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Polluter must pay, but don't revive licence raj: PM

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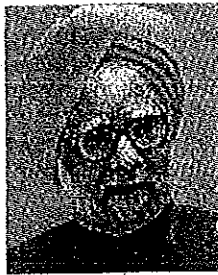
New Delhi, Feb 3: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Thursday sought to make clear his government's policy on the environment-versus-growth debate. He virtually cautioned against over-zealousness of green lobbies, saying regulatory standards ought not bring back the licence-permit raj which the country sought to get rid of in the wake of economic re-

forms of the early nineties.

Addressing the 11th Delhi Sustainable Development Summit here, Singh, however, called for environmentally benign progress.

The PM's remarks need to be read in the context of the clearances being given to big industrial projects which have been held up for long by an obdurate environment and forest ministry.

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Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister

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Recently, the ministry accorded conditional clearances to many of these projects including Posco's steel plant in Orissa, Navi Mumbai airport and the ultra-mega power plant in Orissa.

Singh said a structure of regulatory policies should be put in place to prevent potentially damaging behaviour. "I must emphasise that standards are not enough. They must also be enforced, which is often difficult," he said.

Moreover, to deal with residual pollution caused despite regulatory efforts, Singh suggested the polluter-must-pay principle. "This will discourage 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," he added.

Noting that India was setting standards for most energy-consuming industries, Singh said: "As a general rule, we are trying to establish the principle that polluter must pay, though

that is much more difficult to achieve in all cases."

Last year, the government introduced a cess of 5% on the use of coal - both domestic and imported - to build the corpus of a National Clean Energy Fund.

On the climate change front, Singh said that even if India were able to eliminate all its greenhouse gas emissions, it won't make a significant difference to our climate since the country's emissions account for only 4% of the global total.

"Our view has been that those who have been primarily responsible for the build-up of greenhouse gases and who also have the greatest capacity to act should bear the brunt of the responsibility," he said.

This statement assumes significance as last year at the climate change negotiations in Cancun, environment minister Jairam Ramesh had allegedly diluted India's stance by saying that "all countries must take binding commitments in appropriate legal form," implying that India was ready to accept legally binding emission cuts, a proposal it had vehemently resisted earlier.