

Plan to deal with oil spills in South Asia Region

by Kushani Ratnayake

Environment Ministers of the South Asia Region have refined a plan to deal with oil spills in South Asian waters at a meeting that was held over the past two days in Colombo.

Representatives from the SAARC countries, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and India were present at the meeting sessions.

SACEP was established in 1981 with Sri Lanka as the host country. This was a pioneer step towards regional corporation in the field of environment. SACEP has been able to build partnerships with donors and the international organisations such as NORAD, IMO, SIDA and UNEP.

"We, the members of SACEP, were able to develop the South Asian Oil Spill Contingency Plan and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for this Regional Contingency Plan" Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Rukman Senanayake said.

The MoU was taken into consideration at the second Intergovernmental Ministerial Meeting of the SACEP

Seas program held in June last year, in Sri Lanka.

"I hope during these two days we will further refine the MoU and consider signing it and I am pleased to mention that my ministry, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources has been very co-operative and supportive in the implementation of the South Asian Seas program," he said.

The most important element of this meeting was to finalise a work program to follow up the recommendations of the recently held World Summit on Sustainable Development at the South Asia Sub Regional level, with the special focus on five thematic areas: Water and Sanitation, Energy, Health, Agriculture and Bio-diversity.

"SACEP in its endeavour to promote and support the protection, management and enhancement of the environment, both natural and human of the countries of South Asia, individually, collectively and co-operatively", the chief guest,

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Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tyrone Fernando said at the inaugural ceremony. The South Asian Seas Region, has an extensive system of diverse marine and costal habitats such as mangroves, sea grass beds and coral reefs, which supports some of the richest concentrations of Bio-diversity in the world.

Among the endangered species which inhabit these unique habitats, are the royal bengal tiger, marine tur-

tles, whales, dolphins and Dugongs. More Global warming and the associated sea level rise is a major threat to the region and the Maldives has become an endangered nation due to this phenomenon.

A one meter rise in sea level will inundate 23,000 square kms of the major populated areas of Bangladesh.

Over 1000 children die every day in South Asia from diseases connected with water.