



Raja Ramanna (left) with President Abdul Kalam during his visit to Bangalore on January 16, 2004. (File Photo: K Gopinathan)

"A towering personality"

By Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 24. The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and the Vice-President, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, have condoled the death of eminent scientist Raja Ramanna, who passed away in Mumbai early this morning.

In his message to Malathi Ramanna, wife of the late scientist, Mr. Kalam said the passing away of Dr. Ramanna was a deep personal loss for him as he was his mentor, guide and teacher. "A towering and multi-faceted personality, Dr. Ramanna was always keen to contribute to national development with a sense of mission in any capacity, which was evident in his role as a Union Minister and Member of Parliament," Mr. Kalam said in his message.

'Source of inspiration'

"For us in the science and technology community, Dr. Ramanna was always a source of inspiration and a guide."

Mr. Shekhawat described Dr. Ramanna as an outstanding scientist who personified strength and dynamism of India's scientific talent and served the country with distinction. "He will ever remain an abiding source of inspiration to the young generation of scientists," he said.

"A passionate lover of music, Dr. Ramanna was an epitome of

refinement and dignity. In his death, the country has lost a scientist of immense stature, who made India proud by the sheer power of his genius," Mr. Shekhawat said. The Union Science and Technology Minister, Kapil Sibal, said India had lost a complete human being while the Union Parliamentary Affairs and Urban Development Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, said Dr. Ramanna was an outstanding scientist whose contribution to India's nuclear science programme was unparalleled.

"Outstanding scientist"

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

NEW YORK, SEPT. 24. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, has expressed deep sorrow over the passing away of Raja Ramanna, former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. Conveying his condolences to the bereaved family, Dr. Singh said India had lost one of its most outstanding nuclear scientists. "Dr. Ramanna's contribution to the development of India's nuclear capabilities as well as in the consolidation of India's nuclear power programme will be remembered in a long time to come," a press release said.

"Dr. Ramanna was associated with India's nuclear pro-

The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, also expressed grief and sorrow over Dr. Ramanna's death.

'A great human being'

Our Tumkur Staff Correspondent reports:

The former United Nations Under Secretary General and former Union Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology, Arcot Ramachandran, described Dr. Ramanna as "a great son of planet earth."

gramme at a critical stage of its development and contributed to placing the country's indigenous nuclear capabilities on a firm footing. India's first peaceful nuclear explosion was conducted in 1974 during Dr. Ramanna's tenure as Director of BARC. "Dr. Ramanna made his mark as a distinguished Member of the Rajya Sabha.

He served as the Minister of State for Defence in the Union Cabinet and was a Member of the first National Security Advisory Board. Dr. Ramanna was also an accomplished pianist and a man of letters. His loss will be deeply felt by the scientific community worldwide and the people of India."

Remembering Ramanna

By P. K. Iyengar

It is difficult to give expression to my feelings after a long and close association with an illustrious scientist such as Raja Ramanna, who expired yesterday in Mumbai.

Dr. Ramanna was born in Tumkur in Karnataka on January 28, 1925. He had his early education in Mysore and Bangalore, his B. Sc. Honours in Physics from the Madras Christian College in Tambaram, and his Ph.D. from King's College, London, as a Tata Scholar. In London, he also developed an interest in Western classical music, and learnt to play the piano. He returned to India in 1949 to join the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, as one of the few scientists introduced to nuclear physics in those days.

I joined Ramanna in 1952, after doing my M.Sc. in Physics from Trivandrum. We were both young, in our twenties, and shared many experiences, both in academic life and in social life. His early training in England sensitised him to Western culture and science, but at the same time, he could see the intellectual degradation of colonialism. I was greatly influenced by his synthesis of Western thought and technol-

ogy with Indian philosophy, society and developmental needs. We were keenly bent on the indigenous development of science and technology, and the resultant applications.

Right approach

What I cherished most in our 50-year association was his ability to "look at problems rationally: scientific, technical and managerial. He not only chose the right approach, but even convinced others of the correctness of his approach.

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This is what earned him a reputation as a most successful creator of science and technology in the country. These qualities he shared with our founder Homi Bhabha, and the others who followed him: Vikram Sarabhai and Homi Sethna. All of them had a high regard for his abilities, and therefore very willingly passed on to him greater responsibilities as he grew in stature.

The testaments to his success are many: He held many responsible positions within the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, and was its Director from 1972 to 1984; in between, from 1978-81, he went away as Di-

rector-General of the Defence Research & Development Organisation; he was Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission from 1984-87. Subsequently he was Minister for Defence from 1990-92 and, till recently, was a Member of the Rajya Sabha. He has been given numerous awards, most significantly the Bhatnagar Award in 1963, and the Padma Vibhushan in 1975.

In the 50s, the challenge of doing high quality science and developing advanced nuclear technologies was daunting, given the poverty of the country and the lack of expertise. But Dr. Ramanna was never intimidated by this challenge. He believed in choosing the right people, encouraging and supporting them to perform, and cutting down bureaucratic delays and unnecessary rules and regulations in administering science. His science policies were directed towards encouraging creativity in order to make advances in technology at the most sophisticated level. To develop the skilled manpower required for this task, he, with Homi Bhabha, started the BARC Training School, in which every year 200 scientists and engineers were recruited, tutored for a year, and then absorbed into the laboratories and in projects. This was start-

ed in 1957, and is still continuing, and much of the strength of the Department derives from this seed that Dr. Ramanna planted.

Proud legacy

Out of the uncertain beginnings in the 1950s, if we have today achieved the status of a "developed country" in nuclear science and technology, it is in large measure a consequence of Dr. Ramanna's ideals, policies and efforts. He certainly leaves behind the proud legacy of a magnificent edifice of scientific and technological achievements and attainments, particularly towards the country's energy and national security. But perhaps the even more important legacy is his uncompromising belief in intellectual clarity and rational thinking in every facet of life, and his unwavering belief (which he inherited from Jawaharlal Nehru and Homi Bhabha) that the nation could progress only by embracing science and scientific thinking. The best way to honour his memory is not through eulogies, but by rededicating ourselves to his policies and beliefs.

(The writer is a former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.)

'He always thought of the country'

By Our Special Correspondent

MUMBAI, SEPT. 24. "We argued, agreed and disagreed up and down on several points but would not give up," said an emotionally choked H.N. Sethna today.

Dr. Sethna, the Atomic Energy Commission Chairman during the first Pokhran test in 1974, was speaking after the cremation of Raja Ramanna.

Dr. Ramanna's successor at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and at the AEC, P.K. Iyengar, described him as a great soul who always thought of the country, "how to revive this ancient civilisation, make it economically viable and scientifically and technologically self-generating."

The former director of the

Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Sudhanshu Jha said that Dr. Ramanna was a versatile scientist and was active till the end.

He was a faculty member of the TIFR, the institution with which he was associated from the very beginning.

He said that Dr. Ramanna stressed a lot on basic sciences.

S.M. Sundaram, former director of Reactor Group, recalled how Dr. Ramanna made them work on the 500 MW high flux research reactor, Dhruva, and complete the totally indigenous effort in three years.

Dr. Ramanna's son, Shyam Ramanna, said his father had a full and wonderful life.

Daughters Nina and Nirupa said they would miss his humour and piano playing.