**The young pledge to innovate**

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I am in Vancouver to attend the third meeting of the Young Global Leaders' Foundation Board. This board—comprising among others Klaus Schwab, Queen Rania, Goh Chok Tong, Yoriko Kawaguchi, Aleksander Kwasniewski, Jospeh Nye—overseas the Young Global Leaders' programme which was launched two years ago. This was an initiative of Klaus Schwab to get together the brightest of the young to network and improve the state of the world through effective and strong personal commitment.

The selection of the 'Young Global Leaders', who must be below 40 years, is through a nomination committee of eminent journalists across the globe. The YGL are drawn from politics, academia, civil society, business, arts and voluntary organisations. They must have demonstrated leadership quality and be committed agents of change. They serve a term of five years after their nomination and, with a maximum of 1,111 global leaders, leave scope for fresh nomination of about 250 new entrants each year.

The meeting of the Foundation Board synchronises with the Second Annual Summit of the YGL. The first, which was held in Zermatt, concentrated on critical areas like poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, enhanced security and improved governance. Leveraging talent and the vantage position of this group can influence decision, create awareness and impart momentum for resolving many issues of global concern.

The theme of this year's summit was Innovations for the Future. Within this theme there were parallel sessions on four key areas—namely Earth, its energy scenario and security; Water, concerning well-being and human advancement; Air, in the larger sense of leadership decision-making and networking; and Fire, concerning conflicts, culture clashes and their resolution. In addition, there were session updates on themes considered last year, particularly education, health environment as well as global governance and security.

In relation to the four new themes on innovation, the one on Water was designed to address the fundamental questions of well-being and the issue of technology to modify human nature. It engaged issues like how far should we go in the creation of best human beings through genetic engineering, nano-technology and artificial intelligence, and would this satiate our search for happiness. Not surprising, when looking at our energy vision for future and patterns of consumption for cities, transport, businesses and behavioural changes consequent on new technologies. The one on Fire looked at how individuals and societies cooperate or conflict, and the means to resolve conflicts—religious, ethnic—as well as the ideological implications of growing violence. The one on Air explored the evolution and dynamics of social networks and what improvement communications can achieve in resolving global concerns. Intelligence, according to KS, was based on innovation since knowledge is now the ''Googleisation of global society''.

The interesting session on energy dramatically highlighted how 87 per cent of fuel in the gasoline tank is wasted and only 7 per cent actually goes to power the engine. Automobile engineering needs a change because two-thirds constitutes the weight of the vehicle and use of advanced materials could bring down fossil fuel needs significantly. We must focus on the physics of the fuel, namely reduction in the amount of energy that a car needs for efficient transport and mobility. Similarly energy waste in terms of defective designs of building, insignificant reliance on energy-conserving architecture is another area where mindest changes are greatly needed. Alternative fuels which economise on carbon emission and improve productivity in ethanol, hydrogen, would influence the energy future. The energy security risk is dependent on infrastructure risks, technology risks, environmental risks,

political risks and time to realise and commercialise new energy sources and use environment friendly patterns.

The challenges for innovation are contingent on three issues: First in realising that innovation occurs when collaboration can leverage expertise and there is new content in creation with a broader perspective which enlarges the sphere of influence and very often recognises the wisdom of the crowds.

Second, the future will increasingly be a amalgam of home, work and play. Environment will be underpinned by the acronym of MMORPG, namely Open, Virtualised, Globaled, Knowledge Enabled and Innovation Fuelled, which will drive emerging models and environmental challenges. Third, the challenge is when people join a self-defined community and use up resources but do not either participate or are there only to disrupt. These are areas where there are no maps to follow, no proven best practice, and few digital mature role models to lead.

There were other interesting ideas on managing conflicts and new frontiers of communication networks which significantly alter the accepted paradigms of working methods and processes. To the rhetorical question asked by some global leaders of what they could do, the most acceptable answer appeared to be that they can network, communicate effectively to others the problems and prognosis, convey solutions and develop a motivation programme of consumers under an umbrella communication campaign. The YGL meeting was qualitatively different than the Davos Summit. The young were more intolerant but more enthusiastic on what they could achieve acting in concert even where no obvious solutions were in sight. A better appreciation of the rapidly changing technological frontiers and ability to innovate lend hope in this attempt to effectively respond to complex global challenges. As one global leader, Neil Gershnfeld from Harvard, explained, the world would be vastly different when Things start to Think