

DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY

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**Sabaijor Complex, Near Jamunajor Pul, Castair Town
Deoghar, Mob:-9162500508**





Deadly hit: Damaged houses in the town of Vahibe on the French Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte. AFP

Post-cyclone, Mayotte faces environment and biodiversity crisis

Agence France-Presse
DZAUDZI

Mayotte has changed beyond recognition since a cyclone devastated the Indian Ocean territory, sparking an environment and biodiversity crisis that could last for a decade or more, scientists say.

After barrelling into the archipelago at 200 km/hour (125 mph), Cyclone Chido left behind scenes of desolation: Trees mowed down as far as the eye can see, sturdy tree trunks blown apart as if struck by mortars, the previous green of the foliage replaced by a sad brown.

“It’s an environmental disaster,” said Raima Fadul, a biologist. “There are no more trees. Those still standing have lost their tops... The cyclone flattened the vegetation.”

Part of the mangrove is now completely bare and black. A three-metre earth mound looms where an acacia tree, half a century old, was uprooted by the violent storm.

One effect of the vegetation’s sudden disappearance is that Mayotte’s slums, formerly hidden by lush greenery, are now starkly apparent, making visible their number, and their sprawl.

Trees have always played the crucial role of channelling rain and slowing down potential floods. Now that they are gone, any torrential downpour will wash soil into the lagoon below, covering the seabed in mud.

As a result, part of the lagoon’s coral reef will be killed off, said Fadul, leading to the loss of some of the 300 species of fish, corals, vertebrates and mollusks present in the reef’s ecosystem.

On land, wildlife is already suffering from the loss of forest cover.

Rupee Rattle: Currency hits fresh record low of 85.48/\$

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened weak at 85.31 and plunged 53 paise to the lowest-ever intraday level of 85.80 amid record demand from importers, and FII outflows

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

The rupee on Friday registered the steepest fall in almost two years to hit its lifetime intraday low of 85.80 before a suspected RBI's intervention helped recover some of its losses and settled 21 paise lower at a record low of 85.48 against the U.S. dollar on a strong greenback amid higher month-end demand from banks and importers.

According to analysts,



Tight-fisted: The RBI's stance to hold on to dollar payments in short-term forward contracts added to greenback shortage. REUTERS

the Reserve Bank's stance to hold on to its dollar payments in short-term forward contracts added to

the shortage of greenback, with importers rushing to meet their month-end payment obligations.

Despite robust sentiment in domestic equity markets, the rupee was weighed down by sustained outflow of foreign funds and rising crude oil prices, they added. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened weak at 85.31 and plunged 53 paise to the lowest-ever intraday level of 85.80.

Rising U.S. bond yields that raised the dollar's attractiveness spurred the ₹ dip, said Ajit Mishra, senior vice president of research at Religare Broking.



Letter and spirit

The new detention policy seeks to address a real issue, but it fails

Among the key school education reforms instituted by the UPA government as part of the Right to Education were Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) and a 'no detention' policy up to Class 8. Both sought to create a benign environment in school so that there was no pressure of final examinations and "standards" on the child. The CCE was to be executed from Class 6, in discrete steps throughout the year, which meant no scary final test of just academic achievement based on a year-long curriculum. Whether those reforms contributed to the current situation or not, the reality is that a significant number of students passing out of primary school do not have foundational numeracy and literacy. And they do not seem to catch up by the time they leave middle school. Recognising the gap in achieving learning outcomes, the NDA government sought to do away with the no detention policy, in 2019, leaving it to the appropriate State governments. The CCE was given up too. But the COVID-19 pandemic intruded and made it impossible for schools to even consider detaining students. The recent notification of the Ministry of Education has removed the discretion given to State governments. It has mandated a final examination at the end of Class 5 and Class 8, which will assess a child's competence. If he or she is not found to be competent, the child will be re-examined after two months after additional instruction. If the child fails again, he or she will be detained. The rules say no child should be expelled before completing elementary education.

Practical necessity is driving this change in norms. Steps do need to be taken to address the gap in the learning outcomes achievement. An educated, capable and skilled population is needed to reap the demographic dividend. It takes an entire neighbourhood to educate a child, not just the school and parents. The dismal situation in learning outcomes is a collective failure of society that needs to be addressed. But it would take a lot more than this particular change in policy to trigger a turnaround. CBSE-affiliated and other private schools can easily implement the new policy. However, for some States, it will be a political hot potato. Private schools should not use this as an excuse to expel poor performing students – safeguards would be needed. A sad consequence of the policy is that it brings back a single final examination as an arbiter of a child's promotion or detention. While NEET or the JEE may be taken as special cases applying to extremely competitive professions, to bring back one final test at the school level is a regression. The National Education Policy 2020, for instance, wants to replace summative assessment with formative, and promote self and peer assessments. It promises a "holistic, 360-degree, multidimensional progress report card" detailing the "progress and the uniqueness of each student". The new detention policy does not reflect the NEP's spirit.

Marginalised by caste, marginalised in education

Atul Kumar, the son of a daily wage worker and from the Scheduled Caste community, lost his seat at IIT Dhanbad after he was unable to pay the seat booking fee of ₹17,500 that was required to secure his admission. His case gained widespread attention on social media, prompting the Supreme Court of India to intervene by exercising its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to grant him admission. There are many and similar cases like Atul's, but which never draw media attention or receive justice, leaving many deserving students without opportunities due to financial constraints and systemic inequalities.

The rise in tuition fees

The struggles that Dalit students face echo the challenges of pre-Independence India when they were barred from enrolling in educational institutions because of their caste. While these historical restrictions were overt, the situation now is more insidious. Under the "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan", the Government of India has been pushing for self-reliance in institutions, leading to a significant increase in fees in many government colleges and universities such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), the Indian Institutes of Management, the central universities, and the National Law University. For instance, in 2016, the IIT council's standing committee agreed to increase the undergraduate tuition fees by 200%. This meant a fee increase from ₹90,000 to ₹3 lakh a year.

In response to the criticism regarding the fee increase, the committee set up by the government asserted that students from marginalised communities would benefit from the Vidyalakshmi scheme, which offers interest-free scholarships. However, while this initiative aims to provide support, it remains insufficient to fully address the financial challenges faced by these students, especially as fees continue to rise. The hike in fees that was implemented in seven IIMs including increased tuition fees; IIM-Lucknow hiked it by nearly 30%, IIM-Ahmedabad and IIM-Shillong by 5%, IIM Lucknow by 29.6%, IIM-Calcutta by 17.3%, IIM-Kozhikode by 23.1%, IIM-Ranchi by 19% and IIM-Tiruchirappalli by 20%. IIT-Delhi increased tuition fees for full-time M.Tech students in the semester in 2022-23. The total academic fee is now ₹53,100, which does not include hostel fees. This is a 100% increase from last year's fee of ₹26,450.

The frequent hikes in fees have made it increasingly difficult for students from the marginalised communities to afford higher education or even pursue studies through loans.



Sumant Kumar

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With rising costs in the Indian education system, many students from the marginalised communities are unable to even consider enrolling in prestigious institutions such as the IITs and the IIMs despite securing competitive ranks. As a result, while some students manage to cope with the financial burden, there are others who are overwhelmed by the stress and the inequality in academic institutions. This pressure, exacerbated by the high cost of education, has a human angle too. In 2021, data showed that over the past seven years, 122 students from the IITs and the IIMs had ended their lives, many due to the financial strain of rising fees and the anxiety of securing employment.

The issue of dropouts

Another harsh reality is that many students who manage to enrol themselves in prestigious institutions eventually drop out due to their inability to afford rising education fees. The Human Resources Development Ministry reported that 2,461 students dropped out of IITs in just two years (2017 and 2018). Last year, this issue was raised in the Lok Sabha, revealing that over the past five years, more than 13,500 students from the Scheduled Castes (SC), the Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) had dropped out of courses in the central universities, the IITs and the IIMs. Government data showed that in the central universities, 4,596 students from the Other Backward Classes, 2,424 SC students, and 2,622 ST students dropped out during this period. In the IITs, 2,066 OBC students, 1,068 SC students, and 408 ST students left. Similarly, the IIMs saw 163 OBC, 188 SC, and 91 ST students drop out over the past five years. These numbers highlight the significant challenges faced by marginalised communities in accessing and sustaining higher education in India.

One of the key reasons behind the poor economic conditions of the Dalit community is that their identity in India is still largely defined by caste. Dalits continue to be denied the opportunity to perform work that is on a par with others in society. This has not only left them economically marginalised but also socially vulnerable. Dalits in India are considered an oppressed and discriminated class, often labelled as "untouchable". Historically, this stigmatisation has meant that Dalits have been denied access to education. The term "untouchables" also refers to those who have been forced into the most undesirable and degrading jobs. A recent survey in 29 States on urban sewer and septic tank workers revealed that 92% of these workers belong to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled

Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). A 2019 report by former Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal revealed that 95% of faculty positions in IITs were held by individuals from upper caste backgrounds, with only 5% allocated to SC, ST, and OBC categories, despite these groups representing 70%-80% of India's population. An RTI filed by IIT-Bombay students further exposed the disparities, showing that 24 departments had no SC faculty, 15 lacked ST representation, and nine had no OBC faculty. These statistics highlight the deep-rooted caste-based inequalities that persist in both employment and education.

The barriers still exist

After Independence, with provisions in the Constitution and welfare mechanisms, Dalit school enrolment rates have improved over time. However, Dalit children continue to face significant barriers in education, including poverty, social discrimination, and caste-based prejudice. Dalit students are often judged based on their clothes, language, and other markers, making it difficult for them to integrate with their upper caste peers.

In many cases, caste-based remarks and discrimination wound these students, leading to social isolation. Some students succumb to the emotional toll of this prejudice – there are cases such as a woman postgraduate medical student in a medical college in Maharashtra and two students from IIT Bombay and IIT Delhi that are painful reminders of this reality. These incidents underscore the persistent shadow of casteism and harassment over the aspirations of many Dalit students. This troubling situation raises a critical question: how can these prestigious institutions effectively address this issue and foster a safe, inclusive environment for all students?

The unfortunate incidents of student suicides point to the immense pressure students face in the education system. Many students are burdened by their families' expectations that completing a degree will solve their economic problems. But unemployment in India is also high. An RTI filed in 2024 about IIT placements showed that approximately 8,000 students (38%) across 23 IIT campuses remained unplaced this year. For students from the marginalised communities, this struggle is even more pronounced, as their caste identity often doubles the challenges they face in securing jobs. These issues underscore the pressing need for systemic reforms in education and employment to alleviate the pressures on students and address caste-based disparities.

Rising costs in higher education are one of the many issues affecting Dalit students



'History will count Dr. Singh as a founding father of modern India'

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's life reads like the ultimate dream. Rising from humble beginnings to a glittering resume replete with degrees from the world's best universities, positions of the highest office in public life, global fame and repute, and feted with every coveted award.

A tribute to his legacy would inevitably include a long list of the positions of power and responsibilities he held and his stunning professional accomplishments. In the modern meritocratic era of credentials and positions, his dazzling array of achievements would be Dr. Singh's (as I called him) defining legacy.

But in my view, his defining legacy is to illuminate a virtuous path to extraordinary success in the harsh and treacherous terrain of politics and public service. His whole life is a standout exception to the belief that one has to necessarily sacrifice principles of probity, integrity, sincerity, loyalty, and humility to succeed in politics. His true legacy is about what he was not – the typically duplicitous, virtuous, self-obsessed political leader that is successful. His enormously successful pursuit of the politics of purpose and principles offers tantalising hope and inspiration to millions of idealistic youth to enter public life and dedicate themselves to nation-building. This is perhaps the



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His life story is about how in the desert of political cynicism there can be a flowing oasis

legacy that Dr. Singh himself would have been proud to leave behind for the nation that he loved so dearly.

I am very fortunate to have been the recipient of Dr. Singh's fondness for well over a decade. Over the past few years, as Dr. Singh became physically weaker, rendering him unable to venture much outside, his graceful wife, Gursaran Kaur, would tell me to visit regularly and "engage him intellectually". I visited him nearly every month for the past five years and interacted with him closely, including writing some articles for this paper. During these interactions, I learned copiously from and about him. I am shattered that it is now time to write his obituary and distraught that I am stuck outside India, unable to bid my last goodbye to him.

Perennial nation-builder

Even in the private confines of his living room, Dr. Singh was scrupulously polite, warm, thoughtful, and modest. He may have been the wise sage to the external world but his curiosity for new information and learning was boundless. In the long years that I have known him closely, not once was there a semblance of even an intent to lecture or sermonise from a bully pulpit, a trait that typically plagues most accomplished people. I watched with amazement on the day after demonetisation in 2016, how despite being a former Prime Minister, Finance

Minister, and RBI Governor, he sought information from junior RBI officers to senior former Ministers and only after that he formed his opinion on the move. He was so deeply concerned about its deleterious impact on the poor that he felt he owed it to the people to warn the government, through an uncharacteristically strong speech in Parliament and an article in this paper, which then set the tone for the nation's response and actions. This was quintessential Dr. Singh – the unflinching patriot, the humble knowledge seeker, the thoughtful opinion maker, the constant guardian of people's welfare, and the perennial nation-builder.

Dr. Singh's devotion to his duty was simply mind-boggling. In the past two years, when his health was frail and he was wheelchair-bound, he still insisted on being taken to the Congress party office to cast his vote in the Congress presidential election in 2022 and in the next year, to Parliament to fulfil his duties as an MP to cast a vote on behalf of the Opposition, both of which were neither crucial nor compulsory.

History will rightfully count Dr. Singh as a founding father of modern India. He acutely understood that building a nation like ours, with its enormous complexities and contradictions, is necessarily a political project of consensus-building on a foundation of strong institutions. His inclusive growth

paradigm of economic development and a rights-based social welfare framework continue to be the twin pillars of India's governance model regardless of which government is in power.

'Be attached to purpose'

At the same time, Dr. Singh had a Keynesian philosophy to changing his mind when presented with new credible information. When I met him last in October, he discussed the shifting political landscape in many nations caused by free trade and its attendant impact on people and seemed open to changing his previous doctrinaire position on the benefits of free trade. It takes the sagacity, curiosity, and humility of someone like Dr. Singh to yearn for new information, process it, and alter their views, in the twilight of their hugely successful life.

Dr. Singh's greatest challenge was navigating the mines of India's and the Congress party's politics. But he believed strongly in the medium of politics for nation-building, however harsh and rough it may be. While his contributions to governance and policy are both legendary and highly lauded, it was his outlook on politics that was the most endearing to me. There have been reams written about the 1991 economic reforms that he championed as India's Finance Minister and the enormous foreign policy successes that he

achieved as Prime Minister. But as he often said, those were possible only because he had his resignation letter handy, ready to sacrifice power if the cause was not right. He was able to effect dramatic turns in India's governance landscape, not only due to his intellectual left but also through the power of his integrity and righteousness. "Be detached to power and attached to purpose," he would often tell me.

Dr. Singh will surely fill many chapters of history books in India and the world. There will be abundant information on his governance achievements and the course of the nation under his stewardship. But the true legacy of Dr. Singh, as he may have preferred, would be to inspire and motivate young people to enter public life and uphold the highest ideals in service to the nation. His life story is about how in the desert of political cynicism there can be a flowing oasis. That it is possible to uphold the highest principles and still succeed in public life. At a time when devious, demagogic politics is hailed as 'Chamkayan', when the pursuit of power has supplanted all decency and decorum in public life, when showmanship trumps workmanship, one wonders if the era of the politics of sincerity, humility, integrity, and service will also end with Dr. Manmohan Singh's passing. I pray not, and so will Dr. Singh.



Activists credit Manmohan for rights-based legislation, providing space for dialogue

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 10-year tenure, several rights-based laws from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to the Right to Information and Forest Rights Acts were passed in Parliament. Activists remember the space for dialogue that Dr. Singh provided.

Former bureaucrat-turned-activist Aruna Roy told *The Hindu* that Dr. Singh was always willing to listen and gave space for dialogue and deliberation.

"He afforded easy access. One could go up to him and ask for time for an issue of importance. The views and opinions from advisory bodies, parliamentary committees and study groups in Planning Commission and elsewhere were taken into consideration for policy formulation, which is dramatically different from the present



The Tricolour flies half-mast at Parliament on Friday to mourn former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. AFP

regime," Ms. Roy said.

She explained that even in case he had differences with the position the civil society or the National Advisory Council (NAC) took, he heard them out. "We had our share of differences. For example, we wanted a stricter penalty clause in RTI but he argued that already the legislation is a great leap for the bureaucracy from impunity to transparency. So, we did have the penalty clause but not as stringent as we

wanted," Ms. Roy said.

The country's first Chief Information Commissioner, Wajahat Habibullah, said Dr. Singh was "a little uncertain" about the impact of RTI on the government's functioning. "He was a true bureaucrat who understood the importance of secrecy in the government. So, he was a little apprehensive, but he was committed to the idea of accountability and transparency," he said.

(With PTI inputs)

Indian visionary dedicated to regional peace: South Asia leaders on Manmohan

Leaders of neighbouring countries remember former Prime Minister; former Afghan President Karzai recalls the guidance offered by him, former Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe pays respects at his home; Pakistan's Deputy PM Ishaq Dar recalls his role in improving relations

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Take steady steps and take your time", was the advice former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh gave Hamid Karzai, who became President of Afghanistan at the age of 45, when he first met him in 2004.

Speaking to *The Hindu* on Friday, Mr. Karzai said India and Afghanistan had the "best relations" during Dr. Singh's tenure, as India became Afghanistan's first Strategic Partner in 2012. "I was in a hurry, as a young President, and one day he told me – you can't build a nation in a hurry, you have to have patience for institutions to be built and human capital to develop," Mr. Karzai said, recalling Dr. Singh's famous speech on South Asian connectivity and a vision of being able to have "Breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore and dinner in Kabul".

As tributes poured in from around the world, many of the personal anecdotes came from leaders in



Hamid Karzai greeting former Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi during his visit to India in 2012. REUTERS

India's neighbourhood, who remembered Dr. Singh for his particular interest in South Asian ties. On Friday, Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Bangladesh Chief Executive Muhammad Yunus, Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and Bhutan PM Tshering Tobgay were among those sitting heads of government and state that sent condolences.

"Dr. Singh's wisdom, compassion, and leader-

ship touched many lives, and also strengthened the bond between our two countries," wrote Mr. Tobgay in a social media post, calling the former Prime Minister "a remarkable statesman and cherished friend of Bhutan".

"Nepal will forever remember his support for democracy and lasting friendship," wrote Mr. Oli, and said that Dr. Singh's "wisdom, humility, and dedication shaped India and inspired the region".

Mr. Yunus, a fellow eco-

nomist, said Dr. Singh was responsible for India's "economic transformation", referring to the reforms of 1991. In a message released by the Chief Executive's office, Mr. Yunus spoke of Dr. Singh's role in promoting regional cooperation. "[Mr. Yunus] urged the South Asian countries to work together to build on the rich legacy of his ideas and work as a tribute to Dr. Manmohan Singh," said the statement, adding that after he won the Nobel Peace Prize in

Look East policy

2006, Dr. Singh had written to him, and Mr. Yunus was invited to address members of both Houses of Parliament at an annual parliamentary lecture.

"Dr. Singh's commitment to progress, and his leadership to strengthen the 'Look East Policy' played a pivotal role in fostering development and cooperation across the South Asia region," wrote Mr. Muizzu in a social media post, where he credited Dr. Singh's 2011 visit to the Maldives for the SAARC summit as a "significant milestone in advancing our economic and social development".

Praising Dr. Singh for his "humility and intellect", Mr. Dissanayake said he was "a tireless advocate of international collaboration," adding that he had "countless admirers worldwide", and influence that "transcended national boundaries".

Former Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who is in New Delhi at present, visited Dr. Singh's home and paid his

respects to the former Prime Minister. In 1992, when they first met, Mr. Wickremesinghe was the Sri Lankan Industries Minister and Mr. Singh was Finance Minister, and both held deep discussions about liberalising their economies, and remained in contact years later.

"Dr. Singh was a distinguished economist and political leader," said Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar in a statement. "Beyond his remarkable achievements in the field of economics, Dr. Singh demonstrated a commitment to promoting regional peace," Mr. Dar said, adding that he had played a "notable role in improving Pakistan-India bilateral relations during his tenure as Prime Minister." Although India and Pakistan came close to a non-territorial resolution to the Kashmir dispute, the process was derailed after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. Mr. Singh famously recited a couplet about the situation that said "mistakes were made in moments, for which the price was paid for ages".



