

**In the Coming Years:  
"India Will Be One of The Major Players  
in Technical And Technological Development,"  
Minister Rajasekharan**

Question: Mr. M.V. Rajasekharan, Minister of State for Planning in the Union Cabinet of India, will you explain about your function, and the role of your ministry, in brief?

Answer: The Ministry of Planning directly works under the supervision and guidance of the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh. He is the chairman of the Planning Commission. He is also the prime minister, holding the planning portfolio. As the state minister in charge of planning, there are two responsibilities which I have to fulfill.

One is all the questions addressed to the prime minister for the planning and the planning commission. I have to answer on behalf of the prime minister, both in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. I am directly at work under the supervision and the guidance of the prime minister.

This provides me a great opportunity to work closely and raise great supervision and get the guidance. As we are aware, Dr. Singh is one of the renowned economists and a person with un-impeachable integrity and sincerity. This point of time, our country is greatly privileged to have him as the prime minister. As the Minister for Planning, I am very happy to be able to work with him.

Q: What main problems are you facing today?

A: As the major problem, we need to see that the poor people in our country are able to get decent living. About 26% of our people live below poverty. Their daily income is hardly US\$1 per day. What we have been trying to do is to see that the poorest of the poor are provided the needed opportunity to improve their quality of life, particularly in the rural areas. That is our main objective as per the planning is concerned. How do we take this sector of people, 26% of people of the total population, and take them above poverty line and provide each family a decent living? This is one of the major strategies which we do in the Planning Commission.

The second thing which we are also trying to take care of is to see the overall planning of the country. Our Five Year Plan is worked out in consultation with the chief ministers and senior ministers from states and the senior officers. The plan's size fixes it. Even though the five-year period is there, we have the planning process initiated by Jawaharlal Nehru. He was the first prime minister who brought the concept of the five-year plan.

The overall framework of this five-year plan is that every year, the plan's size is fixed in

consultation with the state government, headed by the chief minister. Discussions are held in the Planning Commission and then based on their requirement, the sectoral allocations take place, once the overall plan is agreed between the center and the state.

The Minister for Planning is also in the Planning Commission as a member. In our country, the planning structure in the Planning Commission is as follows: we have the prime minister or the chairman of the Planning Commission. Under him, we have the deputy chairman. Then the deputy chairman is assisted by the members of the Planning Commission.

Now, we have got that will between five and six members. Under them, we have got advisors coming from different areas of expertise. They work out the various details when the plan discussion takes place, sitting with the state government officials both at the political level as well as the administrative level. That is how the planning process is taken care of. Coming to the areas, we have the member in charge of each sector industries of agriculture and IT sector communication.

The Planning Commission is entrusted with the responsibility to take care of the overall policy and finding resources to their entire development process. This is how the Planning Commission takes care, not only to identify the resources, but also fix the plan size, guidelines and provide which are the trust areas. An example would be the Planning Commission giving great importance for primary education.

This time, the greater location of farms have been made available for primary education. Particularly, that is one of the areas where we would like to see greater impact. Until and unless we educate our children, it will be more difficult for them in the planning process and there, you will get to see the role to play in the nation-building activities.

The second area of trust which the Planning Commission has given is with regards to the health. Right now, we have been working out, under the overall direction and guidance of the prime minister, to launch the National Health Mission. This is also another area where the Planning Commission has been thinking to see that the health has been made available to the doorstep of the poorest of the poor.

When you see the overall process as far as planning is concerned, our trust area is how do we take this 26% of the poorest of the poor? Who are below the poverty line? How do we take them up and give them the decent income and living? Which provides them education, takes care of their health and other needs?

For example, drinking water is one of the major priority areas as per the planning is concerned. It is the responsibility of the state government to provide drinking water to the people who are living in the far off places where there are no facilities.

Naturally, the Planning Commission also has the responsibility to find the needed resources and make them available. This is also another area where of the trust, drinking water is given the highest priority. Then comes agriculture. About 70% of our population in India depends upon agriculture. Agriculture is the main vehicle as per the rural regeneration and rural economy is concerned.

Particularly, after the new government came into being, we have given the highest priority

and allocation to agriculture. Another thing which we have been very much concerned of the policy level now is to bring in private and public partnership.

We also welcome foreign investment. We would like to see that in the nation -building activity. We also try to take the cooperation and support from our friendly countries. Your country, Korea, is one of the countries which has been a great friend of India from the beginning. India has got a relationship with your country running for generations.

We also find some of the best practices, whether it is in agriculture, industries, small scale industry, social/economic development, health care, and education. For example, we are concerned when it comes to education by providing younger generation with skills training.

Your country has done wonderfully well compared to any country in the world. Even percentage-wise, I read in some papers that you have 70% of the younger generation covered in providing skills training. This is what we need in our country. It is also one of the areas where the Planning Commission is concerned in order to improve the quality of education, particularly, the quality of technical and professional education, so that our younger generation will be able to get employment.

Q: In seminars, many worldwide outstanding speakers expect that India is coming with China, saying that India will develop very fast in the 21st Century. What is your vision of India in the 21st Century?

A: Our priority is to have the best of relationship with all the countries in the world, particularly with South Asian and Southeast Asian countries because we are culturally very close. Culturally, we are one. This is one of the strengths on which we have to build our friendship.

The second thing, as per the economic and social development is concerned, we would like to see that India becomes knowledge-based society. Today, we have got a good base created because of the visionary leaders we have had, like Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Now, it is our prime minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh.

Now, India is much empowered with making a breakthrough in the field of technology. We are sure that, in the coming years, India will be one of the major players as for the technical and technological development is concerned, whether it is in the field of agriculture and industry, including the various other technologies which we find in bio-technology and nano-technology. These are the areas in which India is emerging as one of the leading countries. In this, we would like to learn and see what the best practices are. In your great country, Korea, you have the best practices.

You are industrially very forward. Industrially, you have achieved a great breakthrough, as well as economically and socially. You have a good base where your people have been able to share their knowledge with a country like India, which is an emerging country and developing country.

In the future, we would like to see where it achieves its degree of economic and social

stability in India, while at the same time carry the poorest of the poor people, so that they can also have the degree of good livelihood, which is comparable to any other developing country. This is our vision and our objective.

Q: You are very influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. Will you tell me about him in brief?

A: We call Gandhi the "Father of the Nation." He was the greatest human being born on this Earth. We were fortunate to have his guidance and leadership during the pre-independence time. He led the country and got independence. I remember one thing that he said, "Whenever you are doing anything, whether it is the field of planning or doing anything, then think about the poorest of the poor and remember his face. Whatever decision you are taking, if you feel that is going to help him, please take that decision. If you feel that the decision is not going to help him, please do not take that decision."

The second thing which he always mentioned was that poor people are the center of every development. The people's participation in every activity which we launched must be assured. He said that the people should be able to manage themselves, everything of their levels. That is why he was one of the greatest from the very beginning. Gandhi said to make every village as a republic. He wanted to see that the people's democracy is established at average level.

Luckily, after Rajiv Gandhi became the prime minister, we were able to pass an amendment to the Constitution. Today, as a result, we have got lacks of Punjab, working as related with republics, but we have to strengthen them. We have to give them a degree of stability. We have, at the same time, taken care of educating them, as well as providing necessary training for them to plan, implement, as well as monitor entire planning, where they would like to have better living conditions of the people in their villages, especially the poorest of the poor.

Q: What is your hobby?

A: I am an agriculturist. I come from the farming family. I have got a farm near Bangalore. Even today, apart from that, I take a lot of interest in rural development. In that context, I always got greater liking for reading books and then trying to find out things which we can learn from other people. My hobby is to help the rural people to come up in life and achieve a degree of good and sustainable living.