Not strictly speaking environmental, but I think of interest to Legal Planet's readers.

Prime Minister Singh announced a few days ago that Goolam Vahanvati, one of the nation's most distinguished government lawyers, will become the nation's 13th Attorney General, for a term of 3 years. Significantly, he is the first Muslim to hold the position.

In India, the AG does not run the Justice Department (or "Law and Justice Ministry," as it is referred to here): that is the job of the Law and Justice Minister, a Cabinet member (and thus a member of Parliament). But India's AG is a very important post, somewhat akin to an amalgam in the United States of the Solicitor General and the Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Counsel. The Attorney General's opinions bind (or enable) the government, in much the same way that the US AG's do (with attendant criticism about politicization), and he (or, one day, she) represents the Government in cases before the Supreme Court and other High Courts.

Vahanvati's elevation to the position is significant not only in that he is a leading member of the Bar, but because he is a Muslim. There have literally been dozens of Muslim Solicitors General (essentially, the AG's deputy), and despite a plethora of outstanding Muslim lawyers and advocates, none has ever been elevated to the top job. Anti-Muslim discrimination is a commonplace in this country.

I wonder how long it will be before a Muslim gets appointed in the United States.

A misleading analogy, you might say. India has the largest number of Muslims of any nation in the world, well over 150 million. They have long held high government posts. And of course there is a good deal to be said for this rejoinder.

But remember also that this is a nation that just suffered a vicious terrorist attack last November 26th from Muslim extremists. A few years ago, Muslim terrorists attacked its Parliament building. It has been under perpetual assault from Muslim terrorists in Kashmir for years, perhaps even decades, now. It has fought two wars with Pakistan, a nation whose entire purpose is predicated on the notion that Muslims have no place in India, and whose intelligence service gives direct and indirect military and logistical assistance to Muslim terror groups inside India.

Put another way, India's experience with terrorism makes 9/11 look like a speed bump. And it has a Muslim Attorney General, who has advanced to the office with

general acclaim. If America had suffered as much from Muslim terrorism as India has, could you imagine a President naming a Muslim as AG?