

## OBITUARY

It is with shock and profound sorrow that we wish to record the death of five earth scientists from Atomic Minerals Division (AMD), Department of Atomic Energy, and five members of crew in an air crash that occurred in the early hours of 5th April, 1977, in Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh. The ill-fated Dakota aircraft (VT-EEL), owned and operated by the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA), Hyderabad, was on a survey mission when it crashed against the peak of a granite hill, Podligonda, near Edavalli, and burst into flames killing all on board.

Those killed in the aircrash were Sarvashri R. Prahlada Rao, Ashok Joshi, A. Viswanathan, K. G. P. Menon and K. S. Chauhan of the AMD and Sqn. Ldr. M. C. Goel, Flt. Lt. B. R. Kumar, Flt. Lt. N. L. Diwan, Flt. Lt. Sirmukaddam and Shri Michael Anderson of the NRSA.

The enthusiasm and sense of devotion to duty that welded the scientific and aviation crew into a single group working with missionary zeal, unmindful of the risks to their lives, was exemplary. Many members of this group were still young, and had shown ample promise of still greater achievements, had not cruel fate conspired to take away these fresh blossoms of science and technology under tragic circumstances.

Shri R. Prahlada Rao took his M.Sc. degree in 1965 from Mysore University, securing the first rank. Subsequently, he obtained an M.S. degree from the State University of Ohio, St. Columbus (USA). He always recalled his association with Prof. Faure, one of the world's specialists in strontium isotope geology while at Ohio. As geologist of the AMD, Shri Prahlada Rao carried out intensive surface and subsurface exploration for uranium, working often under hostile conditions in parts of Himachal Pradesh and Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh, and very recently, in parts of Karnataka. He had a restless and inquisitive mind and a deep involvement in any work he undertook.

Shri Ashok Joshi who graduated with an M.Sc. degree in geology in first class from Lucknow University made significant contributions to the exploration activities of the AMD in the Chickmagalur area of Karnataka. This young geologist had an incisive way of thinking, was deeply interested in structural geology and was ever ready to accept challenging tasks.

Shri A. Viswanathan, Shri K. G. P. Menon and Shri K. S. Chauhan were not only responsible for the instrumentation employed in the airborne geophysical work but were equally associated with the in-flight operation of these instruments. Unmindful of personal comforts, they worked tirelessly for hours on board the aircraft and in the flight path and data retrieval tasks, soon after completion of the sortie for the day.

The air crew exhibited, in the best traditions of the Air Force, a high sense of devotion and courage in the discharge of their duties, thus providing a source of inspiration to the scientists and also set an example worthy of emulation.

The enormous and interesting data the scientists collected in their earlier survey flights and have left behind for processing and interpretation will be a great contribution to our knowledge of the geology and mineral resources of the area and serve as a fitting memorial to the sacrifice they have made in the cause of geological exploration.

We pray to God to give the members of the bereaved families strength to bear their irreparable loss. May the souls of the departed rest in peace.

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