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Innovation, `the key to success'

FOR those in the thick of computer software in India, it is no longer news that the London Underground (Tube) and the Sydney Metropolitan Transport Services were computerised by Indian companies. And that they gained the expertise while computerising the ticketing for the huge railway system here and State-owned road transport services.

This innovation and improvisation of the latest technology to meet local needs was just the kind that contributed to growth and at an advanced stage, make India globally competitive, said Mr. Vinay L Deshpande, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Ncore Technology Private Ltd, at the Global Village Seminar organised as part of Bangalore IT.Com.

As almost every other speaker did, Mr. Deshpande also said that while there was a good deal Indian software engineers could be proud of, there still had a long, long way to go before they would be at par with world figures. India had the intellectual capacity, but it needed full State and government support in coordinated R&D and the active participation of authorities in creating the market. Innovation had to be encouraged. Almost without exception, previous instances showed that those who had improvised and indigenised technology survived, and those who held to kit import technology perished.

Mr. Deshpande cited instances of Indian engineers making a mark globally, though domestic IT production was less than 0.1 per cent of global figures. Countries like the Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan had achieved far higher figures. However, to list achievements which could have been, with the right kind of help from the government and back to global standards were:

I Yantra the smallest and lightest multimedia notebook (or laptop) PC in the world was developed two years ago and exported to Japan by a Bangalore based company. And yet, today, Taiwan is the second largest producer of notebooks in the world, valued at \$ 6.5 billions. The first is Japan;

I During the last financial year, the entire profit made by a Bangalore-based peripherals manufacturer on a total revenue of Rs. 1 billion came from the sale of printers that were indigenised and improvised through local design and innovation;

I And an independent manufacturing EOU in Kochi, exported advanced networking products worth Rs. 1.6 billions in the last four years, all developed by another Bangalore-based company.

Mr. Deshpande gave several other instances of a similar kind, emphasising that R & D and encouragement to innovations had to come from the Government. This had been so in all the developed countries.

The achievements of the US, Japan, Germany and others were possible only with heavy investment by governments and low-cost lending by banks. The US dominated robotics between the 50s and 60s, a position taken over later by Japan. The Japanese had robotics exports of over \$500 millions by 1987 because of a powerful link between business and government.

In India, the opening of STD/ISD public call booths had created a huge market for metering and billing equipment, another uniquely local solution to local needs, Mr. Deshpande said.

With that kind of approach, India could easily cross the export target for software set by itself, though it was termed `ambitious.'