Development without proper environmental safeguards

NDA govt pushing development:

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- The **NDA government has not been holding back on clearing projects,** it has pushed through 2,000 projects involving investment worth 10 lakh crore since taking over. The project approval time has been reduced to 190 days from 600 days.
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- Delaying project clearances has not gone down well with the minister for environment and forests, Anil Madhav Dave. The minister has set out the following priorities – zero corruption, fast project clearance, no compromise on the ease of doing business etc.,
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Is environmental concerns getting compromised?

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- The minister's desire to push development is unexceptional. But some of his statements suggest that in his haste to do so.
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- According to an expert present at the meeting, the minister wondered "Whether we should be bothered about cutting trees when jawans were dying at the border. He also saw no merit in putting speed breakers on highways to save animals when the CRPF jawans are getting hurt in blasts in Chhattisgarh."
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- There have been some **disturbing changes** brought about by this government in the field of environment.\n
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  - One is the **removal of consent from the gram sabhas** while prospecting for minerals in forests.
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  - The other has been to reconfigure the national board of wildlife, something which is now under scrutiny by the Supreme Court.

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    - The ministry has also allowed coal mines with a capacity of less than 16 million tonnes per year to expand without a public hearing.
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    - Another has been to **ease forest norms and allow industries** to come closer to national parks. These are all clearly aimed at hastening development.
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How environmetal damage is bad for business?

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- But the impact of environmental damage due to lax laws can hurt business and development in the long run. In some cases, it is necessary to have several studies before it can be ascertained whether a project is viable or not.
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- In the case of mining, **projects have got held up in the past at huge cost and loss of investor confidence** because the proper environmental procedures were not followed.
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Conclusion:

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- **Development and environmental protection can easily go together but perhaps not at the pace that the government wants to set.**
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- Time and again the courts have had to step in to protect the environment and act against damaging practices.
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- Many of India’s fragile ecosystems and signficant parts of its coastal flora and fauna have been compromised already.
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- We have already seen the ill effects of unchecked industrialisation and construction across India. It would be better to begin new projects with built-in environmental safeguards rather than make haste only to repent in leisure.

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Source: Hindustan Times

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