

# Two more Indians join 'galaxy'

DH NEWS SERVICE

**BANGALORE:** Two recently discovered asteroids will now be known by the names of eminent Indian scientists: Prof MGK Menon and Prof JC Bhattacharya. The Committee for Small Body Nomenclature (CSBN) of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) recently named two of the six asteroids discovered from the Vainu Bappu Observatory in Kavalur, after the two men of science.

Asteroids "Gokumenon" and "Bhattacharyya" now join (4130) Ramanujan 1988 DQ1, (2596) Vainu Bappu 1979 KN, (2986) Mrinalini 2525 P-L and (2987) Sarabhai 4583 P-L in the sky.

In January 1987, when Prof Bhattacharyya was the Director of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics



**JC Bhattacharya (left) and MGK Menon**

(IIA) and Prof Menon the Chairman of its Governing Council, the IIA had launched 'Project Kalki' to survey and discover asteroids, comets and the elusive tenth planet of the Solar System. A 45-cm Schmidt telescope at the Vainu Bappu Observatory at Kavalur was used for the survey. During the few years that Project Kalki was in operation, it discovered a total of six asteroids.

The first discovery was reported on February 17, 1988, by Dr R Rajamohan,

who led the project team consisting of K Kuppuswamy, V Moorthy and A Paranjpye. The new asteroid was subsequently followed at VBO and was recovered close to its predicted position on plates taken at VBO in May 1989.

The asteroid was numbered 4130 and named Ramanujan after the great mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan. The remaining five asteroids were yet to receive their confirmed minor planet numbers when Project Kalki was discontinued.

When the discoveries of these asteroids were confirmed following the usual procedure of their recovery at positions predicted through orbit calculations, they were given appropriate minor planet numbers — 4706, 5178, 7564, 8348 and 17446. As per the norms set

by the IAU, a discoverer can propose a name for the minor planet that he or she discovers only for the first ten years after its numbering. Beyond that period, an unnamed minor planet may be named by anybody through a request made to IAU's CSBN.

Since the proprietary ten-year period was over for asteroids 7564 and 8348, Dr Rajamohan initially named them "Bhattacharyya" and "Menon." Both had been instrumental in seeing the massive 2.34-m telescope project at Kavalur to its successful completion, thereby creating opportunities for doing good work in optical astronomy within the country. "Menon" was later renamed "Gokumenon" and the two new names were published in the Minor Planet Circular 63639.