

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

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In measuring the success of countries, it is inevitable that people look to the reliable and standard index of economic prosperity. There is no doubt that economic growth is a significant goal that governments all over the world work towards. However, considering the government's primary role of maximising society's welfare, I find it only slightly true that any government's first concern should be economic prosperity. Instead, I posit that unifying society and ensuring environmental sustainability are concerns that governments should place above mere material wealth.

Firstly, economic prosperity should not be the main priority for governments as there is greater value and importance in first unifying a society by providing a sense of identity and culture. This is not to say that unity and economic success are mutually exclusive – in fact, they are two goals that work hand in hand. However, unity must first be achieved if prosperity is to have any real bearing on a nation's success. A country with a strong identity and culture has many more opportunities for success compared to a country prioritising material wealth. Take the example of Singapore which was abruptly forced into independence in 1965. Despite being an underdeveloped state with limited resources, Singapore was able to evolve into a first-world country in less than half a century. Much of this success has been attributed to the 'kampung spirit' of the pioneer generations: the mindset that everyone, regardless of background, can come together for the greater good of the country. Such a strong sense of identity and belonging would not have been possible without the government headed by former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, who actively sought to eradicate sources of social discord in the form of the Communists. Looking on the flipside, countries focused on economic prosperity without social cohesion can find themselves riddled with social problems. An example is the United States, one of the global economic powerhouses that finds itself in a state of turmoil due to the divisive rhetoric of President Trump. Racism and hate run rampant in the country, endangering citizens as local riots and alleged police brutality add on to the social tension. Therefore, it is short-sighted for governments to place an outright emphasis on economic prosperity alone, as ignoring the importance of a country's unity may leave it worse off in the long run.

Moreover, the myopic pursuit of economic prosperity can prove unsustainable and ultimately futile if it is prioritised over environmental protection. Before governments consider acquiring wealth, they must first consider how economic growth can be sustained for future generations through the thoughtful use of the country's resources. Environmental implications must be addressed first before economic prosperity can benefit society in the long run, as overemphasis on wealth can lead to rapid depletion and degradation of the country's resources and environment, doing more harm than good at the end of the day. For example, in Brazil, the government's drive for economic propulsion led to a boom in cattle ranching and agriculture. Regrettably, these activities also resulted in deforestation on a massive scale as profit-driven firms recklessly cleared land for their use. As a result, Brazil currently faces threats to their future progress, as their once abundant stocks of natural resources have been traded for short-term prosperity. Despite the government's attempts to reduce deforestation, much of the damage has already been done, again showing how placing priority on economic prosperity without consideration of other factors first can prove to be a grave mistake. Since economic prosperity at the expense of the environment hardly benefits society, governments should first concern themselves with ensuring environmental sustainability before chasing affluence.

However, it should be duly noted that not all governments have the luxury of dwelling on social unity and environmental protection. The harsh reality is that for many poverty-stricken countries, economic

prosperity must seemingly be prioritised if there is to be any hope for progress at all. In this cruel, materialistic world, money is often the only means for such countries to gain access to basic amenities such as healthcare and education. It can be argued that for third-world countries, the bulk of social issues are caused by poverty, and governments' capabilities of solving them are severely crippled by the lack of financial resources.

Despite this, even for third-world countries, the prioritisation of economic growth by the government can adversely impact citizens. Income inequality can worsen social tensions, and poor management of wealth can result in few benefits from economic prosperity trickling down to citizens. For many underdeveloped countries, the 'Resource Curse Thesis' is apparent as they look to foreign investment in natural resource industries as a source of an economic boost. However, this can bring more harm than good as incomes may be repatriated while such extractive industries degrade the environment. A clear example of this lies in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which holds much of the world's diamonds, yet ranks amongst the bottom globally for social indicators of development. Hence, while economic growth is not unimportant, the fact still stands that prioritising it entirely is unwise, as it can have undesirable implications.

In conclusion, for governments looking to maximise societal welfare, economic prosperity is certainly a viable venture. However, it is naïve to chase the ideals of economic prosperity as an utmost priority, placing it of higher importance than matters such as social unity, environmental protection, and income inequality. A government must not be tunnel-visioned and look beyond the economic scope, as wealth is not all that defines a country's success.

Comments:

The essay is adequately nuanced, with a fair range of examples. However, arguments are limited in range and do not fully expound on the question. Writing is confident and ambitious. Organisation is adequate, and the essay is overall a fair read.