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Manmohan looks for a middle path on climate

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NEW DELHI: The government's new-found zeal on [environment](#) protection -- led by Jairam Ramesh with the backing of [Rahul Gandhi](#) -- was sought to be tempered by [Prime Minister Manmohan Singh](#) on Monday when he advocated a middle path by saying that while environmental concerns were important and needed to be heeded, that should not lead to "perpetuation of poverty" or a return to the "licence-permit raj".

In a sense, this also showed up some differences in the government (despite Singh's strenuous denial of any) on the issue. The [PM](#) said that while "environmental concerns have come to stay", it should not be at the cost of growth. This, in the backdrop of some high-profile measures, including the ban on Vedanta's bauxite mines, in the name of environment could indicate that Singh is in favour of a more nuanced approach to the issue.

Jairam Ramesh, in a move apparently coordinated by the party leadership, had banned mining by Vedanta to extract bauxite from the Niyamgiri hills in Orissa, ostensibly for being in contravention of the Forest Rights Act that seeks to give forest rights to forest dwellers. Within days [Congress](#) general secretary Rahul Gandhi had reached Niyamgiri to claim political ownership over the decision.

But, on Monday the PM asserted his contrasting vision stating that "tribal and ecological considerations must be there but that does not mean we should not exploit resources for developing their (tribals') lot."

On any other context it would have sounded like a call for balancing the requirements of industrial growth with tribal welfare and not letting ad-hocism take over, but days after Rahul Gandhi claimed to be the voice of tribals as a follow up to Ramesh's hard-selling of UPA's green intentions, the PM's statements sounded like a differing signal.

Not just this, the PM announced he would soon call a meeting of the Home, Roadways, [Petroleum](#), [Coal](#) and Environment ministers to hammer out the golden middle path. These ministers have often been at loggerheads with Ramesh on what is often called his "environmental evangelism."

Singh had earlier stepped in when Ramesh had attempted to restrict coal mining in rich forested areas as well as stop the building of large dams on a tributary of Ganga in Uttarakhand. While his intervention had made Ramesh to step back on the coal blocks issue, support from the party leadership saw him prevail over the power ministry's insistence of continuing work on an ongoing dam.

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