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SACEP governing council to meet in Kabul

The fourth governing council meeting of South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) meeting in Kabul, this week assumes greater importance in that it would be necessary for the council to critically examine the strategies so far followed and consider the requirements to strengthen the organisation, in order that it may reap the full benefits of this co-operative effort says a message of SACEP director M. J. Kazem.

The message reads:

For a variety of historical reasons, the countries of South Asia have never in the past, embarked in grouping themselves for a co-operative effort in any field of development activity. It was in this climate that the Government of Sri Lanka conceived the possibilities of countries of the South Asian Region working together in a patently non-controversial area of "the concern for the environment." The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) being sensitive to voluntary reactions of this nature, reacted immediately and a meeting of high level officials was arranged in Bangalore, India, in 1980, under the patronage of the United Nations where nine of the ten countries of South Asia were represented. This meeting led to a meeting of ministers in February 1981 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which adopted a declaration, now known as the Colombo Declaration and approved the Articles of Association which initiated the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme.

SACEP has come a long way since it became a legal entity in January 1982 when the minimum of three countries ratified the Articles of Association. Today seven South Asian countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are fulfilled members of this organisation. Fifteen subject matter areas of priority were identified: to name a few-Environmental Impact Assessment and Cost Benefit Analysis, Technology for Development of Renewable and Reusable Resources, Social Forestry, Education and Training, conservation of corals, desertification and regional seas Programme.

For the Subject Areas, Focal Points designated and subsequent project identification missions were launched. The projects identified were subsequently approved at the first governing council meeting of SACEP held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in January 1983.

In its short space of existence, SACEP has contributed in no small measure to mitigate the adverse effects on the environment caused by human activities in the name of development.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of SACEP has been its ability to bring the regional seas programme of UNEP to the South Asian Region, and by recognition of this fact, the member states of this programme unanimously decided to designate the SACEP Secretariat to function as the secretariat for the action plan of the South Asian Seas Regional Programme. It is envisaged that the action plan will be formally accepted by the member states government by the end of 1988.

Another significant activity of SACEP has been its effort in increasing the tree cover of this region. At the 1st governing council meeting of SACEP held in Colombo in January 1983, a resolution declaring 1988 as the Year of Trees for South Asia was unanimously passed. Subsequently, with the assistance of UNEP a regional action plan was drawn up with each country undertaking ambitious programmes. To commemorate this declaration 8 March 1988 was declared as the Day of Trees for South Asia and symbolic activities were carried out in all member countries. Considerable progress has also been made in the subject area of environmental legislation, environmental education, environmental impact assessment and conservation of corals mangroves and island ecosystems.

The furtherance of SACEP's activities now rests solely in the hands of its member governments and other international Organisations who up to now, have nurtured this nascent organisation. A greater commitment is absolutely essential as SACEP programmes assumes greater proportions.