

South Asia Environment Ministers Meeting at COP27:

Environment Minister Naseer Ahamed Calls for SAARC Counterparts for greater cooperation in mitigating trans-boundary pollution

“Core problem areas in South Asia such as environmental degradation has in part been aggravated by the political mistrust among countries in the region. At a time when the SAARC political process has come to a standstill, new and alternate platforms of cooperation should be explored to set in place more efficient and progressive avenues of cooperation that can work towards solving and mitigating some of the more persistent environmental problems in South Asia.” These views were expressed by Environment Minister Naseer Ahamed when he addressed a meeting of his Counterpart Environment Ministers of South Asian countries on the side-lines of COP27 summit being held from 07-18 November at the resort city of Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt.

Minister Ahamed further said “let us make our utmost commitment towards environmental cooperation and work towards changing ground realities before it is too late. Let us develop one single voice and a sense of mutualism on regional climate disasters irrespective of where it occurs. Let us share our knowledge and best practices on mitigating and adaptation of environment disasters.”

Organised by the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) based in Colombo, the meeting brought together Ministers and Senior officials responsible for environment, forestry and climate affairs to deliberate under the theme “One Voice South Asia”.

Referring to Sri Lanka’s unique environment and climate nexus, Minister Ahmed stated that Sri Lanka is unable to solve the environment pollution and crisis alone due to its essential trans-boundary nature, where;

- Sri Lanka’s air is polluted by the emissions of neighbouring countries which reduces air quality
- Country is facing increasing trans-boundary travel of plastics products and marine litter which destroy marine ecosystems and coral reefs
- Illegal poaching of fish destroys fish populations, diversity, and destroy habitats
- Environment pollution caused by disasters like Xpress Pearl maritime disaster should be prevented by new regional regulatory frameworks in the future. In that context, Minister Ahamed called for SACEP to lead the South Asian countries towards a more regional approach to address environmental issues Sri Lanka is facing particularly to tackle environmental issues of trans-boundary nature. He also requested SACEP to consider;
- Legally binding instruments for Trans-boundary air pollution in the South Asian region
- Legally binding instruments on plastics pollution and marine litter
- Regulating in the Indian ocean and develop regional frameworks for managing marine resources in the South Asian region

- Design collaborative regional programs and projects
- Develop Regional cooperative environment programs with other regional/global agencies and the SACEP member countries
- Strengthen North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation in the areas of environment such as on climate change, biodiversity, land restoration and marine sector etc.

Other member states of SACEP were represented by Senator Ms. Sherry Rehman, Minister of Climate Change of Pakistan, Hon'ble Uma Regmi, Minister of Women, Children and Senior Citizens of Nepal, Minister of Environment of Bangladesh Md. Shahab Uddin, Ms. Habibun Nahar MP, Deputy Minister of Bangladesh, Dr. Farhina Ahmed, Secretary, Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change of Bangladesh, Dr. Pem Narayan Kendall, Environment Secretary of Nepal, Mr. Sonam representative of Bhutan, Mr Nitesh Kumar, Representative of India, Maldives, Mr Donald Cooper, Director, UNFCCC and other distinguished guests were present in the meeting.



Environment Minister Naseer Ahmed (centre) with ministerial delegates from other South Asian countries.

South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) is an inter-governmental organization, established in 1982 by the governments of South Asia to promote and support protection, management and enhancement of the environment in the region. SACEP member countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.