The Geological Society of India commemorated the 97th Birth Anniversary of late B.P. Radhakrishna on 30 April, 2015 at a meeting organized at Khanija Bhavan, Department of Mines and Geology, Karnataka. In addition to paying tributes to BPR on the occasion, it was felt that a topic dear to the heart of BPR should be taken up for a meaningful discourse by all the concerned. BPR was greatly interested in the development of the mineral resources and mining industry in the country on healthy lines, keeping in view the twin objectives of welfare of the common man and the community, and having a deep concern for protecting the environment. Hence, the recently enacted Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation (MMDR) Amendment Act 2015 was a logical choice for the Group Discussion that followed.

The first part of the programme was devoted to remembering BPR and paying tributes to him by the selected group of panellists, who knew him intimately over a long period. Shri R.H. Sawkar, Secretary of the Society, in his welcoming remarks highlighted the contributions of BPR in the advancement of Earth Sciences in general and his special interest in Mineral Deposits and their exploitation in a judicious fashion for the benefit of the country and for our economic progress. He gave the background in choosing the present topic for the Group Discussion as major policy changes in the Exploration and Mining Sector have been incorporated as per the MMDR Amendment Act 2015, like removal of discretionary mechanisms by introducing auction to be the chosen method for allotment of mineral concessions, provision to establish District Mineral Foundations (DMF) and setting up of a National Mineral Exploration Trust.

Shri Chiranjeevi Singh, I.A.S.(Retd.), Former Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka recalled his long association with BPR that helped him understand his vision of Geology in the service of the society and his overarching vedantic outlook on life. He recollected BPR’s unrelenting crusade for a saner utilisation of our water resources, both surface as well as groundwater and his concern for water requirements for sanitation, particularly in the last phase of his life. He felt that BPR’s writings on all these subjects remain extremely relevant in today’s scenario of extreme water stress coupled with problems of spiralling pollution levels in urban as well as rural settings due to using rivers/streams as effluent discharge outlets. Shri Chirnajeevi Singh reiterated the necessity of integrating geological-geomorphological inputs into town-planning exercises to prevent repeating of the same mistakes all over again as new centres of development emerge.

Hon’ble Shri K.N. Shrivastava, Member(A), Ahmedabad Bench, Central Administrative Tribunal, I.A.S.(Retd.) and Former Secretary to Government of India recollected his association with BPR in Karnataka, and the guidance he received from him when he was CMD, Hutti Gold Mines Limited. He mentioned the role played by BPR as the first head of the Board of Mineral Development in Karnataka and his passion for issues related to water. Shri K.N. Shrivastava felt that the new mechanism of auctioning natural resources may require further inputs/modifications from organizations like the Geological Society of India and hoped that the Group Discussion to be followed will aid in such a process.

Prof. R. Vaidyanadhan, Vice-President of the Geological Society of India, who happens to be a founder-member of the society, and a long-time associate of BPR reminded the reluctance of BPR to seek grants/funding from government sources for the growth of the Society. BPR felt strongly that Society should stand on its own legs by its publications and public philanthropy. He hoped that the deliberations to follow on the Amended MMDR Act will concretize some suggestions to the government in the framing of the rules and point out contradictions, if any, in the Act.

Dr. A.N. Yellappa Reddy, I.F.S.(retd.), former Chief Conservator of Forests, Karnataka and former Secretary, Dept. of Ecology and Environment and a noted environmentalist in his tribute to BPR highlighted the writings of BPR on interlinking of rivers and his forthright views on the subject based on sound geological and environmental considerations. He underlined the important role of forests, land and water in ensuring ecological security and pleaded for professionals with ethical and moral principles in their management for the long-term good of the country.

Shri D.V. Pichamuthu, Member, Mining Engineering Division Board, The Institute of Engineers (India) recounted his close family association with Dr. B.P. Radhakrishna and the consequent opportunity to interact with him often on Mining and Geological matters of mutual concern. He hoped that the Mining Industry, which is going through a difficult phase for obvious reasons, will emerge out of the present impasse much stronger in the service of the nation. The new MMDR Amended Act of 2015 should facilitate the growth of the Mining Industry in a more transparent and efficient fashion in the best interests of the country. He hoped that the group discussion will facilitate such a process with valuable recommendations to the government.

Shri Tushar Girinath, Secretary, Department of Commerce and Industries, Karnataka paid his tribute to BPR as a legend and a man of great character with many seminal contributions in his chosen fields and in evolving mineral policies of the government. He felt that India should export more value added products from its mineral industry rather than the raw materials. He also underscored the importance of environmental protection in undertaking mining activities, which has been a neglected area so far barring some exceptions.

Dr. M. Ramakrishnan, formerly Senior Deputy Director General, Geological Survey of India and Former Editor of the Geological Society of India recounted his close association with BPR over
considerable length of time and how fruitful the association was in terms of his own scientific contributions and in bringing out some very valuable publications on the Geology of Karnataka and the country. He expressed his indebtedness to BPR for all the encouragement he received in shaping his scientific career and for bringing out the two volumes on the Geology of India.

The post-tea session in the forenoon was devoted to commodity-wise analysis of some selected natural resources of importance with special reference to the Amended Act. Shri Chiranjeevi Singh chaired the session assisted by Dr. M. Ramakrishnan as Co-Chairman.

The commodities covered were:
- Limestone — Vidyasagar Narang, Paniam Cements
- Bauxite — H. Mahadevan, Anrak Aluminium Ltd.
- Iron Ore — B. Sahoo, NMDC
- Gold/Base Metals — R.H. Sawkar, Geol. Soc. India
- Rare Earths — Tirupati, AMD
- Diamonds — Venkatasubramanian, Rio Tinto

The presentations by the experts gave a bird’s eye view of the present status of exploration and mining of the respective commodity/natural resource in India in the global context. Although it is too early to assess, speakers also spelt out their initial reservations and doubts about the new legislation with reference to their specific industry. On the positive side, some felt that some of the provisions in the new Act may encourage qualified bidders and remove too many non-qualified bidders as of now. In addition to the above experts, several outstation delegates listed below participated actively in the discussions: Shri Pande, Torangal, JSW; Hiremath, Dharwar; Aneel Kumar, Penna Cements; PSN Murthy, Visakhapatnam; BC Mishra, Jindal, Jaipur; Tarafdar, GSI, Nagpur; K. Shashidharan, GSI, Kolkata; V.J. Katti, AMD, Bangalore; Ramachander, Penna Cement; M. Senthilpann, Bangalore, Prof. VRRM Babu, Visakhapatnam and P. Pullaiah and M. Sudhakar, DMG, AP.

The post-lunch session was devoted to a detailed discussion on the MMDR Act as amended by the Government and rules pertaining to the auction mechanism for the grant of mineral concessions (Sections 10B&11). Many from the mining industry appeared to be skeptical about the auctioning process, which presupposes a thorough knowledge about the reserves of the commodity in a given area. As detailed exploration and mining proceeds, resource reserves may be augmented or appreciably altered, which is a continuous process. Except for bedded deposits like coal, the occurrence and distribution of many precious metal resources like Gold, PGE etc., could be very erratic and estimates by different agencies may differ by wide margins. Divergent opinions were expressed by the participants and there was no unanimity on many aspects. Some felt that the Amended Act is a “knee-jerk” reaction to the iron-ore and coal scams and has not been thought through properly.

The MMDR Amendment Act, 2015, gazetted on March 27, 2015, is deemed to have come into force from 2 January, 2015, when the MMDR Amendment Ordinance was issued and hence a fait accompli now. Since Mining is a concurrent subject, the Central and State Governments have to draft the rules and regulations under the Act under Sections 13 and 15 respectively within a period of six months as per the statute and the process is on now.

In view of the above, in the concluding session, Shri Chiranjeevi Singh, with the approval delegates, suggested that Sri Mahadevan may go through the Act critically and also take opinion of other neutral and expert-institutions like the Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore, The Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad and other connected with the mining industries and come up with a document, which can be submitted to the Central and State Governments by the Geological Society of India. Such a document may aid in the framing of the rules in a more appropriate way, as well as form the basis for any possible future Amendment to the Act, if some major contradictions and policy issues are involved.

The Group Discussion came to an end with the vote of thanks proposed by K.S. Godhavari, Secretary, Geological Society of India.