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## **Environment and the Public**

The National Environment Act of 1980 set out the basic legal provisions for conserving our environment. The amendments to the Act in 1988, provided for greater environment protection, improving environment quality, and measures for approval of projects. Parliament has also approved Regulations under the Act to protect the environment and prevent pollution.

These legal provisions mark an important step in our progress towards better environment conservation and management. With the assistance of these laws we will be now able to control the actions of persons and organizations (private & public), who are working in an irresponsible manner. A system of Licensing procedure is being introduced. The level of pollution will be monitored by a laboratory network. Offenders will be warned to stop polluting the environment. If these initial steps fail, the law breakness will be taken to task.

Though action through a legal mode is a necessary measure, it is not a sufficient one. Prevention is in many ways better than legal medicine. In this respect, raising the level of public awareness, mobilizing our younger generation to actively manage and conserve the environment, and also launching new programmes for resource conservation and management may indeed be of greater value to all of us.

In a country with a literacy rate of 90%, the practical value of better environment management and conservation may not require much advocacy. The role of NGO's the broadcast and print media in this task, is indeed an important one. We would like to see more NGO's operating at the local village or urban level, as this level constitutes the point where human and natural environments merge for meaningful project action in management and conservation. If the people in each locality protects their environment, then much of present environment destruction could well be initially prevented.

We also need to launch an effective programme of environmental education through our net work of schools. Each school child should be made to function as a conservator of his/ her environment. If the main aim of having a sustainable environment is to make it a heritage for future generations, then there is no better place to begin than with our younger generations.

Our aim should be, while developing and protecting the environment, to create avenues of self employment. For instance producing of compost, planting of Kitul trees etc. are exercises which will serve both purposes. We must also bear in mind the benefits at grassroot level by use of the media to create awareness among the people at all levels. The media personnel should also contribute towards the dissemination of environment related information and guidance.

Acute poverty is also not a respecter of the environment. For those living below the poverty line exhortations to conserve the environment may fall on deaf ears. Alternative resources or employment avenues, as the case may be, need to be identified in such instances. It is only by making poverty groups, partners in an equitable development process that the environment could be conserved for posterity.

The interaction between man and nature, or the public with the environment, is a key to most development issues. If a long term balance between these two main elements is not obtained, then, the prevailing problems of environment destruction and instability in our country are bound to escalate. The new Ministry of Environment and Parliamentary Affairs which has been established would, therefore, be considering this issue as one of its primary tasks in its policy and work programmes. In this endeavour, the active cooperation of the public is indeed a most vital element.