

Saudi Arabia to spend SR32b on technology

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The kingdom will spend over SR32 billion on research and development as part of its 20-year National Science and Technology Plan (NSTP), according to Saleh Al Atheel, president of King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology (KACST).

The allocation represents 2.5 per cent of the kingdom's GDP of SR1.3 trillion, up from 0.25-0.50 per cent.

Speaking on investment opportunities in the R&D sector during a seminar titled 'Investment Horizons' that was held in Riyadh recently, Al Atheel said that in the near future the government would install 'technology incubators' at five Saudi universities as part of its programme to promote applied research in the kingdom.

Buildings for the project, costing SR15 million each, will be established at King Saud University (Riyadh), King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (Dhahran), King Faisal University (Dammam), King Abdul Aziz University (Jeddah) and King Khaled University (Abha).

He explained that these incubators will be acquired as part of KACST's National Science and Technology Plan to promote scientific research in the kingdom with the collaboration of the private sector. The research project, in its initial stage, will be conducted at the academic level by researchers, for which funding will come from the private sector. "When we talk about R&D spending, we should not confine ourselves only to KACST but rather to the kingdom as a whole. Major organisations like Saudi Aramco, SABIC, universities and the private sector have already stepped up their spending on R&D," Al Atheel said.

He added that this was in addition to the IT cities that are being set up in different parts of the kingdom by the Saudi Organisation for Industrial Estates and Technology Zones (SOIETZ), which will also contribute their share to R&D.

Asked about the GCC summit's decision to utilise nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, he said that their researchers were already engaged in developing this technology for civilian use. He said that nuclear energy could play an important role in providing a protective umbrella against ultraviolet radiation as part of its cooperation plan with the Presidency of Meteorology and Environment (PMA).

"We also cooperate with the customs (for the detection of any equipment exposed to radiation) and the ministry of interior to ensure that companies contracted by it do not leave any hazardous waste that could damage the environment," he said.

Al Atheel said that KACST has already signed an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for the exploitation of atomic energy for peaceful purposes. "We are also committed to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty," he said. He explained that unlike other countries that rely on nuclear energy, the kingdom has abundant oil resources.