

Mr Isamu Yamashita

Mr Isamu YAMASHITA, former Chairman of East Japan Railway Company and Mitsui Engineering and Shipbuilding Company, died in Tokyo on 6 May of malignant lymphadenoma.

Mr Yamashita was born on 15 February 1911, as a son of a medical practitioner in central Tokyo. He studied mechanical engineering at the Imperial University of Tokyo, and joined the Shipbuilding Department of Mitsui & Co. immediately after his graduation in 1933.

In early 1938, he was sent to Europe by his company. He stayed first in Belfast and later in Copenhagen, where he studied advanced diesel technology for shipbuilding. The outbreak of the Second World War in Europe in 1939 forced him to return to Japan via the USA, and he worked for the Mitsui Engineering and Shipbuilding Company which was separated from Mitsui & Co. during the Pacific War.

The reconstruction of Japan's ruined shipbuilding industry was Mr Yamashita's post-war dream, but he had to spend six years from 1948 in disappointment and obscurity. The General Headquarters of the Allied Forces occupying

Japan expelled him from his official job, because he had allegedly been responsible for munitions production during the war.

After returning to the production line, he worked hard to introduce advanced technology from Europe and North America and to sell his products across the world. From 1960 to 1961, he built the world's first fully-automated merchant vessel. In 1970, he became President of Mitsui Engineering

and Shipbuilding Co. From 1975 to 1977, when the industry was suffering from serious recession, he served as Chairman of the Shipbuilders' Association of Japan, coordinating the reduction of production and negotiations with counterparts in other major shipbuilding countries.

In 1979, he became Company Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Keidanren (Federation of Economic

Co., but continued to work actively as the Japanese Chairman of the Trilateral Commission (a non-government discussion group formed by prominent citizens from the USA, Europe and Japan), and as Chairman of the International Standardisation Organisation. He also served as Chairman of the Soviet-Japan (now Russo-Japanese) Economic Commission.

After retirement from Mitsui, Mr

Yamashita had no intention of managing a major company in Japan, but when the former Japanese National Railways was divided into several regional railways in 1987, he answered a polite but firm request from the then Minister of Transport, Mr Ryutaro Hashimoto, to become Chairman of the East Japan Railway Co., the largest of JNR's successors. He accepted the new job, and served until last year, leading the transformation of the old nationalised railway into a new private enterprise.

Mr Yamashita was widely known as one of the most influential business leaders who built the prosperous post-war economy of Japan. In recognition of his achievements, he was decorated

by Denmark (1967 and 1976), Norway (1983), the German Federal Republic (1986), Sweden (1988) and Japan (1983 and 1994). He leaves behind his wife and four married children. ■



Organisations). He played a major role in international scenes representing Japan's business circle, helped by his prominent capability in English and rich experience in international negotiations. As one of the most intellectual businessmen in Japan, he also worked on various government advisory committees, and was involved in many important policy decisions.

In 1985, he retired as Chairman of Mitsui Engineering and Shipbuilding