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‘Poverty eradication needs truly sustainable growth processes’ : PM

PM gives away Green Governance Award

The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh has emphasised the need to operationalise sustainable development in concrete development strategies which take into account imperatives of protecting and preserving our environment. He stressed that we cannot protect the environment by perpetuating the poverty of our people.

After giving away the Bombay Natural History Society Green Governance Award, here today, Dr. Singh said that we have to measure upto the challenge of devising growth paths, development options, which can abolish poverty even without reaching the western standards of per capita income. The conservation of nature and protection of our environment is a collective task involving citizens at large, the corporate sector and all other stake-holders in our complex and diverse society. “Our collective strategy, therefore, needs to focus on developing indigenous responses”, the Prime Minister added.

Referring to the ongoing public debate on Tribal Land Rights Bill, the Prime Minister said that the bill seeks to only record the rights of the people that have gone unrecorded to provide them a sense of security and involve them in protecting the natural resource base. “This cannot and will not be done at the cost of our environment”, the Prime Minister assured.

The Prime Minister presented Green Governance Award 2005 to Godrej and Boyce Manufacturing, Tata Chemicals and 8 Mountain Division of Indian Army. Shri A. Raja, Minister for Environment & Forests and Shri B.G.Deshmukh, President of Bombay Natural History Society also addressed the gathering. Following is the text of the Prime Minister’s address on the occasion:

“I am truly delighted to have the pleasure of presenting the Green Governance Award instituted by the Bombay Natural History Society. I believe the Green Governance Programme is a very important and much needed advocacy effort in our country. I am very happy to learn that many corporate entities, financial institutes and government agencies are associated with this noble effort to promote biodiversity conservation.

I am also delighted to release the book ‘National Parks and Sanctuaries in Maharashtra’ published by the Bombay Natural History Society. I believe the book provides us a comprehensive overview of management practices in the protected areas of Maharashtra. I hope that this book will be a valuable resource for those charged with managing our protected areas. I hope the Ministry of Environment and Forests will prepare such comprehensive documents for other states of our Union.

The conservation of nature and protection of our environment is a collective task involving citizens at large, the government, the corporate sector and all other stake-holders in our complex and diverse society. I am particularly pleased to learn of the involvement of the corporate sector in this programme because we need much more social involvement of business in our country. Issues of the environment concern us all and, therefore, it is highly important that all these stake-holders should consider themselves involved and engaged in preserving and protecting our natural environment. Today we face a situation where the degradation of our environment of land, water, air essential life support systems of our planet. Their degradation threatens the livelihood of millions and millions of poor farmers who live on the edges of subsistence. Our effort to eradicate poverty cannot acquire its true significance unless we ensure that the growth processes are truly sustainable. We cannot of course protect the environment by perpetuating the poverty of our people. And, therefore, sustainable development has to go beyond merely a buzz word. It has to be operationalised in concrete development strategies which take into account imperatives of preserving and protecting our environment. I congratulate Shri Deshmukh and the Bombay Natural History Society for the efforts they have been making in fulfilment of this vital national objective.

In developing countries we are often called upon to integrate environmental concerns into the processes of development itself. This is now an accepted orthodoxy but, as I said, much work needs to be undertaken to

operationalise the concept of sustainable development. Our economic life exerts enormous pressure on the growth process at a time when there is a clamour for jobs and new investment. Developing countries like India, therefore, will have to strive to avoid the development trajectory of the developed industrial economies because these have been far too wasteful and harmful to the environment. We face a complex challenge where we need to constantly engage in trade-offs, including on occasion choosing options that may make our development processes excessively costly. It is important to create enlightened public opinion and promote informed debate on this issue.

I always believed that the western styles of living of the modern consumerist societies of west cannot be copied blindly in our country. Effort to do so will ensure prosperity for few and misery for many. And, therefore, we have a challenge in devising growth paths developing options which can abolish poverty even without reaching the western standards of per capita income. And I, therefore, believe that is a challenge for all development promoters in our country be they our scientists, be they our technologists, be they our captains of industry. And in this context, I am really concerned that India is yet to develop an environmental management paradigm of our own. Very often, Western opinions about environmental crisis dominate and influence the solutions offered. These may not necessarily be apposite to our conditions. Let me recall that traditionally, our society has been less environmentally destructive. Few countries can match our traditional systems of water storage, local forest management, conservation and recycling used resources. But it is also a fact that these traditional sources of wisdom work best when populations are relatively static. When you superimpose upon the system a rapid population growth made possible by a sharp decline in death rate due to advances of medical sciences, the traditional system fail to deliver what they did so valiantly, so effectively under conditions of static population. When I look at our history our culture of re-use is a very valuable protection against waste. It is true that these traditional notions and values are under threat both due to the processes of rapid population growth, rapid urbanisation and modernisation. Our collective strategy, therefore, needs to focus on developing indigenous responses, drawing upon our inherent traditions and using our greatest resource – our people's innate wisdom.

At the present juncture, we have a massive opportunity for greening our country. Given the fact that 75% of water received is lost in run-off, we have huge opportunities for people – centred water conservation at the local level. In response to this need, our government is proposing a massive People's Water Conservation Mission. This will be a people's movement, led by panchayats, using the funds of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to harvest every drop of water that falls. This opportunity for local-level water augmentation has been unprecedented and through this we hope to revive our tradition of harvesting water.

In a similar fashion, replacement of our lost forest cover can be approached through a people-centric movement. For instance, people living in the fringe areas of forests, who are mostly *adivasis*, face a major problem of securing a sustainable livelihood. A massive programme of greening degraded forests can be undertaken again using the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. These are new and valuable opportunities and to make a success of these opportunities we need the support of all creative elements in our civil society.

The on-going public debate on the Tribal Land Rights Bill, that we propose to introduce in Parliament, is a good example of the kind of discussion we need on how best to manage the dual imperatives of safeguarding people and safeguarding our natural habitat. We have people living in lands which were subsequently declared as forests and sanctuaries. These are very different from the Western concept of an "enclosure". The role of local populations in managing the environment has been historic. Even today forest fires are put out by forest officials with the help of Adivasi inhabitants; not through helicopters dousing from above. Sadly, many of these very people do not have rights over their land.

I would like to assure conservationists that the Tribal Land Rights Bill will seek only to record the rights of the people that have gone unrecorded. This should give them a sense of security and involve them in protecting the natural resource base. People who live in close proximity to our forest resources must therefore, become their protector. As the environmental historian Ramachandra Guha once said, "the Indian environmental debate cannot be a debate in the cities about what is happening in the countryside." The effort must be to ensure that people at local levels are involved in the conservation of water, forests and other life-support systems of our planet. This cannot and will not be done at the cost of our environment.

I sincerely hope the Bombay Natural History Society will promote an informed, rational and humane dialogue on what we must do with regard to conservation and environmental and wildlife protection.

It is equally important to focus on sensitising industry, to use new mechanisms to associate businesses as

partners in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). I am happy to note that our country is taking a lead in this matter. The captains of our industry need to be sensitised to conservation to a greater extent than is the case right now. Institutions like the Bombay Natural History Society can play a major role in this matter. We will have to seriously think of introducing concepts such as green accounting and due diligence for environmentally-sound lending. Green rating of companies is increasingly a standard practice being followed in some parts of world. As environment consciousness increases, our enterprises should benefit by securing a better green profile for themselves.

The Green Governance Programme is truly an inspiring movement and I applaud people from various walks of life, who have displayed commitment to the protection of our environment. It is very heart-warming to see the models demonstrated by today's awardees. Whether it is whale-shark conservation by Tata Chemicals Ltd, or mangrove conservation by Godrej and Boyce Mfg. Ltd or even flora conservation by the 8 Mountain Division of our Army, these examples provide a new path that others must also be happy to tread. I once again compliment the three awardees who have come forward to protect the flora, fauna and habitat of our country.

I conclude by congratulating today's awardees. I sincerely hope that their efforts inspire all sections of society to contribute in full measure to this endeavour. If two leading corporate entities and a Division of the Indian Army can display such fine conservationist spirit, I think our nation's collective future is indeed bright."



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