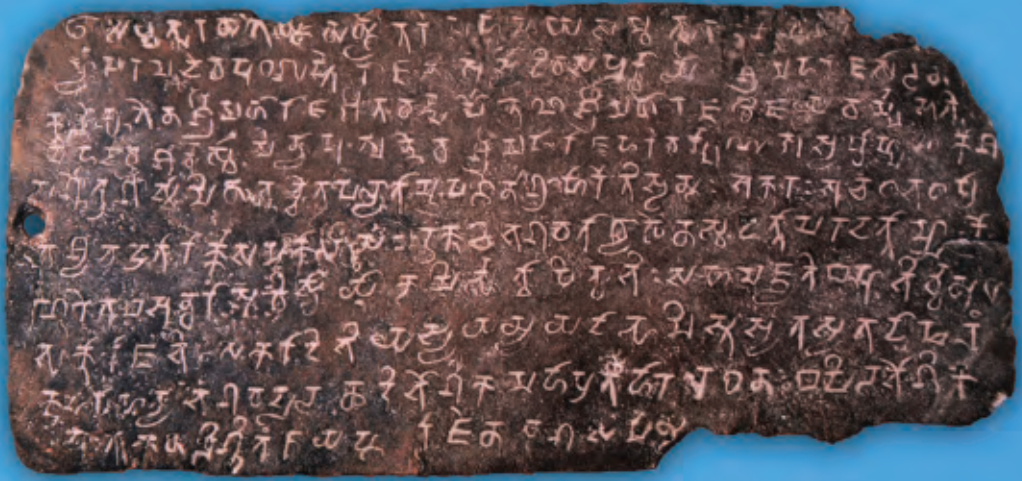
42

and it is repeated three times, whereas, no independent reference to the other two kings are made. In any other instance, the trios are mentioned only as a compound word. Tolkappiyam undoubtedly states that, Chentamil nilam (the land of Chentamil) consisted of the areas of Kodungalloor and Kuttanadu in modern Kerala and the language used there was good Tamil. The words used in a particular locality is called 'thisai chol' for which Tolkappiyam gives the examples taken from the speech forms of Kuttanad, 'thallai' instead of 'thai' and 'acchan' for 'thantai' found in the literary Tamil.

The examples given for 'iyar chol' (used all over Tamizhakam) are thengu (coconut tree), chor (rise) and paal (milk) which are in common usage in Malayalam language. In the last session of the discourse, Tolkappiyam gives colloquial words used to mention the plants, trees, beasts, animals, wild animals, kids, nature and its phenomena etc, and most of them are in common usage in both

Tamil and in Malayalam languages. Apart from the literary Tamil, a big collection of local words we get from colloquial sources, almost all of which are existent in Modern Malayalam. Out of the 1603 rules given in Tolkappiyam, about a 100 rules are exceptional to the Modern Malayalam language, while numerous rules in it do not correspond to the Modern or Middle Tamil. Some grammatical rules of Tolkappiyam even though do not agree with Modern Tamil; seem to be common in modern Malayalam language. The contention to be apprehended here is that, Tolkappiyam authorizes the grammar of Tamil language as well as Malayalam. So, it is Tolkappiyam, not Leelaatilakam to be considered as the first grammatical work of Malayalam language.

The language of the folk dance of the Malankuravar, kuravaikkoottu, in KuRavanchi of Chilappatikaaram and various other portions in it, as well as so many stanzas of Manimekalai

reflect the oral forms of the language used in the coastal region of Tamizhakam during the first millennium of A.D. Political or territorial changes of the country, despite making their marks in the language, do not affect the linguistic area and ecology or the speechology of the language. The psychological tendencies of the speech community, whose cultural environment is the creation of a regular contrast existing between the conservative and progressive tendencies inherent in the genetic structure of the language and the types of contacts it has with major language/s, become decisive factors in the changes of the features of a language.

An analysis of the Sangham Tamil and Tolkappiyam in this perspective, along with the predominance of the Prakrt and Apabramsa languages in the south Indian regions, traces back the roots of Malayalam language to the period of 3rd century B.C, after Hala Kannada (old Kannada), consisting of the

Thollkappiyam

Telugu isoglosses, parted away from the proto-Dravidian language groups and acquired its independent identity. In the course of time, Telugu apart from Hala Kannada acquired its distinctive status. By this time, the proto-Dravidian stage had a halt, repelling various Dravidian dialects and tribal languages of different speech communities in the Tamizhaka region and Sanghattamil attained a designated position because of the political power the Tamizhaka Moovendar had had, and the socio-cultural vistas envisaged in the Sangham poetry, which in fact consists of only one third of the Old Tamil literature and the rest of it is in the abyss of the pasts.

But a lot of references in Tholkappiyam and Pali-Prakrt literature give as much information about the oral literary tradition of Sanghattamil and its speech forms. Samples of such speech forms and indications of their cognation to Malayalam language and grammar are, as pointed out above, amply given in the Tholkappiam. Apart from Chilappatikaaram and Manimekalai, Thirukkural, Thiruppavai, Periyapuranam by Chekizhar, and songs of Thirunaavukkarasar also contain the oral forms known as Malainaattu vazhakkam or Cherattamil tradition of the Middle Tamil period, and after that, the folk songs of Modern Tamil, in spite of the script used to write it, have a close affinity to and resemblance with the oral forms of Malayalam language than that of Chentamil (literary Tamil).

A distinctive gap between the literary or standard forms of languages and its speech forms applied among the common people is natural in the case of developed languages spoken over a large geographical area and the Old Tamil of Tamizhakam, comprising a large region from Tiruppati hills at the North to the Kanyakumari sea shore at the South, is a model for it. Many

The one and only King who is independently mentioned in Tolkappiyam is the Chera king and it is repeated three times, whereas, no independent reference to the other two kings are made. In any other instance, the trios are mentioned only as a compound word. Tolkappiyam undoubtedly states that, Chentamil nilam consisted of the areas of Kodungalloor and Kuttanadu in modern Kerala and the language used there was good Tamil.


eminent Tamil scholars like Joseph Beshchi and Andronov, who had authored the grammars of both, the literary Tamil and the Koduntamil (colloquial Tamil), after field studies of the different dialects and speech forms of Modern Tamil, describe evidently that, there is a wide gap between standard Tamil/Chentamil used in the news papers, media and public meetings, and the Tamil spoken in the streets, markets and other public places. Those who know standard Tamil but unfamiliar with spoken forms will not understand the language spoken by the common mass and vice verse.

Moreover, Tamil dialects have caste orientation also. Such a contrasting tendency vibrant in the evolutionary history of Tamil language can be traced back up to Sangham period and the origin of Malayalam language is related to this oral tradition which existed in the western hill tracts and in the coastal belt of Western Ghats at that period. By the partition of Hala Kannada from proto-Dravidian language group, the remained section was called Old Tamil that consisted of the oral tradition known as Malainattu vazhakkam (tradition of the Malanadu) or Cherattamil (Tamil of Cheras) followed in the western sea shores and hill tracts of Cheranadu, making the place name Malai/Chera an adjective for the topological speech variation of Old Tamil. The literary forms and the script were same whereas, the Malanaattu or Chera linguistic features are reflected in the folk narratives as cited in the above given examples.

The points of deviation between Tamil and Malayalam languages, acquiring each language its own independent identity, either by excluding certain rules stipulated in Tholkappiyam, or by introducing certain new rules in each language, evolved out of the automatic changes occurred in the articulatory phonetical tendencies of each speech

community, are the policy adopted by each language in receiving loan words and lack of the scripts in Tamil for all kinds of speech sounds used in the speech. But, script is not an organic part of the language. Malayalam language extended its alphabets and number of scripts and received loan words accordingly, as for as possible, in the original forms, while Tamil shifted to a new script having limited consonant letters. Adaptation of words and grammatical forms from Prakrt and Apabhramsa languages contributed a lot for the changes of articulation and grammar. By sixth century A.D, Tamil adopted Tamil-Brahmi script which has only 37 letters including Aytham and it lacks the letters for the Sanskrit middle consonants. According to Tolkappiyam (eccha iyal 401,402), 'Vadachol' is the loan words received to the Sanghattamil from the northern languages like, Prakrts, Apabhramsas and Sanskrit and two methods are sanctioned in Tholkappiyam for accepting such loan words in to Old Tamil. If the foreign word is formed of the letters containing in the Tamil scripts, it can be borrowed as such, like, 'kamalam' and 'kunkumam', and if the word is unfitting to the Tamil letters, it should be changed in to the mould of Tamil scripts.

Hence, Lakshmana in Sanskrit becomes Ilakkanan or Ilakkuvan in Tamil and Seeta becomes Cheeta. Thus, Vajra dramshtan becomes Vacchira vallekiran. By another rule, Rama becomes Irama, adding I in the initial position of the word. So, the formally correct form of the title of the ancient Malayalam epic of 12th century A.D is Iramacharitam, not Ramacharitam. In principle, Malayalam language followed the first rule- writing foreign words in its original form-, since it continued the Vettezhuthu script even after middle Tamil adopted the new, Tamil –Brahmi script. In a later stage, Malayalam language shifted to the Arya script now in
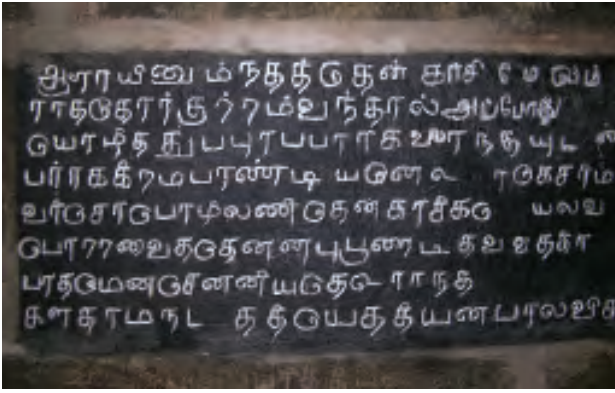
use, which also is capable of writing any Indo-Aryan word in its original form. Historically speaking, it is the basic factor of differentiation between Malayalam and Tamil and all other changes are due to this.

Actually, the six policies said to be adopted by Malayalam language and considered as the factors that differentiate Malayalam language from Tamil, have been existent in the colloquial Tamil and Tamil folk lore, and the absence of the personal ending verbal forms was in force in the initial stage of syntactic development in the proto-Dravidian languages. Moreover, it is impossible to avoid such grammatical forms completely even from modern Malayalam literary language. Arguments based on the derivation of the words, 'kizhakku' and 'mekku' denoting East and West respectively, etc raised by Robert Caldwell intending to establish the antiquity of Tamil over Malayalam has been disproved by the modern linguists and historians, pointing out the fact that, those words are of Sumerian origin and had been brought to the peninsular India by proto-Dravidians.

So, we are lead to the conclusion concerning the above said language policies that, they owe not to the Malayalam language, but to the Tamil folk lore and her common tongue. In fact, the six policies proclaimed by A.R.Rajaraja Varma in Kerala panineeyam following Caldwell

denote not the difference between Malayalam language and Tamil, but between Chentamil and Koduntamil of south-western coasts. A misunderstanding in contrast to it has been established because, the scholars in Tamil and Malayalam equally refused to accept and peruse the folk wisdom and native speechology as valid materials of study.

L.V.Ramaswami Aiyyar through his morphological and phonological studies of Malayalam language, penetrated in to the relation between colloquial Old Tamil and the evolution of Malayalam language, when he said that, 'in the earliest centuries of the Christian era the west coast speech and the language that was used in post Sangham texts (i.e.Early Middle

Tamil) were fundamentally alike, with of course a few regional differences. This speech (which was later employed in literature by Saivites and Vaishnavite bhaktas) may have already been developed in colloquial of the masses some time about the beginning of the Christian era. Old Tamil which continued to be employed in the late Sangham texts may have by this time become Kunstsprache (artificial). In the east coast the living speech of the masses was used in the works of the Saivites and Vaishnavites saints after about the 5th century A.D. In the west coast, about this period the colloquial was perhaps gradually evolving characteristic Malayalam features.'

Though his assumptions are not totally faultless, L.V.R reached

this correct juncture but failed to proceed accordingly towards its normal end because, he didn't pay serious attention to the colloquial of the western coasts or to the findings given in Tholkappiyam on the native usages of the common folk. Rather, a close watch at the Tamil and Malayalam folk lore, especially at the contents of the folk stories and myths, names of the house hold utensils and kinships and the grammatical and lexical features of the folk songs would have impressed him enabling to make a correction in his contention that, the evolution of Malayalam language was related to the Early Middle Tamil. And it would have helped him to arrive at the historically and linguistically reliable conclusion that, the origin of Malayalam language was a topologically characterized speechological deviation occurred and developed among the common mass of south-western coasts and eastern hill tracts of Tamizhakam, around the first century B.C. After the end of the proto-Dravidian period by 3rd century B.C, up to 3rd century A.D was known as the period of Sangham Tamil or Pazhantamil, and it was in this period, the changes described in the colloquial of the common people of western coasts flourished. Hence, the period of origin of Malayalam language goes up to the Sangham age and its roots deep in to the colloquial variant of Old Tamil. ■

The writer is Rtd. Archivist

Aluminium Plant

An unusual garden plant with its ovate green leaves having silvery streaks resembling a dramatic metallic design -it is the Aluminium plant which is scientifically christened Pilea cadierei". The showy, silver-splashed leaves make Aluminium plant a stunning and popular house plant. This is a fast growing and easy to grow perennial plant. The name Pilea comes from Pileus, a Roman felt cap which the seed of the plant resembles.

The fast growing evergreen plant is native to China, Vietnam and South East Asian rain forest. It spreads rapidly in its native tropical habitat where it spreads as a ground cover. It makes an attractive house plant whether grown in a pot or hanging basket due to its special and attractive foliage. The plant can be grown outdoors in tropical regions as a shade –garden ground cover. The oval shaped leaves which are the plant's beauty are thin up to 8 cm long and dark green arranged in opposite pairs.

Their edges are slightly incised and the surface has four rows of raised silvery patches between the green vein areas. Hence the name Aluminium plant. The leaves usually grow from the ground to their standard size, branching out in an umbrella fashion. Leaf appearance gives the plant an additional common name Water melon Pilea. The plant grows to a height of 15 to 30 cms and produces green or greenish-white flowers which are tiny, insignificant and grow in tight clusters. But they are scarcely noticeable. It prefers partial to full shade for

satisfactory growth and does well in 45% shade.

Aluminium plants do not typically thrive in direct sunlight, as it can damage their leaves. But if proper sunlight is not received it may grow leggy. Since they are tropical in nature they require moist, sandy well-drained soil and warm temperatures. The Aluminium plant generally prefers a high level of atmospheric humidity. If the growing place is dry, place the plant on a tray of pebbles filled with water. Be sure the Aluminium plant is sitting on the pebbles and not in the water. For healthy growth the plant needs a sandy well-drained soil. The suitable potting mix should contain one part peat moss to one part loam to two parts sand. During the growing season the plant should be kept evenly moist, but do not allow the soil to dry out completely. Normal air humidity will please the plant. The main shoots of Aluminium plant naturally divide into side branches and dense growth is usually automatic. But it is advisable to nip off over growing shoots sometimes so as to encourage further division. Pinching of growing tips helps to keep the plant from growing leggy. Water sparingly making the entire potting mixture barely moist but never allow the medium to over moist.

Aluminium plant can be propagated by cuttings taken in late spring. Cut the stem just below a node- the place where a leaf is attached. Take young tip cuttings up to 7.5- 8 cm long, dip their cut ends in hormone rooting powder and insert each in a 5-8 cm pot of gritty rooting mixture containing ingredients as mentioned earlier. Each cutting will normally root in about three to four weeks if placed in a warm, shady position and watered enough to keep the mixture barely moist. Water the plant when the first ¼ inch of the soil feels dry. When growing in a container, stop watering when water drips from the drainage holes. Fertilise the Aluminium plant once a month during the growing season. Use a balanced, water-soluble fertiliser, such as any fertiliser mixture like 17 complex or 18 complex. To prepare a fertilising solution, mix one tablespoon of fertiliser with one litre of water and sprinkle the sieved solution at the plant base. Chemical fertilisers need be used only 2 to 3 months after planting.

As the plant grows older stems will drop its lower leaves. This is normal. Cut back older stems in spring when they become leggy. If the plant still drops a few more leaves it may be due to over watering. Then move the plant to a warmer spot and stop watering until the soil dries out to a bit. If over watering was so intense try to repot the plant to save it. Then use a pot with sufficient drainage holes for repotting.

Aluminium plant forms a thick ground cover in a fully shaded location. It can also be used as a ground cover, window sill, and potted plant and in terrariums. The plant is suited for hanging baskets or cascading down a wall. A collection of different available varieties of the plant would make an attractive display on a window with bright but indirect light. Sometimes the plant is preferred as an aquatic plant also. This will survive under water for a few months, maybe even a year, but this is not truly aquatic it cannot survive submerged for long periods of time. There is a special variety in Pilea cadierei which is a dwarf one with leaves about half as big as those of the original species and it seldom grows to become any more than 15 cm in height. ■

Concessions for VHSE students

The government has issued orders in favour of those VHSE students who need special support for attending examinations. According to the order, those students who are mentally challenged and have specific learning disorders can avail the service of a scribe or commentator. Students who are suffering from disorders like Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia will get 10 more minutes for one hour per paper to write the exam. The VHSE director is authorized to issue orders after verification, for those students who need special support.

G.O. (MS) No.8 /2014 / General Education, Dated Thiruvananthapuram, 06.01.2014

Subsidy on interest for Educational loans

The State Government has extended the last date for submitting the application for getting subsidy on interest for Educational loans. Applicants whose annual family income is above 3 lakhs will have to submit their application before 2014 February 28. For those who belong to the BPL category attested copy of course certificate / transfer certificate is enough.

GO (MS)4/2014 /Planning, dtd Thiruvananthapuram 27-01-2014

Creamy layer income limit increased

Government has increased the creamy layer income limit of the Other Backward Classes in the state to Rs.6 lakhs from 4.5 lakhs.

GO (MS) No.05 / 2014 / Backward Class Development Dept., dtd Thiruvananthapuram, 31-01-2014

Special Development Fund for MLAs

An amount of Rs.69 crore has been released to the District Collectors being the second and final instalment for the current financial year under the special development fund for MLA including the nominated member.

GO (Rt) No.266 / 2014 / Fin. , dtd Thiruvananthapuram, 10-01-2014

For details of Govt. Orders and Circulars please visit the websites
www.prd.kerala.gov.in, ww.kerala.gov.in, www.finance.kerala.gov.in