

9 March 2009

**Director's Condolence address to NAL Officers and staff members
& Team SARAS on 9 March 2009 at NAL Lawns**

Dear Air Cmde. Mathappan, Commandant, ASTE, Mr Chidananda, Head, C-CADD, Mr Chandrashekar, Head, ESD and Dear friends,

On Friday last, when all of you reached home from Office, you would have been shocked to see the news item on your TV Channels informing about the crash of NAL's SARAS. I was on my way to the airport at Hyderabad to catch a flight to Coimbatore to take part in the Aerofestival with the Park College of Engineering as a part of our Golden Jubilee Celebrations when Dr HNV Dutt informed me of the sad news. I immediately rushed back to Bangalore reaching here by about 8 O'clock. Air Cmde Mathappan, Commandant, ASTE who was in Delhi also rushed back immediately reaching a little later.

It is indeed very tragic that CSIR-NAL's SARAS PT2 had an unfortunate accident during its test flying on Friday, the 6th March 09 resulting in the loss of the aircraft and its three flight crew, Wg Cdr K Praveen, Wg Cdr DK Shah and Sqn Ldr S Elayaraja of the Aircraft Systems and Testing Establishment (ASTE) of IAF. We are extremely saddened by the loss of precious lives of the three bright young and dynamic members of the IAF

family who, by their passion for and commitment to the SARAS programme, had also become members of the CSIR-NAL-SARAS family.

Wg Cdr Praveen, aged 36 and half years joined IAF as a pilot on 18 June 1994. He was posted to ASTE on 20 June 2005 and was a member of the SARAS test team. He took over as Chief of Test Team (CTT) on 31 October 2008. He leaves behind wife Tanusree Praveen and a 8-year old daughter Naina.

Wg Cdr D K Shah, aged 36 years, joined IAF as a pilot on 17 December 1994. He was posted to ASTE on 20 June 2006 and was a member of the SARAS Test Team. He leaves behind wife Pooja Shah and a two year old son Karan Shah.

Sqn Ldr S Elayaraja, aged 33 years joined IAF as an Engineer on 22 November 1996. He was posted to ASTE on 28 June 2004 and was a member of the SARAS test team. He leaves behind wife Sivasakthi Elayaraja.

Those of you who visited the AEROINDIA Air Show in February would have seen the impressive flight display of our SARAS aircraft. The display flight was commandeered by the same three officers.

On behalf of CSIR-NAL, I would like to offer our deepest heartfelt condolences to Air Cmde Mathappan and his colleagues at ASTE and to

the members of the bereaved families on this occasion. Our hearts go out to the members of the bereaved families. I and my wife, along with Air Cmde and Mrs Mathappan visited the bereaved families and personally conveyed our grief and sorrow on the loss of their loved ones. On hearing the tragic news, our DG, Prof Brahmachari along with Dr T Ramasami, Secretary, Department and Science and Technology, DST (one of the original sponsors of the SARAS programme) rushed to Bangalore on 7th morning to share the grief of the bereaved families and to show their solidarity with ASTE and NAL and their unflinching support to the SARAS programme. They personally met members of the families of Wg Cdr Praveen and Wg Cdr Shah, though regretfully they could not meet those of Sqn Ldr S Elayaraja as they had left for their home town by that time. They were deeply touched by the noble thoughts expressed, even in those moments of extreme pain and suffering, by the father of Wg Cdr Shah that “ their supreme sacrifices would be well served only if the SARAS programme would be a success”. We have received nothing but messages of condolences for the members of the bereaved families and solidarity and support for continuation of the programme from all quarters. This includes **Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, Former President of Government of India, Dr R A Mashelkar, Dr R Chidambaram, Prof CNR Rao, Dr G Madhavan Nair, Mr M Natarajan, Dr V K Aatre , Mr A K Baweja, all CSIR Directors, Director, ADA, Prof R Narasimha, AM Rajkumar, Dr Kota Harinarayana, Dr KG Narayanan, Adml. Raman Puri, former Directors** and a host of other friends and well wishers of NAL from India and abroad. I must also acknowledge the support from the media who

have generally been very sympathetic to our cause in their reporting. I would also like to convey my sincerest thanks to all of you for standing by us at this rather traumatic moment.

ASTE Commandant, Air Cmde Jose Mathappan and his colleagues were pillars of support and strength in this moment of deep crisis. They ensured that the wreckage was safely guarded and that other formalities with respect to flight data were observed until it was taken over by the DGCA team of officers, apart from making all arrangements for the gathering of the members of the bereaved families and bidding final farewell to the departed officers as per the IAF tradition. We are extremely grateful to them for their support. The DGCA team of officers along with our NAL and IAF members are doing the preliminary investigations and DGCA is expected to formally institute a court of inquiry as to the cause of the accident shortly.

I know how traumatic the last couple of days have been to you all, particularly those from the SARAS team, as it has been to me personally and I am sure to Air Cmde Mathappan and Mr Chidananda. Those of you who have built the aircraft piece by piece, component by component, it would have been heart rending to pick up the same pieces and components in a charred, burnt out condition from the wreckage of the aircraft. Those of you who were associated with tending to the aircraft, getting it ready for its flights, like a mother does in getting her child ready for school, it is hard to suddenly realise that the child is no longer there. Those of us who have interacted very closely with the flight crew, developed a personal

bonding with them, it is painful to absorb the fact that we will not see them ever again. These are very painful, emotionally disturbing moments for all of you, because in an institution like NAL we do not face such colossal tragedies. Hence they may lead to deep emotional scars, but time is a great healer and perhaps the only healer. But heal they must, because we have a job to do, and that must always be in our focus. We must not let ourselves be demoralised and demotivated.

We must all clearly remember one thing – we have set ourselves a goal – that goal is certification of SARAS by the end of 2010. Like a harnessed horse, only that goal should be in our vision, and must work to make that happen – only then the supreme sacrifice of our colleagues from Air Force would not have gone in vain.

As you are aware, CSIR-NAL was eagerly looking forward to procuring the order for 15 numbers of SARAS aircraft from IAF as its launch customer, to be manufactured at HAL, Kanpur . The SARAS team worked enthusiastically with their concerned colleagues from HAL and Air HQ towards meeting the IAF's requirements for the same and also completing certification requirements with two prototypes PT1 and PT2 and under production PSA. This unfortunate incident though a temporary setback for the programme, has only reinforced our resolve to meet our commitments to IAF with renewed vigour. Our DG and Secretary, DST have assured us their fullest support personally during their visit here on Saturday, and DG also conveyed to me the same from the Hon'ble Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences. He has also

kept the Principal Secretary and the Office of the Prime Minister informed of the incident. I, on my part as Director, have assured him that we would immediately review the position and come out with an action plan for putting the programme back on its rails. As our colleague Vineet said, it is time get back from the set back. I earnestly solicit the support and cooperation from all of you here in this endeavour.

Unfortunately, I also have another sad announcement to make. One of our colleagues, Mr Venkoba Rao, Group II(3) from the Engineering Services Division passed away due to cardiac arrest on 7th evening in the Manipal Hospital. He was 56 years of age and had served NAL/CSIR for nearly 25 years. He leaves behind his wife, two children (a son and a daughter) and aged parents.

We from CSIR-NAL pray for the departed souls and convey our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families, and pray that they be given strength to bear the loss of their loved ones.

Thank you

(A R Upadhya)
Director, NAL