Our distinguished Chief Guest of the day, Prof Bhalchandra Mungekar, Hon'ble Member of the Planning Commission,

Eminent Guests of Honour on the dais, Dr A B Mandal, Director of our sister laboratory, Central Leather Research Institute, Chennai and Mr M Poongavanam, Director, Bharat Earth Movers Ltd, KGF.

Other Guests of Honour in front, Mr R Swaminathan, Project Director, ADA, Bangalore, and Prof F T Puttaiah, Prof, Kuvempu University ,

My dear colleagues on the Dais, Dr Nayak, Mr Venkataswamy and Dr Rajendran

Distinguished Guests and delegates to the Conference from all over India,

My dear colleagues from NAL and other sister laboratories of CSIR,

Members of the media covering the event,

It is indeed a great pleasure to welcome you all to NAL on this important and historic occasion.

We have had many events and functions in this auditorium in the past, in fact, a good number of them in the past one year alone. But, believe me, today is a very special day.

It is a very special day because, for all of us assembled here, today is the time for triple or three fold celebrations:

The first celebration is of course the fact that today is the birth day of one of the greatest sons of modern India, Bharatratna Dr B R Ambedkar, the father of the Indian constitution, eminent jurist and educationist; and a committed social reformer. He was a champion of the under privileged and downtrodden population, particularly those belonging to the SC and ST communities, and worked ceaselessly for their empowerment. We pay our respectful homage to him on this occasion. Today is also the New Year Day and UGADI, Vishu for those who follow the solar calendar. Hence, Happy Ugadi and New Year to all of you.

The second reason for the celebrations is the fact that we are in the Golden Jubilee Year of the National Aerospace Laboratories, with this conference as one of the main events. The special year and the celebrations commenced in the month of June last year and will end next month. The Golden Jubilee celebrations are aimed at highlighting NAL's contributions to the Nation in the strategic area of aerospace Science and Technology. It is a time to feel proud of our achievements and to look forward to an exciting future with S&T adventures.

The third and foremost reason for celebrations is that more than 300 delegates, scientists and technologists from the SC and ST communities from across India, among others, have assembled here together under this one roof, for the first time in the history. They have come here collectively with their scientific papers, with great enthusiasm and hope, to celebrate the power of empowerment, to celebrate the ability of the enabling process, to celebrate the fruits of the struggle against centuries old mindless suppression and oppression, to celebrate the success of the means provided by a movement initiated and implemented by the Indian Government and

sustained by many leaders from both inside and outside the Communities irrespective of their political affiliations for six decades since independence.

I am sure some of you have presented papers in other more prestigious scientific conferences , both national and international. But those were in your individual capacities as scientists and technologists without any particular reference to your caste or creed. But here today we are speaking as a community, and showcasing our collective effort of scientific achievements and successes in a variety of fields, thanks to the process set in motion by our forefathers. It is also true that some of you have achieved your successes due to individual brilliance and personal effort. This is not to deny that fact. But many of us have been benefited from the hand holding which is so essential when one is kept shackled for centuries. We have hence gathered here to acknowledge that fact and proudly present our achievements which I am sure are second to none. I am also happy and proud that NAL is the organisation that has facilitated that, thanks to the initiative of my colleagues from the SC and ST communities in the lab like Mr Venkataswamy, Dr Rajendran, Mr Veerapathiran and their fellow members from the association and the enthusiastic support given by all my other colleagues.

NAL as an organization has always cared for the weaker sections of the society. It has about 258 employees belonging to the SC/ST communities of which 117 are scientists and technical cadres. This comes to just over 25% of the existing strength of the lab. They are spread out in all the Divisions of the Laboratory working shoulder to shoulder with their colleagues. Apart from implementing all the provisions legislated by the Government, we have introduced various welfare programmes and other measures to help the achievers from the community like the Ambedkar Training

Programme for unemployed ITI certificate holders, diploma holders, science graduates and engineering graduates, free training programme on Fibre Glass Composites Technology, Computer Software, Hardware and Network training etc to upgrade their skills and knowledge in these fields and the like.

NAL has been celebrating Dr Ambedkar's birthday for the past several years. During these celebrations, top ranking six SC/ST students who have secured highest marks in the SSLC examination in sciences subjects in Karnataka are invited along with their parents as guests of NAL for a period of 3-4 days, to kindle the interest in the bright young students in scientific and technological experimentation and also to understand the R&D programmes and day to day activities of NAL. These students are also awarded a cash prize of Rs.3000/- and a citation on the day of Dr Ambedkar's birthday celebrations. You will have this event in the inaugural function today.

I understand that we have delegates from more than 16 institutions taking part in this conference. In the three days starting today all of you would be proudly presenting your work and discussing them. The conference title itself may be somewhat misleading: National Conference on scientific achievements of SC/ST scientists and technologists. No, we are not discussing or debating whether SC/ST scientists have made significant or noteworthy contributions or not. There are no two opinions about that. What we are doing in this conference is to give an opportunity to the community to present their work together and make an impact. Please remember one thing - you have arrived and you have achieved. But there are a lot more from your communities waiting out there, waiting for an opportunity like you have got today to come and present your work infront of peers that they have not yet got. It is time to make space for them and encourage them.

We have a very distinguished personality amongst us today in Prof Bhalchandra Mungekar. We are grateful to him for accepting our invitation to be here with us on this historic occasion. He has a very difficult job to do as a Member of the Planning Commission – plan the development programmes of the country for the future, which is a huge task considering the size, diversity and the one billion population of the country with such a development assuring their economics status. He is also the President and Chairman of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study at Shimla. I undersand that he has to rush back there today for an important function tomorrow. I think he has made a great sacrifice for us today - he has come here to be with us – missing an opportunity to be with his grandson in Mumbai on his birthday which coincides with Dr Ambedkars. Sir, we thank you and also request you to thank your grandson on our behalf.

We are also grateful to the eminent Guests of Honour - Dr Mandal, Mr Poongavanam, Mr Swaminathan Prof Talavar, VC, Mysore University and Prof Puttaiah for accepting our invitation to deliver keynote and plenary lectures. Prof Narendra Jadhav, VC of Pune University should have been here , but unfortunately sent his regrets yesterday for not being able to be with us due to some un anticipated developments.

On this occasion a Directory of SC/ST Scientists & Technologists in CSIR Laboratories, compiled by the Organizing Committee with input from all the laboratories, is being released by Mr Poongavanam. This directory contains information about the SC/ST Scientists and Technologists of all the CSIR laboratories which will facilitate identification of scientists in various specializations in different laboratories.

We are grateful to Babu Jagjivan Ram National Foundation for providing support to the conference. The late Babu Jagjivan Ram was a leader of the masses a champion of the downtrodden, and a man with great political acumen. We are happy to have his blessings on this special occasion.

I express my sincere gratitude to Prof S. K. Brahmachari, DG, CSIR for his wholehearted encouragement and support.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we look forward to a great conference. Let us together make it a grand success.

Thank You.