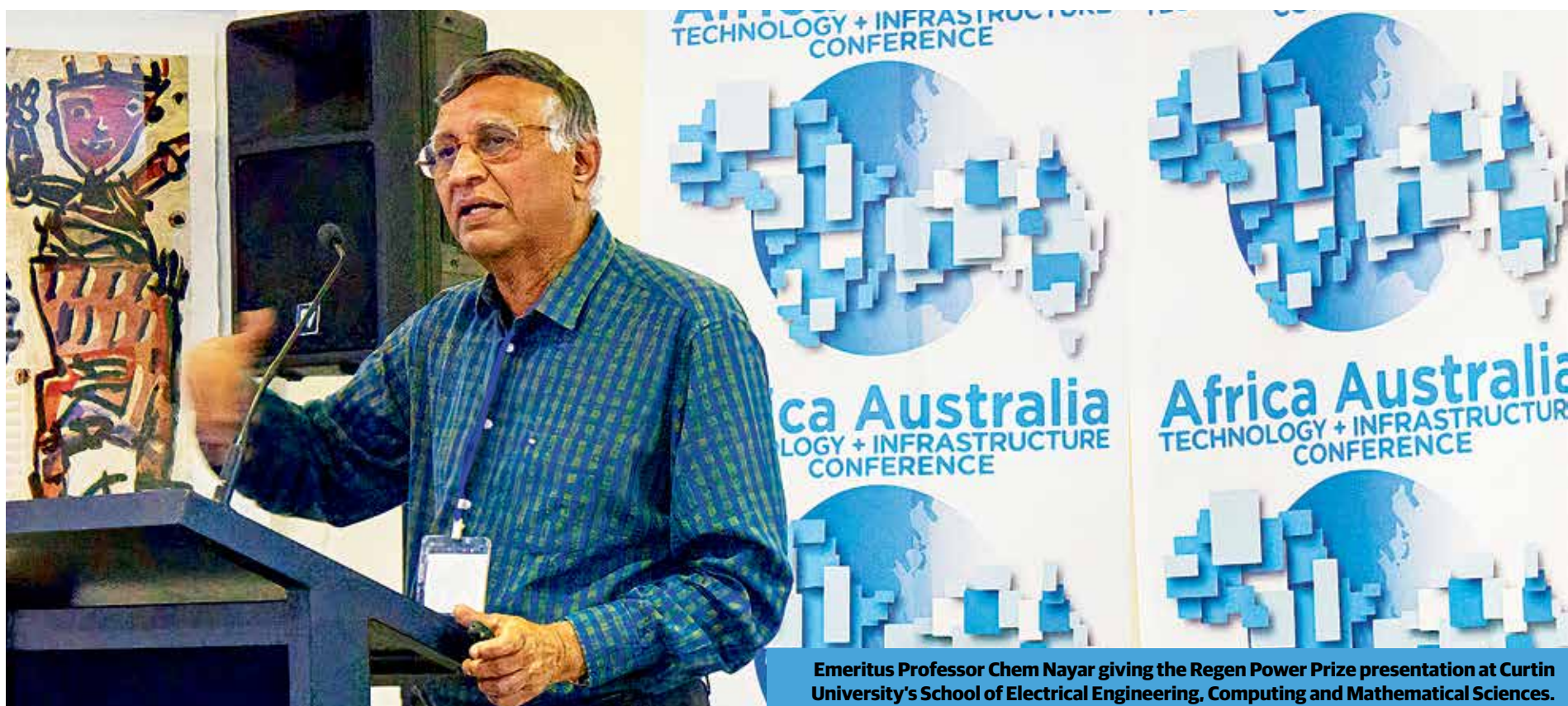




Emeritus Professor Chem Nayar giving the Regen Power Prize presentation at Curtin University's School of Electrical Engineering, Computing and Mathematical Sciences.

Five years on, the light still shines

Remembering clean energy pioneer Emeritus Professor Chem Nayar (1946-2021), founder of Regen Power

This September marks five years since Western Australia lost one of the true pioneers of its clean energy industry.

Emeritus Professor Chem Nayar – researcher, educator, inventor and founder of Regen Power – passed away in Perth on 16 September 2021, aged 75, after a battle with myeloma. Half a decade on, the systems he designed, the students he mentored and the company he built continue to power homes, careers and communities across the State and far beyond.

A leap of faith

When Professor Nayar boarded an aircraft for the first time in April 1982, bound for Perth with his wife and two young children, he carried little more than a scholarship, a bank loan and a conviction that renewable energy could change lives. Just over two years later, he had completed Australia's first PhD on electrical power generation using wind energy at The University of Western Australia – a thesis that would help lay the foundations for an industry that now defines this sun-drenched State.

From Calicut to Curtin

Born in Calicut, South India, in 1946, Professor Nayar knew hardship early. The second child of a lower middle-class family, he lost his mother when he was just three years old. Determination carried him through: first-class marks in his public examinations won him a place at the National Institute of Technology Calicut, and he graduated with a first-class degree in electrical engineering in 1969 before completing his master's at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur.

His inventive streak showed early. In 1977, while lecturing in electrical engineering, he invented an electronic controller for cone winding machines used in spinning mills, patented the device and founded a start-up, Digitron, to commercialise it – working 12 to 14-hour days as a full-time lecturer and a part-time engineer while still publishing research in international journals.

The Curtin years

In 1986, Professor Nayar joined Curtin University, where a teaching and research career spanning nearly four decades would establish the institution as a world-renowned centre of excellence in clean energy. Rising to become the university's first personal chair in electrical and renewable energy engineering, he founded the Centre for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technologies Australia (CRESTA) and was

a founding member of the Australian Cooperative Research Centre for Renewable Energy.

Along the way he secured more than \$9 million in research funding, published over 135 research papers and 80 journal articles, delivered keynote addresses at more than 40 national and international conferences, and led 42 major sustainable energy projects across Australia, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, the Maldives, India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – many the first of their kind in their country. His remote-area power systems immeasurably improved living conditions, connectivity and self-sufficiency in communities that had never known reliable electricity.

Perhaps his proudest output, though, was people. Professor Nayar supervised 40 PhD and master's students, almost all of whom went on to successful careers in sustainable energy. A natural leader and a famously hands-on educator, he inspired them by championing real-life engineering over purely academic pursuit. Curtin recognised his contribution with the title of Emeritus Professor in 2011.

His honours included the Ambassador Award at the 2011 Sustainable Energy Association Awards, appointment as the first Fellow of the Australian Solar Academy, the first Australian Power Institute Lifetime Achievement Award, seven trademark and patent applications, and selection as a finalist in the 2021 Western Australian of the Year Awards.

The company he built

In 2003, convinced that clean energy belonged on ordinary rooftops and not only in research papers, Professor Nayar founded Regen Power with a vision of creating affordable access to power through sustainable solutions and innovative technologies.

At the time of his passing, the Canning Vale-based company had completed more than 30,000 installations. Today that figure exceeds 45,000, and Regen Power stands as Western Australia's top-ranked residential solar retailer, a six-time consecutive ProductReview.com.au award winner and a partner to global technology leaders including Tesla. Its international story – from designing and commissioning India's largest floating solar plant to serving as owner's engineer on a 50-megawatt solar farm in Vietnam – reflects its founder's belief that good engineering knows no borders.

Fittingly, the energy transition Professor Nayar spent his life preparing for is now arriving in earnest. As government rebates drive record uptake of home batteries across Western



Emeritus Professor Chem Nayar (1946-2021).

Australia, the storage-backed solar systems he researched long before they were fashionable are fast becoming the new standard on the State's rooftops.

A legacy that keeps giving

Professor Nayar's memory is honoured where his Australian journey flourished. Each year, the Regen Power Prize is awarded at Curtin University's School of Electrical Engineering, Computing and Mathematical Sciences, recognising outstanding students and continuing his lifelong mission of nurturing the next generation of clean energy engineers.

The research partnership he began endures too. Regen Power and Curtin University continue to collaborate on nationally funded research into battery adoption and the intelligent, consumer-centred energy systems of the future – industry-focused work in the very mould Professor Nayar championed throughout his career.

"Five years on, we still ask ourselves what Professor Nayar would do," Regen Power CEO Dr Nikhil Jayaraj said.

"He taught us that engineering is ultimately about people – a family in a remote community switching on a light for the first time or a Perth household taking control of its power bills.

"Every system we install carries a little of his vision."

The tributes published after his death noted that even after four decades of relentless contribution to the clean energy industry, Professor Nayar had shown no signs of slowing down. Five years later, neither has the movement he helped start. Across more than half a million Western Australian rooftops glinting with solar panels, in lecture theatres and laboratories, and in the company that still bears his fingerprints on everything it does, the current which Professor Nayar set in motion flows on.

He is remembered with love and gratitude by his family, colleagues, students and the entire Regen Power team – and by every Western Australian home his life's work helps to power.

"Every system we install carries a little of his vision."