

SACEP parley

# Development process depends on underpinnings of environment — Premier

(By Christine Nadarajah)

Development and the process of development depended mainly on the underpinnings of the environment which therefore have to be made secure, observed Prime Minister Premadasa yesterday.

Addressing delegates at the first Governing Council meeting of the South Asian Co-operative Environment Programme at the BMICH, Mr. Premadasa said.

"Over six billion people will be added to this world soon; at least 1½ billion will be in the South Asian region, swelling the ranks of the poor".

"This will result in deforestation, erosion, desert, encroachment, pollution, scarcity of water and spread of toxic wastes. Such a world needs sustainable development that can meet at a minimum, human needs", he said.

Explaining the importance of SACEP, Mr. Premadasa said, "The presence of all delegates from this region reflects the recognition of the need to work

together to meet the challenges of environmental management in our part of the world. We are meeting at a time when the resilience of the international economic system is being severely tested".

Mr. Premadasa expressed that it was apt that this meeting was based on the cause of the environment "the means of our sustenance and our further survival".

He stressed the need for co-operation and mutual dependence among nations — especially neighbouring nations in the South Asian region.

"The importance of SACEP lies not only in its being the first step towards co-operative action in this region but the spirit and commitment with which these countries, including some categorised as 'least developed', accepted their financial responsibilities, he added.

He announced the proposition of the government to gift a building site for the establishment of the SACEP headquarters in Colombo.

Describing the links between shelter and the environment as an "intrinsic relationship", Mr. Premadasa urged SACEP to take this into consideration and plan now for the successful launching of his proposal to the UN General Assembly — the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless in 1987.

Trade Minister Lalith Athulathmudali who chaired this meeting said that the problem of environment had been with us probably even before man's existence on earth.

"The problem of ensuring a breathable atmosphere for man, animals and plants is juxtaposed with the problem of development today".

"In our eagerness to develop, it is easy but tragic to forget the effect of this on the environment", he said.

Urging developing countries to learn from the dangers into which developed nations have fallen, Minister Athulathmudali said, "Don't think the earth's resources are infinite".

It was revealed that during a life span of about 70 years, an average citizen in an industrialised nation utilises 21,000 gallons of petrol, draining the earth of vast amounts of its resources.

"We are now concentrating on practical projects as we have already learnt a great deal of theory on this. The use of firewood as a fuel source, environmental education and the reduction of waste are steps towards the preservation of our environment", he added.

Mr. Athulathmudali also recognised the invaluable assistance to SACEP by the United Nations Environment Programme UNEP, who has set aside 500,000 for this work.

Director of SACEP, Dr. Leslie Herath explained that the environment was the management and rational utilisation of the resources base in order that development benefits would accrue to the target groups in a sustainable manner over time.

"Before we look outside for what we want, we should learn to look inside for what we have," he said.

Highlighting some of SACEP's achievements during the past few months, Dr. Herath spoke of the Regional Seas Programme for South Asian Seas. This was launched by SACEP and passed when the last UNEP Governing Council met.

"Another project being implemented at grassroots level now, is the control of mosquitoes with non-toxic materials," he said.

He added that the environmental hazards encountered in the methods of mosquito control can now be avoided.

Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, Mr. Peter Thatcher also spoke.