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FEATURES

# Overcoming economic crisis and rebuilding economy: A clarion call

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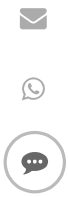


By the National Science Foundation  
(Continued from yesterday)



1. Circumventing and managing anarchical conditions





If addressing the immediate issues of reduced/non-availability of gas, fuel, food, medicines and other essential items is not done immediately, an anarchical situation could engulf the whole country. Symptoms of such a situation are already manifesting itself with an increase in violent and aggressive conduct and a break down in law and order. If the situation persists, a state of anarchy could erupt. It can be unintended and spontaneous or preplanned and organized.

Therefore, we strongly recommend immediate discussion with mainstream print and electronic media and those who create and manage social media content and delivery to deliver non-sensational information. They should provide balanced coverage including some of the positive developments and innovative solutions. They should also contain a sociological content to help people manage emotions and interpersonal relationships. Support mechanisms via social institutions such as Sarvodaya, SANASA and other community-based organizations should be used, and their experience and standing utilised. However, this should in no way be used as a pretext to curtail the freedom of expression and to have political control over free media.

(B). Sectoral recommendations

## 2. **Immediate addressal of power and energy availability**

Consumption and efficient use of energy will remain central to future efforts to promote economic and social growth in developing countries.

- i. Holding direct negotiations with oil-producing countries by a high-powered competent negotiating team
- ii Fast tracking solar, wind, bio-energy and mini-hydro projects in the pipeline and new projects with credible private sector institutions to promote and produce green energy
- iii. Transport of fuel and other cargo must be done by railway at night instead of by bowsers and lorries, to save fuel and reduce distribution cost.
- iv. Quickly develop a supply chain for charcoal, pellets, briquettes and such value-added products as well as for bio-ethanol, bio-diesel and biogas through focused R&D for use as an alternative to LPG and petroleum fuel. Use of wood charcoal in place of coconut shell charcoal should be promoted, since the latter is a foreign exchange spinner.
- v. Establish energy plantations (4<sup>th</sup> plantation crop), particularly in degraded land for production of dendro-thermal energy, using fast-growing tree species such as Gliricidia and early successional species which can also serve as Lungs of the Earth in order to gain carbon credit.
- vi. Promote the use of biogas, making use of household and municipal waste, as is done at the Kaduwela Municipal Council. Other MCs can embark upon similar projects to generate electricity from municipal waste. This, besides offering a sustainable and rewarding solution to municipal waste management, will earn carbon credit, and hence Dollars, for the country.

## 3. **Immediate and short term interventions for improved food and nutrition security**

Sri Lanka has around two million farmers comprising mainly small holders who contribute about 80% of the food production. Agriculture accounts for 25% of the workforce of the country, yet contributes only about 6% of the GDP due to its low productivity and poor value addition. Hence, ensuring food security under the present circumstances is a formidable challenge. Adoption of the following will mitigate the impact of the current crisis on food and nutrition security.

- i. Determination of food and feed requirements, food production and food deficit/surplus in respect of the major food crops at district and national levels. This is required to understand the magnitude and gravity of food and nutritional insecurity and its spatial variation and to ensure equitable food distribution. (For instance, only about 10% of the food requirement of the Western Province is produced within the Province and the deficit, i.e. 90%, is met by food produced in other areas and imports.)
- ii. Identification of food crops and their varieties, i.e. cereals, pulses, yams, vegetables and fruits, that are most essential to food and nutritional security and import substitution.
- iii. Determination of the agro-climatically and edaphically most suitable areas/fields for cultivation of the crops and their varieties identified under (ii), to enable matching of crop and land for optimum yield.
- iv. A rapid multiplication programme of high-quality planting material to meet the increased demand. This is extremely important for paddy and due attention should be paid to collect adequate seed paddy from this year's Yala season harvest to meet the need in the coming Maha season which is about 80,000 metric tons.
- v. Identification of outstanding enterprising farmers in each AGA division who have consistently produced relatively high yields, particularly those who adopt good agricultural practices (GAPs), including integrated farming and integrated nutrient management with the support of relevant institutions and promoting outgrower schemes
- vi. Making available expensive limited inputs, e.g. chemical fertilisers, pesticides, weedicides, fuel for machinery, etc., on a priority basis to the most outstanding selected farmers in areas with high agricultural potential for the crops/varieties in each district. This will ensure maximum return on investment (ROI) and minimize unregulated, uncoordinated, ad hoc crop production for commercial purposes under sub-optimal and marginal conditions.

## **9. Develop a roadmap for critical export-oriented manufacturing**

Sri Lanka is endowed with valuable natural resources including Graphite, Ilmenite, Rutile, Zircon, Quartz, Feldspar, Clay, Kaolin, Apatite, Silica Sand, Garnet, Mica, Calcite and Dolomite. However, presently, large quantities of these minerals are exported with hardly any value addition, thereby country loses a great opportunity to earn considerable amount of foreign exchange; therefore, setting up a basic chemical process industry (CPI) in Sri Lanka is a high priority concern. Two of the on-going industrial revolutions in the world are presently on our soil, namely Biotechnology and Nanotechnology, thanks to some strategic investments. These two investments can significantly add value to our minerals as well as bio resources. With a concerted policy drive, it is feasible for those industries to contribute about 5% to the GDP in the medium term.

The recommendations and observations above are derived from our deep concern over the unprecedented nature of the crisis and existential issues involved. The recommendations are science-based, data driven and above all, politically neutral and objective. They do not seek to supplant inputs by other professional sources, but rather to add to and complement them.

Given the dire situation and the urgency of its resolution, it is imperative that the political authorities, both the Government as well as the Opposition, shed partisan postures and cooperate towards adopting the above recommendations and other desired public policy decisions through an all-party consensual approach involving consultation and compromise including, but not limited to, the Parliamentary Consultative Committee System.

This consensual approach is not some idealistic dream, but a hard-nosed imperative of the hour and for two reasons. It is needed to restore confidence among a skeptical public that those responsible for the crisis are now contemplating serious steps towards reform, normalcy and a road map to growth. Equally, it will demonstrate to our foreign interlocutors, whose tax payers are asked to remit their hard earned money to help Sri Lanka out of this self-made crisis, that our commitment to recovery and reform is backed by a national consensus, and is therefore sustainable. Such a process of confidence building will ideally begin with a truly representative multi-party, if not all party, interim governance arrangement based on consensual decision making as articulated by many segments of society, especially religious leaders, minority parties, the youth, civil society, professionals etc.

Everyone agrees that external assistance is a sine qua non for our recovery, especially in the short term. Those willing to consider assisting the country must, therefore, have the assurance that the succeeding Government will not renege on the agreed programmes of reform and recovery. Such confidence building, derived from a national consensus, is a must if negotiations with our bilateral and multilateral interlocutors are to be concluded successfully.

Finally, we must emphasize that there is no quick fix available to resolve the problems in a modern economy in a fast developing world. A programme of development and renewal will involve unremitting hard work, consistency and early responses based on proper analysis and evaluation of emerging problems. To our knowledge, no country in the world has developed without sustained hard work over an extended period of time. It is imperative therefore, that we get away from politics and devote our sustained attention to governance. Politics could be conducted within parties. But, it has to be always remembered, that parties are elected by the people to govern, not to pursue party politics, the pursuit of which has brought the country to present state.

Prof. Ranjith Senaratne, Chairman, National Science Foundation and former Vice-Chancellor, University of Ruhuna

Dr. Sepalika Sudasinghe, Director General, National Science Foundation and Visiting Professor in Management, Management and Science University of Malaysia

Desamanya M.D.D. Pieris, former Secretary to the Prime Minister and several ministries and currently serving on some professional bodies and committees

C. Maliyadde, Vice President, Sri Lanka Economic Association and former Secretary to several ministries

H.M.G.S. Palihakkara, former Foreign Secretary, Ambassador and former Governor, Northern Province.

Dr. Chandra Embuldeniya, Chairman, Technology Development and Innovations Arm of the NSF, Founder, Vice-Chancellor, Uva Wellassa University, and Past President, The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka

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Professor Saroj Jayasinghe, Professor Emeritus of Medicine, University of Colombo

Prof. Ajith de Alwis, Senior Professor of Chemical and Process Engineering, University of Moratuwa and Chief Innovation Officer (Actg.), National Innovation Agency

Concluded

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# Isn't cleansing hearts a political issue?

Published 10 hours ago on 2024/02/21

*President Ranil Wickremesinghe presenting the government's policy statement in Parliament on 07 Feb.*

In his policy statement during the inauguration of the 5th session of the 9th parliament, President Ranil Wickremesinghe insists that the solution to the economic crisis lies in economic and scientific measures, not political ones. However, he draws inspiration from Confucius and urges citizens to introspect and cleanse their hearts, which can be seen as a political measure beyond being framed as moral or ethical. In the meantime, he has asserted that his government has achieved a significant transformation and provided a concise progress report, highlighting the remarkable recovery of the economy. President Wickremesinghe has emphasised that the

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# President needs to take up challenge of leaving a legacy

Published 1 day ago on 2024/02/20

*President Wickremesinghe*

By Jehan Perera

Even as the date for the presidential elections approaches, there are increased speculations regarding those elections, not only who might win but also whether those elections will be held at all. There is also a debate being generated whether the presidential elections ought to be held at all. There are many who feel that President Ranil Wickremesinghe needs to be given more time to take the country to development. United States Assistant Secretary of State for South & Central Asian Affairs, Donald Lu, might be one such. He has described Sri

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# Silence in the classroom: Confronting the dynamics of 'deficiency'

Published 1 day ago on 2024/02/20

by Ruth Surenthiraraj

I remember, with unusually vivid clarity, the first time I really noticed the presence of silence in the classroom. One of the lecturers, who was taking our undergraduate class, had assigned us reading to be done ahead of time, parts of which were quite tedious and had to be read twice/thrice over to be grasped. In true happy-go-lucky undergrad spirit, my classmates and I



turned up having 'skimmed' the articles and nurturing the fervent hope that someone else would pick up the discussion in the event that any questions were raised. As you would imagine, it went

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