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Presentation Outline and Questions by Chandran Nair

Intellectual dishonesty, ideological obsessions and institutional handcuffs prevent so many from contributing to asking the right questions and helping shape the future. This is our biggest challenge. Much of what is going on today with the meltdown in the financial institutions and the ineptness of regulatory bodies has roots in these factors, very often aided and abetted by the media.

There is a need to move away from the type of polite conversations we typically have with people simply looking to be inspired – inspiration is not a free ride on the back of an inspirational speaker. Inspiration is vital but I believe we need people to get inspired, scared, angry, empowered with facts and knowledge and accountable so they are required to take action – otherwise nothing happens. Denial still remains a comfortable option for many. Ignorance and denial even amongst the global elite of do gooders is a major barrier to change.

The presentation will focus on the fact that Asia as the most populous region in the world and with the highest rates of economic growth will most likely shape the course of the 21st century in more ways than one. China and India are leading that charge, but both with very different political economies.

What will happen to the world's resources if Asia duplicates the Western model of economic growth which was driven by a belief in having rights to limitless resources, and a mentality of privilege and unbridled consumption?

At the same time it is important to recognise that the development model in Asia of the last 30 years has essentially been one that has for a variety of reasons aped that of the West. Ironically that is a model which has its roots in European expansionism, colonialism, global exploitation of resources through the colonies and annexing of new frontiers. It was a model that therefore believed in limitless resources and possibilities, privilege, and no boundaries to consumption.

In adopting this model, Asia ignored one basic fact of the 20th century: in one century its population grew by an amount that far exceeded what it had reached in the history of mankind. We now have a battle for limited resources in the region, at a time when everyone is also being told that they can have everything through market mechanisms. The simple truth is that there is not enough to go around if consumption levels in the West are followed in Asia. All of this is underscored by an economic model that promotes consumption but is ill suited to managing resources fairly because it under prices externalities. Thus the long term solutions are not to be found solely in technology or markets but also in smart and even what may be deemed draconian regulations.

Can we rely on technology and markets to solve this huge disconnect between the availability of natural resources and an economic system which hinges on remorseless demand for more: a problem which has already arrived but one we continue to deny.

Therefore, the solutions for the region will lie in new forms of prosperity creation and capitalism which recognises this fundamental truth about resource usage and embraces the notion that public good must take priority over private interests. This will in turn require us to devise more enlightened forms of governance which go beyond the current notions that a combination of democracy, free markets and capitalism is the grandest achievement of human endeavor with regard to how societies should organise themselves around systems of governance and wealth creation.

What type of governance model or societal mindset will carry us through this new era of acknowledging limits and accepting rations with regard to the use of natural resources?

We call it "Fair Shares Capitalism".

Key questions:

- If 500 million Chinese start consuming fish like the West or Japanese, the oceans will be empty. But who is to deny the Chinese their fish?
- India's car ownership is less than 10/1000 people, compared to about 450/1000 in the US. Can you imagine what will happen to energy security and pollution if India reaches 250/1000?
- CO₂ emission per capita in India and China are a fraction of that produced by people in OECD nations. Consumption driven capitalism which is still in its infancy in Asia will only increase the per capita emission of India and China. Who is going to deny the Chinese and Indians from an equal lifestyle that is enjoyed throughout the developed world?
- Meat production uses 30% of all ice-free arable land and produces as much as 25% of all greenhouse gases, more than that from the transport sector. Today on a per capita basis, Asians consume a fraction of the meat consumed by Westerners. But as they get wealthier and consume more meat, the consequence will be severe. How is this massive increase in demand for industrial meat going to be met if we are at the same time serious about fighting climate change and the other consequences of this ineffective means of food production?
- Most water ways in Asia are polluted. Per water consumption in Asia is currently very low but set to increase as a function of affluence and growing industrialisation. Where will the clean water come from and at what price? What will be the impact on already degraded eco-systems?
- More people in the world today have access to mobile phones than sanitary toilets. Is there something awfully out of balance here that makes it effectively cheaper to buy a mobile phone than install a sanitary toilet? Can we link the building of modern telecom infrastructure and the proliferation of mobile phones with the provision of sanitary toilets in rural areas?
- Thousands of enterprises in rural areas can be part of the solution in promoting sustainability but they cannot attract investment or funding even for the best ideas. Why can't investment banks be required to direct a certain portion of their funds to such opportunities with preferential lending terms?
- Business schools train the elite of the world to become leaders of industry. Yet they simply refuse to accept that there are limits to growth and to acknowledge that there are constraints on a planet with finite resources. Imagine the types of innovation this new teaching might create if business schools taught the best young minds about the limits and urged them to direct their energies to finding solutions.
- The internet has become one of the most powerful tools to advertise and drive consumption of everything and anything. A large portion of internet traffic is also pornography. Do we dare ask the question that as an anti-social medium it needs to be legally restrained?

Given all of this, what sort of government may work best to curb the excess of human behaviour? Is it free market capitalism with democracy or one that is a mixed economy with a more socialist stance?