Manmohan for transparent regimes to ensure sustainable development

‘Protecting environment, promoting development needn’t amount to a zero sum game’

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Transparent and accountable regulatory regimes are necessary to promote a balance between the environmental and economic agendas currently competing for attention, said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh here on Thursday.

Inaugurating the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS), he emphasised that “protection of the environment and promoting development need not amount to a zero sum game”.

Whether it was demand for a national investment board to speed past the “surdle” of green clearances or the ongoing fight of infrastructure and mining lobbies against some provisions of the Forest Rights Act, recent months have seen a pitched battle — within government and outside — between the growth and green agendas.

Flashback two years ago, where at the same venue — during DSDS 2011 — the same Prime Minister had warned: “It is also necessary to ensure that these regulatory standards do not bring back the Licence Permit Raj which we sought to get rid of in the wake of economic reforms of the nineties.”

On Thursday, he elaborated slightly on the kind of regulation needed instead. “What is required is regulatory regimes that are transparent, accountable and subject to oversight and monitoring,” he said. “Indeed, regulatory regimes are often the basic necessary condition to ensure that environmental and economic objectives are pursued in tandem.”

The Prime Minister acknowledged that the growth and development agendas could be short-circuited by disappearing natural resources. “Growing populations, changing consumption patterns and the consequent pressure on precious natural resources are real challenges that we face in our pursuit of economic growth and the alleviation of poverty,” he said. “This will demand re-engineering our economies in ways that are both frugal and innovative in their use of scarce resources.”

This year’s DSDS — an annual conference organised by The Energy and Resources Institute — is focused on the theme of “The Global Challenge of Resource-Efficient Growth and Development.”

Dr. Singh pinpointed quick-vanishing groundwater as one of the most alarming examples of resource scarcity — one that is simply not getting the same focus as, say, the disappearance of energy reserves. “We need to focus attention on water conservation and water efficiency with the sort of zeal that today drives energy conservation and efficiency in the use of energy,” he urged.

Sharing the stage with the Prime Minister were the Presidents of tiny island nations Ki- ribati and Guyana whose survival could be threatened by the impact of climate change.

Welcoming the adoption of a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol — the major international treaty aimed at reducing carbon emissions — Dr. Singh said it was time richer industrialized countries “moved decisively” and “enhanced their ambition levels.”