

Time to say no to polythene bags

Programmes on environmental protection are taking place today more than ever. Everyone wants beautiful surroundings and closeness to nature. Yet, very few are willing to give up little comforts in order to achieve the goal of protecting the environment for our sake, as well as for the sake of the next generation, our own children.

The very people who march into places of scenic beauty or places of religious worship, or even pla-

ces of national heritage because of their attraction, often leave memories of their visits to those places in the form of shopping bags and other garbage. It is a sad thing to say, yet very true is the fact that the Sri Lankan community is a very lazy, a very selfish community lacking much wisdom.

The thin shopping bags are available in plenty and are given freely at the grocery stores and at many departmental stores. Even

though many of us carry those bags home happily most of us do not know what to do with them thereafter. The thin polythene bags do not biodegrade - that means they are not broken down by micro organisms living in the soil - hence they remain in the soil and thus reduce the fertility of the soil.

Accumulation of rainwater in and on these bags has provided breeding sites for mosquitoes. When these bags are burnt toxic gases

are released. Yet, society continues to use them, and complains that no alterna-

tives are available. Even if paper or cloth bags are made available as alterna-



Letters

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tives, many refuse them as they consider them not fashionable enough.

In the year 2002, a few members of Parliament got together and took a decision to ban the thin high density polyethylene shopping bag (*sili sili malu*), as it has happened in other Asian countries. Unfortunately, no sign of implementation of this decision is seen even in the year 2003. It is a known fact that the power of the political parties is highlighted

during election campaigns by the polythene decorations, which are received as donations. Hopefully, the delay in banning of this material is not a sign that an election may be approaching. However, even the politicians need to be supported and encouraged by the public in order to bring about a change such as this. Therefore people must become creative and produce alternatives to the polythene bags.

The purpose of the ban-

ning of these bags is not to close industries, rather to encourage the industrialists too to think of new products which are environmentally and people friendly. If anyone wishes to find alternatives or has ideas on alternatives to the thin polythene shopping bags please write to or Fax to 01-509950. A nation survives not because it has money, but because it has wisdom, solidarity and a common goal. **Dr.(Mrs) Ajantha Perera**