

## OUR ASSOCIATION WITH PROF. LAL

Thirty five years ago it would have been very difficult for a bright young physicist to resist a glamorous career in any one of the emerging and fashionable fields of physics like nuclear and solid state physics especially in the ambience of the then embryonic Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. The young Devendra Lal broke away from this traditional pursuit and was among the very few unorthodox young physicists elsewhere in the world then who dreamt of what they could do in other sciences with the body of physics already known rather than in virgin physics. This trait in Prof.Lal to wander in untrodden beaches rather than follow paved paths has characterized his scientific career all through. Thus began his romance with cosmic-ray-produced isotopes in the atmosphere which over the years blossomed into a refreshing variety of applications of nuclear processes in natural settings. Since the sources and sinks of naturally occurring radionuclides and their decay products do not recognise any anthropocentric divisions of science, Prof.Lal's pursuit of these tenuous tracers of natural processes took him from the high energy particle interactions with unshielded planetary debris through the subtle chemical pathways of the components of the continental wash into the oceans to the wiggles in  $^{14}\text{C}$  variation in the annual growth rings of trees. His relentless campaign has also taken him over the seven seas to

interact with kindred souls who share his passion for such exotic science. In the process he nurtured a small but highly motivated band of young men in India whose collective contributions have earned for India a pre-eminent position in the world scene.

It is by no means easy to keep pace with this man of volcanic energy, insatiable curiosity and relentless perseverance. But those of us who managed to run with him, if left breathless in the process, have had the good fortune to share some of his excitements and contribute in our own modest way to areas of his interest - unravelling the secrets frozen in the deposits of the oceanic abyss, the first appearance in the crust of the mute rocks that form the geologic mosaic of the sub-continent, the antiquity of the Indian civilisation or deciphering the messages from the solar system through the moon and meteorites. At the core of such a bewildering variety of Prof.Lal's interests is his life long dedication to trace the high energy products of natural processes sequestered in low energy environments.

Our long and close association with Prof.Lal made us realise two remarkable traits of his. The first one is his total dedication and hard work. He makes one realise that there is no short cut to industry and that research is not a 9 AM to 5 PM job, but one that requires total involvement even at the expense of other, at times

more pleasurable, aspects of life. The second concerns his science. He is always deeply involved with the science he currently pursues and excited about that - not about his past achievements, a hallmark of a true scientist.

We deem it a honour and privilege to have been associated with Prof.Lal. On this occasion of his 60th Birthday, we wish Prof.Lal and Mrs.Aruna Lal many more years of their truly remarkable and enviable companionship and enduring contributions to that branch of science dear to him.