

Innovative Technologies

Keynote Speech

In Need of Innovations: Research into Rupees

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Today we consider national economy to move towards an advanced economy that is innovative, knowledge-based, and self reliant. The emerging era is promised to be an era of renewed vigour and dynamism. This economy will not materialize unless there is a dynamic innovation eco system which implies that universities and researchers have a significant role to play. As we listened to research presentations in an event such as this we have to consider what is next and what impact are we likely to have? Mere presence of data and interpretations are not sufficient.

It is important that researchers take on challenging topics which have national significance. In agriculture and plantations scientific researchers may have to be ready to be up anytime and climb trees at odd hours of the day as well if one is to view how things are shaping up whatever the cultivar is. New cultivars have to be made ready for emerging situations – climate change, drought conditions, salinity tolerance, nutrient depleted soils – and the developments of such take years if not a decade. We hear with excess paddy we cannot do much with exports as the varieties we have are not in demand on the global market. For Sri Lanka 2016 is considered to be challenging, adding too the El Nino situation. Those who are used to plan on short term basis such concepts are alien. However the non recognition of these mandatory efforts can lead to serious productivity differences in time to come

South Africa was a country which celebrated end of apartheid in 1990 officially and in 1994 democratically. Their interest in science technology and innovation in transforming the economy after years of neglect is quite interesting and a parallel perhaps can be drawn with Sri Lanka as we too emerged out of a 30 year conflict and looking towards in becoming a breakout nation! South Africans were also worried that the speed gained with the euphoria of a new era need to be translated to solid action to sustain growth. South Africa had set up a National System of Innovation and has a National Council of Innovation. They have moved on with provincial innovation hubs too. There is a strong movement to develop their human capital in this direction. A comment from Prof Michael Ogembo-Kachieng'a of University of Pretoria is quite important – Human capital is where the ladders of modern, knowledge-intensive businesses start: the wellspring of innovation, the homepage of insight and creativity. Money talks, but it does not think; machines perform, often better and faster than human beings do, but they do not invent.

The past had shown Sri Lankans can innovate. There are many examples of negative innovation from the present – implementations of ideas that are not useful. We must rejoin the innovation community through active pursuance of this as an objective. Our research must end generating rupees to the nation.