EDITORIAL

From the Editor's Pen

Dear IJPS readers,

In this issue, I wish to talk about Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam whose sad demise I heard as I was planning to write about something else. A brilliant academic, scientist par excellence, 'missile man' and a 'people's President,' Avui Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam was born into a poor Muslim family in Rameswram, Tamil Nadu, on 15 October, 1931. After having preliminary education locally, he graduated in Physics from Saint Joseph's College, Tiruchirapalli, affiliated to Madras University. He then joined the Madras Institute of Technology and pursued graduation in Aeronautical Engineering. He wished to join the Air Force as a fighter pilot and was also selected for it but as he was 9th in the rank and there were only 8 vacancies, he could not fulfill his early dream. He was then attracted to Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and made significant contribution as Project Director to develop India's first indigenous satellite launch vehicle, SLVIII, which injected the Rohini satellite in the near earth orbit in July 1980 making India an exclusive 'Space Club' member. After working for two decades in ISRO and mastering launch vehicle technologies, Kalam took up the responsibility of developing guided missiles at Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) as Chief Executive of Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme in 1982. Here, he was responsible for the development and operationalizing of Agni and Prithvi missiles. He played a critical role in building indigenous capability in critical technologies, collaborating with multiple institutions. He was Adviser to Defence Minister and Secretary, DRDO from July, 1992 to December, 1999. In these capacities, he was the man behind the weaponization of strategic missile systems and the Pokhran- II nuclear tests in collaboration with Department of Atomic Energy, which made India a nuclear state. He served as Principal Scientific Advisor to Government of India and as a Cabinet Minister from November 1999 to same month in 2001, responsible for policies, strategies and missions for many development applications. His contribution to India's satellite programmes, missile projects and LCA made him a household name and brought him many laurels including winning of Padma Bhushan (1981), Padma Vibhushan (1990) and, the highest, Bharat Ratna (1997). He became the 11th President of India and occupied the highest constitutional office from 2002 to 2007. Even after retiring from public life, he continued to inspire the people, especially youth, by delivering lectures in various institutions of India. He was prolific writer and among his books are India 2020 (1998), Wings of Fire (1999), Ignited Minds (2002), Dialogues on the Purpose of Life (2005) and Transforming Dreams into Actions (2013). His books flew off shelves as soon as these were published. A man of frugal habits, he remained a bachelor. He breathed his last on 27 August, 2015, while delivering a lecture at IIM, Shillong.

He was a President like no other. He embodied the new India. To the aspirational new India, he was a President free of political affiliations. The floppy silver mop curling on his forehead, the twinkling eyes and the ever smiling visage seemed to radiate boundless infectious energy. Long after he left Rashtrapati Bhavan, he remained high on every popularity poll. This is evident from the fact that as a respect to his passing away even the U.S. flag was put at half mast in the White House. He was popular because he could explain science and other complex things in a very simple and straightforward way. His writings were simple and understandable. His message was so attractive that the youth was pulled towards him. I vividly remember that when he visited my alma mater, the Lucknow

University, during the Indian Science Congress he freely mingled with students- and research scholars. He could spend hours interacting with students about their research. He was not jealous of others achievements but appreciated them, for example, when my university wanted to confer honoris causa on him, he instead suggested some other name for, according to him, his contributions were no less great. Similarly, he felt it is not he but another Indian scientist who deserved a Nobel prize. Everybody wanting a new India liked his audience. He, being a self-made man, could connect with any common man, especially students. People generally know of him as a teacher, scientist and a President, but he was also a healer. When many questioned India's spending on rockets and missiles when it could not feed half its population, Kalam showed the caring side of rocket science by facilitating the development of at least two products from highgrade steel used in missiles that revolutionaised health care: a stent that made heart surgeries affordable and calipers that made walking easier for polio-affected children. When he and Dr. B.Soma Raju, a heart surgeon at the Nizam Institute of Medical Sciences, were ready with the stent that brought down price from Rs. 75,000/- to Rs. 10,000/-, Kalam became emotional and said that for years he was developing missiles that kill people, now towards the fag-end of his career he was developing something that would save lives. Similarly, while working on Agni and Prithvi missiles, Kalam found use for carbon- composites to alleviate polio-affected people's pain. This led to the development of calipers that weigh as less as 400 gram instead of earlier 4 kg.

By any yardstick, Kalam was an odd choice for the post of President of India. He was not a veteran politician like most of his predecessors, nor a man of letters like Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Dr. Zakir Hussain. Yet, few have impacted the Indian presidency as much as this eminent scientist who blew in like a breath of fresh year, turning a ceremonial figure into a popular people's icon. Two things set Kalam apart. One, his determination to break down walls of pomp and protocol that separated the institution of President from aam admi (common man). The other, his zeal to turn everything he did into a national mission. Kalam took his presidency seriously. He attacked it with the same enthusiasm as a scientific research project and dared to push the envelope to see how far he could go to reinvent a largely figurehead position patterned on the British monarchy. He did away the bandhgala for invitees to the Presidential 'At Home' receptions. He'd blithely jump over security cordons around VVIP enclosures to mingle with the guests. Through everything, Kalam's love for people, particularly children, burned bright. It became his USP, prompting a journalist to dub him the "People's President." It was Kalam who threw open the hallowed portals of the imposing Lutyens' edifice on top of Raisina Hill to people from all walks of life..He reached beyond Delhi's charmed circle to include outsiders in ceremonial events. One year, he invited sportspersons. Another year, it was various sarpanches. A third year, he called postmen. When the Mughal Garden opened every year for public, Kalam would spend time chatting with visitors. He travelled extensively and instead of confining himself to ribbon-cutting events, insisted at least one programme be an informal interaction with students.

Presidents, over the years, have left behind various legacies. Kalam is unique in he hall of fame because he was the first to try to narrow the distance between the institution of President and the people of India. He was first to show that the President can be a real person who inspires and leads. There is little doubt that his presidency will remain his defining moment. Kalam ensured that the era of monarchical President is over.

IJPS pays its most respectful homage to Dr. Kalam's memory.

(C.P. Barthwal)