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## **A Practical Approach to Environment Conservation**

It is indeed opportune to examine our future environment conservation and development policy, in an article to the first issue of the new journal on environment, published by the Ministry of Environment and Parliamentary Affairs and the Ministry of Environment.

His Excellency President R. Premadasa is the creator of the environment conservation concept of modern Sri Lanka. He is the architect of the National Environmental Act of 1980, under which he set up the Central Environmental Authority. And the credit goes to him for the implementation of environment programmes in accordance with the provisions of the Act. It was the President himself who was instrumental in the approval of special amendments to this Act in 1988. It enabled the Central Environment Authority to operate against environmental pollution within a legal framework.

In the Presidential and Parliamentary elections manifestoes both, of the United National Party, a special programme of action on environment was included at the instance of the President himself. His extreme concern for environment motivated him to take upon himself the national executive responsibility of environment activities. Subsequently in March 1990 he instituted a separate Ministry of Environment for the first time, because he was conscious of the high priority the subject should receive nationally and internationally.

From this background I shall seek to examine the future policy activation on environment. Under the provisions of the National Environment Amendment Act No. 58 of 1988, the National Environment Conservation State provisions, which should have come into force from 1st July 1980, were approved by Parliament. This was an important landmark. By this the Central Environmental Authority was empowered legal authority to ensure environment standard and protection. Under the provisions a person or institution is expected to turn out products which conform to the standard specified by the Authority and uncondusive to pollution.

A special Cabinet Sub-Committee is entrusted with the task of taking action against industrial pollution. The Ministry of Environment will have representation in it. The other regulations will be decided and enforced by the Central Environment Authority under the aegis of the Environment Ministry. It can cause the change of existing structure of factories, without affecting their administration, and will also take steps to obtain foreign aid for the purpose.

According to a directive issued by the present President while he was Prime Minister a National Conservation Strategy has already been prepared in 1988 by a task force appointed by the President. Its implementation in a manner suitable to the present context is entrusted to the Environment Ministry and the Central Environment Authority. Accordingly a programme of action on environment, related to various fields will be put into operation soon.

A syllabus on environment education is now being drawn up to enable the introduction of environment as a subject in the university curriculum. It will be presented to the Minister of Education and Higher Education for approval. Steps will soon be taken to implement the recommendations of the Inter Ministerial Education Conference on soil conservation. A decision also will be taken on the Inter Ministerial Programme on afforestation and forest conservation. An islandwide propaganda campaign will be launched to prevent illicit felling of trees.

Before any industrial, commercial or any other project is undertaken its effect on the environment will be assessed. A conservation and development programme will be initiated under the Mahaweli Development Project. The instructions for the prevention of unscientific application of insecticide will be given. For the solution of environment problems that arise from agricultural development activity — regularisation of land tenure, prevention of erosion, protection of fish and aquatic resources, coastal management, elimination of the possibility of earthslips, reduction of harmful effects due to the tourist industry, protection of environmental health, solution of environmental problems arising from urbanisation and the establishment of new settlements.

It is not possible for the Environment Ministry or the Central Environment Authority alone to achieve conservation. In addition to the functions of the Ministry and the Authority, District Environment Societies have been set up. An important responsibility in environment will rest with every local government authority, religious institution, school, estate superintendent and non-governmental organisation.

The environment conservation programme will find a place in the National Economic Plan. The environmental plan implementation will give a new meaning to economics. Sri Lanka will be associated in the national and international programme of environmentally sustainable development. Sri Lanka has already joined the international agreement for the protection of the ozone layer to maintain human settlements on earth. Sri Lanka will in future contribute adequately to international environment projects.