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'Ramanna wanted Kalam to develop missile programme'

By Srinivas Laxman/TNN

Mumbai: "I kept asking Ramanna when are we going to have a nuclear deterrent," said Vice-Admiral M.K. Roy, former Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command.



Ramanna

Speaking to *The Times of India* on

Saturday from Kolkata, Roy, who later became director-general of the Advance Technology Vehicle (ATV) project, recalled what Raja Ramanna, who died on Friday, replied: "Wait and see." The ATV was the code name given to the highly classified nuclear submarine programme.

Recalled Roy: "This conversation between Ramanna and me about the importance of a nuclear deterrence took place in May 1974, just a few days before the Pokhran explosion. After the bomb test on May 18, 1974, he telephoned me from Pokhran asking me to read the newspapers. I found that the news about the success of the test had been flashed everywhere," he said.

When Roy was discussing with Ramanna regarding the need for India to possess a N-deterrent, he was the commander of 'INS Vikrant,' the aircraft carrier which has since become a Naval museum. "We were both close by since he was working at the Old Yacht Club at Colaba which is the headquarters of the Department of Atomic Energy," he said.

The former Naval commander remembered that when the Centre gave the go-ahead for having a nuclear propulsion system for submarines of the Indian Navy, Ramanna asked him to head the team to proceed to the former Soviet Union to evaluate the project.

"Ramanna, I and a few others went on this trip. At the end, Ramanna signed an agreement with the Russians to collaborate on the project. On our return, I was constantly interacting with him at the BARC since I had then become the director-general of this project," he said.

Told that the programme had failed to make any headway, Roy disagreed. "Yes, there were some problems initially, but all these have been sorted out," he said, declining however to say anything more about it on grounds of secrecy.

He said that when Ramanna became the scientific adviser to the defence minister in the late 70s, he succeeded in shifting A.P.J. Abdul Kalam from ISRO to DRDO to develop a missile programme.

"Ramanna and I used to go to Hyderabad at periodical intervals and hold meetings with Kalam at the Defence Research and Development Laboratory regarding the missile projects which, over the years, have seen fruition," he said.

It is for this reason that when Kalam came to visit Ramanna at the Bombay Hospital on Thursday, he described him as his guru and told the doctors that they should spare no efforts to save him. But, the efforts of the doctors failed.