

\$2.30 African and the \$2.20 EU cow

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Article

New Sunday Times - 06/15/2008

I AM of the opinion that it I would be an injustice if we A were to completely extract and enjoy the benefits without leaving anything at all for future generations."

Such were the profound words of concern voiced by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on the occasion of his birthday last week.

He further acknowledged that "if necessary, the people should change their lifestyle to help reduce the impact of the rise in prices on them".

These suggestions cannot come at a better time, and it applies not only to Malaysia but more so to the international community. The reminder is all the more appropriate as we try to embrace the idea of "sustainable development" as the new thrust of thinking for our own survival on planet Earth.

"Sustainable development" has come to be commonly understood as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations".

Inherent in this idea is the urgent need to change our present lifestyle which in many ways is no longer sustainable and is bound to cause even more agony and misery given what is happening currently.

This is especially so in the developing countries where many are struggling to survive and are therefore among the most vulnerable.

Interestingly enough, the king in his address uses the one all-important word "injustice" to describe the consequences of some of our "unsustainable" practices today. Indeed, injustice, too, seems to be one of the stark root causes of the state of imbalance faced by many communities in almost all aspects of life.

One clear way to illustrate this is to look at the trend in the consumption of the world's foremost resources, oil. The G8 countries of the developed economies, namely, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and US, together with China, India and South Korea, are said to collectively account for 65 per cent of the world's energy consumption (IHT, June 9).

What is ironic is some despite of these countries do not produce a single drop of oil, for example. South Korea which is the "world's fifth-largest oil consumer", according to its prime minister. Others are among the world's worst polluters, the ill-effects of which are seen more significantly among many of the economically-deprived non-G8 nations.



Thanks to soaring oil and energy prices, such global injustice and hypocrisy can no longer be conveniently swept under the carpet. It is sobering to listen to the Japanese trade and energy minister when he admitted: "If left unaddressed, it may well cause a recession in the global economy."

This is, of course, an understatement because this will ultimately translate into more suffering and pain for millions who are already in a dire situation, pushing the so-called "misery index" even higher.

Many more lives will invariably be lost to something that is preventable if only we care, act justly and stop the hypocrisy.

It is because of such an attitude that at least four billion people are now languishing at the base of the economic pyramid with less than US\$3 (RM9.80) a day. Few even noticed that thousands of innocent children are dying every day while the rich and powerful continue to play politics and pay lip-service.

A case in point is the most recent finding of the Copenhagen Consensus Centre released late last month. Based on the work of more than 50 economists, including an expert panel of eight economists, five of whom are Nobel laureates, many low-cost measures have been suggested as a priority list of cost-effective ways to help the world's poor.

Four in the top five are: supplements of vitamin A and zinc for malnourished children, supply of iron supplements, salts iodisation and de-worming; expanding youth immunisation, and biofortification of seed stocks.

In summary, there is ample evidence to show that the so-called "scarcity" of resources today is in part due to the prevailing injustice in the way the rich squander whatever is available here and now.

To make it worse, those reaping the full benefits of such actions are hypocritical about the ways the world's poor could be helped despite the doable suggestions by the Copenhagen Consensus Centre.

The injustice is best summed up in the words of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, World Bank managing director and former finance minister and foreign minister of Nigeria: "Is it really acceptable while the average African lives on US\$2.30 a day, cattle in Europe draw an average subsidy of US\$2.20 per head a day?"

The stark reality is there are many contradictions today that point to the fact that our ways are no longer sustainable. And we are facing the tipping point unless we change our thinking and lifestyle soon.

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