

# Nation bids adieu to Narasimha Rao

By Our Special Correspondent

**HYDERABAD, DEC. 25.** The mortal remains of the former Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao, were consigned to the flames with full military honours amid the chanting of vedic hymns on the banks of the Hussain Sagar Lake here today. His eldest son, P. V. Ranga Rao, lit the pyre.

A large number of mourners bid a tearful and emotional farewell to their "Telugu bidda" (son of the soil), the first one to make it to the office of Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and his wife, Gursharan Kaur, came in a special plane. Others present were the former Prime Minister, H. D. Deve Gowda, the BJP president, L.K. Advani, the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, and the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram.

As Mr. Ranga Rao lit the pyre, he broke down and was helped by his brothers, Rajeswara Rao and Prabhakar Rao.

Fourteen men of the Gorkha Regiment fired three volleys each in the air while the buglers sounded the last post.

Earlier, amid the recitation of the Bhagavad Gita, mourners trickled in for a last glimpse of the departed leader.

Scores of people from Rao's native village, Vangara in Karimnagar district, came to bid farewell to their *dora* (endearing term for an elder). The funeral rites were performed by the family priests from



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh offers floral tributes at the funeral of former Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao in Hyderabad on Saturday. — AFP

Hanamkonda.

After the pyre was lit, Dr. Singh and his wife consoled the members of the bereaved family.

Earlier, the funeral procession started from Jubilee Hall where the body was kept in state for mourners to pay their last respects. The body was shifted to a flower-bedecked gun carriage for the final journey.

The cortege reached the cremation site at 1 p.m. shortly before

the arrival of the Prime Minister. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, accompanied the cortege for a short distance.

The Governor, Sushilkumar Shinde, and his Maharashtra counterpart, S.M. Krishna, and Chief Ministers Vilas Rao Deshmukh (Maharashtra), Dharam Singh (Karnataka) and N.D. Tiwari (Uttaranchal), joined Dr. Reddy in paying homage to the departed leader as did the former Andhra Pradesh Chief Min-

isters, N. Chandrababu Naidu, N. Janardhana Reddy and N. Bhaskara Rao.

Others who attended the funeral were Motilal Vora and Ashok Gehlot, Congress leaders who represented the party president, Sonia Gandhi, M. Venkaiah Naidu, former BJP president, K.V. Krishna Rao, former Army Chief, and G.V.G. Krishnamurthy, former Chief Election Commissioner. Several Central and State Ministers were also present.

HO-1  
28/12

J. Perov...

# Rao: The Astute

He was one of those few leaders who changed a country, in substantial ways, for the better

*2 April 86-8*  
**O**F all of India's prime ministers, P.V. Narasimha Rao has left the most paradoxical legacy. He assumed office in the midst of an unprecedented national crisis. Rajiv Gandhi had just been assassinated, the Indian economy was on the verge of a fiscal meltdown, Mandal had created unprecedented divisions in Indian society, and the Ram movement was acquiring the character of a mass movement. To keep India on an even keel in such circumstances would have been a tall order for even the most gifted politician. But Rao, in some respects, converted this crisis into an opportunity to redefine India's future. He had the perspicacity to see that the old economic order could not continue. He took the bold decision of setting India on the path of liberalisation and integration into the world economy. With hindsight, one can argue that he did not use the crisis to restructure the priorities of the state enough. But there little doubt, as even Manmohan Singh has acknowledged, that India's reforms would have been inconceivable without him. Few leaders can boast that they changed a country in some significant respects, decisively for the better. Rao is one of them.

But in many other respects, his political style proved inadequate to address the various simmering political tensions that he had inherited. The demolition of the Babri Masjid and the

*2 Personalism*  
carnage that followed, often gave the impression of a prime minister whose characteristic response to political challenges was to sit on them. Rao's cynical political style only contributed to the growing cynicism about public life. Scams, corruption scandals, and the manipulative uses of state institutions became the staple diet of Indian politics. Rao took fleeting steps to revive the Congress Party by introducing a modicum of intra-party elections, only to revert to a strategy of undermining challengers. Perhaps this was a style that befitted a politician who never had charisma or a mass following, and whose success was premised largely on the politics of manipulation. Even in office, he was characteristically distant from the electorate at large. He exuded a certain kind of inscrutability allowed him to ride out serious crises. But that inscrutability also prevented the country from embracing him as their own. He commanded a cold esteem, but seldom warm affection.

Rao was, without doubt, one of the most intelligent politicians India has had. He was capable of a striking degree of self-reflection about his own actions. When these were put in the service of his considered convictions, as was the case with economic reform, the results were striking. That Rao the astute politician could not quite rise to the stature of a statesman is something many will regret; that he did leave a substantial legacy, few should doubt.

2 DEC 2004

INDIAN EXPRESS

# PV Narasimha Rao ~ 29/12 9. G. Venkatesh SR 5

## The second chance man

BY RAVINDRA KUMAR

IT is unfortunate that the perfectly legitimate claim Pamulaparti Venkata Narasimha Rao had on greatness was blighted by the controversies surrounding aspects of his Prime Ministership. As you would expect of a man with an exceptional intellect, this fact bothered him.

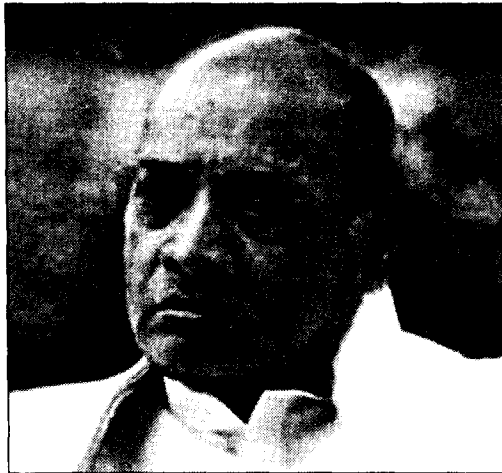
For some reason, this newspaper's criticism of his performance as Prime Minister — especially his handling of the Babari Masjid demolition, the Harshad Mehta affair and the JMM bribery case — troubled him greatly. Thus, some years after his term in office had ended, he sent word that he wanted a meeting and I had gone over to see him at his New Delhi residence.

He came to the point straightaway and said that while nearly all newspapers had criticised him, he was aware that most of them did so because they had an agenda to pursue and were unhappy with him for not having given them whatever it was they sought from him.

"The Statesman," he told me, "never sought anything from me when I was Prime Minister. That is why your criticism hurt so much." I asked him if he thought the criticism was unjustified, or if in his view we had treated him unfairly. "Perhaps not unfairly, but not entirely fairly," he retorted. He said he had been misled by a member of his Cabinet, who he had sent to Uttar Pradesh in the days leading up to the demolition, into believing that the state government would ensure nothing untoward happened. The JMM affair, he said, was the culmination of the backstabbing indulged in by some of his own party colleagues. And then, he stopped to offer a suggestion.

"Why don't you go back to Calcutta, review everything I was criticised for by your newspaper and give me a list of as many questions as you want? And I will answer each and every question," he said. On hindsight, I should have pressed him for more details since he clearly was in a communicative mood. But offered a chance to get detailed answers to every probing question, I went along with his suggestion.

On my next trip to Delhi, I telephoned



Khandekar, his assistant, and was invited to visit Rao the next day. Armed with a detailed questionnaire, I presented myself. But at this meeting, he was perceptibly more reserved, almost gruff. He glanced through the questions, told me Khandekar would contact me when he was ready with the answers, and the meeting ended.

I did not hear from Rao again. Some months later, he was present at the marriage of a former colleague's son. There were BJP Ministers, a CPI-M politburo member and several Delhi power-brokers present at the wedding. But Rao was ignored, almost as if his fall from grace within the Congress party had obliterated the fact of his Prime Ministership.

I went up to him, and asked him why he had changed his mind on answering my questions. He whispered to me in Telugu that because some of the matters he had wanted to discuss were still before courts and commissions of enquiry, his lawyers had advised him against speaking to a newspaper. "Let these cases be over and I will send for you," he promised.

Politicians seldom keep promises, and Rao was as much an enigma as he was a practical politician. On the one hand, there was this desire to clear his name. On the other, there were practical considerations. There was his erudition as a speaker, and there was the

famous pout that, for some years, came to define indecision; indeed it was the image used by magazines to describe his alleged inability to say Yes or No.

The pragmatist came to the fore in the ruthless manner in which he engineered splits within parties opposed to him. The romantic reduced himself to a fictionalised parody of an autobiography.

Within these contradictions resided the persona of a man who accomplished more than many others as Prime Minister. He was the architect of liberalisation, and to say that it was part of a World Bank agenda given over to Dr Manmohan Singh to implement, is as unfair to Rao as it would be to say that his Home Minister alone was responsible for the Ayodhya debacle. Or to say that the Berlin Wall fell on its own.

Nearly two decades earlier, I had covered his campaign for the Hanumakonda seat in Andhra Pradesh. Having spent a day talking to his constituents, and having learnt that there had been very little progress in the area in spite of his long spells in office (as Minister and Chief Minister in Andhra Pradesh and as a member of the Union Cabinet), I asked him over lunch at his village home, where several others were present, how he expected to win when his voters seemed so dissatisfied. Rao was furious, almost imperious in his dismissal of criticism. "Don't they (the voters) know that when one is at the Centre, one has to think of the nation?" But later, as I took his leave, he said, "I know this will be a difficult election." In the event, he lost the seat and made it to Parliament from Ramtek in Maharashtra.

Winning from Ramtek when he had lost Hanumakonda, becoming Chief Minister when no one expected him to, emerging as a consensus Prime Minister when he had decided to call it a day and pack his bags, not having a majority yet lasting a full term, transforming an economy when not much was expected of him after a lifetime spent in introspective placidity, Rao was a man who often got second chances from life. To his credit, he always capitalised on them. And there lay his greatness.

24 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN



# GANDHI IN ECLIPSE

## Need For Great Moral Revolution In Public Life

By RK DASGUPTA

576  
mic

Mahatma Gandhi, who was born on 2 October 1869, has been in eclipse in the Indian political scene since his assassination on 30 January 1948. Actually the Mahatma was losing his voice in the Indian National Congress even four years before that sad event. In an article published in *Harijan* on 3 September 1938 he wrote: "I see great danger of the Congress collapsing by the weight of its own weaknesses". Only a year later he wrote in *Harijan*: "I would go the length of giving the whole Congress organisation a decent burial rather than put up with the corruption that is rampant". On 22 October 1938 he wrote to the same paper: "when the real time comes we shall be found wanting". The prophet of non-violence appeared to be too saintly for a crowd of ambitious politicians wrangling for power. He warned the Congress against this love of office but nobody listened.

### Unique greatness

Now the condition of the Congress is far worse. It lost its hold on the national mind almost absolutely when Rajiv Gandhi who succeeded his mother Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, lost the election in 1989. It now seems to be back to power heading a fragile coalition supported by an uncertain political group in Parliament which, however, chose not to join the government. Obviously, it is unbecoming for the Congress which led the movement with Mahatma Gandhi as its leader and brought us our freedom. Actually, the Congress has no image today. It no longer has the moral prestige with which it began to rule the country in 1947.

The most important reason for the fall of the Congress is that it does not realise that India and the world valued the Congress because it was led by a statesman like Mahatma Gandhi. But the Congress leaders have no time to think of Gandhi now. They now care for the few other Gandhis who had supplanted Mahatma Gandhi. Which Congressman has written a profound work on Gandhi to say that he is still capable of guiding the destiny of the nation which achieved freedom through a movement led by Gandhi. It is a shame that the best books on Gandhi are being written by Europeans.

*The author, an eminent scholar, is former Director, the National Library of India*

It is no use compiling remarks of distinguished foreign writers on Gandhi's unique greatness. There are many works where we can find them, the most important of them being *Profiles of Gandhi*, edited by Norman Cousins and published in 1968 and S Radhakrishnan's *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections* published in 1949. Perhaps the first great European to acknowledge Gandhi's greatness and the relevance of his message to the modern world is Tolstoy who after reading Gandhi's *Hind*

of 607 pages published by the Government of India in 1967.

Let us not care much for the praises of Gandhi in India and abroad. Let us only remember the words of Jawaharlal Nehru who said in his foreword to this work: "Gandhiji trained and moulded the Indian people for half a century". But who will train and mould our people today? We are petty men with petty minds. To value Gandhi's non-violence and ideal we must remember that according to Gandhi even ambition, political



*Swaraj* wrote to him in a letter dated 8 May 1910: "I have read your book with great interest, because I think the question you have therein dealt with is important not only for Indians, but for the whole of Mankind". And the last great European to speak of Gandhi is Einstein who said about him that the generations to come would hardly believe such a man ever walked upon this earth.

### Petty minds

Between Tolstoy and Einstein's statements was published in 1924 Romain Rolland's *Mahatma Gandhi: the Man who Became One with the Universal Being* (Eng. tr., Catherine D. Groth) in which the French writer said: "The indomitable tenacity and the magic of the Great Soul operated and won out: force had to bow down before heroic gentleness". To understand Rolland's response to the personality of Gandhi we may read *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, a work

ambition, is a form of violence.

We must now realise that if we do not have a Gandhi amongst us we should at least have some people to make us understand what he was and what he believed and what he practised. We cannot expect our young men and women to read 90 volumes of his *Complete Works* published by the Government of India. Perhaps we do not have the time even to read selections from his writings like HA Jack's *The Gandhi Reader* or Ronald Duncan's *Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (1951) or Raghavan Iyer's *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford, 1993). Still it should be possible for us to know Mahatma Gandhi and his message. We must read at least one biography of the man like B.R. Nanda's *Mahatma Gandhi* which is the finest work of this kind written in the English language.

We must now ask ourselves one plain question — what is the essence of Gandhi's message? Gandhi himself was asked this

question and he answered with a smile, "My life is a my message". This is very true. But we common men and women may not understand the meaning of his life. For him non-violence was a comprehensive concept. It was not for him only necessary in political action. Non-violence is an ideal of the whole of our life. The two political movements he contemplated and led were non-violent, non-cooperation and non-violent civil disobedience.

If, as a writer on Gandhi says, his non-violence has been a sublime failure it is obviously because his followers did not understand the ideal of non-violence. That ideal is more vital for the world today than it was in Gandhi's lifetime. The Congress would have cleaned and purified the party and its members if they decide to make non-violence their national ideal. For this we don't need to abolish our navy, army and air force. What is needed is a beginning of a great moral revolution in our public life. We have to see that our pursuit of democracy is a pursuit of power.

### Fundamentalism

The United States and its allies are approaching terror with terror. International politics is now a horrid spectacle of terror and counter-terror. Unless we are repelled by any show of violence for any purpose we will not understand that the military intervention by a superpower in the affairs of a state crippled by terrorism cannot put an end to that terrorism. Gandhi's non-violence is certainly important for any country today, but our big powers should detest violence and not use it for any occasion.

Gandhi was a striking political force in his time. He is even a greater force in our time. This is the substance of David Hardiman's *Gandhi in His Time and Ours* (2003). The concluding words of this very significant publication are that 'Gandhi rejected an intolerant and hate-filled opposition to the Other, whether it was the white Britisher, the Indian collaborator, the Muslim, or the assertive subordinate'.

Gandhi's ideal is now the only answer to our fundamentalists, the knight-errants of Hindutva doctrine who now aspire to rule India. When we root out fundamentalism from our country we will be in a position to remove all forms of fundamentalism in the world.

J. P. Purohit

9  
Personality

# Raja Ramanna passes away

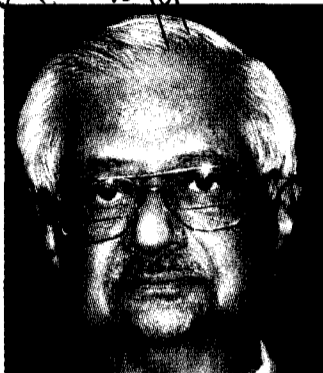
25/9

By Our Special Correspondent

**MUMBAI, SEPT. 24.** The mortal remains of the doyen of India's nuclear programme and noted physicist, Raja Ramanna, who died in the early hours of today, were consigned to the flames here this afternoon.

Dr. Ramanna, who was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit of the Bombay Hospital in a critical condition yesterday, passed away at 3.15 a.m. today. He was 79 and is survived by his wife, son and two daughters.

The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who had a close associ-



ation with Dr. Ramanna, had specially flown in here last night to enquire about his condition.

Dr. Ramanna, an early disciple of Homi J. Bhabha, was the brain behind India's first nuclear test at Pokhran in 1974 when he was Director of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). Later, he became Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and Minister of State for Defence.

Among the mourners were the former Chairmen of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), H.N. Sethna and P.K. Iyengar, the chairman of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India, S.K. Jain, the chairman of the Heavy Water Board, S.C. Hi-

remath, and the former BARC director, B. Bhattacharjee. Also present was film-maker Shyam Benegal.

Dr. Ramanna's son, Shyam Ramanna, took the body to the cremation chamber after a solemn Vedic ceremony. Earlier, wreaths were laid on behalf of the Maharashtra and Karnataka Governments and also on behalf of the Defence Ministry. The Naval Officer-in-Charge of Maharashtra, Commodore Surendra Khanna, represented the armed forces.

**Tribute, condolences:**  
**Page 14**

HD-10  
LA

## RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE, 1926-2004

THE ABIDING CONTRIBUTION of Ramakrishna Hegde to public life lies in his enrichment of Indian democratic practice. His vision and creativity in developing cooperative federalism will remain an enduring aspect of his political legacy. As Chief Minister in Karnataka between 1983 and 1985 and again between 1985 and 1988, he became an active votary of State rights within a federal set-up, but one who made no concession to regional or linguistic chauvinism. Secondly, he took innovative initiatives in expanding the federal principle within the State, primarily in the area of devolving power to local bodies and in trying to enforce accountability. During his Chief Ministership, Karnataka pioneered legislation on *panchayati raj* that devolved a substantial degree of financial and administrative powers to a three-tiered structure of local government. In 1984 he introduced legislation to deal with official and administrative corruption through the institution of the Lokayukta.

Mr. Hegde did his best to operationalise his vision of a more responsive and accountable brand of politics in the State. He distinguished himself as a development-minded Minister in the administrations of S. Nijalingappa (1957-58 and 1962-68) and Veerendra Patil (1968-71). He joined the Congress (O) after the party split in 1969. Not surprisingly, he was among the many Opposition leaders imprisoned in Karnataka during the Emergency. He showed that it was possible to have a workable alternative to the Congress that was closer to the people and more sensitive to their needs. From a State leader of considerable dynamism and talent, Mr. Hegde emerged as one of the most influential national leaders of the post-Emergency era. His conviction that there was a space for a non-Congress,

non-Bharatiya Janata Party formation at the national level led him to play an important role in the formation of the Janata Dal in 1988.

Mr. Hegde acquired an aura that extended beyond the State. "Probity in public life" and "value based politics" became phrases popularly associated with him. He appeared to lead a crusade against corruption, demanding that politicians be clean and demonstrably so. His fealty to these principles held such appeal that he appeared always to hold the moral high ground through a turbulent political career that saw some lows in the final years. His political stock of yesteryear and his image saw him through a phase of alliance with the BJP, a somewhat unexpected departure from his professed framework of political partnership. Mr. Hegde's alienation from active politics at the State level began with his defeat in the 1991 Lok Sabha elections. He did not contest a popular election after that, although he was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1996 and served as a member till 2002. Despite the weakening of his political stock, he continued to play the role of elder statesman in the fractious Janata Parivar. With the fruition of a long-cherished dream, namely that of a Third Front taking office at the Centre, Mr. Hegde seemed well-placed to head the coalition. That his candidature fell in the cracks of coalition politics was a disappointment he accepted with dignity. The setback led him on a political trajectory that further distanced him from his original moorings. Although in recent years his ill health kept him away from the political spotlight, he did not for a moment allow himself to be cut off from the mainstream of public life or from issues that mattered. Ramakrishna Hegde was a leader with true mass appeal; he thought interestingly and created new possibilities in Indian politics.