

**Address by the Hon'ble President of India
Shri Ram Nath Kovind at the valedictory function of the Dr Vikram
Sarabhai birth centenary celebrations**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, September 25, 2020

It is my pleasure to address the valedictory function of the Vikram Sarabhai Birth Centenary Programme.

1. There are some people whose life and deeds lift our spirits. Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, 'Father of Indian Space Programme', is one of them. A man of singular charm, he was full of humility that masked his tall achievements. He was a world-class scientist, a policymaker and also an institution-builder – a rarest of rare combination. He achieved it all in a relatively short span of time, as if he knew his end was near. His life unfortunately was cut short too early. We wonder where India's space science would have reached if he could have served the nation for long.
2. Huge credit for his extraordinary personality goes to his family. His father, Ambalal Sarabhai, was not only a leading industrialist of his time; he was also a great philanthropist. Ambalal-bhai and his family were among the earliest supporters of Mahatma Gandhi when he returned to India and decided to make Ahmedabad his base.
3. After graduation from Gujarat University, Dr. Sarabhai went to Cambridge in 1937 for post-graduate studies. The Second World War forced him to return to India, but then he got the opportunity to study under the great Sir CV Raman. Later he went back to Cambridge for his PhD on cosmic rays, finally returning to India in 1947.
4. To continue his research, he set up a small laboratory at his beautiful home in Ahmedabad. That was the birth of what was to

become the cradle of India's space research, the Physical Research Laboratory. At PRL, he not only pursued his research but also trained the next generation of scientists. It is a testament of his visionary and dynamic leadership that this institution remains a living monument to his scientific endeavours.

5. As a scientist, Dr. Sarabhai was never content with merely noting observations. He always looked into the implications of the experimental data for a better understanding of the nature of the interplanetary space. Between 1947 and 1971, he published as many as 85 research papers in national and international science journals. He was also associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology of the USA as a visiting scientist.
6. With his warmth and winning smile, Dr. Sarabhai had a gift of making friends. One of his friends was Dr. Homi Bhabha, the pioneer of India's nuclear research. Both had spent the turbulent years of World War II at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore.
7. It is noteworthy that for both Dr. Sarabhai and Dr. Bhabha, science was not only an exciting journey in itself but was also a path to modern development for a country like India. When the whole world was using space for military domination, Dr. Sarabhai thought that for India with its immense size and diversity, the space technology is the suitable platform for fast-track development.
8. Dr Sarabhai's enthusiasm was fired up when the erstwhile USSR launched the first artificial earth satellite called Sputnik in 1957. He convinced the government that even India could go to the Moon. This led to the creation of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Dr Sarabhai had the uncanny ability to attract talent. He convened an army of brilliant scientists, anthropologists, communicators and social scientists from all corners of the country to spearhead the Indian space programme. One of my great

predecessors, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, was among them. He always remembered Dr. Sarabhai fondly and called him a great teacher.

9. Dr. Sarabhai was also a great pragmatist. He did not steer India's Space Programme on the lines of other space-faring nations. Instead of the incremental mode, he preferred leapfrogging. He was convinced that a developing country like India should directly plunge into satellite communication.
10. It is indeed a tribute to his foresightedness that he chose Sriharikota, a desolate island near Chennai, as launching station for future space missions. During my visit to Sriharikota in 2019, I was wondering as how Dr Sarabhai could look into the future and pave the way for his successors to develop Sriharikota as one of the world's best space ports.
11. Dr. Sarabhai wanted to demonstrate the usefulness of a satellite system for national development. He said, "I am a dreamer, and I dream of the day when India's masses will have their education through television. We may be able to do that through our satellite communications." Today, we realise the significance of his dream, when the Covid-19 pandemic has failed to interrupt school education which has continued in the remote learning mode.

Dear Friends,

12. From such humble yet ambitious beginnings, we have reached the stage where preparations are on to launch a human space flight. Mission Gaganyaan, slated for the 75th year of India's independence, speaks of the legacy of Dr. Sarabhai.
13. The government has paid a fitting tribute to the legendary scientist by announcing space sector reforms in the birth centenary year of Dr. Sarabhai. He famously said, "We must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to the real problems of man

and society.” When India strives to become more ‘Atma-nirbhar’, we realize the significance of his words.

14. He was convinced that the living conditions of the masses can be improved by creating institutions in which science and technology are properly nurtured. The city of Ahmedabad has been fortunate in having numerous institutions set up through his efforts. They include the world-renowned PRL and Indian Institute of Management (IIM). They also include the delightful Community Science Centre, which is the best example of promotion of the true spirit of science among children.
15. Offering a fitting tribute to the great man, the Department of Space and Department of Atomic Energy chalked out the year-long ‘Vikram Sarabhai Birth Centenary Programme’. Various events including lectures by eminent speakers, exhibitions and competitions for students were organised at around 100 places across the country. The ISRO also organised mobile exhibitions in many cities and villages. I am told the enthusiasm shown by people, especially the youth, has been overwhelming.
16. I take this opportunity to pay my tributes to Dr. Sarabhai, the great visionary son of India. I compliment the department of space and Department of Atomic Energy for organising today’s function. I wish you all great success in future endeavours.

Thank you,
Jai Hind!