

Sustainable development a priority for South Asia - *Tyronne*

It is the poor who rely almost exclusively on the biomass economy and their livelihood depends critically on the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources, Foreign Minister Tyronne Fernando told the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) on Tuesday.

Minister Fernando was the Chief Guest at the SACEP meeting at Hotel Colombo Hilton which was attended by Environment Ministers of all South Asian nations including Sri Lanka's Rukman Senanayake.

"The highest priorities in the South Asian region are poverty alleviation and environmentally sound and sustainable development", the Minister said urging the need for the SACEP to work closely with regional groupings such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, ASEAN, IORAC in creating a better environment for Asia.

"There are urgent matters to be addressed with relation to the environment. Over 1,000 children die everyday in South Asia from diseases connected with water", he said.

"The region covers five per cent of the world's land area, but has 20 per cent of its population.

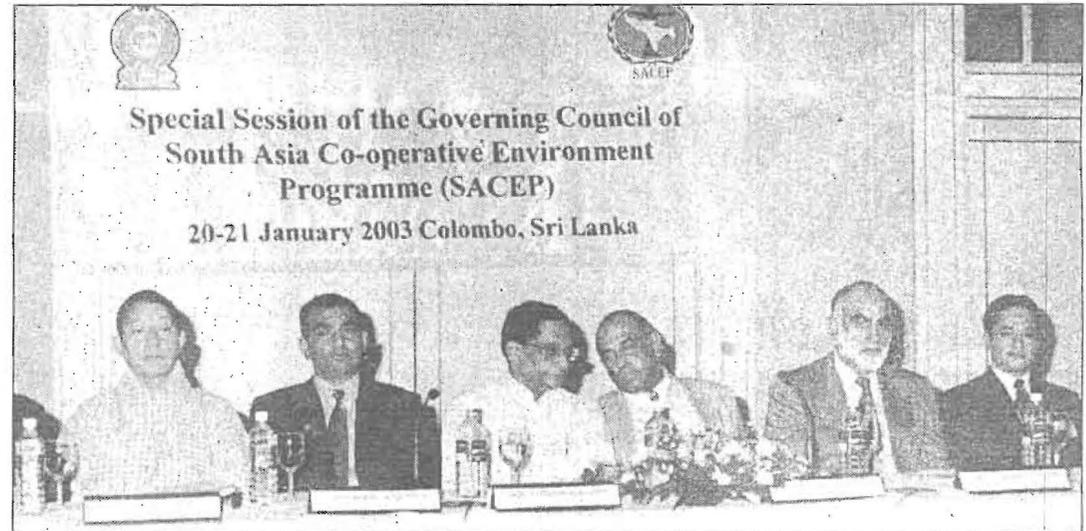
"Biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate. A major portion of marine fisheries and around 70 percent of coral reefs are endangered. Our region has an extensive system of diverse marine and coastal habitats such as mangroves, sea grass beds and coral reefs, which supports some of the richest concentrations of biodiversity in the world.

"Global warming and the associated sea level rise is another major threat to the region and the Maldives has become a victim due to this phenomenon. A one-meter rise in sea level will inundate 23,000 kms of major populated areas of Bangladesh.

The social and economic problems of the countries of the South Asian sub region are immense. In

per capita GNP terms all of them belong to the lowest income category. Acute population pressure, abject poverty and development devoid of environ-

mental safeguards have resulted in irreparable environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources, the Minister added.



Foreign Minister Tyronne Fernando and Environment Minister Rukman Senanayake with Environment Ministers of the South Asian Region at the SACEP meeting at Hotel Colombo Hilton on Tuesday.

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