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BERNAMA SPECIAL REPORT

For immediate release

GLOBAL EFFORT NEEDED ON ENVIRONMENT AND
DEVELOPMENT AS THERE IS ONLY ONE EARTH

By Tai Sing Onn

(P)

DW 30/9/91

Environment and development. Both must proceed apace. You cannot have one and ignore the other. You cannot address the environmental issue in a simplistic manner as a distinct, separate problem.

At the risk of oversimplification, one issue affects the other.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has made this point clear in his hard-hitting speech to the UN General Assembly in New York last week.

Touching on the environment, Dr. Mahathir said it should be made known whether the Rio de Janeiro meeting was going to be a constructive one or a finger-pointing Third World-bashing session.

He felt the meeting should be used to discuss and agree on a common course of action on environment and development. -- more

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That also is the burden of a 17-page article by Richard Sandbrook in the latest quarterly issue of the Washington-based JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

In his article titled +Development for the people and the environment+ he says the determination to link development priorities to the environment question +is by no means new+.

Indeed, he adds, it was a major theme of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment 20 years ago. -- more

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He describes it as +ironic+ that so much diplomatic effort had to be deployed last year in the UN General Assembly to reestablish the linkage for the 20th anniversary conference next year.

Why should this be so, Mr. Sandbrook asks, as the mass of literature and analyses published since the Stockholm conference clearly and more than adequately demonstrates +the connection between economic development and environmental development policy.+

He feels +one simple answer to this question is that it is easier and cheaper, on face value to keep them separate+ and makes the point: +It is far cheaper to care about just the pandas and elephants than about the people who live among them as well.+ -- more

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He goes on to say that members of the +green+ lobby +or at least some who purport to represent it, seem to sympathise with this view, emphasising more the plight of nature than that of humankind, as if people were not a part of the natural world.

+This narrow argument...becomes problematic, however, when one brings in the problems of poverty, equity, progress and human aspiration.

+Dealing with environmental issues in isolation is bound to fail in all but the most unusual circumstances, thus those concerned with global environmental change must be concerned with development too.+

Mr. Sandbrook feels that the evolution of thinking on economic development and environmental protection has not occurred at an even pace.
--more

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However, he feels the tide is turning.

He says +the cause and effect of environmental deterioration has become a matter of concern to the various pro-development lobbies and agencies (Mr. Sandbrook mentions here the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and UNICEF) +so much so that, today it is fashionable among members of these groups to emphasise environment-development linkage before others in order to justify accelerated development efforts and enlarge institutional budgets.+

He adds that +now is the time for some of the environmentalists to catch up with the thinking of the pro-development groups, so as to forge a common cause.+ -- more

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On the issues to be faced by the international community as it approaches the UN Conference on Environment and Development next year, Mr. Sandbrook says these +are evidently not the same in scale as those the world faced in 1972.

+However, the fundamentals remain unchanged, insofar as poverty and unbridled industrialisation are still the major causes of environmental damage.

+But we must now accommodate an extra billion people into our policy calculations.

+The 25 per cent increase in the world's population during this period means that we now clearly face global, rather than simply regional, or even local, effects of environmental degradation.+ -- more

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Mr. Sandbrook says what is frequently missed in the current debate +is the connection between poverty, life expectancy and the number of live births per family.

+Addressing the population issue means, in many cases, addressing the poverty issue first.

Climate, change, industrial pollution and the destruction of biodiversity and habitats do not compare in sums of immediacy with the outright misery now facing over a billion people.

+Only by integrating poverty into the calculus will the more obvious environmental problems get solved.+ -- more

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Unfortunately, Mr. Sandbrook says, indications from the preparatory committee meeting in Nairobi in August last year for next year's conference are that +the plight of the poor is to be relegated to second priority, after issues of biological diversity, deforestation and global warming.

+Yet it is inconceivable that well over half of the nations of the Earth are going to allow anything much to change without the plight of their people being recognised first.+

Mr. Sandbrook says for next year's conference it is +essential that the downtrodden of the world are well represented by the agencies entrusted to help them.

+As a result, UNDP and other UN agencies have an enormous challenge ahead.

+They should be mobilised to demonstrate on a country-by-country basis what is needed to achieve economic and environmental sustainability -- at least in prospect. -- more

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+The way to do this is through honest and down-to-Earth country reports, not the usual collection of agency self-promotion tracts.
+The challenge is to group policies in such a way as to demonstrate the linkage between development and the environment.

+External constraints of debt, terms of trade and technology transfer must then be shown for what they are: constraints on environmental protection and on human development.

+Progress will only come with co-ordination. In the North, one challenge is to extend domestic environmental concern into foreign policy so that questions of financial support and trade opportunities for the South are adequately addressed.+ -- more

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Elsewhere on greenhouse gas net emissions, Mr. Sandbrook makes the point that +75 per cent of the emissions responsible for the greenhouse effect come from within the United States and Western Europe.+

In summing up, he says:+In short, the world has seen too many global assessments -- and global conferences -- that result in nothing but the most general platitudes.

++Globespeak+ of environmental doom must be replaced by country-specific studies, policies for change and an international commitment to make them possible.

+Failure to start this process by 1992 will mean the international community will once again slip into its usual performance of rhetoric without resources on environment and development.+ -- more

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Elsewhere, in the journal, another illuminating article says +although much of the global environmental destruction is taking place in developing countries, the economic model of the developed world must be changed since the development aspirations of the South mirror Northern lifestyles and economic achievements.

+These Northern lifestyles can be characterised by consumption rates of energy, water, minerals and biomass that are roughly 10 times higher than those in developing countries.+

There you have it, a growing chorus to Malaysia's call for protecting the environment taking into account a country's development.

A global assault on the twin problems is what is needed, not some bully-boys from the North trying to impose a new form of colonialism on the developing countries of the South.

This should be a shared task involving all countries for we only have ONE EARTH. -- Bernama

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