

Again, PM underlines: regulate, do not allow a green licence permit raj

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AS HIS government strives to make difficult choices in the "growth vs environment" debate, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today laid down norms for effective environmental governance: put in place a regulatory structure, evolve standards and enforce them strictly, but do not allow return of the "licence permit raj".

Speaking at the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit organised by The Energy and Resources Institute, the Prime Minister said there was no getting away from the fact that if societies chose to damage environment in pursuit of material gains today, "they do so by risking the well-being of future generations to come". He said it was imperative that economic decisions were taken in an "environmentally benign" manner.

"We must put in place a structure of regulatory policies which will prevent potentially damaging behaviour. This is what we do by setting regulatory standards and enforcing them: I must emphasise that standards are not enough. They must also be enforced, which is often difficult. It is also necessary to ensure that these regulatory standards do not bring back the licence permit raj

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PM for strict enforcement of green rules

which we sought to get rid of in the wake of economic reforms of the early Nineties," Singh said while inaugurating the three-day summit, which has become an annual feature.

His remarks come three days after his government gave the environmental nod to South Korean company POSCO to go ahead with its plans to construct an iron and steel plant in Orissa, and amidst a raging debate within the Cabinet on how environmental laws should be implemented against crucial development and infrastructure projects.

The Prime Minister said that in spite of a strong regulatory structure, there would be "residual pollution" because of economic activity and in such instances the "polluter pays" principle must be invoked.

"This will discourage the polluters and also provide a means of financing the corrective steps necessary to counter the pollution caused. We in India are trying to do this by setting appropriate standards in several areas, especially in the most energy-using industries. As a general rule we are trying to establish the

principle that the polluter must pay, though that is much more difficult to achieve in all cases," he said.

The Prime Minister also talked about the Forest Rights Act — the alleged non-implementation of which was used as one of the reasons to hold back environmental clearance to POSCO, amongst others — and hoped that this "landmark legislation" would "spur local initiative on sustainable use of resources, conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological balance".