

# New light on Halley's comet

BANGALORE, Oct. 27. (UNI) — Scientists the world over have achieved a quantum jump in the knowledge on Halley's comet after its recent apparition, Space Commission Chairman U.R. Rao said today.

Inaugurating a three-day national symposium on Comet Halley here, Prof. Rao said ground observations and those carried out by spacecrafts launched by several countries had brought forth information on size of the comet's nucleus, its density, the topography and rare events in the tail.

The size of the nucleus that was unconfirmed so far was found to be about 500 square km. The observations by spacecrafts Vega-I and Vega-II of the Soviet Union had revealed that the density was lesser than thought of earlier. These recordings had thrown new light on the spin rate of the nucleus. The craters and mountains on the comet were also photographed for the first time, he added.

He complimented the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) for photographing events like disconnection of the tail and the twists and turns in the tail region.

**OPTIMISM:** Prof. Rao said he was optimistic that many of the unanswered questions would be solved with the launch of spacecrafts by the United States in the near future.

In his address, Pro. R.R. Daniel, Chairman of the Advisory Committee for Space Sciences, said the Indian Halley Observation Programme (IHOP) was an example of a well organised national effort. He expressed happiness over the results of the observations made by Indian astronomers under the programme. He paid rich tributes to the late Indian astronomer Vainu Bappu and said it was he who had conceived the idea of a national mission to carry out observations of the comet.

IIA Director, Dr. J.C. Bhattacharya, said more than 60 astronomers would present their results during the symposium. Tracing the previous apparition of the comet, he said the latest

had occurred in a vastly changed environment. He thanked the Government for the support extended to the programme.

The symposium has been co-sponsored by the IIA, the Department of Science and Technology, the Indian Space Research Organisation and the Advisory Committee for Space Sciences.