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TRANS-BOUNDARY COLLABORATION MUST FOR REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT: SOUTH ASIAN EXPERTS
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South Asian environmental experts say regional countries need to collaborate effectively to tackle their common environmental problems and frame policies that promote judicious use of natural resources for achieving sustainable development goals and help check environmental degradation. They said sustainable development goals cannot be achieved until and unless environmental degradation is not checked and sane use of natural resources that provide livelihoods to millions in the region is not ensured. The environmental and sustainable development experts expressed these views here today at the two-day '13th Meeting of the Governing Council of South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme' (SACEP).

The SACEP meeting was attended by delegate from south Asian countries & senior government officials, ambassadors and the international organizations. The SACEP meeting being held here at a local hotel aims to streamline the regional efforts for achieving the goals of sustainable and environmental-friendly development in the region.

The meeting will be also significant in terms of development of action plan along with outlining the strategy for a regionally coordinated programme called South Asia Seas Programme (SASP). Established in 1982, SACEP is an inter-governmental organization. The forum seeks to promote and support the conservation and management of the natural and human environment in the South Asia region with view to achieve sustainable development goals while making joint efforts to minimise environmental degradation. In his welcome address, the Secretary Climate Change Division, Raja Hasan Abbas, said that the resource-rich South Asia region is blessed with the highest mountain peaks, the most fertile plains and a unique ecosystem unparalleled in the world. But this endowment, which is a natural gift, comes with a great responsibility to take care of for achieving common human development goals in the region. "As citizens of our respective nations and collective citizens of South Asia, we must prove ourselves worthy, efficient guardians of these resources," he urged. Mr. Abbas told the meeting that since the establishment of SACEP, the member states have continuously worked towards implementation of the SACEP strategy and programme, which covers the key areas for intra-regional collaboration, such as, capacity-building, awareness-raising, systematic information exchange, technology transfer, environmental management and sustainable development, regional cooperation in the management of mountain ecosystems, watershed and coastal resources, wildlife and habitat conservation. He underlined need for making SACEP a pro-active, robust platform for projection of synergized efforts for collaboration in environmental management at the regional level.

The Climate Change Division's secretary said that climate change, industrialization, population pressures and startling surge in vehicular traffic pose serious threats to the environment in the region, that has affected efforts aimed for achieving sustainable development in the region. "We need to set realistic goals for reducing environmental degradation and ensuring sane use of natural resources for human development and then strive to achieve them in a sustainable and cogent manner. But this will be possible only after sustainable development and environmental conservation are integrated into national economic policies," The Division's Secretary Raja Hasan Abbas cautioned. Director-General of SACEP, Anura Jayathilake, said that SACEP provides a great opportunity for the regional SAARC countries to play their active part to jointly tackle issues of environmental degradation and unsustainable use of natural resources. "Regional cooperation is vital when it comes to tackle environmental issues in trans-boundary manner. Two weeks before, we have witnessed the collective commitment at global level when world leaders came to an agreement at the 19th Conference of Parties convened in Warsaw, Poland, convened by the United Nations Framework of Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC)," he said.

Mr. Anura Jayathilake hoped that the 13th meeting of the Governing Council of SACEP will be success by coming up with novel ideas and initiatives to achieve regional environmental development.

Mrs. Wijayanthi Edirisinghe, Counsellor for Sri Lanka High Commission to Pakistan represented her country at the SACEP meeting. She said that during 30 years of its existence, SACEP in collaboration with various partner organizations has implemented a number of programmes in the field of air pollution, biodiversity, climate change, clearing-house mechanism, coastal and marine environment, combating illegal trade in wildlife, data and information management, environmental education, environmental law, environmentally sustainable transport, multi-lateral environmental agreements, waste management, etc. "Hosting and coordinating regional arms of international programmes and activities, have been a major role played by SACEP. For example, SACEP since 1983 has served as the secretariat for the South Asian Seas Programme, which comes under the umbrella of UNEP Regional Seas Programme," she said.

She assured on behalf of her country that Colombo will continue to support vision and goals for regional sustainable development in the region that will eventually lead to uplift of living standards of the South Asian people and clean environment.