

## South Asian nations meet to check air pollution

**Himalayan News Service**

*Kathmandu, July 18*

A two-day annual network meeting on "Male Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and its likely trans-boundary effects for South Asia" kicked off here on Thursday as South Asia is working to expand the network and strengthening monitoring facilities to check air pollution a regional level.

The 1998 Male Declaration stated the need of for countries to carry forward, or initiate, studies and programmes on air pollution in each country of South Asia. The participating countries are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Mal-

dives and Iran.

Phase I of the initiative was the establishment of network of organisations to implement the declaration and compilation of baseline information on air quality monitoring and management in the participating countries. Phase I was completed in March 2000.

Phase II implementation of the declaration that started February this year will put in place expertise, equipment, and information for quantitative monitoring, analysis and policy recommendations for eventual prevention of air pollution at the region. The network meeting, the third meeting in Kathmandu, will discuss the technical details needed for establish-

ment of monitoring network.

Urban air pollution is one of the most important environmental as well as social problems in South Asia. The air in Asia's cities is among the most polluted with the level of smoke particles and dust, which cause respiratory diseases, are generally twice the world average.

"Male declaration is now considered as an example of sub regional cooperation for environmental issues in South Asia," minister of population and environment P L Singh told the inaugural session of the meet. He also expressed hope that the through the implementation of the Male Declaration, the desired capacity to deal the air pollution would be developed.

# Experts exploring ways to prevent air pollution in South Asian cities

Post Report

KATHMANDU, July 18

Experts from South Asia region have converged in the capital for an annual network meeting on Male Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and its likely transboundary effects for South Asia.

Minister for Population and Environment P.L. Singh opened the annual meet, which is being held in Kathmandu for the third time. Experts from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives are partaking in the meet.

The Male declaration was issued after the seventh meeting of the Governing Council of (SACEP) South Asia Co-operative Environment Project, held in Male (Maldives) in April 1998. The declaration called for the need for countries to carry forward, or initiate studies and programmes on air pollution in each country of South Asia.

Member countries of Male declaration include Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The

declaration also called for phase-wise (three-phase) implementation of pollution control measures in the countries.

While Phase I implementation started with the adoption of the implementation plan by the first network meeting held in February 1999 and subsequent compilation of baseline information on air quality monitoring and management in the participating countries, Phase II implementation started in February this year. It is to put in place expertise, equipment and information for quantitative monitoring, analysis and policy recommendations for eventual prevention of air pollution.

Speaking at the start of the two-day meet, Minister Singh expressed concern on the deteriorating air quality of South Asian cities and called for collective efforts to improve the situation. Member of the National Planning Commission (NPC), Jagadish Chandra Pokharel, pointed out the need to generate and share data on air pollution to pave the way for better networking.

Acting Secretary at the

MOPE, Dr Jigbar Joshi called for better institutional mechanism and framework while pointing out the need to mitigate transboundary air pollution effects. Surendra Shrestha of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reiterated that the UN agency was committed to set up a station in Kathmandu to monitor air quality.

Dr Vinayak Bhadra of ICIMOD spoke at length on the state of environment, particularly air pollution emanating from excessive use of fossil fuel, and pointed out the need of expertise to collectively resolve the problem.

According to a World Bank report released last year, urban air pollution is a leading cause of premature deaths in South Asian cities, where gasoline-powered vehicles with two-stroke engines constitute half of all vehicles and contribute significantly to the problem. The particulate emissions are the most damaging type of airborne pollutants in South Asian cities—responsible for 100,000-300,000 premature deaths per year, according to the report.

## Regional meet on air pollution starts

*By A Staff Reporter*

KATHMANDU, July 18: The South Asian network meet on air pollution and its trans-boundary impact in the region started here today with emphasis on effective measures to ensure cleaner air for better health.

The two-day meeting is the follow up of the Male (capital of the Maldives) declaration on air pollution and its regional effect held in 1998. The Male meet had stressed on the need for the countries in the

region to speed up studies and tackling programmes on air pollution. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Iran are the participants.

The objective of the present meeting, organised by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the Ministry of Population and Environment, is to expand the regional network on the issue and to launch and consolidate the monitoring facilities on air pollution control. The

meeting also aims to help to conduct study on the trans-boundary effects of air pollution.

This is the fourth annual network meeting in a row held since the Male declaration. The previous (third) network meeting was held in Colombo in June 2001.

The implementation of the Male declaration on air pollution is divided into three phases. The first phase sought to create awareness, form network and prepare baseline

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information on region's air pollution. Currently, the process of implementation is in the second phase which has the objective of mobilising the expertise and equipment to study the air pollution issue.

The final and third phase of implementation will seek to provide necessary information for policy making and mitigation measures.

Under the running second phase of action plan, the national level capacity building measures are due to be launched from May this year. Technical training on monitoring and analysis on trans-boundary air pollution will be held.

Opening the meeting, Minister for Population and Environment P.L. Singh drew a dreadful picture of the ill impact of air pollution on public health. Presenting the instance of Kathmandu on increasing air pollution and measures initiated to tackle it, Minister Singh shed light on the importance of regional network to fight the menace.

Dr. Jagadish Chandra Pokhrel of the National Planning Commission laid emphasis on the importance of generation, comparison and standardisation of data on air pollution so that the issue could be addressed effectively. He portrayed the network in terms of data sharing and harmonisation of legal instrument to battle air pollution in a concerted manner.

Surendra Shrestha of United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) said his organisation is committed to set up an air pollution study station in Kathmandu.

Dr. Binayak Bhadra of ICIMOD shed light on the role of air pollution for respiratory diseases and prescribed to be cautious in the use of fossil fuels. "Expertise is required to solve this problem," he added.