

Environment levy won't affect CoL – Ranawaka

by Ifham Nizam

The Environment Conservation Levy would in no way affect the cost of living and the Government hoped to collect one billion rupees from it annually. The levy was minuscule and therefore it would not be a burden on the public, Environment and Natural resources Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka said.

He told *The Island* that while respecting any views or decisions by the Speaker W. J. M. Lokubandara on the levy Bill, he challenged anyone in parliament at anytime to a discussion or debate on the Bill.

Money collected from the levy would be utilised to encourage environmentally friendly goods and services, he said.

Ranawaka said the levy had been presented to Parliament as a Bill on Tuesday after two Consultative Committee discussions at the Finance Ministry and two at the Environment Ministry.

He said the levy was one of the market based instruments that could be used to improve the efficiency of



Ranawaka

environmental management.

At present, both the polluter and the non-polluter bore the cost of pollution. The levy helped rectify the situation to a considerable extent, he said.

Citing examples, he said the levy imposed on mobile phones made the user pay for disposal of this product. Thus, it prevented the non user bearing the cost of pollution.

"The levy should have been imposed at least a decade ago. Anyway, it is not too late for us to adopt innovative strategies to address the burgeoning problem of environmental pollution and remedy it," he said.

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Earth day 22nd April

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Earth Day and the rise of environmental consciousness

By TIMOTHY BROWN
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Earth Day, April 22, is the annual celebration of the environment and a time to assess the work still needed to protect the natural gifts of our planet. Earth Day has no central organizing force behind it, though several nongovernmental organizations work to keep track of the thousands of local events in schools and parks that mark the day. It affirms that environmental awareness is part of the country's consciousness and that the idea of protecting the environment -- once the province of a few conservationists -- has moved from the extreme to the mainstream of American thought.

This was not always the case. In the 19th century, Americans, blessed with a vast land rich in natural resources, lived with the notion that fresh fields were always just over the horizon. When one exhausted the soil or forests or coal of a given place, it was possible to move on to another. As industry boomed in the early 20th century people accepted without question skies blackened from smokestack emissions and rivers fouled with industrial waste.

During the 1960s public attitudes began to change. In 1962 a marine biologist named Rachel Carson pub-

lished *Silent Spring*. The title referred to a future without birds and described in plain language devastating long-term effects of highly toxic pesticides and other chemical agents then commonly used in American agriculture, industry and daily life.

In 1968 Apollo astronauts, returning from their pioneering orbital flight around the moon, photographed the planet Earth as a whole for the first time. This image of the Earth -- small, fragile, beautiful, and unique -- quickly was imprinted on the psyche of millions. In 1969 the U.S. Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), establishing a "national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment."

Origin of Earth Day

Gaylord Nelson, a U.S. senator from Wisconsin and a longtime conservationist, was one who understood that the methods developed for use in the anti-war protest could succeed in other areas as well. "At the time," Nelson later wrote, "It suddenly occurred to me, why not have a nationwide teach-in on the environment? That was the origin of Earth Day."

Nelson returned to Washington and began promoting Earth Day to state governors, mayors of big cities,



editors of college newspapers and, importantly, to Scholastic Magazine, which is circulated in U.S. elementary and secondary schools. In September 1969, Nelson formally announced that there would be a "national environmental teach-in" sometime in spring 1970. "The wire services carried the story nationwide," recalled Nelson. "The response was dramatic Telegrams, letters, and telephone inquiries poured in from all over the nation. Using my Senate staff, I ran Earth Day activities out of my office. By December, the movement had expanded so rapidly that it became neces-

sary to open an office in Washington to serve as a national clearinghouse for Earth Day inquiries and activities

"Earth Day achieved what I had hoped for. The objective was to get a nationwide demonstration of concern for the environment so large that it would shake the political arena. It was a gamble, but it worked. An estimated 20 million people participated in peaceful demonstrations all across the country. Ten thousand grade schools and high schools, two thousand colleges, and one thousand communities were involved That was the remarkable thing that be-

came Earth Day."

Groundbreaking federal legislation followed the success of the first Earth Day. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was established in 1970, followed by the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act of 1972, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Among the many far-reaching provisions of these bills was the requirement that automobiles use unleaded gasoline, achieve a minimum number of miles-per-gallon of gasoline and be equipped with catalytic converters to reduce the amount of toxic fumes released by automobile exhaust.

Then, in the wake of this legislative success, Earth Day seemed to disappear. Yet the spirit of Earth Day continued. Environmental organizations grew in size and power. Groups such as Greenpeace, formed in Canada in 1971, adopted principles of nonviolent civil disobedience to raise public consciousness about dwindling whale populations and the risks of nuclear power. Funded by public contributions and staffed with lawyers and educators as well as scientists and naturalists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) became aggressive watchdogs for the environment.

At home, Americans, often prompted by children, began to sepa-

rate their household trash for recycling. By the late 1980s recycling programs were established in many communities.

Resurgence in 1990's

Earth Day came back in a big way in 1990. Led by Dennis Hayes, a primary organizer of the first Earth Day, Earth Day 1990 was international in scope. More than 200 million people around the world -- 10 times the number in 1970 -- participated in events that recognized that the environment had finally become a universal public concern.

The global momentum continued in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where an unprecedented number of governments and NGOs agreed on a far-ranging program to promote sustainable development.

Earth Day celebrates its 38th anniversary in 2008. What began in 1970 as a protest movement has evolved into a global celebration of the environment and commitment to its protection.

The history of Earth Day mirrors the growth of environmental awareness over the last three decades, and the legacy of Earth Day is the certain knowledge that the environment is a universal concern.