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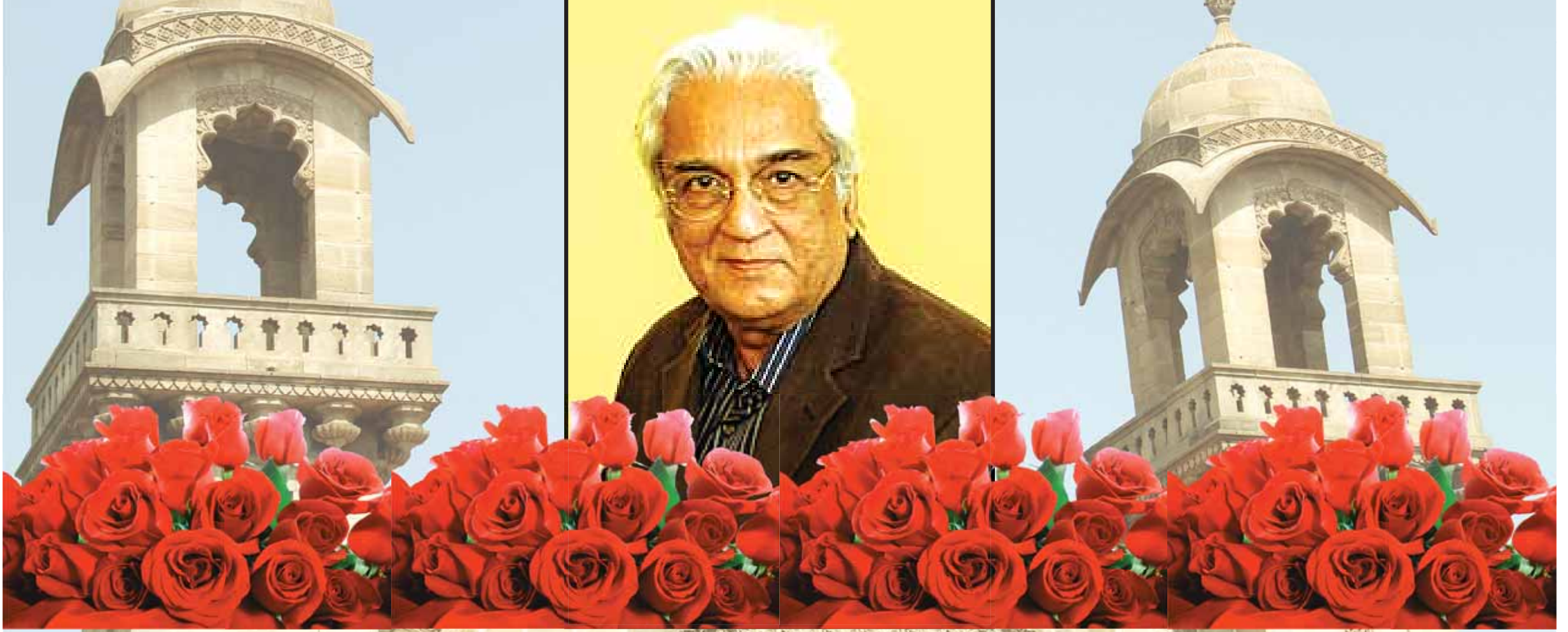
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Maharaja Ranjitsinh Pratapsinh Gaekwad



8 May 1938 - 10 May 2012

The death of an Icon, The End of an Era



Vadodara came to a standstill on Friday as more than 15,000 of its dwellers lined the city's streets to bid adieu to Maharaja Shrimant Ranjitsinh Pratapsinh Gaekwad. He was laid to rest at Kirti Mandir, the royal family's cremation grounds. Seventy-four year old Ranjitsinh breathed his last on Wednesday night, losing a longstanding battle to kidney ailments.

Today we mourn the loss of a great man, and an impactful leader. Former Member of Parliament from Vadodara and scion of royal family Shrimant Maharaja Ranjitsinh Pratapsinh Gaekwad died late on Wednesday. The Maharaja, who turned 74 on May 8, is survived by wife Shubhangini Devi, son Samarjeetsinh and two daughters. According to reports, Ranjitsinhji breathed his last at around 00:15hrs at a private hospital in Vadodara on Thursday. He was cremated at the royal family's cremation ground behind Kirti Mandir on Friday. Ranjitsinhji was suffering from

kidney ailments and had undergone a surgery in a Mumbai hospital in December last year. Later, he was also administered radiation therapy at a hospital in Karamsad, near Nadiad. Within hours of his demise, Ranjitsinhji's body shifted to his home, Laxmi Vilas Palace. Thousands of Barodians paid their last respect as his mortal remains were kept in an air-conditioned box at the palace.

Admirers, well-wishers and even the commoner started pouring into Laxmi Vilas Palace since early on Thursday morning. More than 5,000 people including family, relatives, friends and public in general stood in the sweltering heat paying their last homage to Ranjitsinhji. As the mortal soul left his palace for the last time, his wife Shubhangini Raje was inconsolable. Members of royal families of Kolhapur, Satara and Jasdan supported her and the Gaekwad family in this painful loss. For his last ride, Ranjitsinhji was clad in royalty - in opulent robes and the

traditional Gaekwad red hat. Police band played dhoons as the funeral procession moved out of the palace. Barodians braved the 10 o'clock sweltering heat and lined the streets to bid the Maharaja their final goodbye. Water was provided to those who joined the journey to Kirti Mandir while makeshift sheds were erected for those paying floral tributes to him. Traffic was diverted along this route as the procession rolled from the royal palace to Kala Ghoda. According to sources close to members of royal family, the late Maharaja had expressed his wish to honour his great grand father and former ruler Sayajirao Gaekwad with Bharat Ratna posthumously. He served two terms as Congress MP from Vadodara seat, first in 1980 and again in 1984.

Ranjitsinhji enjoyed close ties with the Gandhi family, especially with Rajiv Gandhi and his wife Sonia, in whose honour he had hosted a dinner at his Laxmi Palace in 1986. Chief Minister Narendra Modi and

royal families of other erstwhile kingdoms like Kolhapur, Jasdan and Devgarh Baria attended the funeral of Ranjitsinhji.

MS University declared two-day mourning period with its offices to remain closed for two days. A condolence meeting was scheduled at 1:30pm at Senate Hall, University office. Baroda Cricket Association has also decided to keep the shutters down at Gun Store office to pay tribute to Maharaja and a former first class player. Chief Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences at Ranjitsinh Gaekwad's demise. The CM said that Ranjitsinhji had lived his life with simplicity and contributed greatly to art, literature and culture. Ranjitsinhji's body arrived at the cremation grounds at around 11:30am. Gaekwad family's Rajpurohit performed bhumi poojan and deh poojan before his son Samarjitsinh Ranjitsinh lit the pyre forty-five minutes past noon. Among politicians, CM Narendra Modi and leader of opposition in Gujarat

Assembly, Shaktisinh Gohil were present at the palace to pay their last respects to the Maharaja. Modi was also seen in a prolonged conversation with Ranjitsinhji's son Samarjitsinh Gaekwad and elder sister Mrunalini Puar, who is chancellor - Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara. "It is unfortunate that he is not with us in our celebrations of the 150th birth anniversary of Sayajirao Gaekwad," said Modi, at the palace.

"Ranjitsinhji carried the baton of the rich tradition of art and culture of the Gaekwad rulers. Though he belonged to royalty, he led a simple life. Always soft-spoken but stood his opinion bravely and in an honest fashion," he added. "He had such passion for fine arts that he remained devoted to the subject till his death. My prayers are with the Gaekwad family to give them strength in these trying times." Ministers Bhupendrasinh Chudasama and Pradeepsinh Jadeja were present with the chief minister at the condolence meet

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