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Sathya Sai Baba interred with State honours

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Last rites performed by nephew R.J. Ratnakar

— PHOTO: AFP



Sri Sathya Sai Baba's body was lowered into a specially designed vault of 7 feet by 12 feet on the very dais where he gave his darshan to devotees.

PUTTAPARTHI: The mortal remains of the 85-year-old spiritual guru, Sathya Sai Baba, were interred amid State honours at the same spot in the Sai Kulwant Hall from where he used to deliver his message to his devotees for decades.

Vedic rituals were performed as the body was laid to rest while Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish priests recited their scriptures. The last rites were performed by the Sai Baba's nephew R.J. Ratnakar, who is also a member of the Central Trust, amid chants by a group of scholars led by Kandakuri Kondavadhani from East Godavari district.

The ceremony commenced behind the large maroon screen which was lifted once the religious rites were completed as the audience watched the ceremony, fighting emotions.

A guard of honour was given by policemen who came in slow march, draped the national tri-colour on the glass casket and removed it after a while as the buglers sounded the Last Post.

Half a platoon of policemen fired three shots in the air in a gun salute. A general salute was also offered by the men in uniform.

Among the VIPs present were Governors E.S.L. Narasimhan (Andhra Pradesh) and Shivraj Patil (Rajasthan), Chief Ministers N. Kiran Kumar Reddy (AP) and B.S. Yeddyurappa (Karnataka), former Chief Ministers N. Chandrababu Naidu (AP) and Ashok Chavan (Maharashtra) and Andhra Pradesh Ministers N. Raghuveera Reddy (Revenue) and J. Geetha Reddy (Major Industries).

The actual process of laying the mortal remains to rest began after the rituals were completed.

The vault had a foundation and a layer of the finest marble, said to have been sourced from Rajasthan.

Water from sacred rivers and soil from every State in the country were sprinkled on the memorial.

After the casket was lowered and the 'samadhi' made ready, VIPs walked upto it and sprinkling sacred ash, prayed and paid their last respects. The ceremony that started at 8.45 a.m. came to a close with a traditional 'harathi' after which entry into the Sai Kulwant Hall was barred for a while. Devotees were allowed to have darshan and pay their respects from noon. Interestingly, media attention peaked when Sai Baba's personal caregiver Satyajit, who has been provided security by the police, made an appearance the first time after Sunday when Sai Baba passed away.

He was seen seated near the body throughout the whole two-hour long ceremony that started at 8.45 a.m. and came to a close by about 11 a.m.