

Each person has a role to play

Saving the Planet

WEEKEND REFLECTIONS
REFLECCIONES



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WE TEND TO THINK THAT CLIMATE CHANGE IS A PROBLEM THAT HAS TO BE DEALT WITH BY THE AUTHORITIES OR GOVERNMENTS. THE COMMON REFRAIN IS THAT "THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO INDIVIDUALLY" ABOUT IT. PEOPLE IN POORER COUNTRIES THINK THAT RICH COUNTRIES MUST TAKE ALL THE BLAME AS THEIR EMISSIONS ARE MUCH HIGHER. WHILE THIS IS TRUE UP TO SOME EXTENT, THE HIGHER POPULATION DENSITIES AND OUTDATED ATTITUDES TO THE ENVIRONMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES OFTEN MAKE MATTERS WORSE

A recent UN Report warned that Climate Change would be an existential threat to mankind, if we do not dial down on the Greenhouse Gas emissions and other activities that contribute to global warming. A staggering 143 million people will likely be uprooted over the next 30 years by rising seas, drought, searing temperatures and other climate catastrophes, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report published a few weeks ago by the United Nations.

The world needs to launch a "transformation" to curb global warming, a top researcher behind an upcoming UN report on climate solutions said, adding that it is never too late to act. In the United Nations assessment dubbed an "atlas of human suffering", experts laid out in devastating detail the past, present and future impacts of climate change on people and the planet they depend on. Science now considers it unequivocal that humans are responsible for this accelerating climatic upheaval.

To do that the world must find a way to drastically cut the amount of planet-warming gases pumped into the atmosphere. We are talking about the large-scale transformation of all the major systems: energy, transport, infrastructure, buildings, agriculture and food. According to many experts, we are at a crossroads and depending on the decisions taken, we can contribute to making the problem of climate change worse or try to find answers.

Determination

We tend to think that Climate Change is a problem that has to be dealt with by the authorities or Governments. The common refrain is that "there is nothing we can do individually" about it. People in poorer countries think that rich countries must take all the blame as their emissions are much higher. While this is true up to some extent, the higher population densities and outdated attitudes to the environment in developing countries often make matters worse.

Indeed, even as big decisions on Climate such as the Paris Accords are best left to the Governments to negotiate and implement, there are plenty of steps that can be taken at individual level to prevent global warming. The best thing is that most of these mea-



sures cost little or even nothing at all. Everyone can take these steps easily - some of them with a certain amount of sacrifice. What is needed is the determination to succeed and a desire to protect Planet Earth, our only home at least until we learn to go in search of habitable planets in far-flung galaxies. But that will not happen anytime soon.

One of the best ways of saving the Planet is using less fossil fuel. Here in Sri Lanka, the current circumstances have compelled us to save fuel in any case, but even when fuel becomes widely available as usual, we should be determined to continue this practice. If

you go to the office by car, give the bus or train a try. If you use the car to go to the junction to buy the newspaper, just walk. It is good for your health too, not to mention the health of Mother Earth.

Carpooling

The practice of 'carpooling' is very common abroad, whereby several people in a given neighbourhood use one car to go to the City or another destination. This could be popularised here bit by bit. Slowing down on the road, even by 10 km/h, can save some fuel, as does the correct or optimal tyre pressure. Sudden accelerations and sudden brak-



ing (unless in an emergency) also take a toll on fuel, so give up those habits. It is also generally better to run on a full tank of fuel as much as possible.

At home (or office) too, there are many steps that we can take to save our Planet. We know that most of our mains electricity comes from thermal power plants which produce noxious emissions. Just the simple act of switching off a light bulb or a fan in an empty room can move the needle a bit. If you use an air-conditioner at home or office, remember that even setting your air conditioning unit one degree warmer than you normally would can cut costs by up to 10 per cent. If you go

for a new air-conditioner, choose an inverter model which can save power by as much as 70 per cent. And check whether you can do with a fan instead of the AC, especially at night.

Alternatives

Right now, we are also experiencing an LP Gas issue. Here again, there are alternatives such as induction cooking that you should explore. They use less electricity than mainstream electric cookers and have zero emissions. With induction, heat is transferred directly to your cookware, not the surface of the cooktop. With induction cook tops,

you can control the temperature more precisely than gas or electric. It is easy to clean too.

When you buy food to cook on your cookware, remember to go local. In today's globalised world, we get food from all over the world. But a can of sardines from Chile would have travelled around 16,000 Km to get to your table. Just think of the emissions of the ships that brought that can of sardine to your table. On the other hand, buying a locally made can of sardine (or fresh fish, for that matter) would not even incur one-tenth of those emissions.

Say no to plastic bottles

And unless essential, refrain from buying bottles of water or soft drinks in PET bottles. It takes hundreds of litres of water just to make one of these plastic bottles. Tap water, even without boiling, is just as safe. Eating less meat and dairy products is another step advocated by most climate change activists and lab or plant based alternatives that taste like the real thing are now available.

One of the best steps that you can take to protect the Planet is planting a tree. There is a worldwide movement to plant a billion trees by 2030 and you can join that initiative very easily. Saving the planet is not difficult if we are truly committed to that goal.