

Privileged must help the less privileged, says Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh

New Delhi: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Thursday that "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 society." Dr. Singh was speaking at the inaugural session of a conference on 'Democracy, Development and Social Inclusion,' organised by the Jagaran Forum. He argued that India "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." As he saw it, there was need for "a new 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." Perhaps reflecting on his own journey from Finance Minister to Prime Minister, Dr. Singh noted that "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." Acknowledging that "it is not always easy to ensure popular support for the difficult decisions Governments must take in the interests of development", Dr. Singh said: "there are inter-generational and inter-class distributional issues that have to be taken sometimes, which may go against the popular and populist mood." The Prime Minister said there must be a general acceptance for 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." At the same time, he argued that! development did not mean unlimited growth for a section of 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 development must be to include every last member of our society, particularly those who are at the margins," he said. Positing a linkage between growth, democracy and social inclusion, the Prime Minister noted that only by broadening the base of development could we strengthen democracy. "If the beneficiaries of the development see their role in this light, Government can raise the required resources to make development more inclusive."

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