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Bharat Ratna presented to Pranab Mukherjee

Relative of ideologue Nanaji Deshmukh also receives award

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI:

Former President of India Pranab Mukherjee, late Bharatiya Jana Sangh ideologue Nanaji Deshmukh and late singer Bhupen Hazarika were on Thursday conferred the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award.

President Ram Nath Kovind gave the award to his predecessor Mr. Mukherjee, Mr. Hazarika's son Tej, and to Virenderjeet Singh, a close relative of Mr. Deshmukh, at a brief ceremony at the Durbar Hall of Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Dignitaries present

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu, Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and several Union ministers were among those who were present at the function.



President Ram Nath Kovind confers Bharat Ratna upon former president Pranab Mukherjee on Thursday. •PTI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, former Vice President Hamid Ansari, Congress leader in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Deputy Leader in the Rajya Sabha Anand Sharma and senior Lok Sabha member Shashi Thoor were also among the guest.

Mr. Mukherjee's daughter Sharmishta and son Abhijeet also attended the ceremony.

When the awards were

announced, Mr. Hazarika's son Tej had made a public statement about not accepting the award in protest against the proposed Citizenship Amendment Act that would make it easier for Hindu migrants from Bangladesh to become citizens in Assam. Subsequently, he changed his position and called the award a "great honour" for the family and the people of Assam.