

SANKALP LECTURE SERIES

Synergy for Advanced Networks, Knowledge and Academia–Industry Learning Progress
on Emerging Technologies and Technology Transfer

INAUGURAL LECTURE

The Chandrayaan Story

Date

16 July 2026, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. IST

Venue

We the Peoples Hall, UN House, 55 Lodi Estate, New Delhi, and Online

Keynote Speaker

Dr. S. P. Somanath

Distinguished Scientist and former Secretary, Department of Space and Chairman, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)
Vikram Sarabhai Distinguished Professor, ISRO

A joint initiative of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, and the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT) of UNESCAP

Why this story needs to be told

What does it take for a nation to reach the Moon on its own terms? India's Chandrayaan-3 mission answered that question definitively in August 2023, achieving the first soft landing near the lunar south pole and placing India among the foremost spacefaring nations in the world. Behind this milestone lie nearly six decades of patient institution-building, generational knowledge transfer, and an unshakeable conviction that indigenous scientific capability — built at home, by Indian hands and minds — is the surest foundation for long-term development.

This lecture is an invitation — to researchers, innovators, policy makers and students — to look inside that story. Because understanding how India built one of the world's leading space programmes from scratch is not just history. It is a blueprint.

Emerging technologies — AI, IoT, quantum computing, robotics, renewable energy — are reshaping our world at a pace never seen before. The question for every nation across Asia and the Pacific is the same: how do we build the indigenous capability to not just adopt these technologies, but to lead in them? India's space journey offers concrete, real answers. And Dr. S. P. Somanath, who spent nearly four decades at the heart of that journey, is uniquely placed to share them.

Lecture: The Chandrayaan Story

Dr. Somanath will draw on close to four decades of direct experience shaping India's space capabilities to offer an inside account of what it genuinely takes to build a national technology programme into a globally respected institution. This is a candid reflection on the decisions, setbacks, breakthroughs, and institutional investments that made Chandrayaan possible, and what they mean for any country pursuing ambitious technology goals.

The discussion will explore:

- What it felt like to lead Chandrayaan-3, Aditya-L1, and the Gaganyaan human spaceflight programme — the pressures, the failures, and the breakthroughs
- How ISRO invested in homegrown talent and created an R&D culture that could sustain innovation across generations
- The role of bold, mission-driven goals in pulling a nation's scientific community together
- How India reduced dependence on external technology and built self-reliant capability — lessons directly applicable to any country pursuing its own technology ambitions
- The National Space Policy and what opening the sector to private companies and startups means for the next generation of space innovators

The lecture will follow a fireside chat format and an open question-and-answer session. Participants are encouraged to put in their questions that matter most to their own work and aspirations in the chat box.

A Note for Young Scientists, Students and Early-Career Researchers

Every scientist who worked on Chandrayaan-3 was once a student, staring at the night sky, wondering if it was possible. Dr. Somanath's journey — from TKM College of Engineering in Kerala to leading one of the world's foremost space agencies — is proof that the distance between curiosity and the cosmos is shorter than it appears. This lecture is an opportunity to hear, directly, what that journey looked like from the inside.

What Participants Will Take Away

Participants will leave with a sharper understanding of:

- How mission-driven research organisations build enduring self-reliant technological capability
- How frontier research can feed back into national and regional development, creating spillovers far beyond the original mission
- Practical lessons for innovation policymakers, and capacity-builders across Asia-Pacific

Participants

The lecture is open to a broad community of stakeholders across the Asia-Pacific region, including policymakers and government officials, members of the academic and research community, innovators, entrepreneurs and startup founders, technical specialists, venture capitalists and investors, and students and early-career researchers in science, engineering, and technology.

Participants will come from various Asia Pacific countries. United Nations agencies, DSIR, CSIR, Educational Institutions and other relevant regional institutions will also be represented.

The Programme

Time (IST)	Session
10:30 – 11:00	Registration
11:00 – 11:30	Special Remarks Ms. Preeti Soni, Head, APCTT Dr. N. Kalaiselvi, Secretary, DSIR, and Director-General, CSIR, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India Mr. Stefan Priesner, UN Resident Coordinator for India Group Photograph
11:30 – 12:30	Fireside Chat Dr. S. P. Somanath, Distinguished Scientist and former Secretary, Department of Space, Government of India and Chairman, ISRO Moderated by Dr. Dinesh C. Sharma, Author, <i>Space: The India Story</i>
12:30 – 12:45	Questions and Answers — from participants in person and online
12:45 – 13:00	Closing Remarks and Takeaways Dr. Vipin Chandra Shukla, Scientist G, DSIR, Government of India
13:00	Lunch and Close

About the SANKALP Initiative

The SANKALP Lecture Series (Synergy for Advanced Networks, Knowledge, and Academia–Industry Learning Progress) brings together leading practitioners, scientists, and innovators to share the experience behind major technology journeys across Asia and the Pacific — from the laboratory to large-scale application. It is designed to inform and inspire policymakers, researchers, technology transfer professionals, entrepreneurs, and the next generation of scientists and engineers in equal measure.

Speaker's Profile

Dr. S. P. Somanath

Distinguished Scientist and former Secretary, Department of Space; Chairman, Space Commission; and Chairman, Indian Space Research Organisation (January 2022 – January 2025). Currently Vikram Sarabhai Distinguished Professor at ISRO.

With nearly 40 years in space technology and launch vehicle systems engineering, Dr. Somanath is among the principal architects of India's modern space programme. As ISRO Chairman, he piloted the National Space Policy, drove private sector and startup engagement in the space economy, and oversaw the commercial activities of New Space India Limited (NSIL). Key missions under his leadership include Chandrayaan-3 (first lunar south pole landing), Aditya-L1, XPoSat, INSAT-3DS, NVS-01, SpaDeX, the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV), the Re-usable Launch Vehicle Landing Experiment (RLV-LEX), the Gaganyaan Test Vehicle abort demonstration, commercial PSLV and LVM3-OneWeb launches, and Space Vision-2047.

Earlier roles include Director of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (2018–21), overseeing LVM3, Chandrayaan-2, and Gaganyaan systems; Director of Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (2015–18), completing the C25 cryogenic engine and conducting India's first electric propulsion launch on GSAT; and Project Director for the LVM3-X/CARE crew module atmospheric re-entry experiment (2014). He began his career as a project manager and integration engineer on PSLV.

Education: B.E. (Mechanical Engineering), TKM College of Engineering; M.E. (Aerospace, Gold Medallist), Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru; Ph.D., Indian Institute of Technology Madras; honorary doctorates from more than a dozen universities. Fellow of INAE, INSA, AeSI, and ASI; Member, International Academy of Astronautics; IAF Hall of Fame; National Aeronautics Prize; Space Gold Medal (ASI); Distinguished Alumni of IISc and IIT Madras; former Vice President, International Astronautical Federation; delegate to UN-COPUOS.

Moderator's Profile

Dr. Dinesh C. Sharma

Award-winning journalist, author, and science communicator. Author, Space: The India Story.

Dinesh C. Sharma is an award-winning journalist and author based in New Delhi, with a career spanning close to four decades covering science and technology, climate change, health, environment, and innovation for Indian and global media, including The Lancet and Wired. He was previously science editor at Mail Today and managing editor at India Science Wire. In 2008, he joined an international scientific expedition to the Arctic to report on climate change.

He is the author of the national bestseller *Indian Innovation, Not Jugaad*. His book *The Outsourcer: The Story of India's IT Revolution* was awarded the Computer History Museum Book Prize in 2016. His most recent book is *Beyond Biryani: The Making of a Globalised Hyderabad*. Sharma has been a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellow and visiting faculty at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and at Ateneo de Manila University, Manila.