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***Daily News Feed***

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# Israel's plan to boost settlements in Golan is met with conflicting emotions

The government has approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's \$11 million plan of financial incentives to double the population of settlers in the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria in the 1967 war; about 50,000 people currently live there, roughly half of them Israeli settlers

## Associated Press

A dry mountain wind whipped through a cluster of Israeli flags at the entrance of a kibbutz in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, where the tranquillity belies the tumultuous events unfolding nearby.

Earlier this month, Syrian President Bashar Assad was ousted after nearly 25 years in power. Within hours, Israeli tanks rolled past a razor wire-reinforced fence into the Golan's demilitarised buffer zone in Syria, created as part of a 1974 ceasefire between the countries. Israel said it was a temporary move to secure its border.

Days later, the Israeli government approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's \$11 million plan of financial incentives to double the population of Israeli settlers in the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel will "continue to hold onto it, make it flourish and settle it," Mr. Netanyahu said.

## Israeli occupation

The international community, with one exception, considers the Golan to be occupied Syrian territory, while the UN lists Israeli settlements there as illegal.

In 2019, the U.S. became the only country to recog-



An Israeli flag on top of the entrance of a bomb shelter in the kibbutz of Ein Zivan in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, which most of the world considers occupied Syrian territory. FILE PHOTO

nize Israel's 1981 annexation.

About 50,000 people currently live there, roughly half of them Israeli settlers and the other half Arab Druze, a religious minority spread among Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the Golan Heights.

In the towns and kibbutzim of the Golan, news of the plan to increase the number of settlers was met with a mixture of scepticism, excitement and shock.

Paul Hecht, who at 42 has lived in the Golan nearly all his life, greeted the news with "mixed emotions, to be honest, because I love the Golan Heights the way it is. I'm kind of afraid that the

place will be overpopulated but at the same time, of course, I want the place to advance."

The attraction is the rural way of life, the open spaces and the mountains, he explained. Doubling the population "sounds a bit extreme," especially if attempted in a short time frame, he said, noting the region needs infrastructure improvements for its existing population before more people are brought in.

The Golan's economy relies heavily on farming and the hospitality industry. Previous government attempts to attract more settlers have had little success – in large part because of a lack of job opportuni-

ties and the long distance from major cities.

A well-publicised move in 2019 to name a Golan settlement after then-U.S. President Donald Trump failed to attract a major influx of residents.

## Sense of security

But Mr. Hecht said he believed more Israelis could be tempted by a life in the Golan after Mr. Assad's fall. "I think that will that will bring in a lot more people who want to come and live in the Golan Heights because of the sense of security that people will have here," he said. "And obviously the best view and the best nature in Israel."

One such new settler could be Shlomo Benhaim,

60, who has been thinking of moving to the Golan for years. "It's my dream. If I will fulfill it, who knows," he said during a day trip with his wife to Ein Zivan, a kibbutz about two kilometers from the Syrian buffer zone. One of the oldest kibbutzim dating from the late 1960s, Ein Zivan has barely 500 residents today. "I love the Golan. It's a unique area in Israel, very unique, with a lot of history, archaeology, modern history, a lot of memories," he said.

But moving wouldn't be easy. The area is popular with mainly Israeli tourists who come for the mountains and outdoor activities, but it's a roughly three-hour drive from urban centers with well-paying jobs like Tel Aviv.

On the other hand, there's also a good education system and no traffic jams. "There's a lot of benefit to [life] in the Golan, and also a lot of negative things," he said.

In nearby Kibbutz Merom Golan, hotel manager Shefi Mod said that with tax breaks and cheap land, "I think the support of the government indeed can help people to come and live here."

Mr. Mod first came to the area as a soldier decades ago and liked it so much he moved here. But whether others will be tempted to follow suit is

still unclear. Many Golan Heights Druze consider themselves Syrians under occupation. While Israeli citizenship is open to them, most have not taken it and have Israeli residency permits instead.

"Whatever this government wants to do, it won't ask our permission," said Khaled Elshaer, a restaurant owner in the Druze village of Masada.

The plan to double the number of settlers left him "numb and shocked," he said.

He considers the Golan to be Syrian. But asked if he wanted it to be a part of Syria, he said no.

"I feel Golani. Neither Israeli nor Syrian," he said. "We are connected to the land, not to who will be president over it."

Local surgeon Ali Abu Awad stressed that the Golan Heights are "an essential part of Syria".

He accused the Israeli government of apartheid-like discrimination against religious minorities, including his own, and said there was clear discrimination in access to higher education and preferential treatment to Jewish citizens of Israel.

He was dismissive of the government's plan to double the number of settlers. "They can say what they want," he said. "But until now, they have said this before and they have failed."



# AI, ML to aid Indian pharma industry to pivot on innovation

YEARENDER

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

As technological advancements like AI, machine learning (ML) and precision medicine revolutionise drug discovery, manufacturing and patient care, Indian pharmaceutical industry is set for a 'profound transformation' in 2025 with innovation, wider global access and improvement in quality becoming key themes for the future.

The industry, which is expected to grow nearly two-fold to around \$130 billion in size by 2030, is looking to take advantage of conducive policies, demographic and digital ta-

lent, in making India play a pivotal role in advancing global health for all.

Currently accounting for around 20% of the overall generic drug sales globally, the Indian pharma industry is focussing on research excellence and innovation in order to position the country as a global hub for high-quality, affordable pharmaceuticals.

## Quality, innovation

"The Indian pharma market is expected to move up to \$120-130 billion by 2030 from the current size of \$58 billion. Initiatives in terms of quality, innovation and wider global reach will help the Indian pharma sector realise its potential," according to Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) secretary gen-



**Huge potential:** The industry is likely to grow nearly two-fold to about \$130 billion in size by 2030. AP

eral Sudarshan Jain.

Given the conducive policies and the advantage of demographic and digital talent, India will play a pivotal role in advancing glo-

bal health for all in years to come, he added.

IPA represents 23 leading research-based Indian pharmaceutical companies like Sun Pharma, Ci-

pla, and Dr Reddy's Laboratories, among others. Mr. Jain said innovation will continue to be a major focus for the industry.

He noted that the go-

vernment is expected to soon announce the operational details of the Promotion of Research & Innovation Programme which would spur innovation.

Elaborating on the initiatives lined up in the private sector, he said leading companies are increasing their focus on specialty portfolios and diversifying into higher-value drugs.

"Additionally, the industry is set to make notable progress in areas such as CAR-T cell therapy, mRNA vaccines, and the development of complex molecules, which hold immense potential for driving future growth," Jain said.

Besides, the patent expiries of blockbuster biologics by 2025 present a significant growth avenue in the global biosimilars market,

he stated. Similarly, Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) director general Anil Matai said the industry is set for a profound transformation in 2025. Technological advancements like AI, machine learning and precision medicine are set to revolutionise drug discovery, manufacturing and patient care, he said.

OPPI represents research-based pharmaceutical companies, including AstraZeneca, Novartis and Merck, in India.

Besides, strengthened regulatory frameworks will enable the swift adoption of innovative therapies while prioritising patient safety, Mr. Matai said.

"A focus on research excellence and innovation will position India as a glo-

bal hub for high-quality, affordable pharmaceuticals. Collaboration between policymakers, academia and industry stakeholders will address unmet medical needs, particularly in under-served regions," he stated.

## Ethical standards

Also, adherence to Uniform Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP) will uphold ethical standards, fostering trust and transparency across the healthcare ecosystem, Mr. Matai stated.

Reflecting on the year gone by, Mr. Jain said 2024 was a year of building on a robust foundation with sustainable growth and thrust on simplifying regulations and harmonisation with global standards.



# OpenAI finds AI in education a major risk in India but experts disagree

Policymakers argue that threats to education from AI are a uniquely high area of concern in India compared with other countries; but other experts believe AI's threats to education are overblown, misplaced, and failed to recognise that the benefits greatly outweigh the dangers in India

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Nihal Krishnan**  
NEW DELHI

Indian policymakers specialised in artificial intelligence (AI), who were surveyed by tech giant OpenAI on AI risk perceptions, broadly said that threats to education from AI are a uniquely high area of concern in India compared with other countries.

However, experts within government, industry, and academia told *The Hindu* that they disagreed with many findings of the OpenAI risk perceptions study. They said that AI threats to education are overblown, misplaced, and failed to recognise that the benefits greatly outweigh the dangers in India.

OpenAI's private research conducted between September to December, 2023 through surveys and expert interviews with a few dozen policymakers in five countries found that "Education risks (e.g., students over-relying on AI tools at the expense of critical thinking skills), were viewed as least risky," but "India is a notable exception: Indian respondents ranked risks to education as the fifth priority area of concern, greater than geopolitical risks or the alignment problem."

No explanation was gi-



**Silver lining:** Visually-impaired students using AI-powered smart glasses. AFP

ven in the OpenAI study for why Indian policymakers found AI in education risks to be of particularly high concern. OpenAI did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this article.

The OpenAI study, which *The Hindu* exclusively obtained, focused on four broad categories: benefits and risks from A.I., pace of AI development, AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) and existential risks, and AI risk management. The study implicitly focused on cutting edge generative AI use cases such as AI tools that generate new text, images, videos etc. rather than broad uses of artificial intelligence which have existed for many years.



**Indian respondents ranked risks to education as the fifth priority area of concern, greater than geopolitical risks or the alignment problem**

OPENAI'S PRIVATE RESEARCH

OpenAI, the largest and most popular generative AI company in the world, found in the study that the greatest dangers from the technology came from "AI misuse/malicious use" by bad actors and 'economic risks' (like job displacement due to automation)," according to policymakers surveyed in India, Japan, Taiwan, U.K., and the U.S.

the technology.

"We've already worked with tens of thousands of teachers and students who have used AI in their schools and the benefits outweigh the risks or dangers that exist," said Mr. Sharma who is a serial entrepreneur who previously co-founded Housing.com and founded Genius Teachers, a quiz-based e-learning platform.

### Far ahead

"The other four countries in the OpenAI study are much ahead of India in their use and understanding of AI in education so there's bound to be a higher perception of problems in India if it's not been used much before," Mr. Sharma said.

Mr. Sharma added that if the OpenAI study were conducted again in 18-24 months, the risk perception of AI in education in India would drastically decrease due to widespread use and awareness of the benefits of it as well as the vulnerabilities going down.

The potential loss of critical reasoning among students due to the use of the technology in education in India is one of the most important considerations and threats, according to Indian educators and policymakers surveyed by OpenAI.

For example, thanks to cutting-edge generative AI tools, a student may not

need to think or reason out a problem because the technology can give them an immediate answer and thereby could cause a decrease in original thinking and problem-solving skills among students.

Another potential worry of Indian educators is that if students around the country are using generative AI tools like OpenAI's popular ChatGPT chatbot then schools could face the challenge of testing machine intelligence rather than the students themselves and this could force educators to change the way they assess and test students.

"Some challenges definitely exist like when AI tools produce incorrect or misleading results but still I'm very optimistic about AI in education because it's great for brainstorming and is a very useful knowledge co-creation tool," said Krishnan Narayanan, Research Lead at IIT Madras' Centre for Responsible AI, which is driving a 'GenAI4Edu' initiative.

"We just have to learn how to design AI systems to be Socratic, to get the technology to force students to come up with or be guided to answers themselves rather than giving them the answer automatically," said Krishnan, an award-winning author of 'Against All Odds: The IT Story of India', and former senior executive at Infosys.



# Why is strengthening fisheries extension services crucial?

What support do Matsya Seva Kendras provide to fish farmers?

Abhilash Likhii

## The story so far:

India possesses diverse fisheries resources that provide livelihood opportunities to approximately three crore fishers and fish farmers. The country has witnessed an 83% increase in the national fish production since 2013-14, that stands at a record 175 lakh tons in 2022-23. With 75% of this coming from inland fisheries, India is the second-largest fish and aquaculture producer globally. In this backdrop, strengthening last-mile fisheries and aquaculture extension services is of paramount importance. Experts contend that such extension should provide request-based services to fishers/fish farmers on the life cycle of improved species cultured, water quality, disease, and available rearing technologies; address issues faced by seed growers and hatcheries; and conduct need-based

training to promote sustainable practices and fisheries-based activities that have the potential to be viable business models.

## What is the role of Matsya Seva Kendras?

Under the flagship Pradhan Mantri Matsya Samapada Yojana, 'Matsya Seva Kendras' (MSK) has been envisioned as one-stop solution to provide a range of extension services by trained aquaculture professionals. The governmental assistance to set up such Kendras for women and weaker sections is available to the extent of 60%. Funds have been provided to State governments and Union Territories for operationalising 102 such Kendras. For example, the MSK in Thrissur, Kerala has a well-equipped lab for water, soil, and microbial analysis to conduct request-based disease tests, while the MSK in Nasik and Sangli districts in Maharashtra focuses on capacity building for fishers/fish farmers

on varied seed/feed inputs backed with the required technology infusion.

Fostering a 'whole of government approach,' the Government of India advises MSKs to mobilise start-ups, cooperatives, fish farmers' producer organisations, joint liability groups, and self-help groups to share best practices. The latter includes regenerative and conservation management practises for both inland and marine fisheries in view of the effects of climate change.

## How do Sagar Mitras support fishers?

Another innovative extension initiative by the government is the deployment of "Sagar Mitras" in coastal States and U.T.s as a vital interface between the government and sea-borne fishers. They compile information and data on daily marine catch, price fluctuations, and requisite marketing needs at fish landing centres/harbours. They disseminate information to fishers on local

regulations, weather forecasts, natural calamities, hygienic fish handling, and potential fishing zones in the seas.

## How can extension services be improved?

To make the extension and advisory services in fisheries and aquaculture more robust the need of the hour is twofold. First, the above initiatives should be institutionally converged with the already networked field extension machinery of over 700 Indian Council of Agricultural Research-driven Krishi Vigyan Kendras and the State governments and U.T.s extension services. Second, promoting digital outreach. The National Fisheries Development Board has initiated a nationwide virtual learning platform, 'AquaBazaar,' that enables experts to clarify basic concepts and provide practical demonstrations to fishers on breeding/seed production of commercially important fish.

In this context, the World Bank-assisted Government of India project to formalise the fisheries and aquaculture sector is a boon indeed. It aims to create work-based digital identities for all fishers and fish farmers in the country, thereby strengthening their extension, capacity building, and awareness generation needs.

Abhilash Likhii is Secretary, Department of Fisheries, Government of India. The views expressed are personal

## THE GIST

Strengthening fisheries extension services is essential for supporting fishers and promoting sustainable practices, with initiatives like Matsya Seva Kendras and Sagar Mitras playing key roles.

Matsya Seva Kendras and Sagar Mitras help fishers by providing critical support, training, and information to improve productivity and sustainability.



# Should the wealth tax be reinstated in India?



**Ajay Shah**  
Senior Research Fellow and Co-founder Xkdr Forum



**Rahul Menon**  
Associate professor at the Jindal School of Government and Public Policy

## PARLEY

**A**t a recent panel discussion in New Delhi, French economist Thomas Piketty suggested that a wealth and inheritance tax be imposed on the super-rich in India, which, in turn, could fund health and education. India's Chief Economic Advisor, Anantha Nageswaran, opposed the idea, arguing that higher taxes could encourage fund outflows. Should the wealth tax be reinstated in India? Ajay Shah and Rahul Menon discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Saamreen Wani. Edited excerpts:

**Is it a good idea to reintroduce a wealth tax in India?**

**Ajay Shah:** I'm not an enthusiast. We should never think about public policy from a standpoint of moral outrage. We should think about means and ends and the effectiveness by which certain objectives can be met. There are two kinds of difficulties. First, how are you going to measure the wealth of a person? If the government says that the measurement of wealth is the value of the assets of a person that are held in liquid assets like equities or debt, then people will get a strong bias in favour of holding assets like real estate and gold. In fact, it is harmful for the country when people emphasise holdings of real estate and gold because the productive assets of the economy are equities and the bonds. Second, people would just leave. If we say that we will tax the elite at a high rate, many will just leave and all the prospects of progress will get damaged.

**Rahul Menon:** It is time to start talking about it. Just announcing a wealth tax in a budget is not going to do anything. There needs to be a large institutional framework around it. There is a case for it right now simply because the levels of concentration of wealth are extremely high. I don't think it is a moral problem to call out the inequality right now. It is a fundamental development problem, because an increase in inequality reduces capabilities and opportunities for many people. We have a sophisticated and strong system right now to track economic activity. We have implemented it for people at the bottom half of the pyramid. I don't see why we can't start thinking about using it at the top, which is a smaller population.

**India had a wealth tax before it was abolished in 2016-17, but the collections were less than 1% of the gross tax collections. The government had said that the cost of collection of the wealth tax was really high. What were the issues then?**



A view of Mumbai. GETTY IMAGES

**RM:** Much of the problem was what afflicts most economies when they undertake something like that, which is, how do you define this wealth? How do you define who is the owner of this wealth? It is easy to shift my wealth from one form of holding to another. I exercise effective control and in name alone it is with someone else. So, that enables me to evade tax. These problems will continue to persist if we impose a wealth tax again. This problem has also affected the developed world. Collections from wealth taxes are very low. In much of the literature that has been motivated by Piketty's ideas, there are other interesting propositions that have come up to plug all these loopholes – have a comprehensive tax, don't distinguish between labour and capital, tax real estate at the same rate as equity assets, etc.

**AS:** I'm not convinced that inequality is an important problem for India. Growth is the only problem that we should focus on. All measures of well-being – infant mortality, female empowerment, or any measure of well-being – respond to growth alone. Redistribution never made a country better. There is no Marxian theory of value. There is only a market theory of value. So, a company is worth whatever a buyer is willing to pay for it. When there is a dislike of the elites, it creates unliveable countries and that is not a path to progress. So, we have really got to tamp down this rhetoric and get back to a more Gandhian approach. Let's live together, make a good country. That is about building prosperity rather than getting into warfare about distribution.

**Piketty's work was based on data on income tax, consumption, wealth, national accounts, and rich lists, which might have issues, but those are not India-specific. How**



We have a sophisticated and strong system to track economic activity. We have implemented it for people at the bottom half of the pyramid. I don't see why we can't start thinking about using it at the top, which is a smaller population

**RAHUL MENON**

**can we address this problem of data issues to get better approximations of inequality?**

**AS:** At the upper end of the distribution, there is no hope of meaningful data. So, the field investigator is never going to get this data and people are not going to realistically report on their income. Household survey data really does not capture the upper end of the distribution. I don't know any other way to improve the data. There is the *Forbes* magazine ranking of the richest people in the world but that's not a description of a country.

**RM:** Yes, the surveys don't give you a true picture of what's happening at the top end. But there are ways. Piketty and other academics use the data from various wealth lists. Then, using economic techniques of interpolation, they combine these with surveys to get some amount of data over a period. Now it's very clear that these are approximations, but they do give us a picture. One of the most important ways to do it is through international collaboration. The U.S. has tried doing that by signing agreements with other economies to develop more transparency.

**There are two main contentions against the wealth tax. The first is flight of capital and the second is that when certain thresholds are imposed, some people/organisations will be incentivised to stay below that, which will widen the gap between the bottom half and the top half. How do you respond to these?**

**RM:** Yes, there may be flight of capital but there are some research papers that say that the scale of this is not too large in countries such as the U.K. and in Norway. In Norway, for instance, there is a lot to keep people there; there is a lot of public infrastructure. There is a reason to stay there even if your taxes rise. That is not the case in India. Wealth tax by itself means nothing unless it is used properly. So, the idea is to use this wealth tax and invest in health and education to create a more educated and healthy workforce. That gives a reason for people to continually invest here, even if the wealth tax is raised.

On the question of thresholds, thresholds for MSMEs don't matter if I'm taxing just 0.04% [of the population]. They can grow until they reach 0.04% and that is when they will be taxed. Again, no one is talking about bringing about perfect equality. Some amount of inequality will always be there. But how much is too much?

**AS:** The emergence of democracy in the U.K., starting from the Magna Carta in 1215, happened with generation after generation having enormous wealth and power concentrated with a few. That was way beyond anything that we see today. So, inequality is a fact of life.

Finally, I want to come to this idea that we should impose a wealth tax because it can be used for, say, health or education. This is wrong. It is a fundamental feature of public finance that you have a complete decoupling of expenditure and the revenues. I am disappointed that Piketty, a skilled economist, does not get this. We ask ourselves what are the good uses of public money and basically, they are public goods. I think there are only three good taxes in India – personal income tax, GST, and property tax. It is possible to implement these under Indian conditions as long as the rates are kept low with reasonably low distortions. Every other tax in the Indian public finance literature is termed 'bad tax'.

**Wealth tax might give some revenue for the social sector. But how do we address the issues in allocations in the same sectors?**

**RM:** There are huge problems with it. We have seen it in education. All the ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) and Pratham surveys say students are not up to the mark. There is a very legitimate question that if we tax billionaires and we put money there, are we just throwing good money after bad? But levying a tax and using it for spending allows us to finance a lot of development goals. It also allows us to do this without necessarily running a deficit, without necessarily borrowing from the public.

**AS:** There is no merit in that idea. The education system is terrible. It is not efficient to put more money into that problem; we have a management crisis. I feel that the wise approach in India is to choke expenditure until you prove bang for the buck. A meaningful expenditure ratio for India at the present level of development is about half of what is spent today.



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# Tapping into Kazakhstan's rare earths potential

As the world accelerates its transition to cleaner energy through cutting-edge technology, the demand for rare earths has increased globally. India, the third-largest carbon emitter, is pivoting to renewable energy and faces a growing need for rare earths. Despite being the fifth-largest holder of rare earth elements, India relies heavily on China for imports as it lacks advanced technologies for extraction. Amid supply chain disruptions and security concerns tied to China's dominance in this sector, New Delhi is diversifying its sources through agreements with the U.S., Latin American, and African countries to mitigate dependency on China. In this context, Kazakhstan emerges as a promising and strategically closer alternative.

## China's monopoly

China accounts for over one-third of the global rare earths' possession and around 70% of its production, with India sourcing around 60% of its imports from Beijing. This heavy reliance stems from India's insufficient domestic production to meet the demands of critical sectors like electronics, defence, and clean energy.

However, China's past actions of disrupting critical technology and mineral supply due to bilateral issues give rise to fears as it tries to exert control over the critical mineral industry. China's monopoly in global and Indian rare earth demand leverages its position to dictate supply chain terms. China recently halted the supply of antimony, crucial for flame retardants, solar cells, batteries, and military gear, citing national security concerns. This move, along with a ban in December 2023 on critical technologies for extracting rare earths and producing magnets, reinforces China's grip on the sector.

Meanwhile, reduced ore supplies from Russia



**Ayushi Saini**

Junior Research Fellow and a final year PhD candidate at JNU, specialising in Central Asia

– mainly antimony concentrates used in wind and solar energy production – have intensified China's concerns as both the largest producer and consumer of rare earths. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further exposed the risks of concentrated supply chains, resulting in India and Western nations to seek sustainable, diversified alternatives.

## Why Kazakhstan is important

In this context, Kazakhstan, a close ally of India, offers a viable alternative to meet India's rare earth demands. Kazakhstan is among the richest sources of rare earths. With New Delhi's increasing engagement with Astana through the 'Connect Central Asia' policy and connectivity initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor, a rare earth partnership could unlock significant economic benefits for both nations. Kazakhstan holds 15 of the 17 known rare earth elements and, with advanced extraction technologies, could dent China's dominance in this sector. Astana already has extraction agreements with Japan and Germany, while the U.S., South Korea, and the European Union have recently joined exploration and production deals to tap its rare earth reserves.

Kazakhstan's extraction of rare earth elements like dysprosium is projected to grow significantly between 2024 and 2029. The country's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev recently highlighted rare earths as the "new oil" for Kazakhstan's economy. The country hosts one of the world's three full-cycle beryllium and scandium factories, crucial for telecommunications, and is among the four global manufacturers of tantalum and niobium, essential for nuclear reactors and clean energy. Astana is expanding its role in rare earth and strategic mineral production with investments in tungsten, battery materials, and magnets. Its vast mining potential in rare earth

elements can complement India's efforts in this sector. The Kazakh government is prioritising advanced technologies and partnerships to strengthen its presence in emerging fields like lithium and heat-resistant alloys. Additionally, Kazakh metallurgical plants extract bismuth, antimony, selenium, and tellurium, and use imported technologies to produce gallium from alumina and indium from polymetallic ores, all of which are essential for renewable energy production.

## The way forward

India's COP29 pledge to achieve 500 GW of renewable energy by 2030 highlights the importance of rare earth elements like dysprosium in advancing clean energy technologies. India lacks capacity across the rare earth supply chain but plans a 400% increase in mining output over the next decade.

India's over-reliance on China and possible global shifts after the U.S. regime change underscore the need for diversification. India-Kazakhstan collaboration can enhance India's resource security, reduce dependence on China, and support sustainability by procuring rare earth through domestic extraction and import sources through partners in closer proximity. Apart from India's direct connectivity challenges with Kazakhstan, there is a lack of necessary extraction technologies in both countries. Nevertheless, the 'India-Central Asia Rare Earths Forum', proposed by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval during the second India-Central Asia Summit in Astana, aims to boost partnerships and private sector investment, potentially combating these challenges. It could facilitate bilateral training, joint mining ventures, shared geological data and expertise, sustainable extraction practices, and create a regional market to reduce reliance on China.

India's over-reliance on China and possible global shifts after the U.S. regime change underscore the need for diversification.



# An avoidable tragedy

## India must take measures to reform crowd management

**A**s tragic as it is, India is arguably the country with the highest number of stampedes and resultant injuries and fatalities. Data from the National Crime Records Bureau reveal that between 1996 and 2022, India recorded 3,935 stampede incidents, resulting in more than 3,000 deaths. These numbers show a chronic failure in ensuring public safety during religious festivals, political rallies, and celebrity appearances. Religious gatherings account for a significant proportion of these tragedies. In 2011, in Sabarimala, 106 people died on a narrow pathway. In 2013, during the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, 36 people were killed at a railway station due to overcrowding. Political rallies have also proven deadly – in 2014, more than 30 people were killed in a stampede at Gandhi Maidan in Patna. While stampede fatalities during celebrity appearances have been rare, they point to the dangerous combination of fan fervour and poor planning.

During a promotional event for the film *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, at Hyderabad's Sandhya Theatre, a "surprise" appearance by Telugu actor Allu Arjun led to a stampede. A 35-year-old woman, Revathi, lost her life, and her eight-year-old son, Sri Tej, is battling for survival. Allu Arjun, the film's production team, and the director have collectively decided to donate ₹2 crore to Revathi's family. In the aftermath, blame has been laid on the Hyderabad police, the actor, and his production team. Questions surrounding protocol, security arrangements, and crowd control have yet to yield clear answers. Was the police force prepared for the size of the crowd? Did the actor and his production team respond swiftly when they got news of the stampede? Revathi's death points to a recurring pattern of negligence, mismanagement, and inadequate planning. India must prioritise crowd safety with actionable measures. It is important to consider spatial and thermal comfort when planning events and provide sufficient hydration facilities to prevent exhaustion. There should be multiple and clearly designated entry and exit points, capable of handling the projected crowd size. Emergency preparedness, including the deployment of medical aid, trained personnel, and effective chaos management protocols, must be a non-negotiable standard. India ought to ensure the safety of its citizens, whether they gather for faith, fandom, or politics.



# How the Right overtook the Left in India

**T**here is a famous dialogue from the Hindi film *3 Idiots*: “*Dekho hum kahan nikal aaye aur tum kahan reh gaye*” (See where we have reached and where you are left).” The Rashtriya Swamajsevak Sangh (RSS)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) cohorts could be saying this to the Communists in India.

The RSS will complete 100 years in 2025. The Communist movement in India is also a century old. The Left produced some of the most valiant fighters during the independence movement even as the Right was cosy up to the British empire. It is no secret that a large share of prisoners in Cellular Jail in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were Communists. Despite such a glorious past, the reality is that the Indian Left is now in a labyrinth.

Today, the Right clearly dominates Parliament: the BJP alone occupies 240 Lok Sabha seats. The Left parties combined occupy just eight seats. Compare this to the first general elections in independent India in 1951-1952 when the Congress was in power and the Communist Party of India (CPI) was the principal opposition party.

At present, the Right is also far ahead in terms of organisational strength and structure. The total membership of the Left parties (those who contest elections) is not more than 2 million and the mass organisations that they represent number around 30 million. The RSS alone has a membership of over 7 million, and the BJP has a membership of more than 100 million.

## The trajectory of the Left and Right

The rise and fall of these political entities depends on various historical episodes, the foremost being changes in the social production system. The initial years of development after the 1950s saw the establishment of industrial towns and the emergence of a strong Left-leaning working class. Major cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata witnessed a robust presence of the Left, which was reflected in their political strength. However, the capitalist production system underwent significant changes after the mid-1980s. The rise of fragmented production, a diminishing organised working class, and the corresponding growth of informal sector workers pushed the Left out of the political scene.

Meanwhile, the Right maintained its presence through cultural interventions – a space largely neglected by the Left. Informal sector workers



**Tikender Singh Panwar**

Former Deputy Mayor, Shimla, and Member, Kerala Urban Commission. He served as political secretary of Sitaram Yechury

became fertile ground for identity politics based on caste and religion. Consequently, there has been a parallel rise of the Right and the decline of the Left in Indian cities.

Another critical factor was the strong presence of the Left in rural India, driven by the ‘land reforms’ slogan and related movements. These were influential across the country for a long time. However, over the past few decades, newer classes within the peasantry have emerged and many of them have shifted towards the Right.

Beyond land reforms, the Left struggled to build sustainable layers of governance, except in West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala. It remained overly preoccupied with the imminence of a revolution and the idea of capturing state power. It sidelined all other essential matters. And the revolution never materialised.

The national question is crucial for both the Left and the Right, though their approaches differ. For the Left, it involves uniting all democratic sections of society against external enemies, particularly imperialism. This was evident during the colonial period. However, in independent India, the narrative of a foreign enemy could not be sustained as strongly due to obvious reasons.

In contrast, for the Right, the national question is less about unity among the people and more about promoting the narrative of ‘Hindu nationalism’ against perceived ‘others’. During the independence movement, this narrative did not gain much traction, as Indian nationalism against British rule was able to mobilise larger sections of society. Over the last few decades, however, this second form of ‘nationalism’ has increasingly dominated the narrative and has become more and more pronounced with time.

Another major element relates to the idea of modernism and the role of the Constitution. Undoubtedly, the Constitution is rooted in the finest modernist values of equity, secularism, socialism, and more. However, the nation-state remained influenced by feudal and semi-feudal values, which continue to shape its character.

Unlike in the West where modernism evolved out of the defeat or destruction of class feudalism, which was preceded by the Renaissance, religious reformation and enlightenment, in India no worthwhile renaissance could take place. The religious reformation that took place in some parts of the country could not disintegrate the caste system

which affected all Indian religions, and the Brahmanical enlightenment could not produce a new anti-caste equalitarian philosophy. India has a peculiar situation now, where the Constitution is far ahead of the polity and human values, which are still evolving. This gives fertile ground for the Right to make advances on both post-truth narratives and campaigns on religious and identity issues.

## Leadership and organisational strategies

Jyoti Basu, former Chief Minister of West Bengal, once spoke of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)’s “historic blunder”. He was referring to the party’s decision not to allow him to be the Prime Minister after the 1996 Lok Sabha polls threw up a hung Parliament. His remark warrants deeper reflection. The Left is still fixated on the revolution and is reluctant to embrace the multi-layered demands of electoral politics. If the Left is unwilling to take full responsibility, why should people trust them with their votes? This disconnect is evident in Kerala, where voters support the Left in Assembly elections but turn to other parties in general elections. On the other hand, the Right maximises every electoral success to further its agenda. In every national and Assembly election over the last 10 years, it has been clear that the Right tries to ensure that no opportunity is left unutilised.

This divergence also highlights the contrasting leadership styles of the Left and Right. The generation of Left leaders who built mass movements and endured state repression is nearly gone. Leaders such as H.K.S. Surjeet, who spent over a decade in jail, represent a fading legacy. Today’s Left leadership often emerges from educational institutions – a natural progression – but lacks the experience of building movements on the ground. In China, the Communist Party believes in building cultural consciousness. Even Xi Jinping was sent to work in the farmland for years away from his university. But this is not the case in India. On the other hand, leaders of the Right spend time with their cadre and help build leadership. Before he became Prime Minister, when Narendra Modi was in charge of States, he would constantly spend time with the cadre and even stay in their homes.

Globally, the pendulum of social and political ideologies has swung to the extreme Right and India is no exception. The question is: when will it swing back, and what will catalyse that shift?

The Left is still fixated on the idea of revolution and is reluctant to embrace the multi-layered demands of electoral politics



# Need to equip youth with skills in emerging technologies, says PM

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that in the rapidly changing world, new needs, expectations, and future directions were emerging and there was a need for a futuristic approach to equip youngsters with skills in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Observing that the energy of youth has played a significant role in India's progress, Mr. Modi said that his government was committed to supporting young talent and fostering their self-confidence.

"This era has moved beyond machines to machine learning. AI is taking centre stage, and we can see its application replacing conventional software. It is essential to make our youth future ready to tackle these challenges," he said in his address at the Veer Bal Divas celebrations.

Veer Bal Divas is celebrated every year on December 26 to pay tribute to the unmatched bravery

**Modi observed that the energy of youth has played a significant role in India's progress**

and sacrifice of Guru Gobind Singh's four sons, who are among the most revered figures in Sikhism.

Mr. Modi said that all policies, whether for the start-up ecosystem, the future of space economy, the sports and fitness sector, the fintech and manufacturing industry, or skill development and internship schemes, were youth-centric and aimed at benefiting young people. He added that the new National Education Policy modernised education.

He also announced the launch of Suposhit Gram Panchayat Abhiyan (mission for proper nutrition in village panchayats), which will promote a healthy competition among village panchayats to eliminate malnutrition. He urged the youth to work towards making their respective sectors, be it railways, semiconductors, travel, or astronomy, the best.

# A forthright FM who unleashed the animal spirits of Indian economy

**Vikas Dhoot**  
NEW DELHI

Less than a month after he took over as India's 22nd Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh presented a Union Budget in July 1991 that changed the country's economic trajectory with some of the hard decisions that were desperately needed.

It is rare for a Finance Minister of any regime to make even a nuanced critique of their own party's predecessors in office, especially if the party swore by those leaders' indelible imprint. Manmohan Singh, inarguably India's most educated leader, was not one to be weighed down by such expectations.

In his historic speech to Parliament on July 24,

## **The leader could also take on staunch criticism with a dose of humour or literary references**

1991, Dr. Singh explained in painstaking detail the need for India to embrace a new era of industrial delicensing and economic liberalisation.

Noting that the efforts of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, had given India a 'well-diversified industrial structure', Dr. Singh, however, didn't hesitate to link the genesis of the crisis firmly to policies of the past.

It is well known that Dr. Singh opened up the doors for foreign investments in myriad sectors during his time as Finance Minister,

and subsequently as Prime Minister, when he pushed back on Left allies' resistance on issues like easing telecom and insurance FDI limits and pursuing the critical India-U.S. nuclear cooperation deal.

However, few would remember his maiden Budget also set the foundations of India's modern stock market boom as he announced the formation of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to protect investor interests. Or that he talked passionately against protectionism and batted for consumer interests as well as wealth creators, even as he held strong reservations against "mindless and heartless" conspicuous consumerism – issues that resonate today as well.

It speaks volumes for his

sagacity that he could take on the staunchest criticism with a dose of humour or literary references. So when the Left attacked him for drafting a Budget policy on the diktats of the World Bank, he joked that the WB's interests were indeed at work – elaborating it as West Bengal instead.

In his 2007 autobiography *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World*, former U.S. Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan credited Dr. Singh for tearing a modest hole in India's regimented economy in 1991.

His exit leaves a vacuum in public policy discourse, the absence of which may make it tougher for India to rip apart the hole he managed to tear, in what Mr. Greenspan called India's Fabian socialism fabric.



# From nuclear deal to Quad, he left a lasting imprint on external relations

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

When the tsunami hit India on December 26, 2004, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, then just a few months at the helm, faced not only a grave national tragedy, but also a moment where India would be tested internationally. Contrary to his quiet demeanour, he made several bold decisions in the hours that followed, recount officials who served with him.

The first was that India would not accept aid from abroad. The second, that India would help others who had been hit by the giant waves that took more than 2,30,000 lives across the Indian Ocean. Within hours, the government cleared naval and Air Force missions to Indonesia, Sri



Manmohan Singh with then Japanese PM Shinzo Abe. PTI

Lanka and the Maldives, with a total of 32 Indian ships and 5,500 troops joining the international effort, which announced India's arrival on the global scene as a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) first responder. The third decision was to coordinate regularly with others involved in the effort, most notably the U.S., Japan and Australia, in

meetings that led to the formation of the Quad.

Within a year, however, Dr. Singh's government was hit by a political tsunami, as his External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh had to resign over the Volker oil-for-food bribery scandal. He replaced him with Pranab Mukherjee, and later with S.M. Krishna, but Dr. Singh never really gave up control of Indian foreign policy, and his imprint on each foray was unmistakable.

## **Twin breakthroughs**

The engagement with the Quad also laid the path for two of Dr. Singh's biggest foreign policy breakthroughs: first, with Japan, that ended India's isolation over the nuclear tests of 1998. The other was the engagement with the U.S. for

the civil nuclear deal. Without agreeing to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Dr. Singh's team of negotiators were able to win waivers at the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and freed up India's access to nuclear energy. Dr. Singh's personal ties with U.S. President George W. Bush, and with his successor President Barack Obama were a key part of the relationship.

In an interview to *The Hindu* when former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee died, Dr. Singh said in a non-partisan moment - now quite rare in Indian politics - that he had followed the path shown by Mr. Vajpayee in two areas. "In relations with the United States, and ties with Pakistan, I took more or less the same line as Mr. Vajpayee had taken," he said.



# Gentleman politician Manmohan Singh opened up India's economy in 1991

Before he became Finance Minister, he had held every top economic job, including RBI Governor and Finance Secretary; the high point of his tenure as PM was his handling of the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal; under him, there was also a gradual departure from the Nehruvian approach to foreign policy

**Sandeep Phukan**  
NEW DELHI

**F**ormer Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, 92, who passed away on Thursday, though known as a reluctant politician, pushed through the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal in 2008, the high point of his 10-year Prime Ministership.

Despite being called an accidental PM, the economist-turned-politician almost single-handedly turned the tables on the Left parties, which were providing outside support to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance, by securing the support of the Samajwadi Party (SP) in a crucial trust vote in July 2008 over the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal.

Until then, relations between the Congress and the SP were one of suspicion and distrust as Mulayam Singh had reneged on his promise of supporting a Congress-led government in 1996 after the fall of the 13-day-old Atal Bihari Vajpayee government.

However, the original Mr. Clean in Indian politics, Dr. Singh would be best remembered as the person who opened up India's economy in 1991 as Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's trusted Finance Minister.

If his prescription to deal with the severe eco-

nomics crisis changed India's trajectory in 1991, Dr. Singh's taking over as the country's premier in 2004 was also a turning point for India's foreign policy.

Slowly, but surely, there was a gradual departure from the Nehruvian approach of non-alignment as his government sought to forge ties with superpowers, including the United States, on a more equal footing.

Born in Gah in undivided Punjab (now in Pakistan) on September 26, 1932, Dr. Singh had a long and illustrious career as a testament to the spirit of hard work that people affected by Partition had often displayed.

## Brilliant student

A brilliant student who had a first-class degree in economics from Cambridge University and a D.Phil. from Oxford in the early 1960s, Dr. Singh had earned a reputation as an economist and served in several top institutions.

Before he became India's Finance Minister in 1991, at the age of 58, he had held every top economic job: Chief Economic Adviser; Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission; Reserve Bank of India Governor and the Union Finance Secretary.

His ability to steer the country's economy in the 1990s out of its worst crisis



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

and political statesmanship to put India into the prestigious Nuclear Club won Dr. Singh many admirers internationally.

In 2010, former President of the United States, Barack Obama on the sidelines of a G-20 summit in Toronto (Canada), praised

Dr. Singh's deep knowledge.

"I can tell you that here at G-20, when the Prime Minister speaks, people listen," President Obama had said.

But that was also the time when Dr. Singh's image at home took a beating

as a string of alleged scams over the 2G spectrum allocations, coal block allocation and the Commonwealth Games dominated the headlines.

Inflation and price rise made the common man angry, while corporates started talking about 'policy paralysis' under Dr. Singh.

## Public disapproval

In September 2013, while Dr. Singh was on an official visit to the U.S., then Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi's public disapproval of a controversial ordinance prompted BJP veteran L.K. Advani to reiterate his charge that "Dr. Singh was the weakest Prime Minister ever". The BJP routinely described him as someone who was "remote controlled" by the then Congress president Sonia Gandhi. But there was evidence to argue the opposite as well. He went ahead with the nuclear deal in 2008 against the party chief's wish and risked the survival of his government.

The Left parties had made it clear that they would withdraw political support to Dr. Singh if he went ahead with the nuclear deal.

When the Congress managed to win a second consecutive term in the 2009 Lok Sabha, the mainstream media had coined the term: "Singh is King".

In July 2009, against his party's wishes and popular mood, Dr. Singh took his chances with Pakistan and signed the joint statement with his then Pakistani counterpart Yusuf Raza Gilani at Sharm-el-Sheikh.

Many strategists had questioned the statement that clubbed India's demand to bring perpetrators of 26/11 Mumbai attacks with Pakistan's concerns over terrorism in Balochistan. But the Prime Minister was convinced of the need to carry forward the composite dialogue process.

Allegations of corruption, driven by adverse audit reports under Comptroller and Auditor-General Vinod Rai, a mass movement for an anti-corruption ombudsman by Maharashtra-based activist Anna Hazare and street protests following Nirbhaya gang rape in December 2012 triggered a political storm that wiped out the Congress in the 2014 Lok Sabha election.

In January 2014, addressing his last press conference as Prime Minister, Dr. Singh said, "I honestly believe that history will be kinder to me than the contemporary media, or for that matter, the Opposition parties in Parliament".

The spontaneous outpouring of grief at his passing away may have proven him right.



# Over 10.58 lakh votes were ‘not counted or rejected’ in Lok Sabha election, show EC data

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Over 10.58 lakh votes were not counted or rejected in the Lok Sabha election held earlier this year, says a detailed statistical report released by the Election Commission on Thursday.

Of these, 5,35,825 were postal votes and 5,22,513 were votes cast in electronic voting machines.

According to the data, which was released as part of a comprehensive set of 42 statistical reports for the Lok Sabha election, show that more than 97.97 crore citizens had registered themselves as voters as against the over 91.19 crore in 2019, which is an in-

## 2024 LS election in numbers

As many as 86% of the over 8,360 candidates who contested the Lok Sabha elections lost their deposits



Total electors:  
**97.97**  
crore



Women voters:  
**47.63**  
crore

Total voters:  
**64.64**  
crore

Female voter turnout:  
**65.78%**

■ Votes not counted/rejected:  
**10.58** lakh (including 5.36 lakh postal votes)

■ Total polling stations:  
**10.51** lakh

■ Average electors per polling station:  
**930**

■ Number of independent candidates:  
**3,921**

■ Women candidates: **800**

SOURCE: ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

crease of 7.43%.

Out of these registered electors, 64.64 crore voted in 2024. Of the votes cast, 63.89 crore were valid.

While three were proxy

votes, 9,634 were “tendered” votes, which means that there were incidents where impersonators voted in the name of genuine voters and there were com-

plaints. Only one Lok Sabha constituency of Surat (Gujarat) was uncontested.

The total number of polling stations was 10,51,016 and the average number of electors per polling station was 930. There was re-polling in 40 polling stations.

While the number of nominations filed in the Lok Sabha polls stood at 12,459, only 8,360 qualified to contest after rejection of nominations and withdrawals. Of those who contested, 7,190 candidates (86%) lost their deposits as they failed to garner more than one-sixth of the votes polled.

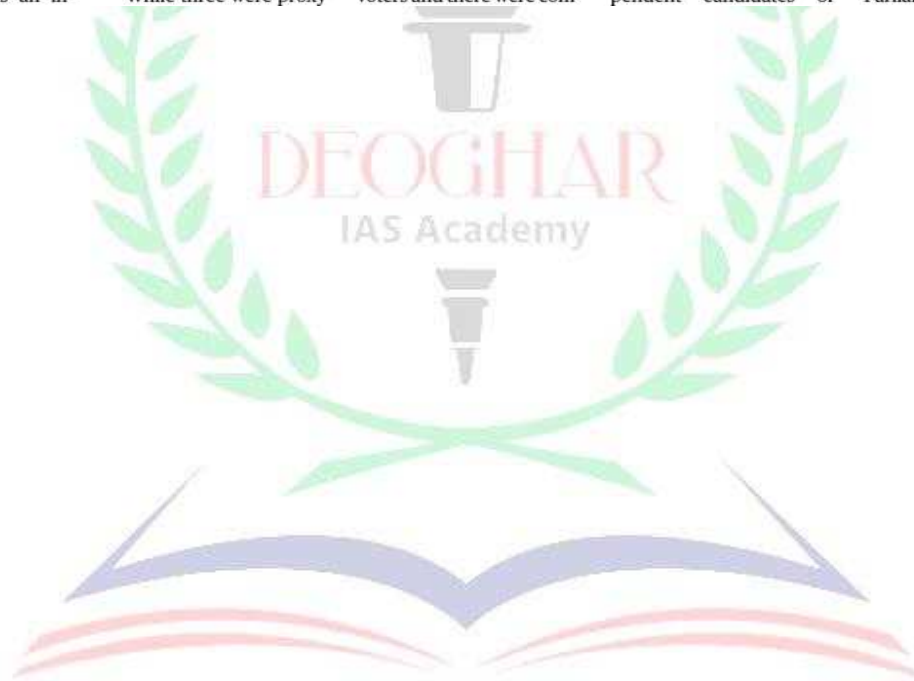
There were 3,921 Independent candidates of

whom only seven managed to win. None of the 279 women Independent candidates won.

As compared to 726 in 2019, the number of women candidates increased to 800 in 2024, while the number of women voters rose to 47.63 crore in 2024 from 43.85 crore in 2019. The female voter turnout increased from 65.55% to 65.78%.

The six national parties, including the BJP, Congress and CPI(M), bagged over 63% share of the total valid votes.

Also, 47 recognised State parties and 690 registered, unrecognised political parties contested the Parliamentary polls.



# Nation mourns former PM Manmohan Singh, economist-ruler credited with liberalisation

He passed away at AIIMS on Thursday night after falling unconscious at home

President Droupadi Murmu describes Singh as 'one of the greatest sons of Bharat'

Modi says as PM, Singh made extensive efforts to improve people's lives

Government functions cancelled and seven-day national mourning declared

Sandeep Phukan  
NEW DELHI

**F**ormer Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, 92, passed away at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences here on Thursday evening.

Dr. Singh was admitted to the hospital in the emergency ward around 8 p.m. in a critical condition. "He was treated for age-related medical conditions and had sudden loss of consciousness at home. Resuscitative measures were started immediately at home. He was brought to the medical emergency at AIIMS Delhi at 8.06 pm. Despite all efforts, he could not be revived and was declared dead at 9.51 p.m.," an AIIMS bulletin said.

He is survived by his wife, Gurcharan Singh, and three daughters.

Dr. Singh, who was PM

for two terms in the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government from 2004 to 2014, had been in poor health for the past few months. As Finance Minister under former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, he was the architect of reforms in 1991 that changed the course of India's economic trajectory.

As a mark of respect to the former Prime Minister, all Union government functions were cancelled and a seven-day national mourning was declared. The Union Cabinet will meet on Friday morning to pass a condolence resolution. Dr. Singh's last rites will be performed with full state honours.

Paying her tribute to the former Prime Minister in a post on X, President Droupadi Murmu described Dr. Singh as "one of the great

## A lasting imprint on India's external relations

NEW DELHI

Although he was sometimes criticised by the Opposition for being "moun" or silent, Manmohan Singh was a prolific communicator when it came to his foreign policy. His engagement with the Quad made way for two of his biggest foreign policy breakthroughs: with Japan, that ended India's isolation over the nuclear tests of 1996, and with the United States, which allowed for the civil nuclear deal. **» PAGE 5**

est sons of Bharat".

"Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji was one of those rare politicians who also straddled the worlds of academia and administration with equal ease. In his various



Manmohan Singh  
(1932 - 2024)

## A forthright FM who effected social change

NEW DELHI

It is well known that Manmohan Singh made way for foreign investments in myriad sectors. Yet, few would remember his maiden Budget also set the foundations of India's modern stock market boom with the creation of SEBI. Or that he passionately battled for consumer interests as well as wealth creators, even as he held reservations against "mindless and heartless" conspicuous consumerism. **» PAGE 5**

and admirers," she said.

Offering tributes to his predecessor, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished leaders whose wisdom and

humility were always visible. "Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji. Rising from humble origins, he rose to become a respected economist. He served in various government positions as well, including as Finance Minister, leaving a strong imprint on our economic policy over the years. His interventions in Parliament were also insightful. As our Prime Minister, he made extensive efforts to improve people's lives," Mr. Modi said on X.

Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi and her daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra reached the hospital as soon as news of his hospitalisation became known. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, who were in Karnataka's Belagavi for an extended

meeting of the Congress Working Committee, rushed back to Delhi.

In a post on X, Mr. Kharge said India has lost a visionary statesman, a leader of unimpeachable integrity, and an economist of unparalleled stature, and asserted that "history will undoubtedly judge him kindly". "A man of action rather than words, his immense contribution to nation-building will be etched in the annals of Indian history."

"Manmohan Singh Ji led India with immense wisdom and integrity. His humility and deep understanding of economics inspired the nation. My heartfelt condolences to Mrs. Kaur and the family. I have lost a mentor and guide. Millions of us who admired him will remember him with the utmost pride," Mr. Gandhi said.

