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Again it could be argued that many GMRs and railway men have tried in more recent times many innovations, improvements and developments. But sadly the processes that are needed to complete such initiatives were not in place. The professional judgment was not allowed freedom to implement. Political considerations have over ridden engineering considerations. A good example of this is the attempt to double track the track between Kadugannawa, Gampola and Kandy to run a suburban train service. However this was not allowed due to issues raised on regaining railway reservation required for double tracking. Thus the space available for engineering leadership and leadership of engineering institutions has almost become non-existent.

Thirdly Eng. B.D. Rampala was a man with the People's welfare in mind.

Even though he planned and implemented many technological advancements Mr. Rampala was one who also realized that the needs of the people must also be met through these developments. It was during this period that the construction of new stations that were more spacious with better facilities such as waiting rooms, canteens, long platforms with roof covers were carried out in Matale, Jaffna, Kandy, Galle and Trincomalee under priority. Eng. Rampala also led the localization of the CGR from very British practices. For example the new station building did not follow British Architecture. He also started giving Sinhala and Tamil names to trains and locomotives.

Mr Senguttava wrote to the press in 1989, about Eng B.D. Rampala following his 100th Centenary lecture that 'many benefits to commerce, social cohesion and mobility have flown from his artistic thoughts. and that his name will be remembered along with the immortal Yal Devi for a long time to

An engineering perspective of the past, present and future of Railways

ENG. B. D RAMPALA MEMORIAL LECTURE

The 9th Eng. B.D Rampala Annual Memorial Lecture organised by the Institution of Engineers, Sri Lanka (IESL), was held at the Wimalasurendra Auditorium of the institution on 20th December 2011. This year's lecture was on the theme 'An Engineering perspective of the past, present and future of Railways' delivered by Eng (Prof) Amal Kumarage (Senior Professor of Civil Engineering, Department of Transport & Logistics Management, University of Moratuwa).

The significance of the theme and contents of the lecture that follows would surely be not lost on policy makers, administrators, professionals etc. and who could help revive the Sri Lanka Railways at the present times. The late Eng. B.D Rampala, as General Manager, Sri Lanka Railways (1955-70) had risen up to the occasion when the country needed its sons to decide its own destiny. His sterling performance in that seat won acclaims both within and beyond the shores of our country and set an example to all others.

The IESL is the premier professional body, incorporated by an Act of Parliament, to serve the science and practice of engineering in Sri Lanka. It piously commemorates the engineering greats of the past who gave invaluable service to the country during their lifetime, with memorial lectures on themes that are relevant to the present times. The IESL which has over 14,000 members on its roll currently had the honour of having the late Eng. B.D Rampala as its President in 1958.

come'. Such is the fondness with which he is remembered by people who felt he was sensitive to the culture and needs of all the people of Sri Lanka.

Rampala appears to have been a servant of the people in the true spirit. He is often remembered as one who never took credit for his many innovation or his successes. He was never shy of publicly giving credit to his juniors. It is said that such instances never failed to inspire his juniors to even greater heights. Their welfare and potential seem to have been his pre-occupation.

Yet he was firm and tolerated no slack or bluff. Eng ARP Wijesekera recounts his experience with Mr. Rampala as his boss where he states that 'good understanding of one's work led to advice and guidance from Eng. Rampala. Bluff on the other hand received short shrift'. In other words he appreciated the hard

work and commitment and took to task anyone who did not demonstrate these qualities adequately. 'He knew about every branch of engineering and no one could pull wool over his eyes' is what Mr. Paul Senarathne also a former railway engineer and one of the most illustrious Executive Secretaries of IESL, wrote about him in the IESL Felicitation volume on Eng B.D. Rampala in 1989.

In fact he nurtured many of his juniors to great heights. Eng. ARP Wijesekera who was one of them, recounts that 'on his first week of the job as the newly promoted Deputy Chief Mechanical Engineer where he had keenly reported on his progress on solving a problem of a burner in one of the engines. To which Rampala's cold reply has been 'you seem to be able to do only one job at a time'. Wijesekera who himself went on to become Chairman of the



B.D Rampala

CTB and several other organisations says those were the words that had the biggest impact and shaped his life most thereafter. How such words have changed and shaped his juniors has been seen in the life of many railway men such as Mr P. Rajgopal, Mr. N.A. Vaityalingam, Mr Paul Senaratne, Mr L.S. de Silva and Mr A. Chanmugarajah almost all of whom went on to become leaders in both the railways and in engineering with many of them holding position at the IESL also.

In 1982 he addressed the 76th Annual Sessions of the IESL as its Chief Guest possibly the only time in the history of the IESL that one of its own members was invited as the Chief Guest. He observed how Sri Lanka needed to move

on towards industrialization and the need for establishing a global reputation for quality products so that could compete effectively in the international market. His knowledge of world markets and of international trade was to me, deep and profound. He has spoken with strong views on the need but yet caution of getting foreign investment and obtaining international credit and of joint ventures at a time when even experts in financing were yet to be fully conversant with these financial instruments. It is no wonder that he tried to and understood the forces that shaped the society in which the people he served lived. This is so very important for engineering leaders of today and tomorrow to think outside of mere engineering technology and in fact be competent in doing so. Their thinking and actions must be shaped by world affairs, economics, culture and even philosophy. We can only serve the people we work for when we understand, appreciate and can stand up against the forces that shape their world and lives.

It has been said that it was not due to lack of logic in asking that railways did not get enough funding, from the Treasury but due to lack of logic in national priorities. But it needs to be said here that engineers need to rise about technical logic to economic, financial and even political logic. This is where it appears Rampala was a maestro.

Finally, Eng. B.D. Rampala, what can we learn from his life and work?

Another former GMR Mr D.C. Leiwela who served in the late 1980s notes in the Felicitation volume put out in honour of Eng. Rampala in 1989 that Mr Rampala 'rose above all his contemporaries and his predecessors. He moved like a Colossus. None could and none ever had challenged him in matters of Engineering because of his masterly techniques of handling engineering problems and his profound knowledge of the theory and practice of the science of engineering.

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