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Dr. Manoranjan Sharma
(Chief Economist)

THE SMILING COLOSSUS- THE LATE ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE, FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

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Vajpayee Ji was a towering, visionary leader and an able statesman. He was a Democrat to the core, and despite his strong political and ideological differences with the Congress and the left Parties, he had friends and admirers on both sides of the aisle.

He took over as the PM of India in 1998 in trying circumstances preceded by political instability, which was reflected in 4 Lok Sabha elections in 9 years, as we have seen.

With his inspiring leadership and able and effective administration, he provided an impetus to Information Technology, telecom and communications, the Golden Quadrilateral Project, metro connectivity, and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. He stood his ground, much to the chagrin of the Western powers, during the difficult days when India went nuclear.



He was a reasonably good Speaker of the English language (he was fond of NYT (New York Times) thrillers and best-sellers), but he excelled in the Hindi language, as exemplified in his iconic debates in the Indian Parliament and other places, his extraordinary sense of wit and humor, and his remarkable poems in Hindi.

To my mind, he was the most eloquent Speaker of the Hindi language in our generation with his stirring thoughts, choice of words and expressions, and what was most characteristic of him- his long pauses something like a computer processing voluminous data and information to arrive at the right response.

He could be devastatingly critical of his opponents without ever hitting below the belt. His strongest disapproval of his critics in the highest democratic tradition was “yeh acchi baat nahi hai”, i.e., this is not a good thing.

He was possibly the tallest leader of our generation- a leader, who consolidated the process of economic reforms initiated by PV Narasimha Rao and strengthened India’s position in the comity of nations. May his soul rest in peace! Om shanti.