

Environmental crisis - Root of the global economic downturn

ASHOKA
ABAYAGUNAWARDANE

Continued from June 24

According to these tired systems the chief indicator of development is the growth of the GDP. Engaging in unchanging industrial jobs, shifting away from labour intensive jobs, spending large amounts of time in physically non-taxing activities, constructing homes and establishments that far exceed actual requirements, building and using larger and larger vehicles, constructing wider and wider roads to run them on, reducing quality time with family members, reduction in relaxation, encouraging enterprises and businesses that cause degeneration in quality and morality and implementing massive projects that cause equally massive environment damage are components of these ill-formulated and destructive economic fundamentals.

Better system of existence

This system of measuring growth via the GDP is not one that indicates a higher quality of human existence. Instead, it is one of the speed with which mankind brings itself to destruction. Blinded and tricked by this measurement the entire populated world is on a mad race to extinction and, in a dark age where a human being dies of hunger every 20 minutes, it is crucial that the world finds a better system of existence if it is to continue to exist at all. Measurements that are indicative of these systems are currently being formulated by experts.

The principles for these new mechanisms are not based on uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources but rather, are based on increasing the space available for individuals to lead satisfied lives. To put it simply, these methods encourage people to eschew excess and deprivation and instead, advocates a balanced, thoughtful and regenerative existence.

Recently a new measure known as the universal happiness index has been proposed by experts. Those nations that are considered to be the most developed in terms of the GDP find themselves at the other end of the spectrum when measured against this index and its implications for citizens' welfare.

Nations hitherto vilified as undeveloped suddenly find themselves in the forefront when views in terms of the new index. Topping the list according to this



Cutting trees for development projects should be minimized

measure is little known island of Vanuatu Northeast of Australia. A number of Brazilian countries nations are in the top bracket. Sri Lanka flogged and insulted as a 'poor country' stands at number 16. Only Bhutan and Vietnam score higher than Sri Lanka in Asia and they come in at 12 and 13 respectively. In comparison, China is at number 31 and India at 62. Way down the list lie Japan at 95, Britain at 108 and America at 150. The lowest in the list are a few countries in Africa.

America and Europe have now recognized the inescapable, brutally harsh truth that well-being doesn't automatically result from being well-off. They are attempting to wean themselves from their socially, environmentally and economically damaging addictions. The 'Dreams Project' of American President Barack Obama is a case in point. According to this, it is envisioned that America will double the use of renewable energy sources within three years. The challenge issued by former Vice-President of the USA, AL Gore to the people of America to exclusively use renewable energy by the year 2018 is another.

Now, knowing that we are way ahead in terms of the new indicators of growth and development, it is crucial that we maintain or increase that position, stop being tricked into bad development plans, act with clarity and responsibility and plan for a rejuvenated and renewed Sri Lanka.

Financial debt vs Environmental debt

The chief deterrent to the development of Sri Lanka is its debt burden. However, looking at the future direction of what will become the ideal of global development, countries currently known as development countries will in fact be designated as undeveloped or under-developed. Moreover, given the massive environment damage per-

petrated by those developed countries indicates that their environmental debt to countries such as ours by far exceeds our financial debt to them.

It is common knowledge that an individual living in a 'developed' country emits about 20 times more carbon into the atmosphere than a counterpart living in a 3rd world country. The bottom line observation of uncontrolled pollution that resulted from this excess is that people from developed countries have also, in the process taken away the right of those in poorer countries to emit CO₂.

Environment sustaining growth

The two main political parties in Sri Lanka have each proposed a different system for developing the country.

The first is the 'Re-awakening Sri Lanka' plan of the UNP. It starts with a 'vision for development' that is introduced (not verbatim) in this manner: "There is only one path. That is sustaining a high rate of economic development. We are not talking of a 4-5 percent growth but rather an 8-10 percent growth. Not in the short term but in the long term. It is only through such sustainable development that we can ease our debt burden." It is clear that the UNP is still trapped in tradition, outdated economic paradigms. That it is clueless about the developments in current thinking. It is simply a blind aping of destructive paths taken by America and Europe.

The second is the 'Mahinda Chinthana' of the UPFA. It starts by stating that the plan envisages a movement towards a disciplined society. Its opening topic is 'Quality Citizen'. The first paragraph is as follows (not verbatim): "In order for individuals to grow not only materially but spiritually as well, they need to be imparted with knowledge of both devotion and insight. In order to achieve this, it is my goal to

eradicate hatred and instill quality and productivity in relationships between parents and children, wives and husbands, teachers and students, those providing services and those using those services, those that rule and those that are ruled.

This is the fundamental requirement for a framework for future philosophical outlook, lifestyles and life systems. This is not a system that landed within the 'Mahinda Chinthana' by chance but rather a system born out of the foundations of insight based on the Buddha's Dharma that has thrived and sustained human beings in high quality living for thousands of years. It is our responsibility to work towards building a strong nation based on these principles.

Just as much as Sri Lanka found a way to completely eradicate terrorism, we can formulate a new system for the benefit of the world through the 'Mahinda Chinthana'.

We must, every single one of us, commit ourselves to zeal and focus towards finding such a solution. Just as much as the Armed Forces took the lead in defeating terrorism, academics and experts to take the lead in development. If this is not done soon, then Forces bent on diluting and distorting the 'Mahinda Chinthana' with outdated economic systems will drive us into a morass of social and economic putrefaction from which we will not be able to recover.

If we are to ensure that these efforts of destruction come to naught, we have to deeply analyze and educate ourselves on the economic and environmental challenges that the world faces and bring our formidable cultural and religious heritage to the fore to find lasting and, most importantly, 'universally satisfying' solutions to this intrinsically bound plethora of problems. **Concluded**

(The writer is Executive Director - The Energy Forum)