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National dissemination seminar on energy environment and climate

The national dissemination seminar to enlighten the policy makers and researchers on the final outcome of Phase III of the Asian Regional Research Project on Energy, Environment and Climate (ARRPEEC) conducted by the national research institutes under the coordination of the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand with the financial assistance of Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) was held recently at Hotel Galadari, Colombo.

This seminar was organised by the Sri Lanka Energy Managers Association (SLEMA) in collaboration with the other two national research institutes, the University of Moratuwa and the Industrial Services Bureau, Kurunegala was attended by a large group of policy makers and other high profile stakeholders in the energy and environment sectors including resource persons from AIT. The chief guest for the occasion was Hon Susil Premajayantha, Minister of Power and Energy.

This regional study in seven different countries in South and South-East Asia has dealt with both greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions impacting global environment as well as other emissions affecting the local environment in the four important sectors, power, transport, small & medium scale industries and biomass. Sri Lanka participated in this research study in three of these sectors namely power, small & medium scale industries and biomass.

Addressing the gathering the minister said that though Sri Lanka did not have significant per capita GHG emission level at present, we needed to be mindful of the increasing trend in emissions due to growth in the use of fossil fuels. He said that this increasing trend was quite apparent in the energy sector with the increased use of fossil fuels both in power generation as well as in other heating applications while the use of petroleum in the transport sector had been growing exponentially in the last two decades.

He took the opportunity to brief the gathering on some of the important government policies and strategies involving the energy sector. These policies and strategies were to help mitigation of both GHG as well as other emissions impacting the local environment.

He said that the power sector in Sri Lanka had been experiencing many problems during the last few years. Successively failed monsoons, rising oil prices, rising demand and system losses and inadequate generation capacity additions leading to expensive sup-

plementary power generation and a deteriorating financial situation of the Ceylon Electricity Board were some of those major concerns. These required urgent attention at the time of his taking over office about one and a half years ago.

He explained that there were many other areas where the power sector has done very well. The rural electrification programmes, focussed on grid-connected as well as off-grid systems and renewable energy sector, mini-hydro sector in particular, have done quite well during this period. The electrification rate in the country has increased to about 70% covering about 3.4 million households mainly due to efficient and fast implementation of the donor assisted electrification schemes by the CEB. There are more than 50,000 solar home systems already installed in the country. Further there are over 140 village or small estate hydro schemes established supplying about another 5000 houses. These have materialised as a result of the assistance extended by the donors, public and private sector institutions and community organisations.

The ministry has resurrected the plans for large generation capacity additions keeping in mind the necessity of fuel diversification and the increase use of reliable indigenous primary energy resources for electricity generation. It has taken a decision to go ahead with the coal power plant in the west coast at Norochcholai and has already secured financing from the Chinese government. When this plant is established all the measures are to be taken to use the latest technologies to ensure maximum fuel efficiency and minimum emissions to the environment.

He said that the only large-scale reliable indigenous resource we have, hydropower was to be utilised to the maximum. This will provide a win-win situation; minimising emissions in the power sector while saving valuable foreign exchange to the country. In this context the ongoing Upper Kotmale project will be completed within the scheduled time period overcoming many obstacles this project has faced. It is only through these projects that we'll be able to cushion the adverse impacts of oil price hikes on the energy sector.

While recognising that the answer to the country's generation capacity requirement is the establishment of large-scale power plants, he said that the government would provide incentives and all the encouragement for the alternative renewable energy based plants. The government has fully

recognised the positive impacts of these plants have on the local communities and the country's economy.

The government is already convinced on the necessity of providing incentives for the renewable energy development particularly for dendro power and wind power. Mini hydro sector has already become an economically viable sector and can easily compete with traditional generating plants. The incentives, such as guaranteed power purchase for small hydropower producers will continue and expand into all these renewable energy based systems.

He recognised the contribution of the institutions such as SLEMA, Energy Conversion Fund (ECF), National Engineering Research and Development Centre (NERD) and Industrial Services Bureau in energy conservation and management activities for many years in various forms. The last of these initiatives is the recently established Sustainable Guarantee Fund under the ECF with the technical assistance of USAID to help implementation of energy efficiency related projects.

He said that the efficiency of operations in the power sector needed to be improved through better governance, management practices, transparency, accountability and customer services so that the consumers would reap the maximum benefit of these enormous public resources invested in the power sector. In this regard, the need for restructuring of the power sector has been recognised. Government has already accepted the concept paper developed in this regard by a committee consisting of eminent persons and this would be implemented within a realistic time frame. Already the independent regulatory structure has been put in place with the establishment of the Public Utilities Commission. This restructured power sector will create an enabling environment for further development of the renewable energy sector and energy efficiency improvements in the energy sector.

Eventually all the activities and encouragements in the renewable energy sector and energy conservation and management will help to mitigate both GHGs as well as other emissions impacting the local environment.

He assured that Sri Lanka would continue to contribute with its capacity to the global efforts of GHG mitigation in this manner.

He appealed to the gathering to contribute to mitigation of GHGs and other harmful emissions with individual capacities.