

# S. Asian development

## forges ahead

SACEP--South Asia Co-operative Environment Program--the first ever co-operation effort by the countries of South Asia-- has completed one year of operation after it was legally constituted on January 7, 1982, when the minimum required number of countries ratified the articles of association. The first Governing Council, the highest policy-making organ consisting of ministerial representatives of the member countries, is due to meet during the last week of this month.

Tackling problems of pollution and environmental hazards facing mankind as a result of advanced technologies and development can no longer be the concern of one nation and confined to national boundaries.

The pollution of the atmosphere, seas and the rivers as well as depletion of resources of one nation can easily affect other nations as well. This has been proved by the United Nations Environment Program as well as other United Nations agencies.

While tackling the problems of pollution and environmental hazards at the national level it is important that the nations take collective action at the global level as well.

It is with this in view that eight nations in the South Asian Region met in February 1981 in Colombo and formed the South Asia Co-operative Environment Program (SACEP) to tackle the problems of environment in a co-operative effort, sharing each others experiences.

Prime Minister, R. Premadasa as the Minister in charge of Environment aspect in Sri Lanka gave his blessings and support and inaugurated the sessions that gave birth to the organisation.

The Nations comprising SACEP are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Iran,

Sri Lanka and Nepal. It was hailed as a significant happening in South Asia as these nations--five of which are classified as least developed--comprising 1000 million people--have got together to make this part of the planet a safe place to live in.

Incidentally this was the first time that the countries of the South Asia region professing divergent views and ideologies and having different climatic and geographical conditions had ever decided to take co-operative action in any field.

Sri Lanka was fortunate to have been chosen as the headquarters of SACEP. A Sri Lankan Director Dr. Leslie Herath was unanimously chosen at the inaugural sessions.

SACEP commenced its operational activities proper from January 1982. And now after one year of operation SACEP has initiated several programs.

This month the fledgling organisation of SACEP will have the first meeting of its Governing Council in Sri Lanka from January 27 to 29. The delegations of the eight countries participating will be led by Ministers of the countries. Prime Minister Premadasa will open the Seminar on January 27.

SACEP Secretariat in Colombo is mainly run from contributions from member countries and Sri

Lanka as the host country has provided the host facilities including the premises. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and other UN Agencies too assist the organisation in whatever manner they could to carry out specific projects. A consultative Committee comprising Ambassadors in Sri Lanka of the nations comprising SACEP meets periodically to review the progress of its activities.

SACEP has already initiated work on three distinct fields in which three countries have already been chosen as the focal points of activity.

India is the focal point to carry out work on the

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evolution of technologies for the development of renewable and reusable resources. This will be worked out at the UN-ESCAP sponsored Regional Centre for Technology Transfer, Bangalore, which had agreed to undertake the consultancy at nominal cost.

Sri Lanka has been chosen as the focal point for environmental impact assessment and cost benefit analysis in respect of environment and development. This study is being made on how they could develop the country without destroying its resource base such as using energy saving material.

SACEP's first task is to

train the people to conduct the study. Prof Pitchai of the Anna University of Madras was recruited to undertake this consultancy and his draft report has been circulated among member countries.

SACEP obtained assistance from UNEP to undertake these projects.

With the help of the UNDP, SACEP sent a mission to six countries to identify a series of projects for Environmental Education and Training, Environmental Legislation, Energy and Environment.

Dr Leslie Herath outlining the projected plans of SACEP said that a large number of bilateral donor agencies had indicated their support to SACEP activities and have requested well formulated projects and program for their consideration.

Dr Herath said that SACEP has initiated action on tackling a problem common to all states of SACEP -- the mosquito menace. The SACEP has requested the Government of Britain to conduct pilot studies in selected localities in member countries to assess the efficacy of the use of non toxic mosquito control methods which had been successfully researched and developed by the University of Southampton and Insect Central Limited of London.

SACEP also plans to work out a program in connection with the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, the proposal initiated by Sri

Lanka's Prime Minister Premadasa, particularly in the field of promoting the use of low cost building materials and energy saving building technology. On a request made by SACEP the ESCAP Regional Center for Technology Transfer in Bangalore has already developed two programs for the manufacture of building materials for construction of rural housing using waste material from the manufacture of bricks and paddy husks.

The organisation in the coming years proposes to organise projects and proposals for the identification of endangered valleys in South Asian countries, which run the risk of depletion of its forest cover due to over exploitation, and draw up programs for their rehabilitation.

A Regional Seas Program for South East Asia is another field SACEP is working on. The UNEP at its 10th Governing Council Sessions in Nairobi adopted a resolution moved by Sri Lanka's Deputy Minister of Local Government, Mr P.C. Imbulana that the SACEP countries in consultation with each other draw up a program to prevent their seas from pollution, thus saving its marine life and beaches.

All other countries have a Regional Seas Program under UNEP auspices but not South Asia. SACEP countries are now on the threshold of reaching accord on the need for drawing up such a Regional Seas Program.