**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE LAUNCH OF PSLV - C20 SARAL MISSION'**

**Sriharikota, February 25, 2013**

1. I was delighted to witness the remarkable launch of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) C20 SARAL Mission, along with six more satellites today. It is a pleasure to be in the midst of distinguished scientists and technologists who have gathered here to celebrate the culmination of the meticulously executed chain of events and rigourous pre-launch preparations for the Mission.

2. I congratulate the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) for successfully executing this Mission. I am confident that the SARAL spacecraft launched today would function as planned and perform as designed and serve the intended applications in Ocean Topography, Coastal Altimetry, Ocean currents monitoring and Animal migration studies worldwide. The PSLV has become a household name in our country and this mission would only reaffirm this position through its efficacy, accuracy and reliability of this launch vehicle.

3. An important manifestation of India's bilateral cooperation with foreign countries is in the field of Space technology. I congratulate the French space agency, *Centre National d'études Spatiales* (CNES), for whole-heartedly participating in this collaborative mission. This mission epitomizes the spirit of the Indo-French partnership, which the two nations have shared for decades.

4. Ladies and Gentlemen, curiosity is mankind's second nature and human beings have always sought to unearth the mysteries that lie beyond our Mother Earth. The desire to know the unknown has driven us to inculcate a scientific temper for inquiry.

5. India's space programme is about half a century old though our rich legacy of astronomy dates back to Aryabhatta and Bhaskara. Due to the genius of our space scientists led by stalwarts such as Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Dr. Satish Dhawan, Prof. U.R. Rao, Prof. Kasturirangan and others, our space programme has over the years become successful in delivering to our country indigenous capability in design and development of satellites, launch vehicles and space applications.

6. It is heartening to note that in the road towards self-reliance, ISRO has played a vital role in the enhancement of technology levels and indigenization of strategic materials. The Indian National Satellite System is today a proud repository of the largest group of communication satellites in the Asia Pacific region. Our launch capabilities have been duly acknowledged the world over, with ISRO increasingly launching satellites of other countries.

7. Ladies and Gentlemen, challenges to our country's progress are many and they cannot be successfully countered without technology playing a pivotal role in the effort. This is true whether it is for ushering in a sustainable development paradigm, establish a strong agricultural sector, respond to climate change, building the rural sector amongst others. Our space programme has all along been an application-oriented initiative, and hence, been an able partner in our development process.

8. Our first Prime Minister, Late Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru had once said and I quote: "*It is science alone that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening custom and tradition, of vast resources running to waste, of a rich country inhabited by starving people... Who indeed could afford to ignore science today? At every turn we have to seek its aid... the future belongs to science and those who make friends with science*." (unquote).

9. Our scientific progress has been built on this philosophy. We have used space applications to bring government closer to people, particularly those who are far removed from urban centers and reside in remote areas of the country. Space-based applications like tele-education and tele-medicine have enabled greater access to our rural population to these basic needs.

10. The telemedicine project has made it possible for health care centres in remote locations to connect with super specialty hospitals in towns and cities through INSAT satellites for provision of health care facility to the needy and under-served population. I am told that 1.5 lakh people are availing of the telemedicine facility annually.

11. The EDUSAT satellite has brought about a change in the way education is delivered in our schools, colleges and universities, including the non-formal education system. Interactive education has made it possible to bring education closer to our students, particularly those located in under-served areas.

12. The Village Resource Centre initiative, which connects resource centres like Agricultural Universities, Skill Development Institutes and Hospitals for training of people in diverse fields such as agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, livestock, water resources, computer literacy, micro finance and vocational training, is commendable. Over five lakh people have availed of this facility and I am sure many more will do so in the future.

13. Our farmers have hugely benefitted from weather forecasting as also tele-agriculture initiatives that educate them about different methods and techniques of farming. Management of our natural resources has greatly relied on our remote sensing capabilities.

14. Such socially relevant uses of technology that meet our country's development goals are imperative to address the demands of our population. Our endeavour must be to lower the cost of access to space through greater innovation and drive towards technology refinement.

15. Ladies and Gentlemen, ISRO enjoys tremendous trust amongst our countrymen. This faith and confidence puts the onus back on the organization to raise the bar of its performance, scale greater heights and explore newer frontiers.

16. Over the past three years, ISRO has successfully accomplished an impressive array of 15 missions including CARTOSAT - 2B, MEGHATROPIQUES, RISAT-1 and a number of PSLV launches.

17. The entire nation is eagerly looking forward for the successful flight of the Geo-Synchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV), with the Indigenous Cryogenic Stage. The planned experimental mission of GSLV Mark 3 is a huge step forward in the development of heavy-lift space transportation system in the country.

18. Our Chandrayaan-1 mission made the country proud. I am also confident of the first Indian inter-planetary venture, The Mars Orbiter Mission, targeted for this year, to be successful and to place India into the ranks of the few Nations that have attempted such a feat.

19. Ladies and Gentlemen, for India to occupy its rightful place in the comity of nation, we must promote innovation and technological advancement. ISRO should be in the forefront of such a movement.

20. I am certain that ISRO, with its team of able, energetic and committed professionals, will meet the future scientific and technological challenges and continue to be a nerve centre of innovation and creativity. I wish ISRO every success in the missions to come. Let me conclude by saying that India's tryst with space will continue to evoke awe amongst many.

Thank you.

JAI HIND