

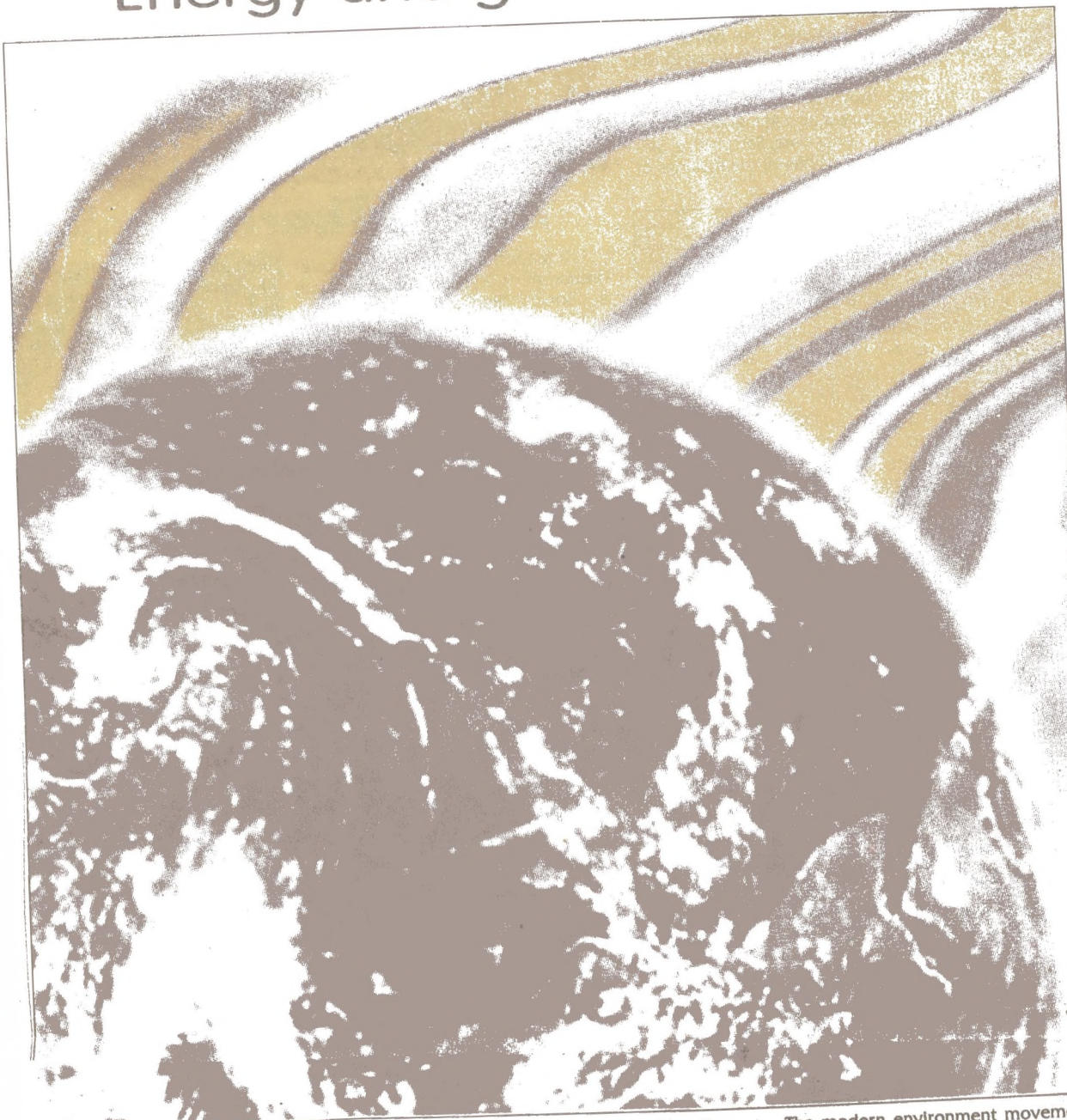
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# Earth Day 2001:

## "Energy and global warming"

# Weekender



BY FLORENCE WICKRAMAGE

Earth Day 2001 on April 22, brings into sharp focus several main objectives. These include creating awareness about emissions from coal, diesel power plants which pollute the atmosphere and contribute to the "Greenhouse Effect"; that "Green House" gases in the atmosphere which warm the world, cre-

ate unexpected storms, droughts, thus submerging low lands, small islands and causing desertification; and that these emissions cause loss of biodiversity and the increase in the spread of diseases. Therefore it is our duty to contribute collectively to preserve the environment so that the Earth will remain safe for the existence of all living creatures.

The modern environment movement was born over thirty years ago on April 22, 1970 - the first Earth Day founded by Gaylord Nelson. He proposed the first nationwide environmental protest "to shake up the political establishment and force this issue onto the national agenda". Reports say that on April 22, 20 million Americans took to the streets, parks, and

auditoriums to demonstrate for a healthy, sustainable environment. This action caused groups that had been fighting against oil spills, polluting factories and power plants, raw sewage, toxic dumps, pesticides, freeways, the loss of wilderness, and the extinction of wildlife to suddenly realize that they shared common values. Therefore, the first Earth Day led to the creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of the Clean Air, Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts.

As 1990 approached, Earth Day went global, mobilizing 200 million people in 141 countries and lifting the status of environmental issues on to the world stage. Earth Day 1990 gave a huge boost to recycling efforts worldwide and helped pave the way for the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Today the Earth Day movement is a global network which involves millions of people across the earth to support the Earth Day each year. This movement encourages people all over the world to strive for clean energy sources and energy efficiency as the answer to global warming and to minimise or prevent the devastating consequences of fossil fuel use.

Fossil fuels cause heat-trapping gases like Carbon Dioxide to accumulate in the earth's atmosphere. These and all other greenhouse gases contribute largely to climatic changes leading to extreme weather conditions. The developing world is hard hit by this condition even though the industrialised world is the biggest polluter of the environment.

Global warming is threatening the world's water supplies and food production in the tropics and sub-tropics which will risk an additional 50 million people with hunger by 2100. Rising sea levels caused by climatic changes now threaten 10 million people living in low-lying areas in countries like Bangladesh, the Maldives, Egypt and China.

Reports say that Bangladesh will suffer more from climatic changes than any other place anywhere else in the world. About 20 to 30 million people are likely to be affected, while the country's own emission of greenhouse gases are less than 0.1% of the global total.

The likely impacts cannot be predicted exactly though some of Bangladesh's

scientists have become world-respected on the vulnerability of climate changes. Some of their predictions warn of increased droughts and floods from rainfall and melting snow; rise in sea levels causing salinization of coastal crop lands; soil erosion and damage to coastal mangrove forests; impact on fisheries as sea water temperatures and conditions change and cyclones becoming more severe and perhaps more frequent.

### Local scenario

Experts predict that global warming would endanger Sri Lanka's coastal belt. The Southern coast would suffer damages while the water will flow up to Baddegama over the low-lying areas. The recent cyclone left severe impacts in Puttalam where flooding in the lagoon area had destroyed the vegetation along the lagoon banks.

The Sixth Conference of parties to the Climate Change Convention (COP6), the latest on the series following the agreements made at Kyoto in 1997 (the Kyoto Protocol) has ended with no agreement. The US did not agree to control the emissions and said it had already taken measures to control global warming by financing the third world countries in many ways such as carbon sequestering. Countries like the US are reluctant to take measures that might be unpopular with voters or with corporations.

Meanwhile the Minister of Forestry and Environment Mahinda Wijesekera in a message on behalf of Earth Day has stated that the Ministry has ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and had prepared and submitted the first National Communication of Sri Lanka on Climate Change with financial assistance of Global Environmental Facility/United Nations Development Program. In it are included the sources of greenhouse gas emission that cause global warming, national climate policies and vulnerability areas to climate change.

He further says that the Ministry is now studying the implications of ratifying the Kyoto Protocol which originated as a legal instrument to reduce emissions and which requires the industrialized countries reduce their emission levels by 5.2% by 2012 compared to their emissions in 1990. The Kyoto Protocol also defines the Clean Development Mechanisms where

developing countries can also contribute in reducing global emissions.

The Ministry has already established two Clean Development Mechanisms Study Centres at two Universities with the aim of developing a Clean Development Mechanism Strategy for Sri Lanka. The Ministry has also been assisted by the Global environmental Facility to carry out some studies on impacts of Climate Change to Sri Lanka.

Mr. Wijesekera said that Energy and Transport Sectors are mainly responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions in Sri Lanka. The Ministry is working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Power & Energy to promote generation of energy through renewable sources in order to minimize the emissions from thermal power plants. Towards this end the Ministry of Forestry and Environment has launched projects to use solar energy for rural electrification and wind energy generation in the Southern Part of the country. Another healthy example is several of the park bungalows in National Parks run by the Department of Wildlife Conservation are using solar power for their energy requirements.

The government has approved a Cabinet memorandum in 1999 to totally ban Leaded Petrol by the year 2010. New emission standards for petrol and diesel have been introduced but not covering gas-converted vehicles.

The Environmental Foundation says that shifting of energy into renewable sources should be a major step if Sri Lanka is to help prevent global warming. They say "as long as the world remains within a Carbon based energy economy, it is difficult to delink economy substantially from Carbon Dioxide emissions. Industrialised countries have used more than their share of the atmosphere, through their high emission levels in the past and the present.

In this way, global warming is their creation and they should take the initial responsibility of reducing emissions. A rapid transition to clean energy will help stabilize our climate, alleviate dozens of other environmental ills and provide a better future for all of the earth's inhabitants". The message is clear: "Grow more trees and protect the Green Cover and let Mother Nature light up your home".