Prof. M.G.K. Menon headed the Indian Space Programme as Chairman, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), for a short but crucial period in 1972, when I was still studying in university. But I knew about Prof. Menon, who, by then, was a prominent scientist and science administrator in the country. Academically trained as a high-energy physicist, Prof. Menon has made yeomen contributions to scientific and technological domains in independent India.

Prof. Menon was associated with the Indian Space Programme right from its inception. He was a member of the Indian National Committee on Space Research (INCOSPAR), a national body of eminent scientists chaired by Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, set up by the Government of India in February 1962 for formulating India’s Space Programme. As a close associate of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, the architect of the Indian Space Programme, Prof. Menon was involved in many critical decisions taken during its evolutionary and formative years.

When Dr. Sarabhai suddenly passed away on 30 December 1971, the Government asked Prof. Menon to head the Indian Space Programme. This was in addition to his responsibilities at TIFR as its Director, Electronics Commission as its Chairman and Secretary of Department of Electronics, that he accepted the chairmanship of ISRO, and held that position during the period January-September 1972.

During his tenure as Chairman, ISRO and in subsequent years, Prof. Menon made immense contributions to steering the Indian Space Programme. He was instrumental in:

- Identifying and recommending Prof. Satish Dhawan for the post of Chairman of ISRO, on his return from sabbatical, and persuading him for the same.
• Organising activities at Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station (TERLS) and Veli Hills in Thiruvananthapuram and Sriharikota Range (SHAR) into one entity to give impetus to organised development of Launch Vehicles under the Indian Space Programme, naming it after Dr. Vikram Sarabhai as ‘Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre’ (VSSC), and identifying Dr. Brahma Prakash to take the lead as the first Director of VSSC.

• Integrating the activities at Ahmedabad, such as Microwave unit and Experimental Satellite Communication Earth Station (ESCES) into Space Applications Centre (SAC) and suggesting Prof. Yash Pal to be its Director.

• Carrying forward the discussions initiated earlier with Russia by Dr. Sarabhai regarding satellites, getting Government’s approval for building India’s first satellite ‘Aryabhata’, with Prof. U.R. Rao in the lead, signing the agreement for its launching onboard a Russian rocket, and moving ISRO’s satellite building activity from Thiruvananthapuram to Bangalore.

• Moving the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) at Ahmedabad, of which he himself was Director, under the umbrella of the Space Programme and identifying Prof. P. Lal as its Director.

• Also, most crucial, supporting Prof. Satish Dhawan in bringing ISRO under governmental framework (with its headquarters in Bangalore) towards ensuring sustained funding support for the Space Programme, commissioning the policy of Department of Space with Prof. Dhawan as its Secretary and Chairman of Space Commission, while continuing as Member of Space Commission.

As the years went by, Prof. Menon continued to make more and more key contributions to the Indian Space Programme.

• The National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA), which was established by the Government as an autonomous body under the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in 1975, had started making progress in the areas of aerial as well as satellite remote sensing. Recognising the need for giving fillip to these activities, especially keeping in mind the ensuing IRS programme, Prof. Menon, as Secretary, DST (1978-82), readily facilitated transfer of NRSA to the Department of Space.

• By the early 1980s, ISRO’s multifarious activities had started moving in full swing; the Indian Remote Satellite (IRS) programme had started off; and, ISRO had made an elaborate preparatory work to institutionalise remote sensing for management of natural resources and supporting developmental activities in the country, under the aegis of the Government of India – Planning Commission. Prof. Menon, in his capacity as Member (Science), Planning Commission (1982-89), chaired the Preparatory Committee of National Natural Resources Management System (PC-NNRMS), graced the mega-NNRMS National Seminar at Hyderabad that had participation of all stakeholders from across the country, and continued steering as well as supporting the cause all through further years.

These direct contributions of Prof. Menon to the country’s Space Programme apart, through his long and exemplary career-span as Scientist and Science Administrator, he supported and catalysed space research and space technology and its applications in the country for national development. We, the ISRO/Department of Space community, pay our humble, respectful tributes with utmost gratitude to Prof. M.G.K. Menon.