

PM'S ADDRESS AT THE CONFERENCE ON DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

New Delhi: December 8,2005

The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, has called upon developing countries to evolve political and social consensus on the desired pattern of development and not blindly imitate the developed world. Speaking at the conference on "Democracy, Development and Social Inclusion" organised by Jagran Forum, here today, the Prime Minister said that the standard of living of a nation is, in the final analysis, a matter of higher efficiency and higher productivity, and there are no short cuts to it.

Dr. Manmohan Singh urged professionals from all sections of the society to take an active interest in democratic politics. The Prime Minister underlined the 'need for more professionals in our legislatures, who recognize the danger of dividing our people on the basis of religion or caste'. "If politics is based on the exploitation of religious and caste differences, the end result can be a low-level equilibrium, characterized by social strife and an uncertain environment for the growth of enterprise', he added.

The Prime Minister urged the media to remain vigilant to empower the people so that our democratic institutions could be constantly reviewed. Noting the explosive expansion of Indian language media, Dr. Singh said that this had helped bring issues of development and empowerment onto the forefront of the national political agenda and that the defining principle of our country has been and will always be "Unity in Diversity". 'This is the idea of India. Our unity has been forged through the institutions and values of democracy', the Prime Minister said.

The following is the text of the Prime Minister's speech on the occasion:

"I am delighted to be here today to inaugurate this "Conference on Democracy, Development and Social Inclusion". I welcome the initiative taken by Dainik Jagran, one of our foremost Hindi dailies. I commend the publishers and the journalists associated with Dainik Jagran for the mark they have made in Indian journalism.

One of the most important aspects of our development process in the past two decades has been the impressive growth of the Indian language media, both print and television. This is testimony to the spread of literacy, and the rising political and social consciousness of the Indian people. It has contributed to the strengthening of our democratic processes and institutions. It has also benefited our development process, contributing to greater social inclusion. This explosive expansion of Indian language media has helped bring issues of development and empowerment onto the forefront of the national political agenda.

Ours has truly been a unique experiment in nation building. Initially, in the 1950s, that debate seemed to go in our favour, as democratic India did rather well in terms of development. As a doctoral student in the late 1950s, I recall many western scholars describing India as a ray of hope and a successful laboratory for combining both democracy and development. Regrettably, however, the 1960s were a lost decade for us. Three wars, severe drought, a balance of payments crisis and a series of political agitations disrupted the growth process. Once again in the 1970s and 1980s it became fashionable for people to speak of India paying a heavy developmental price for choosing democratic governance. This debate was finally set to rest in the 1990s when India's growth momentum was regained.

My friend Mahbub ul Haq, a former Finance Minister of Pakistan, undertook an extensive study at

the United Nations Development Programme on democracy and development. He established conclusively that there was no correlation, much less causation, between democracy and development. As many democracies performed well in developmental terms as did non-democratic societies. Following upon the work of my friends Amartya Sen and Lord Meghnad Desai, Dr Haq underscored a point that bears reiteration. He suggested that we must view democracy not as a means to an end, namely development, but as an end in itself. Because democracy empowers people. It unleashes individual creativity. It restores the dignity and self-respect of hitherto oppressed and suppressed sections of society.

Therefore, for us in India, democracy is not just a way of life, it is the way of life. For our nation the defining principle has been and will always be "Unity in Diversity". This is the idea of India. Our unity has been forged through the institutions and values of democracy. Indeed the fundamental premise behind our governance system is that every Indian is a free person. We seek salvation for ourselves through the framework of an open society and an open economy. Today, it is with pride as an Indian that I recognize the extent to which our democratic experience is regarded abroad with admiration.

I would like to emphasize that ensuring sustained development within a democratic framework is not an easy task. Development entails inter-generational trade-offs and choices that political parties cannot easily make given electoral compulsions. Moreover, it is not always easy to ensure popular support for the difficult decisions governments must take in the interests of development. There are as I said inter-generational and inter-class distributional issues that have to be taken sometimes, which may go against the popular and populist mood. In particular, there must be a general acceptance of the proposition that money does not grow on trees, and a nation cannot spend its way to prosperity. The standard of living of a nation is, in the final analysis, a matter of higher efficiency and higher productivity, and there are no short cuts to it.

Unfortunately sometimes democratic politics does not recognize the validity of these solid propositions. To ensure that rapid economic development buttresses our democratic edifice, the privileged sections of society also have an obligation to ensure an improvement in the standard of living of the poor and the empowerment of the less privileged sections of the society. Wealth in the final analysis must be seen as a societal trust; therefore the processes of wealth creation must benefit the largest number possible.

The goal of the development process must be to include every last member of our society, particularly those who are at the margins. This not only broadens the support base for development, it also strengthens the government's ability to perform its core developmental role. If, therefore, the beneficiaries of development see their role in this light, Government can raise the required resources to make development more inclusive. I do not suggest that Government needs to interfere in the processes of wealth creation; on the contrary. But in a developing democracy, Government cannot invest in the future of our people unless it raises the necessary resources to finance that commitment.

The art of political management, therefore, lies in ensuring longevity in office while taking difficult decisions, and simultaneously in resisting populism. Democracy is based on the notion of a popular mandate, but it should not be construed as a populist mandate.

I therefore believe that a mature democracy is one that balances the daily pressures of politics against the long-term needs of development. These conflicting demands, between the here and now of electoral politics, and the requirements of the long run that development imposes, can be and must be balanced. But for this, society inescapably needs broader responsibility among the privileged sections of the society, greater social inclusiveness and the greatest possible readiness to work towards a broader national consensus. The imperative for this is heightened by the multiplicity of demands, the constraint of resources, and the complexity introduced by the inescapable linkages of our economy with evolving external world. For these reasons, developing countries must evolve political and social consensus on the desired pattern of development. We

cannot blindly imitate what is in place in the developed world. We cannot become excessively acquisitive societies like the societies of the West placing undue burden on Government and on natural and financial resources. We need a development paradigm in which the Government guarantees the freedoms of an open society and an open economy, while acquiring the capability to invest in the larger public good.

India is a multi-religious and multicultural society. Democracy and the respect for fundamental human freedoms and for the rule of law do provide a congenial environment for development. However, if politics is based on the exploitation of religious and caste differences, the end result can be a low-level equilibrium, characterized by social strife and an uncertain environment for the growth of enterprise.

Therefore, I urge professionals in all sections of society to take an active interest in democratic politics. We need more professionals in our legislatures who recognize the danger of dividing our people on the basis of religion or caste, who recognise that sustained development is not like going to a free dinner party. We need people whom our people can respect and not merely because they belong to their own subsect, but because they have personal attributes that are relevant to the task of nation building. They must therefore represent the best that we wish to see in our society. That is why I believe more and more professionals in our country must join the ranks of those who participate in the processes of political management.

In working towards these ends, and for Government to be an effective instrument of development, it is necessary to make it more transparent as well as more accountable. Excessive and corrupt bureaucracies stifle the developmental role of Government. Here the media has a very important role to play. It has long been said that eternal vigilance is the price of democracy. I hope Dainik Jagran and other media in our country remain vigilant to promote these values and empower our people so that we can constantly renew our democratic institutions. I wish your Conference all success.”