

South asian countries stress on common environmental issues

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Islamabad: The Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Zahid Hamid, said that the economies of South Asian countries are growing at a rapid rate, but they are also facing severe common environmental problems. However, these common problems can be tackled effectively only through unhampered collaboration and cooperation at the regional level. "Regional cooperation and a collaborative approach represent the way forward to overcome our common challenges," he said.

He expressed these views in his keynote speech at the three-day 13th meeting of the Governing Council of South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) and the 5th Inter-governmental Ministerial meeting of South Asia Seas Programme (SASP) held here today. The Minister said that strengthened regional efforts need to focus on a range of response options and instruments to address these challenges of environmental degradation and climate change-induced disasters, such as floods that are common problem of the South Asia region. "However, regional partners need to emphasize the realization for increasing responsibilities and greater cooperative efforts by all stakeholders.

Besides, increased awareness of ecosystem services should be adopted as important mechanisms to mainstream environment into social and economic development processes in the region."

He hoped that the three day intensive technical and non-technical sessions have remained fruitful and productive that will help boost regional cooperation among SAARC member countries for regional environment and sustainable development and tackling common climate change-related natural disasters like floods, forest fires, cyclones, typhoons, sea-level rise, droughts and depleting water resources. Highlighting Pakistan's on-going efforts, Mr, Zahid Hamid, said that the country is actively developing capabilities to cope with environmental challenges and effects of climate change such as floods and earthquakes. Pakistan has adopted a number of sound policy measures in this connection, namely, the National Environment Policy, National Climate Change Policy and the draft National Sustainable Development Strategy, he added.

The minister remarked that the government of Pakistan is fully conscious of its responsibility to make strong efforts to achieve the environment-related Millennium Development Goals in order to provide healthy living conditions to its inhabitants. Director-General of the SACEP, S. M. D. P. Anura Jayatilake, said that the SACEP is the first inter-governmental forum in the world. Where all South Asian countries come together to support SACEP initiatives and programmes during 30 years of its existence since 1981. Addressing at the occasion, the Climate Change Division Secretary, Raja Hasan Abbas, said that the high-level meetings of the SACEP and SEAS sessions have accorded us all a unique opportunity to hold productive discussions related to environmental issues with political leadership of the South Asian countries, senior government officials, representatives of the UN organizations and civil society. Talking about intensive proceedings of environmental related technical sessions, the climate change division's secretary, the last three days witnessed the ministers and high-level officials meetings, networking and knowledge, intensive discussions over environmental challenges including the National Biodiversity Strategy, Promoting Sustainable Consumption and Production in South Asia, Environmental Data and Information Management system, Control and Prevention of Air Pollution, Waste management, Conservation of Wetlands, Regional Marine and Coastal Biodiversity Strategy, Ocean Governance and most importantly the commitments made by the Governing Council of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme.

Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India, Shri Anand Singh Khaki and Minister for Environment and Renewable Energy of Sri Lanka, Susil Premajayantha, SACEP shown their governments commitment for environment and future of

South Asian countries is an important area to address in effective manner.

Earlier, during the meeting of the 13th Governing Council of SACEP, Pakistan's Climate Change Division Secretary Raja Hasan Abbas has been elected as a Chairman of SACEP, Karma Tshering from Bhutan as vice-chairman while the Climate Change Division Director-General, Irfan Tariq, has been elected as a Rapporteur.

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