

'The first concern of any government should be economic prosperity.'
How far is this true?

Joanne Yep (17S37)

The main goal behind any good government would be to serve its people and to provide for their basic needs, by ensuring that necessities are accessible and affordable to all. In a world where wealth is increasingly idolised and cash is king, it is the role of the government to weigh the benefits and costs of government intervention and consider what is best for the country. Undeniably, economic prosperity is an important factor that contributes greatly to the success of a country. However, governments should also be forward looking enough to consider other factors like equity, political stability, environmental sustainability which contribute to the country's non-material standard of living, in its bid to improve the quality of life of its people. Therefore, it is not true to a large extent that the first concern of any government should be economic prosperity, but rather the welfare of the country.

To start off, economic prosperity should indeed be an important concern of the government because it determines the material standard of living of the average person in the country. This is important as it impacts the ability of people to consume goods and services such as healthcare and education. This is especially the case in less developed countries such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa, where many are unable to afford healthcare due to their poverty and are forced to go without medical attention. This greatly shortens the life expectancy of people living there and causes them to lead less than comfortable lives. Furthermore, beyond just the consumption of goods and services, economic prosperity also contributes to a person's sense of satisfaction. For example, in Singapore, when the economy does well, any surplus generated will be shared among the Singaporeans via the Grow and Share package, thus allowing Singaporeans to receive more from the government. Thus, as economic prosperity contributes to many aspects of one's life, it is not wrong for the government to make it its first concern.

However, as the Latin adage goes, when times change, people must change with it. Hence, to stay relevant, the government should also focus on other factors beyond economic prosperity in order to fulfil their goals of serving the people's needs.

Firstly, the government should be concerned with the state of equity in the country and consider its stance on income inequity. In Indonesia, the richest one percent control close to half of the country's wealth, leaving a yawning chasm of income inequality between the rich and the poor. When the country has such high levels of unfairness in distribution of a country's output, it serves as a breeding ground for discontent. What does it matter if a country prospers economically in numbers on paper while in actual reality, it is not so. As economic prosperity is useless without an equitable system of distribution, governments of countries should also place their attention on achieving equity, using indicators like the Gini coefficient to aid them in policy formation. Thus, the first concern of the government should not be economic prosperity.

Secondly, the government should also be concerned with creating a favourable political climate. This is important as it could greatly impact the day to day lives of its people. For example, under the rule of President Bashar Al-Assad in Syria, the country has broken out into a civil war that continues till today. Civilians who are innocent have been killed when they were caught in the crossfire between the opposing groups. There would also be a heightened sense of fear for those who continue to live in the region. The same also goes for the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, which has drawn de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and her government internal flak for the way they have handled the issue which continues to spiral out of control. This not only causes an adverse impact on people living in the country, but also inhibits any form of progression economically. With so much resources being spent

on trying to resolve the conflict and investors being unwilling to invest due to low confidence, the country is unable to prosper economically as well. Thus, it is evident that the first concern of the government should not simply be economic prosperity.

Thirdly, ensuring sustainable growth through taking responsibility for the ownership of the environment is also an important factor that the government should be concerned with. This is because any resources we have in the environment is finite. There is no use in powering ahead for the sake of short term economic growth but sacrificing the environment in the long run. What governments should be looking out for is to ensure long term sustainable growth that is able to benefit its people without compromising their wellbeing in the process. Taking Beijing in China as an example, with sky high pollution levels and smog, what is the use of being one of the fastest growing economies of the world when the welfare of its people is sacrificed in the process? Thus, it is important that economic prosperity should not be the first concern of the government to a large extent.

Lastly, the government should also be concerned with the number of working hours its people put in as it affects their quality of life. A country may be doing extremely well statistically, but its people might be collapsing under the weight of the stress they are put under to meet that level of performance. In Japan, deaths due to overwork have become so common that a term 'karoshi' has been coined for it. Such incidents becoming commonplace is indeed a pressing concern the government needs to think about and prevent any further incidents from happening. Therefore, the government should not place economic prosperity as its first concern to a large extent as it may negatively impact the wellbeing of its people.

Overall, the most important thing any government should be concerned with should not be economic prosperity but rather how to improve the wellbeing of its people. While economic prosperity does play a big role in influencing a person's quality of life, it is not the most important factor, but rather, the wellbeing of a person which is pieced together by a variety of factors such as equity of distribution, political stability, environmental sustainability and the number of working hours. As every country is different, the governments of each country would have to carefully evaluate their priorities as to what would suit their people best. As author C.S. Lewis once noted, life is not like following a path on the radii of a circle where if followed long enough, it would eventually lead us all to the same destination. But rather, life presents us with challenges and every few miles, the road forks into two and we are then forced to make a decision. Thus, there is no silver bullet for any problem and governments should not only place economic prosperity as their first concern as that rigid move not maximise the welfare of its people.

Comments:

Clear thesis statement which shows what one can expect in the essay. There is sound evaluation of the importance of various concerns that governments have to address. However, the quality of your discussion needs to be more consistent throughout the essay. The examples can do with further elaboration, but overall, competent and fluent writing. Effective use of language e.g. using the occasional rhetorical question and quote.