

WINTER PREPAREDNESS

With the onset of winter, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) faces the challenge of heavy snowfall, which can disrupt daily life, transport, and essential services. The government, in collaboration with various agencies, has ramped up its snowfall preparedness to mitigate the impact of adverse weather conditions and ensure the smooth functioning of the region during the winter month.

The J&K UT has developed a comprehensive plan to clear roads, especially highways, that are crucial for connecting the region.

Snowfall can lead to power outages and damage to infrastructure.

To address this, the Power Development Department (PDD) has preemptively ensured the repair of vulnerable electrical lines, and backup systems are ready for immediate use. Similarly, the J&K Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA) has undertaken efforts to prevent snow from obstructing water supply channels, especially in the Srinagar region.

The government has set up emergency response teams that include medical, police, and civil personnel ready to assist in snow-affected areas.

Snow clearance teams are also trained to operate in extreme conditions, ensuring roads remain accessible for emergency vehicles.

Control rooms have been set up at district levels for effective coordination during snowfall.

The government has also launched campaigns to raise public awareness about the importance of preparedness, such as checking heating systems, ensuring vehicles are winter-ready, and stocking essential supplies.

While J&K faces the annual challenge of heavy snowfall, the government's multifaceted approach to preparedness aims to minimize disruptions and ensure public safety throughout the winter season.

Household Consumption Expenditure Survey: 2023-24

The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) is designed to collect information on consumption of goods and services by the households. The information collected in HCES helps to understand the consumption and expenditure pattern, standard of living and well-being of the households.

Massive Surge in India's Consumption Over the Decade

According to the "Household Consumption Expenditure Survey-2023-24," the average MPCE (Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure) is Rs. 4,122 in rural India and Rs. 6,996 in urban India, marking a rise of 188% and 166% respectively from 2011-12. The survey also highlighted that there is a positive trend of improvement in consumption expenditure over the last decade.

Some Pertinent Points from the Report Positive Trend of Improvement in Consumption Expenditure over the Last Decade

Over the past decade, India's economic landscape has witnessed a transformative surge in consumption patterns. The latest Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (2023-24) presents a clear picture of this transformation. Comparing with the HCES:2011-12, the data highlights a remarkable trend: consumption levels at current prices have nearly tripled in both rural and urban areas. This significant rise reflects the economic empowerment and increased purchasing power of Indian households across the country.

► A comparison of MPCE figures of 2023-24 with that of 2011-12 reveals that over a period of more than 10 years, at current prices, it has become nearly triple in rural as well as in urban India.

► The growth of MPCE at current price in rural and urban India has been 188% and 166%, respectively during this period.

Urban-rural Gap Narrows down Further

The evolving consumption landscape of India over the past

decade reveals a significant narrowing of the urban-rural divide, further emphasizing the country's economic growth and improving quality of life across both regions. This narrowing gap is not just a statistical achievement but a reflection of India's broader economic transformation, where rural India is no longer lagging behind but increasingly contributing to the nation's overall consumption-driven growth.

► The urban-rural gap in MPCE has declined to 70% in 2023-24 from 84% in 2011-12. This shows the decline of 16%. The urban-rural gap MPCE was 71% in 2022-23. This reflects a sustained momentum of consumption growth in rural areas.

Declining Consumption Inequality (Gini Coefficient)

The decline in India's Gini coefficient, a key measure of income inequality, reflects a significant shift toward more equitable economic growth over the past decade. The HCES:2023-24 highlights a notable reduction in the Gini coefficient for both rural and urban India, signaling a decrease in consumption inequality across the country. The reduction in consumption inequality is a direct reflection of the successful measures taken by the government over the past decade. Targeted welfare schemes, rural development programs, and policies aimed at improving access to education, healthcare, and financial inclusion have contributed to a more balanced distribution of wealth and consumption.

► Comparison of the Gini coefficient from HCES: 2023-24 to those from 2011-12 shows a decline, from 0.283 in 2011-12 to 0.237 in 2023-24 for rural India and from 0.363 in 2011-12 to 0.284 in 2023-24 for urban India.

Non-Food Spending Breaks 50% Again: A Major Shift in Consumption

The report reveals a significant shift in spending patterns across India, which is moving beyond basic needs and increasingly allocating more towards non-food items. For the first time since independence, rural India crossed a sig-

nificant threshold in its spending habits in 2022-23. The share of non-food expenses in household budgets surpassed 50% in 2022-23, marking a monumental shift from subsistence to aspiration-driven consumption. The latest report reaffirms this trend, showcasing that non-food expenditure continues to dominate rural spending patterns.

This shift in consumption patterns, particularly the growing focus on non-food items, is a direct reflection of the government's successful policies and initiatives. Programs designed to boost rural incomes, improve access to credit, enhance infrastructure, and provide social security have all played a role in empowering rural households to move beyond just meeting basic needs.

As a result, rural India is now enjoying a higher standard of living, with greater purchasing power and improved access to a wider range of goods and services.

► According to the HCES:2023-24, across India, the households are observed to spend more on non-food items with share of non-food items in average MPCE being 53% and 60% in rural and urban areas, respectively.

► The comparison of HCES: 2023-24 to 2011-12 shows that the share of non-food items in the average monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) has increased from 47.1% to 53% in rural areas and from 57.38% to 60% in urban areas.

► Beverages, refreshments and processed food continues to have the major expenditure share in 2023-24 in the food items basket of the rural and urban households.

► Conveyance, clothing, bedding & footwear, miscellaneous goods & entertainment and durable goods have major expenditure share in non-food expenditure of the households in both rural and urban areas.

► Rent consisting of house rent, garage rent and hotel accommodation charges with about 7% share is another major constituent of the urban households' non-food expenditure.

Sacrifice, valour, courage of four Sahibzada's & its commemoration

OMKAR DATTATRAY

Some December the Indian's in general and the Sikh community recalls the unparalleled sacrifice, valour, courage and conviction of the four sons called Sahibzada's. Their memories of sacrifice comes to mind to all the religious and nationalist people. On the Veer Baal Diwas, we remember the unparalleled bravery and sacrifice of the Sahibzada's. At a very young age, they stood firm like a rock in their faith and principles, inspiring generations with their courage. Their sacrifice is a shining example of valor and commitment to one's values. The true saga of the martyrdom of the very young Sahibzada's is written in the golden letters in Indian history and it is a huge inspiration, symbolizing and signifying the bravery, courage, valor, conviction, determination and above all precious sacrifice of the four young Sahibzada's in their tender age. They embodied their commitment to faith, principles and Dharma and they laid down their precious life for upholding dharma and righteousness and their martyrdom will continue to inspire generations of Indian's irrespective of religion. These young martyrs stood courageously and fearlessly for the right cause of protecting dharma and faith and have under-

gone pain and unprecedented inconvenience and have sacrificed their precious lives for upholding dharma and humanity. They choose their religion and bluntly declined to embrace any other religion and so these martyrs are the beautiful examples of valor, sacrifice and courage and the ideals and principles for which they stood steadfast is worth praising, commendable and worthy of emulation. These young martyrs stood for faith, culture and righteousness and our young generation should get inspirations from their sacrifice and so serve the nation and dharma in the face of all adversities and problems. Realizing & recognizing the unparalleled sacrifice and valor, Prime Minister Narendra Modi saw their sacrifice as a living and bright saga and tale as well as symbol of culture and heritage. Modi rightly declared 26th December in 2022 as Shaheed Bal Diwas on the auspicious occasion of the Prakash Parav of Guru Gobind Singh Ji so that their sacrifice will remain ever fresh in the memory of our people and our future generations will learn from the tale of their sacrifice, courage and valor. The declaration of 26 December as Shaheed Bal Diwas is the best tribute to the memory of the Sahibzada's and it will honor their commitment and thus India will commemo-

rate their sacrifice for all time to come. Now from December 26, 2022, Shaheed Bal Diwas is observed annually on December 26 to commemorate and honor the highest sacrifice and courage of the young martyrs and it becomes a befitting tribute to the Sahibzada's. The four Sahibzada's were executed on the orders of Wazib Khan in the year 1705 on December 26. The Sikh community in Punjab and across the globe commemorate the supreme sacrifice of the young Sikh martyrs during the Shaheedi Week. Many Sikh families commemorate the sacrifice of the young Sahibzada's by sleeping in open ground in shivering cold during this week to honor the sacrifices of Guru Gobind Singh and his family for upholding dharma. The sacrifice of the Sahibzada's is not only a matter of pride for the Sikh community only but for Indians as well. Their sacrifice will ever remain etched in the memory of Indian's. The Sahibzada's preferred death than converting to Islam and they tolerated and endured all tyranny and persecution by the Muslim ruler. The aim of Shaheedi Bal Diwas is to acquaint and aware Indian youth about the sacrifice and courage of the young martyrs so that they also learn to protect and uphold

dharma in the face of conversions and opposition by the radical elements who try to propagate their religion by resorting to force and conversion. It is the duty and responsibility of our young generation to safeguard their faith in the face of all adversity and opposition by the fanatic elements who want to convert the people of other faith. The martyrdom of the young martyrs teaches our youth to desist and decline all temptation and stood like a rock in safeguarding their culture, traditions and religion as shown by the great young martyrs. In fact Veer Bal Diwas honors the unparalleled courage and sacrifice of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's sons, inspiring generations with their devotion to righteousness and steadfast commitment to their belief. India, a land steeped in cultural and historical richness, observes Veer Bal Diwas on December 26, every year to honor the supreme and matchless sacrifice of the Sahibzada's -four young sons of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. This national observance, initiated in 2022 by the GOI, pays homage to the bravery, commitment, and sacrifice of these young martyrs who stood firm in their faith against tyranny. The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi

remembers the unparalleled bravery and sacrifice of the Sahibzada's on Veer Baal Diwas on 26th December. He remarked that their sacrifice is a shining example of valor and a commitment to one's values. PM Modi also remembers the bravery of Mata Gujri and Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The Prime Minister posted on X, "Today, on Veer Baal Diwas, we remember the unparalleled bravery and sacrifice of the Sahibzada's. At a young age, they stood firm in their faith and principles, inspiring generations with their courage. Also on the occasion of Veer Baal Diwas, BJP National General Secretary Tarun Chugh paid his respects at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib and paid tribute to the matchless and unparalleled sacrifice of the Sahibzada's. Chugh remarked that the courage and martyrdom of the Sahibzada's stand as a golden chapter in Indian history. Their sacrifice for the protection of the nation and religion is an eternal source of inspiration for the world. Chugh stated that more than 16 thousand programs are being organized across the country today under the leadership of the BJP in every mandal of the party to commemorate Veer Baal Diwas. Under the vision of PM Modi, this day was cele-

brated in every corner, from Kerala to Kanyakumari, Guwahati to Kashmir. These programs serve not only to honor the sacrifices of the Sahibzada's but also to guide the future generations of the nation. He said, "By initiating Veer Baal Diwas, PM Modi has ensured that the valor and heroism of the Sahibzada's inspire generations to come. On 26TH December, at Rashtrapati Bhawan, brave children were honored as part of the Veer Baal Diwas celebrations, which is a matter of immense pride. Later, the PM celebrated this occasion with thousands of children from across the country at Bharat Mandapam. This heroic chapter is not only Punjab's legacy but a treasure trove of India's heritage. The martyrdom of the four Sahibzada's reminds us of the importance of loyalty, dedication, and courage in defending our faith and country. In short the sacrifice, valor, courage and commitment to the religion and nation will continue the countless people of not only India but of the world as well. Let us imbibe the values, principles and courage of the young Sahibzada's make them as our ideals and role models.

(The author is a columnist, social, KP activist and freelancer)

Dr Manmohan Singh was an exceptional person, rare in this world

SURJIT SINGH FLORA

Dr. Manmohan Singh, who held the position of Prime Minister of India from 2004 to 2014, died on Thursday at the age of 92.

Dr. Manmohan Singh was an extraordinary individual, the sort that seldom graces this world. Individuals who remain focused on their responsibilities and diligently pursue their tasks without seeking recognition often find that success and respect come to them effortlessly, much like a river flowing toward its destination. He was soft-spoken and mild-mannered, a Sikh, which is a rare thing to come by.

He was the most hardworking, dedicated, and honest PM India ever had. Even the opposition party praised him for his honesty.

Besides that, he was the prime minister who significantly altered the discourse surrounding development in India. He surpassed all other prime ministers in fulfilling election commitments. He kept every promise he made.

He ensured that work, food, and education are rights, making the development needs of the common person independent of the whims of the powerful. He didn't rely on the trickle-down effect. Inclusive growth should be a steady, reliable strategy, not just a response to favourable circumstances. We should treat it with the same urgency as defence spending.

Despite occasionally seeming somewhat awkward, his self-confidence was notably high. In a speech delivered around 2008-09, he claimed that India would attain a double-digit growth rate despite the economic downturn. Furthermore, we anticipate that this phase of economic decline will have limited effects on India. Ultimately, we confirmed the precision of the data.

Indeed, with the time, complaints arise about his failure to confront the Gandhi family. Why would he do that? Manmohan did not win any elections and was prime minister solely because of Sonia Gandhi's influence. As a PM, he tackled various issues in India and successfully made changes despite his limited authority. He didn't care about the self-serving ambition of portraying himself as a strong leader like Modi, as that would put personal image above national interests. Dr. Singh placed the nation first. Manmohan exhibited humility and expressed gratitude for the opportunity he had received. That's why Obama held him in high regard and respected him deeply.

Dr. Singh was passionate about economics, mastering it to tackle development and inclusive growth challenges globally. He never expressed any interest in a position. He achieved everything an exceptionally driven person desires or can accomplish.

In conclusion, Manmohan can be regarded as a forward-thinking leader within the political landscape, and India reaped the rewards of his guidance.

Singh was the sharpest Indian prime minister ever. He led possibly the most corrupt government in Indian history, yet he still managed to maintain his reputation.

Manmohan Singh's first term ran well. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's administration performed significant work, and Manmohan Singh, a pragmatic and excellent economist, maintained those efforts. India gained from the judgment. Carrying on someone's job does not need much intelligence, yet it was nonetheless criti-

cal to India's prosperity. The administration then used digitization and other smart initiatives. The stock market fared well.

During his time as prime minister of India Between 1991 and 2010, India's growth resulted in the third-largest GDP in the world. Millions of jobs were created, and millions of people were lifted out of poverty.

It was heart-breaking to witness a representative of this courageous race, elected to the highest position in the nation, be reduced to following instructions from someone unworthy of tying his shoelaces.

Dr. Singh held almost all major positions in the management of economic issues in the country, working in the finance ministry as a chief economic advisor, as deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, as RBI governor, and then as finance minister. He possesses a comprehensive understanding of the economy and bureaucracy. He brought all this wealth of experience to PM's position.

He did his best with all the constraints put on him. To put it simply, some other person, any politician, would not have survived even for a couple of years heading such coalitions (except perhaps PVNR & Vajpayee).

As PM, he had to handle various parties, administer the coalition government, and persuade Congress head Sonia Gandhi of every government move. He maintained 8% GDP during UPA-2. He struck a nuclear agreement with the US despite left parties' withdrawal and the BJP's vehement opposition.

During his tenure as Prime Minister of India, he navigated the challenges posed by the 2008 economic crisis, the peak prices of crude oil, and the emergence of the Anna movement in the country. He submitted an RTI application to India. Aadhya constituted his initiative. The launch of Mangalyaan occurred during his tenure. While one may hold various opinions regarding MNREGA, it is important to acknowledge that it has provided essential support for the livelihoods of many impoverished individuals.

He experienced significant poverty during his childhood, yet he refrained from sharing this information with others, unlike those who frequently boast about their circumstances. One might engage in criticism or even abuse toward him, yet it is worth considering the implications of applying the same scrutiny to the current Prime Minister. Dr. Singh exhibited humility rather than weakness. His silence was valuable. He performed significantly better than any prime minister would have in comparable circumstances.

During his final press conference as prime minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh expressed his belief that history would ultimately be more favourable toward him. He suggested that future assessments would be more positive than the public perception he faced during the UPA 2 era, a time when he was often the subject of jokes among the Indian populace. Historically, Sonia Gandhi may be held accountable for the shortcomings of the UPA Government, while Dr. Manmohan Singh may receive recognition for the positive outcomes achieved during that period. I began the discussion by asserting that Dr. Manmohan Singh was the most intelligent Prime Minister in history.

(The author is a veteran journalist and freelance writer based in Brampton)

Sambhal: A Living Legacy of Hindu Heritage from the Pages of History

SUSHANT AMAN

Sambhal district in Western Uttar Pradesh is currently in the limelight. It is being discussed everywhere, both domestically and internationally. It seems as if the entire Sambhal is seated on a historical heritage that was brutally "crushed" during the Mughal era. In reality, present-day Muslim-majority Sambhal was not always this way. In the past few decades, the Hindu population here has drastically declined. The primary reason behind this has been the history of riots in the region, in which hundreds of Hindus lost their lives over time, yet no government took action to address this issue. As a result, many frightened Hindus fled the area. Despite this, Sambhal has always held religious significance for Hindus. It is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Vishnu's tenth and final avatar, Kalki.

According to Hindu scriptures, Kalki is said to appear in Sambhal to end the Kali Yuga (Age of Darkness). In early 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for a grand Kalki Dham and called for the establishment of the 'Ram Rashtra'. It was claimed that Kalki's incarnation would determine the future of thousands of years. While discussions about the incarnation of Kalki Maharaj in Sambhal were taking place at the beginning of the year, by the end of the year, some Hindu groups started claiming that the Jama Masjid in Sambhal was built on the ruins of a temple dedicated to Kalki. The matter reached the local court, where the petitioner alleged that during Babur's invasion in 1526-27, the temple was destroyed and the mosque was constructed in its place. Historical texts like Baburnama and Akbarnama were cited as documentation of Babur's destruction of the temple. The court ordered a survey, which led to riots in Sambhal on November 24,

2024. Supporters of the Jama Masjid refused to accept that their mosque was built on the ruins of a temple. Consequently, when the survey team arrived at the Jama Masjid on November 24, clashes broke out between the police and Muslims, resulting in five deaths. Eventually, the situation was brought under control.

Before the Jama Masjid vs. Kalki Temple dispute could settle down, news emerged once again from Sambhal after an ancient temple was discovered during an eviction drive in a Muslim-majority area. Following the violence during the Jama Masjid survey, the administration had launched a campaign against illegal encroachments and electrical hazards. On December 14, an ancient temple was discovered in the Khaggu Sarai area, which had been abandoned for about 50 years. This was the Kartikeswar Mahadev Temple, which had a Shivaling and a Hanuman idol. Approximately 200 meters away from this temple was the house of SP MP Zia-ur-Rehman Bark. Later, a well was found near the temple, and during its excavation, several idols of deities were discovered. Another well was found 50 meters from the temple, located in front of a mosque. On December 17, another Radha Krishna temple was discovered in the Sarayatireen area of Sambhal, with a well found in its courtyard. Inside the temple, idols of Radha Krishna and Hanuman were present. The temple was cleaned afterward. On December 21, an ancient Banke Bihari temple was found in the Laxman Ganj area of the Chandausi tehsil.

It is said that Hindus had lived in this area in large numbers 25 years ago, but the population of Muslims gradually increased, and Hindus began to migrate. It is also reported that this temple was used for worship until 2010, but in that year, miscreants allegedly damaged

the idol of Banke Bihari and other deities.

The history of Sambhal didn't end there. On December 22, an old stepwell was discovered in the Laxman Ganj area of the Chandausi tehsil. It is believed that this stepwell is nearly 150 years old and spans about 400 square meters. Located around 150 meters from the Banke Bihari temple, local people claim that this is a 1857 stepwell. They also say that after the Hindus migrated, mafias took control of the area. History didn't stop there either. On December 26, a death well was found around 200 meters from the Shahi Jama Masjid in the Khaggu Sarai area of Sambhal. According to the local ward member, this well is one of the 19 wells in Sambhal, though it has been closed for many years. The houses built nearby have dumped debris into it, but the municipal corporation is now digging it to revive this ancient well.

After the discovery of the stepwell in Chandausi, Raja Chandra Vijay Singh of Billari, a former MP and the ruler of Billari, held a press conference in his palace in Sahaspur. He stated that people had been talking about the discovery of a stepwell in Chandausi. This stepwell is three stories high, which is a rare feature in northern India, as stepwells are more common in Rajasthan and Gujarat. He also clarified that this stepwell belonged to his family and that there were two heirs: himself and his younger sister.

He requested the Archaeological Department to take it under their care and restore it so that it could become a tourist attraction for the people of Chandausi. He also mentioned that this stepwell was part of the Krishna Niwas Kothi, which was built by his ancestors, and a stone inscribed with "Krishna Niwas" is present at the site. If the administration examines the old records, the truth will be revealed.