The National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI), Hyderabad [under the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), New Delhi], a premier Earth science research laboratory of India completes fifty glorious years of its existence on its Foundation Day, 11 October 2011. Addressing themes of societal and strategic relevance apart from basic research in a wide range of Earth science disciplines, the Institute has contributed significantly in aspects of groundwater exploration and management strategies, exploration for hydrocarbons and mineral resources, earthquake hazard assessment and fundamental studies on the evolution of Earth’s lithosphere.

Since the latter half of 2009, the NGRI family led by Dr. V.P. Dimri (former Director) and Dr. Y.J. Bhaskar Rao (present Acting Director) has been planning the celebration of the Golden Jubilee Year (GJY), which is an occasion for reminiscing the momentous events over the last fifty years and planning future directions. The Golden Jubilee inaugural function was held at NGRI on 17th January, 2011 and this article presents the important events of the day.

The Inaugural Function was graced by the Director General, CSIR, Prof. Samir K. Brahmacchari, former Directors of NGRI as well as representatives of different industries and agencies that have been stakeholders of research at the Institute. The presence of esteemed former Directors, Prof. Hari Narain, Prof. Guptasharma, Prof. Harsh Gupta, Dr. D.C. Mishra and Prof. V.P. Dimri and their recapitulation of events during their tenures provided a glimpse into the tribulations and triumphs of the past, while an overview of the current research programs by the Acting Director highlighted the current capabilities and core competence at NGRI. T.R.K. Chetty described the Institute’s plans for the Golden Jubilee celebrations. It was indeed a touching moment to listen to Prof. Hari Narain, who had steered the Institute for nearly two decades during its formative years and nurtured it through its early development stage. Prof. Narain recalled his highly inspiring interactions with Smt. Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India at the inauguration of the Institute’s main building in its present campus in 1967. Sadly, it turned out that 17 January 2011 was the last public appearance of Prof. Narain, who passed away on 27th January, 2011.

In his inaugural address, Prof. Brahmacchari acknowledged that he felt privileged to be heading the CSIR at a time when many laboratories are celebrating their Golden and Diamond Jubilees. In spite of the poor state of the economy during the 1950s, the investments made in creating these institutions bear out the hope and trust that leaders, scientists and technologists, such as, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Prof. Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar bestowed on S&T as a vehicle to convert the country’s daunting challenges into aspirations. He reiterated Prof. Hari Narain’s comments that while the nation was investing in atomic research and exploration of outer space, there was perhaps an even greater need to study and explore the mother Earth and thus the immense importance of institutions such as NGRI. He was unequivocal in stating that NGRI had made stupendous impact in terms of basic and applied research in Earth sciences over the last fifty years and appreciated that many contributions of the scientists of this Institute have been well received across the world.

Prof. Brahmacchari listed several priority technology missions of the nation during the ensuing XII Five Year Plan. The missions, such as, self sustained energy, potable water to all, natural disaster mitigation would constitute the core challenges for NGRI in the coming years. Presenting Vision-2022 for CSIR, he emphasized on global benchmarking of our
research and the need for catalyzing innovation with industry to ensure technology development and transfers in niche areas as well as on a holistic planning to achieve end-to-end solutions. He stressed the need to nurture talent in trans-disciplinary areas enabling scientific entrepreneurship, leading to open and inclusive economic development. He also outlined the concept and structure of the newly established Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research (AcSIR) as a vehicle to create the necessary talent pool for the present and future, synergizing individual’s aspirations with the organization’s growth and the needs of the nation.

Earlier, Prof. Samir K. Brahmachari had inaugurated the Gashydrate Research Centre, a new facility in the Institute. He also released the following three books, which embody the diversity of research themes and expertise at the Institute.

- ‘Exploring the Earth... 50 eventful years of NGRI’ - Special NGRI Booklet.
- ‘Exploration of Gas Hydrates-Geophysical Techniques’ by Dr N.K. Thakur, Emeritus Scientist, NGRI.
- ‘Mathematical Analysis of Gravity Anomalies-Concepts, Algorithms and Computer Programs’ by Dr. V. Chakravarti, Scientist EI, NGRI.

The inaugural function also included an interaction with representatives from the industry and Government agencies who have played key roles in the growth of the Institute in a myriad ways. Dr. Bhaskar Rao presented an outline of collaborative and sponsored projects that NGRI had executed with these partners, while Prof. Brahmachari highlighted the CSIR’s multifaceted R&D dedicated to the nation’s technological and industrial development. He specially commended the idea of stakeholders presenting their candid views about benefits, lapses and future requirements, what he termed as ‘unconferencing’; a similar idea had led to the CSIR Technofest in Delhi during November-2010, which was widely acclaimed by the public. He also urged that CSIR Institutes need to be closely associated with State Agencies and Departments to be able to bring the fruits of science to the public.

Shri P.K. Bhowmik, ONGC, Dehradun; Shri A.G. Chhatre, NPCIL, Mumbai; Shri K. Ramdass, Coordinator Gas Hydrate Program of MoES; Shri P.B. Maithani, AMD; Shri Arun Sawant, MNRE, outlined how their respective organizations benefited from partnership with NGRI.

The Director General was presented with the NGRI Golden Jubilee Volume-1: Seismic Imaging of the Indian Continental and Oceanic Crust by Dr. P.R. Reddy.

During the Press meet, the DG elaborated on the fledgling AcSIR, the new flagship of CSIR. In context of NGRI, he explained that specialized courses on paleo-climate, water mapping, hydrocarbon exploration, geothermal energy management and such others, for which facilities at the Indian Universities are sparse, would form the focus of NGRI-AcSIR activities.