A note for the 3rd 'Dialogue On Democracy'
at New Delhi on April 15-16, 2004

Ongoing Democracy's Vague & Confused Concepts Have Provided Opportunities To Wealth Owners And Corruption & Crime-Oriented Politicians To Destroy Our Planet's Natural Environment And Harm Its Bio-Social Resources

The above-stated heading sums up what has been stated below in this write up. Or, in other words, it is our conclusion of the present state of affairs existing in our world.

I. What Do The Facts Tell

Corresponding to the principle as stated in the invitation letter, we have followed "the genre of the annual reports of the multilateral institutions (e.g., UNDP's Human Development Report or UNEP's State of Environment Report) in combining quantitative and qualitative assessments" to present our case. Thus, we give below a brief account of the reports made by UNEP and UNDP along with a host of other scientific and social expert opinions.

A) UNEP Report

The 2002-UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report warns that the expansion of cities, destruction of forests, erosion of fields and rising demand for water are likely to threaten human and ecological health in many countries.

It says the growth of agriculture is damaging landscapes, depleting aquifers, raising the level of salt in the soil and reducing habitat for wildlife. .

Already, five billion acres of soil, more than the areas of the US and Canada combined, is degraded by human activity with a sixth of that strongly or extremely degraded. More than 80 percent of the damage has come through water and wind erosion.

It adds most regions of the world will still see their biological diversity and coastal eco-systems badly damaged by 2032.

B) UNDP Report

According to the 2003-UN Human Development Report, the disparity trend between the rich and the poor and the high and the low continues growing unabated, without any sign of reduction in size or halting at some point. The 2002-UN Human Development report expresses: the world's richest 1 percent receive as much in terms of income as the poorest 75 percent. The 2001-UN Human Development Report writes: of the 4.6 billion people in the developing countries, more than 850 million are illiterate, nearly a billion lack access to improved water resources, and 2.4 billion lack access to basic sanitation. Nearly, 32 million boys and girls are out of school. And 11 million children under age 5 die each year from preventable causes—equivalent to more than 30,000 a day. Around 1.2 billion people live on less than (the equivalent of) $1 a day (1993 PPP US $) and 2.8 billion on less than $2 a day. Such deprivations are not limited to developing countries. In OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, more than 130 million are income poor, 34 million are unemployed and adult functional illiteracy rates average 15 percent. The report further states that the richest 10 percent of the US population (around 2.5 million people) had a

combined income greater than that of the poorest 43 percent of the world's people (around 2 billion people). The 1999-Human Development Report says: by the late 1990s, the fifth of the world's people living in the highest income countries had 86 percent of world GDP, the bottom fifth just 1 percent and 74 percent of world telephone lines, today's basic means of communication, the bottom fifth just 1 percent and 82 percent of world export markets the bottom fifth just 1 percent.

The 1996-UN Human Development Report tells: Just 3 of the world's richest people have the combined GDP of the 48 least developed countries. The world's 225 richest people have a combined wealth of over $1 trillion which is also the total income of 47 percent of the poor who number 2.5 billion.

C) Other Scientific & Social Expert Opinions

Further, the following facts based on expert reports also substantiate the above conclusion.

The 2000-statement issued by the internationally prominent scientists has emphasised that if the human community did not stop the production of Green House Gases (GHG's) in a short span of time, the global warming would make the earth uninhabitable for bio-life by the end of the 21st Century.

The 2002-UN Johannesburg world summit on sustainable development was held to consider the fatal problem of environmental degradation and human resources degeneration.

The 2002-study made by the UN worldwide fund had warned that if the human community (especially the rich nations and the rich persons) does not change its extravagant and wasteful lifestyle, our earth will become unsustainable for human life by 2050.

The 2003-Rome Conference of the world-noted scientists has cautioned that if the worsening process of environmental degradation is not reversed within a short time, the earth will become totally unsuitable for bio-living in the near future.

A January 2004-article published in the scientific magazine, *Nature*, says that "climatic change over the next 50 years is expected to drive a quarter of land animals and plants into extinction." The other scientific experts, who have not committed themselves to any time-table, do admit that the environmental situation is highly alarming.

A well-known economic historian A. Madison has stated that the gap between the richest and the poorest countries in 1820 was about 3 to 1. It became 11 to 1 in 1913, 35 to 1 in 1950, 44 to 1 in 1973 and 72 to 1 in 1992. In 1997 it was roughly 74 to 1—a heart rendering figure. Earth shaking is the disparity that today exists between a richest and a poorest person in the world. While Bill Gates, the richest American of our world, owns a total wealth of $80 billion and Azim Premji of India possesses assets worth $6 billion, a starving person, with an empty pocket and deprived of every source, to get even a loaf of a bread, has no option but to go begging, subsist for sometime and then quit for the next world. The medical experts pronounce such deaths as a result of defective stomach bowls or some other physical ailment.

A handful of the developed countries, with hardly 15 percent of the world population, today control over 80 percent of the world's material and financial resources, leaving less than 20 percent for 85 percent of the world people, living in over 130 developing countries.

The January 2004-report of the World Watch Washington has remarked that the extravagant and unsustainable lifestyles of the world's rich and the upper middle classes (constituting 14th of the world) is pushing the human community towards a dangerous crisis.

The March 2004-Report of the Natural Environment Research Council Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Dorchester, UK says, "a sixth massive extinction event in the history of life is upon us yet again." Such mass extinction of living species of flora and fauna has periodically occurred during the course of five gigantic pre-historic extinctions. The Dorchester, UK Centre says that previous five extinctions due to the inter-play of natural causes, while the sixth one seems to be due to human activity.

The March 2004-UN Report says that the 'smokeless industry' of Information Technology is a major global pollutant. According to it, a 24 Kg computer along with a 27 centimetre cathode ray tube monitor requires at least 230 Kg of fossil fuel, 22 Kg of chemicals and 1,500 Kg of water—a total of 1.8 tonnes.

D) State Of Environmental & Human Resources In South Asia

Taking up the question of environmental degradation in South Asia, the region has witnessed an extensive erosion of its natural resources base over the last five decades. As a result of rapid deforestation, the forest cover of the region has declined to 17.5 percent of the land area. Some of the worst natural disasters, like floods and drought, are directly linked to the pressures on its eco-system, global warming caused by the Green House effect is found to have serious implications for all coastal regions, with the Maldives and Bangladesh being the most vulnerable.

As regards the degeneration of human resources in South Asia, over 400 million South Asians go to bed hungry every night. Another 300 million live just above the poverty-line. More than half the South Asian people are illiterate, one-third homeless, 40 percent under-employed, one-third devoid of safe drinking water and other health care facilities and three-fourth do not have access to latrines. 53 percent of children below 5 years are underweight. About 100 million children in the 5-14 age group work as labourers. The condition of women is highly distressing. South Asia tops in gender-based violence world over.

The average annual income of the people at $309 is even far below $555 Africa's Sub-Saharan region, the most deprived region of the world just two decades ago.

Country-wise also, national incomes are among the lowest in the world, ranging from Bhutan's $180 to $360 for India.

The problem of poverty is further aggravated by various other social deprivations. South Asia requires primary schooling for 126 million children, healthcare for 690 million and safe drinking water for 770 million people, adequate nutrition for 87 million children and provision of family planning services to 287 million married couples.

All this demands a huge amount of finance. But the ruling elite pursues its own priorities. The internal and external conflicts, generated by wrong official policies, devour much of the region's financial resources.

E) Long-Term & Short-Term Causes Of Environmental & Human Resources Degradation

The above-stated dangerous environmental degradation and human resources degeneration cannot occur due to any ordinary thing. Obviously, the cause of such a threatening issue lies in some fundamental reason. Historical experience shows that such like changes in the past have occurred either due to natural causes or due to the certain specific phenomenon's activity. The whole scientific community is today one (though a few differ on its solution) in telling us that the present environmental degradation is the outcome of human actions which have ignorantly devastated the environmental resources. The present and past human living shows (since the appearance of Homo Sapiens) that the former has always worked in a social form which has generally existed in the form of a social system. Hence, the basic cause of the existing eco-bio crisis on our planet rests with our existing social system and the immediate cause lies in the operational agency (i.e., government) of this social system. This means that this grave danger is grounded in the ongoing democracy (the prevalent system and its operators, i.e., the politicians).

II. Ongoing Democracy—Its Nature, Parameters & Practice

Taking up its definition, democracy is a combination of two words, i.e., Demo and Cracy. Demo means people and Cracy means rule. It specifically means peoples' rule or rule by the people. The prevalent dictionaries have defined it as the rule by the people, for the people and of the people. Historically, the word democracy comes from a Greek word Demokratia, from demos 'the people' + kratia 'power, rule'. The concept of democracy originated in certain city states of ancient Greece in which power was exercised directly by the whole citizen body, rather than indirectly by voting for representatives. Such rule was possible because the population of city states was small and women and slaves had no political rights. The slave-owners distorted the reality of slave-owners rule by designating it as a peoples' rule.

It is a simple fact that the ongoing democracy does not represent a direct people's rule. Instead, it is a people's representative rule. The people have the only right to elect their representatives through an electoral process. Beyond that, the people have no right. Our representatives have the right to rule

over us for five years. In this sense, we can characterise our democracy only as a people's representative democracy and not a people's democracy. But the ruling politicians have named it as people's rule which is contrary to facts. Both brands of democracy, i.e., the existing corporate democracy (operating through multi-party method) and communist democracy (functioning through only a single communist party in the state-led or party-led form) name it a people's rule. To call the people's representative rule as people's rule is a distortion of the fact. In our current people's representative rule, people have the only right to elect their representatives. They have no other right except the right to vote. The elected representatives have the exclusive right to do whatever they like. In fact, in the present above two types of national democracy, people have no say to intervene in any other matter.

Further, the corporate electoral law in India permits a Lok Sabha candidate to spend Rs 25 lakhs in his constituency on electoral expenses (while the electoral expenses law varies from country to country and allows much bigger sums to be spent on election expenses). Evidently 90 percent people in India do not afford to spend such a huge amount of money on election expenses. Hence, the common people have to forgo the opportunity of becoming a candidate in the election (however capable they may be). Only the party nominated candidates (who generally belong to wealth owning classes) enter the contest. In fact, the electoral contest remains confined to the wealth owning classes and their favourites. It is interesting to mention here that a Lok Sabha candidate, according to an Election Commission sponsored CSDS study on the 1999 polls, when the ceiling was Rs 14 Lakhs, average expense per candidate worked out to Rs 70 Lakhs, which now works out to be worth Rs 1.20 Crore.

In the communist democracy, only the ruling communist party has the privilege to put up the candidates. Thus, while in the corporate democracy, wealth owners or their representatives succeed to get control over the political power in every election, in the communist democracy, communist party holds the monopoly of power.

Taking into account the above facts, the nature of corporate and communist democracies expresses a two-sided character. Firstly, it does not represent the people's direct rule and secondly, it is controlled by wealth owners in the case of corporate democracy and monopolised by the communist party (i.e., its leading group) as regards the communist democracy.

As to the parameters of the two forms (corporate & communist) of democracy, both these types start from the social premise that makes them human centric. In fact, wealth owners in corporate democracy and communist party, i.e., its few leaders, in communist democracy act as the motive forces of these two respective capitalist models and everything is geared to serve their interests in their respective social formations.

The second parameter of these two respective capitalist forms is to regard force as the ultimate tool to resolve any problem. As a result, the war remains their top option to resolve any intricate problem. Necessarily, the defence becomes their main priority in running their respective social models and resolve their problems.

The third parameter of these two forms is to attain state power at all costs, by hook or by crook for maximising their wealth and rule over the people and to hold on the state power for good.

The fourth parameter of these two forms is their respective value systems. Corporate value system sanctifies the commercialisation of all types of activities—sports, film shows, beauty contests, etc. While verbally clamouring to abolish gender inequality and give women rights equal to men-folk, it shrewdly encourages the traditional patriarchal domination in social and family life, treating women as second class citizens.

Communist value system is basically regulated through the communist party and its state. People are generally conditioned through government controlled press and media that the ruling communist party and its leaders are the real votaries of social truth that deserves to be upheld at all occasions.

The fifth parameter of these two respective capitalist forms is to measure development in terms of money. Although both (corporate and communist theories) differ in their definition of capital (the corporate naming it as wealth and the communist calling it as workers surplus value), yet, both denominate it in terms of money and measure development, progress and prosperity at the rate of the increase or growth of money. That is why they call accumulated money as capital for investment. They use every type of device to multiply their capital, the topmost thing in society. Their

understanding of capital motivates them to proliferate it by all means (hook or crook), without any regard to natural or human resources.

Coming to the practice of these two respective capitalist forms, both have ruthlessly sought to maximise their capital by all means, degrading environmental resources, on the one hand, and degenerating the human resources, on the other—thus, damaging them beyond repair. That is the picture presented by UNEP, UNDP and other scientific and social expert reports.

Summing up the whole process of ongoing democracy (i.e., its corporate and communist varieties), it can be said that, while its positive side includes certain technological and scientific innovations, the negative side consists of the highest crime ever committed in the biological history (overshadowing its achievements)—a crime that is now posing a life and death threat to both natural and human resources. The entire 200 year history of the ongoing democracy bears witness to this fact.

III. Nature-Human Centric Model Of Democracy

Nature-Human Centric Model of Democracy holds that human and environmental resources are two principal forces in the development of human society.

It believes that man is a bio-social being, characterised by individual biological existence, on the one hand, and social interests, on the other.

Nature-Human Centric model of democracy considers social development as a process, comprising three equally important dimensions of human nature, such as existential (i.e., urge for security of life), psychological (i.e., yearning for freedom of thought and action) and social (i.e., strong impulse for equality and justice in all material and psychological processes). Here, people have to decide how to ensure life-long social security to every person; how an individual be granted total freedom of thought and action and how much difference there be between equitable incomes.

It thinks that the theory of might being right (symbolised in the form of war) has today become unproductive. Holding peace as its basic principle, it stands for the resolution of all conflicts, including Jammu-Kashmir, Palestine, through talks and negotiations.

It maintains that both ends and means have an equal importance. It holds a planetary and inter-planetary vision. The fundamental principle of this vision is to put the people and the environment at the centre of our entire activity.

Corresponding to this vision, it stands for a new global order in which the UN general assembly becomes the top decision-making body. The general assembly elects a council to carry out its decisions (abrogating the old rule of appointing a security council, with a few members having permanent council seats and enjoying veto powers) and restructures in future the present national units on the basis of two considerations: common identity and more or less equal population.

It maintains that capital comprises a two-sided phenomenon, i.e., the environmental resources, on the one hand, and human resources, on the other. It rejects the theory of the money being the denominational unit of capital. It considers money only as a medium of exchange.

Its development model stands for a five fold fundamental principle, i.e., environmental sustainability, equity (with 1:5 difference in incomes and social security as a fundamental right to all), productivity, peoples-led democracy and all sided transparency.

This model differs with both the corporate-led and the state-based development models on the issues of their purpose, management and style.

While the corporate model stands for developing the capital and capital owners and the state model advances the interests of the ruling politicians and bureaucrats plus the labour aristocracy, the Nature-Human Centric one serves the interests of people and environment, in general, and the poor and deprived sections, in particular.

In management, while the corporate sector upholds the monopoly corporate management and control and the state sector supports the monopoly bureaucratic management and control, the Nature-Human Centric development model stands for democratic management and control of public limited companies by elected joint committees, each comprising two-third elected members from ordinary share-holders and one-third elected workers represen-tatives in place of permanent corporators.

In style, contrary to the authoritarian and secretive corporate and state style, the Nature-Human Centric development model stands for democratic, transparent and accountable style.

Nature-Human Centric politics stands for a democratic order that is based on fully democratic principles, functioning and structure. Such a model necessitates the introducing of the principle of the maximum possible empowerment of the people in decision-making.

Nature-Human Centric economics demands a rational and realistic economics whose concepts, laws and rules are required to be framed in the light of former's two top priorities (i.e., humankind and environment) and five principles (i.e., environmental sustainability, equity, productivity, democracy and transparency).

Nature-Human Centric value system calls for a way of life (or life-style) that is embedded in basic human and environmental values and promotes rational humanist and environmentalist thinking, behaviour and organisation among the people.

The Nature-Human Centric model of democracy will ensure that all types of constitutions (from local to international levels) be prepared by respective elected constituent assemblies and then finally referred to the people for their final approval and sanction.

Here the following ideas may also be considered.

The executive constituting the legislative members not to hold the leading position.

All parts of state structure, i.e., legislative, executive, judiciary, administration to have an equal position.

The Nature-Human Centric model of democracy holds that all representative bodies in all processes (social, economic, cultural, political etc.) be elected through elections in which every member of society will have the right to contest. No association, body, party or group be given any special position in the electoral process at all levels.

All type of elections be conducted through the state funding to each contesting candidate.

Voters be given the right to recall their representatives. Candidates not to deposit any security and instead to produce 5 percent signatures of their supporters from among the electors in any electoral constituency.

IV. Course Of Action

The way forward, in our view, lies in doing five things.

(a) To raise people's awareness for restructuring the ongoing money (or capital)-based and corruption and crime-oriented politicians led ongoing democracy into a Nature-Human Centric democracy.

(b) To make people conscious about distinguishing right and wrong in the present conditions. The prevailing corporate system has generated a public mindset that considers money, power and might as the principal aims of human society and every human. The environmental and human interests demand that these three negative and harmful motivational factors be replaced by the environmental and human resources as principal objectives.

(c) To start the mass mobilisation campaign among all sections of the people, in general, and deprived and neglected sections, in particular, because their lot demands an immediate change.

(d) To prepare the development agenda concerning each of the deprived groups, namely, the rural and the urban poor, houseless, unemployed, widows, women, working children, girl child, invalids, scavengers, agricultural labour, bonded labour, unorganised labour, tribals, prisoners, under-trials, old people having no attendant, factory workers, lumpen elements, such as beggars, etc., office employees, students, youth and minorities, etc.

(e) To build fraternal relations with all those involved in social movements (voluntary and NGOs) and those who have grassroot connections in India and other countries of the world.

06-04-2004