

Address of Smt. D. Purandeswari MoS(HRD-HE) in K.C. Mammen Mappillai Memorial Lecture in New Delhi at 5:30 p.m. on 15th November, 2007.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel specially honored to be invited on the K.C. Mammen Mappillai Memorial Lecture to be delivered by Sri Harold Evans, former Editor of the Times, London. As you are all aware that K.C. Mammen Mappillai was Editor of Malayala Manorama for 50 years (1904 to 1953). He was a visionary and a social reformer. He built up the newspaper into a unifying force in Kerala during India's freedom struggle. The government banned the paper for nine years, confiscated all his property, and jailed him for two years. He revived the paper after the Indian Independence and inspired his successors to use it to foster social harmony and uphold human dignity.

Mammen Mappillai was born on November 28, 1922, to K.C. Mammen, as the youngest in a family of eight children. His father wanted him to become a commercial artist, but Mammen Mappillai had other ideas. He started off in 1946 making balloons from his home in T. Nagar (Chennai), quickly expanded business and six years later he started manufacturing retreading compounds. To-day Madras Rubber Factory is the number one tyre company in the country with a turnover of Rs.2400 crore. Mammen Mappillai had his education at the M.D. Seminary

School, the Madras Christian College School and graduated from the MCC, Tambaram. While he was in college, the princely State of Travancore jailed his father and confiscated the family's assets after shutting down their bank and newspaper, Malayala Manorama, which was in the thick of the Freedom Struggle. From the lap of luxury, there was a sudden descent into penury. Young Mammen began to sleep on the floor in St. Thomas's Hall in college from the day he heard of his father's imprisonment for two years until the latter's release. The family fortunes revived after nine years. As chairman and managing director, Mammen Mappillai kept a low profile and rarely granted media interviews. He disliked personal publicity and instead believed that the professionalism and work ethics that he cultivated at Madras Rubber Factory were the company's best image-builders. He saw an opportunity in every problem. He was not deterred, dejected or defeated by a hurdle. His wife Kunjamma Mammen Mappillai recalls about another occasion, 50 years ago, when he would send her and the children to Kerala during summer. Once he wrote to her saying she need not bother about him as, Rukmani would take care of him. The anxious wife returned the next day and on searching high and low found the early edition of the present-day pressure cooker called "Rukmani cooker" in which one could put in rice, dal and vegetable and hey presto, lunch was ready. He never stood on formalities. His attitude and humility were amazing. He hated to promote himself and always preferred to give credit to the team. At Madras Rubber Factory's

golden jubilee function, a few years ago, Mammen Mappillai said: “***Madras Rubber Factory stands for all of us; it is not just one or another person. All of us have worked together to help this organization grow.***” The words held the secret of the success of one of India’s premier companies, a company that is today the 12 largest tyre major in the world and has a staff strength of 9,000. He attributed his success to “God’s grace and guidance.” Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review had chosen Madras Rubber Factory as one of the ten best Indian companies. Fortune magazine has ranked the company as the fifth best in the world in terms of quality and productiveness. Mammen Mappillai passed on at the age of 80 on March 2 after a brief illness.

Such was the career and personality of Mammen Mappillai, who was completely a self-made man who had no hesitation for doing any sort of work high or low. Royal in dignity and disposition, he was the humblest of the humble with modest and humane behavior. He virtually epitomizes Kipling’s words that describes the qualities of a great man, “as one who, while he walks with kings, does not lose the common man’s touch.” With these words I pay my humble tributes to the memory of this great man.

Jai Hind
