

Former Indian prime minister and liberaliser Singh dies at 92

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India's former prime minister Manmohan Singh, who liberalised the economy and then led the country through a period of strong economic growth, has died.

Singh, 92, was being treated for age-related medical conditions, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi said, as it announced his death yesterday.

An Oxford university-trained economist, Singh set India on a path to becoming a fast-growing economy as finance minister from 1991 to 1996, when he opened up the country to more foreign trade and private investment.

Considered a political lightweight by many at that time, Singh was then a surprise choice by the Congress party to be prime minister after it won parliamentary elections in 2004.

Alongside a growth rate of almost 7 per cent, Singh's decade as premier was marred by allegations of widespread corruption against his party's

leaders, although his personal integrity was rarely questioned.

Singh was accused of inaction and opposition parties claimed he was subservient to Congress's chief at that time, Sonia Gandhi.

Shortly before Congress lost elections to Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata party in 2014, Singh said in a speech to parliament that "history would be kinder to me than the contemporary media, or for that matter opposition parties".

Modi yesterday described Singh as one of India's most distinguished leaders, saying he left a "strong imprint on our economic policy over the years" and had "made extensive efforts to improve people's lives" as premier.

Rahul Gandhi, a senior member of Congress, paid tribute to Singh, saying he had lost "a mentor and guide" whose "humility and deep understanding of economics inspired the nation".

A member of parliament for over three decades, Singh retired from active politics earlier this year.