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ESSAY 3

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Five Years; Five priorities,
One Aim - Upliftment and
empowerment of the downtrodden

Indian economy successfully assimilates two diametrically opposite features - free market and governmental planning, with socialist ideals. When leading economies are around the world are under severe stress, India's position is fairly stable. One of the reasons for this positive outcome, strong regulatory role played by the government and the five year planning holds significant weightage. It's the right time to capitalise on this favourable position

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and plan for a better future with less vertical and horizontal imbalances. The relevance of planning has gained currency with acceptance of the fact that capitalism is not a panacea for all ills. Unlike in developed countries, the people of India expect a lot of services from the government. The Twelfth Five Year Plan (FYP) is a golden opportunity to address the major issues concerning the society.

The issues to be addressed are huge in number but as the resources are limited, we have to prioritise our aims.

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It is though it is a painful exercise, to select five items which need focus in the next five years. The five items which need utmost focus in the next five years are food security, health concerns, infrastructure development, creating a skilled workforce with proper education and ~~reforming~~ ^{revamping} the government machinery to address the complex challenges.

India was a food deficit country in the 1950s and 1960s and had to wait for the ships carrying food grains from USA under PL-480 scheme. But Green Revolution and other concerted efforts have made

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India a food surplus country. with respect to wheat and rice. But still it has to import many food grains including pulses to meet its demand. 60% of the country is still dependent on the 'gamble of the monsoon'. Irrigational facilities has to be expanded to those areas. Climate resistant varieties need to be developed, & more areas need to be brought under cultivation and more importantly & productivity has to be improved. Cheap credit should be made available to farmers and they should be incentivised to produce different varieties that are

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essential for food security.

The Minimum Support Price (MSP)

basket should be expanded to include more food crops.

The subsidy for fertilizers should be properly revamped ~~to~~ considering long term viability of cultivation.

More than half of the undernourished children of the world are in India. The Public Distribution System must ~~be~~ include food items such as pulses, oil, millets etc. The Food Security Bill should be enacted as soon as possible giving ~~max~~ the most possible extensive inclusion criteria. Allowing FDI in retail is expected to improve the efficiency

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of the supply chain. The ~~gov~~ government effort to set up mega food parks and cold storage facilities should be supported very well in the 12th FYP.

Extending Green Revolution to Eastern India which is described as a 'sleeping giant' needs to be prioritised. R & D efforts should be strengthened to increase the productivity with the help of science but the introduction of GM food crops must be done only after wide consultations.

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The next ~~the~~ priority item is health sector. The successful running of NRHM has improved the health scenario of the country. But much needs to be done before we can shift our focus from this. NRHM needs to be continued in the 12th FYP and be made a permanent feature until significant gains are reaped. It should be supplemented with NUHM with special focus on slum areas.

The Non-communicable diseases ~~are on~~ like heart ailments, AIDS, diabetes etc are on the rise and proper awareness should be generated amongst the people. Communicable diseases

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Like malaria, dengue fever, swine flu and chikungunya has become very common. and the mutant varieties are a case of great concern and sufficient funds should be provided for R&D to produce cheap and effective drugs. Primary Health Care Centres should be opened in uncovered areas and their capacities enhanced. The prevalence of multi drug resistant TB and super bug NDM1 all point to the effort required in this area. Health insurance cover should be provided to a larger section of the society. There should be inbuilt provision for social audit in new projects.

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The conditional cash transfer schemes like Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahayog Yojana must be replicated in other health aspects ~~to improve~~ like immunisation to improve basic coverage.

Though ~~the~~ Infant Mortality Rate ($50/1000$) and Maternal Mortality Rate ($2.8/1000$) have reduced, they are not in track to reach ~~the~~ Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

The next in line is infrastructure development. It is estimated that India would require \$1 billion investment in the infrastructure sector. The government has to play the role of a facilitator base but it also has to

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ensure that a huge burden does not fall on the shoulders of the poor to avail the services. The most critical infrastructure to be developed is power. Energy India has an installed capacity of 1.7 lakh MW and needs to triple it by 2025 if it is to meet the demand. But climate change concerns and sustainability factor forces us to move away from coal thermal power plants which produces 65% of our power now. Ambitious projects like TAPI and IPI must be pursued to ensure adequate supply of energy. But proper attention should be given to environment friendly power generation methods like solar, wind, and

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tidal power. We cannot avoid nuclear energy and we must increase its share in total power production from current 3% to 20% by 2025. All these necessitate huge investment. Sufficient funds should be made available to R&D so that the energy from these can be made affordable for the common man. Though most of the projects require private investment, the government cannot sit back but it has to take lead in starting projects. The ambitious Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission which aims to generate additional 20,000 MW of electricity by 2022 should will need large plan allocation into the initial stages

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The transport system needs to be right revamped. We need to 'move people not vehicles'. Urban ^{public} transport systems in major cities and goods transport connecting all the major towns needs to be upgraded and re-evaluated to reduce pollution and wastage. Railways should be depended more for the transfer of goods and since it is a monopoly of the government it requires a large plan allocation. Inland water transport should be promoted in an environment friendly way. The communication sector is highly advanced but its possibilities need to be fully explored for better delivery of services.

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The fourth priority item is Skill development with a view to Increase the employability of the workforce. The Right to Education Act, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan etc needs to be integrated with vocational training and this calls for careful planning and resource allocation. The National Skill Development Corporation with Prime Minister as its chairman needs to be supported with resources. The Country's population is still hugely depending on agriculture with more than 50% of the population earns their livelihood from primary activities. India has circumvented the stages of development by

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straightly developing tertiary sector with more 55% of the GDP coming from it. But less than 20% of the population stands to gain from it. The people should be enabled to get jobs in 2^o and 3^o sectors. Providing generating employment opportunities is just one part and to make it sustainable, the people should be skilled. The Kerala Model of development, whereby the skilled and healthy people found lot of opportunities to work all over the world can be replicated. Embedding vocational courses along with school curriculum and providing separate skill development training on a uniform level requires the attention of Planning Commission.

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The last but the most important item to be prioritised is the modernising of the government machinery and adapting it to cater the newly found aspirations of the people. Normally it is considered as a routine activity and not included in long term planning. But the unique position of the country warrants that this must be accorded due preference in the 12th FYP. It is estimated that out of Rs 1 spend the Government spends for the people, only 23ps reaches them. One former Prime Minister placed the figure at 15ps. Whatever be the statistics, the ground realities point towards a great deal

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of pilferage, corruption and wastage. National e-Governance Programme (NeGP) should be given high priority to ensure transparency and accountability. The plan to provide every citizen with a Smart Card under National Population Register and a Unique Id under Aadhar will go a long way in streamlining the government services. These projects require large financial support. But the benefits that will arise out of this in the future justifies it. The loopholes in the PDS, fertiliser and fuel subsidies can be plugged and money thus saved can be utilised for other developmental activities.

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Separate allocation must be made for setting up a Citizens Grievance Redressal Mechanism and Citizens Charter under each Department on the lines of RTI. Modernisation of Security forces also require resources which can be included under the head of major reforming government machinery.

The Human Development Report of 2010, places India at a low 119th position out of 166 countries. This is despite having 10th position in terms of nominal GDP and 4th position in terms of GDP in PPP terms. India's HDI standard was lower than the world average in all the indicators including

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healthy, per capita income and education. All these point to the fact the Government intervention is necessary in these areas in the future also.

There is a suggestion to abolish the distinction between the plan and non-plan expenditure of the Government. Even if it is accepted, the relevance of planning will ~~still~~ remain high. ~~until~~ as long as there are major disparities in the society.

The 12th FYP can be effectively used to prove this point. If it can successfully make a difference in the food security situation of the country and the health threats that the poor are facing today, it will be a

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Stepping stone in the direction of eliminating poverty from the country. Add to it, the purchasing power gained by the skill development programmes and the opportunities created by the infrastructure boom, the ordinary citizen will be economically empowered. And the revamped government machinery will address the grievances of the citizens and will serve as an icing on the top.:-