

'Stephen Hawking's visit was big boost for Indian scientists'

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Bengaluru: An inspiration for more than a generation of scientists, Stephen Hawking's influence on Indian minds is phenomenal. While some grew up reading his book, *A Brief History of Time*, a few have worked on some of his major theories.

Admitting that his death is a grave loss to science, scientists stressed on the fact that Hawking's contributions are unparalleled.

Bala Iyer, who heads India's efforts in the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) project, says: "I met him briefly; we've been at the same meetings and my Ph.D was, in fact, on Hawking's Radiation. To me, what he really represents — other than his science, of course — is the fact that he could be a role model for people with disabilities." That Hawking could do so much despite so many limitations is his big contribution, besides the major role he played in advancing physics, Iyer added.

Rajesh Gopakumar, director, International Centre for Theoretical Sciences (ICTS), a theoretical physicist, says: "Hawking was always a delight



INSPIRING PRESENCE: Hawking during the 2001 conference in Mumbai

to be with despite his towering personality. We were together during the 2001 Strings conference in Mumbai and I remember how lively he was; he even tried joining people for a dance to Bollywood music on his wheelchair at the banquet." His visit to India was an endorsement to the Indian community's strength in theoretical physics, particularly string theory. It was a big boost and helped create some visibility for the community, Gopakumar added.

Prof R C Kapoor, former scientist at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, pointed out how his contribution to black hole physics changed

the way we look at things. "He deserved a Nobel but his work excels even that ... He will be part of the history of science and a source of inspiration," Kapoor said.

Prof Spenta Wadia of ICTS, who was part of the 2001 Strings conference, said: "It was an important meeting where other eminent physicists like David Gross and Edward Witten were also present. The meeting implied a recognition of the string theory contribution from India. During the conference banquet, we celebrated his 59th birthday and I vividly remember his dance ... he had a zest for life!" Prof Wadia said.