

Challenges of 2010 and 'Believable Change' for 'a Brighter Future'

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Locally 2009 was a remarkable year as it was possible to wipeout terrorism from Sri Lankan soil and to ensure a safe future for its citizens. Globally 2009 was a year doomed by the inability of world leaders to seal a deal to stop the climate catastrophe to ensure a safe future for humankind.

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) 2009 has been warmer than 2008 and was expected to be the fifth-warmest year on record since 1850. Most importantly, they predict that due to a combination of man-made global warming and a moderate warming of the tropical Pacific Ocean (a phenomenon known as El Niño), it is very likely that 2010 will be a warmer year than 2009. This means that it is more likely than not that 2010 will be the warmest year in the instrumental record, beating the previous record set in 1998. This trend will continue with further burning of fossil fuels. Today, as a result of climatic changes, the dynamic equilibrium of all ecosystems is at risk. Rain patterns have changed. The dry season is getting drier and longer, making water resources scarce. There will be harder rains during the wet season disturbing the growth of food crops. It is essential to reverse this trend during the new decade. In this decade, people living on earth will have to decide whether or not a 10 millenniums old human civilization is to continue beyond the first century of this one.

Sri Lanka has already suffered from drought in 2009 which significantly reduced food production and ultimately resulted in rice being in short supply for the country. If this year is worse than the previous year, it is of utmost importance to face this challenge as it will threaten food security as well as the livelihood of a large majority of farmers. Higher temperatures can be detrimental to agricultural productivity. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that in low-latitude countries like Sri Lanka, even a moderate temperature increase of 1–2 degrees is likely to have significantly negative yield impacts for major cereals. The productivity of our main food crop rice will be drastically reduced at high temperatures as this crop is vulnerable to sterility at temperatures over 35 degrees.

As Sri Lankans are we ready to face this challenge? Do we have a vision, a strategy and a plan? Locally the year 2010 is an important year to discuss this matter as Sri Lankans will decide who is going to lead the country and what is going happen in Sri Lanka during the first half of the new decade. The presidential election is now on and parliamentary election will soon follow. Last week General Fonseka launched his manifesto known as 'Believable Change'. This week presidential election manifesto of President Rajapaksa 'A Brighter Future' was made public.

The vision statement of General Fonseka is based on the assumption that the one and only obstacle for better life is the presence of President Rajapaksa. It looks like that General Fonseka and his team are either unaware of the global challenges of the coming decade or believe that it is not a country priority. There is no question that this is an over simplification of the causes. It is true that people play a role but it should be clearly understood that the determining factor are not individuals but social systems. From a content perspective, 'Believable Change' is nowhere near as comprehensive as the manifesto of the UNP front for the last election known as "Regaining Sri Lanka". 'Believable Change' clearly reflects the reflective and intellectual poverty of current politics in Sri Lanka. 'Brighter Future' on the other hand is a better election manifesto however it is only an extension of the 'Mahinda Chinthana' program. Worldwide developments since 2005 need to be seriously analyzed if we are to address the core issues of modern day development.

The modern day vision of a country should be based on the well known environmental principle of 'Think Globally; Act locally'. The approaches of the presidential candidates need to be drastically improved if we are to think of a 'believable change' for a 'brighter future' for Sri Lanka. The root cause of the global financial crisis and the global ecological crisis are the result of that conventional economic goal: never ending, cancerous economic growth. We need to take steps to establish green economic goals to face situations arising due to the existing ecological imbalance. The people of Sri Lanka, until the completion of the next general election, will have the opportunity to have a constructive dialog on what should happen during the first half of the new decade in Sri Lanka.

I think it is important to discuss the following fundamental themes at the elections: achieving spiritual development over economic development for the satisfaction of the people; reorganizing tertiary education to suit the existing employment opportunities and the development of cottage industries; promoting nature farming over chemical agriculture for long-term food security; take measures adapting to climatic changes; improve public transport, minimizing mobility needs, improving energy efficiency and promoting renewable energy to get rid of fossil fuel addiction; pushing the developed world towards sustainable development by negotiating for a tradeoff of financial debt against ecological debt; developing a decision making structure to get rid of the concept of having an opposition.

Conventional narrow minded political thinking is not the answer to face the challenges of the new decade. I sincerely hope that all political parties and opinion builders have the courage and creativity to come up with new solutions to new challenges in the new decade.