

## Globetrotting Kalam speaks for free

Hotfooting it around the country and abroad addressing seminars, convocations and conferences, former Indian president A.P. J. Abdul Kalam is a man much in demand - perhaps even more than when he was in Rashtrapati Bhavan, the presidential palace. And he does it all for free!

Unlike his counterparts in the west - former president Bill Clinton, for instance, who received \$9.2 million in the first year out of office - Kalam charges nothing while he does the rounds of the lecture circuit.

Since he demitted office eight months ago, the 77-year-old nuclear scientist, who has received honorary doctorates from as many as 30 universities, has delivered over 160 speeches.

'We receive at least 10 to 15 invitations every day asking the former president to be the chief guest at some function or the other. Obviously, he takes the call but there is no respite from the requests that pour in,' says Kalam's secretary, H. Sheridan.

'There is a minimum of three engagements every week. And, no, he does not charge for any of his speeches when he is called out,' Sheridan told IANS.

According to the New York Times, Clinton received the \$9.2 million for giving 59 speeches to investment banks, Jewish and Israeli groups, public relations companies, advertising agencies and other organisations.

Other US presidents have cashed in too after leaving office. In 1998, Global Crossing, a telecommunications company that has since gone bankrupt, paid former president George Bush Sr with company stocks that grew to be worth \$14 million in lieu of an \$80,000 fee for a speech.

In October 1989, former president Ronald Reagan received a \$2 million honorarium for a nine-day trip and speeches in Tokyo.

Since July last year, Kalam has been abroad on seven occasions - twice to the US as well as to Indonesia, Britain, the Netherlands and most recently to Israel and South Korea. The lectures have been huge sellouts with crowds queuing up to hear the first scientist and first bachelor to have occupied India's presidential palace.

Ironically, Kalam never visited the US while in office.

From meeting up with entrepreneurs in Pittsburgh and addressing the International Aerospace Conference in Pasadena, California, to giving the keynote address on global sourcing and innovation at Amsterdam's Nyenrode Business University, Kalam is at home everywhere.

'Yes, he still talks about his pet subjects. Knowledge economy, e-governance and the need to implement Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) are still hot,' said Sheridan.

Back home, Kalam is constantly on the move either honouring the World Congress of Poets in [Chennai](#) or presiding over the platinum jubilee celebrations of the All Religions Conference in Dharamsala.

'Kalam has such a packed agenda that he has been able to visit Rameswaram, his hometown in south India, just once after demitting office,' said another aide.

During his five-year stay at Rashtrapati Bhavan that ended in July last year, Kalam set a record by delivering over 1,020 speeches all over the country. Clearly things haven't changed that much since the days when he was president.

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