

# PM's 'gift', South Asia sat, to soar on Friday

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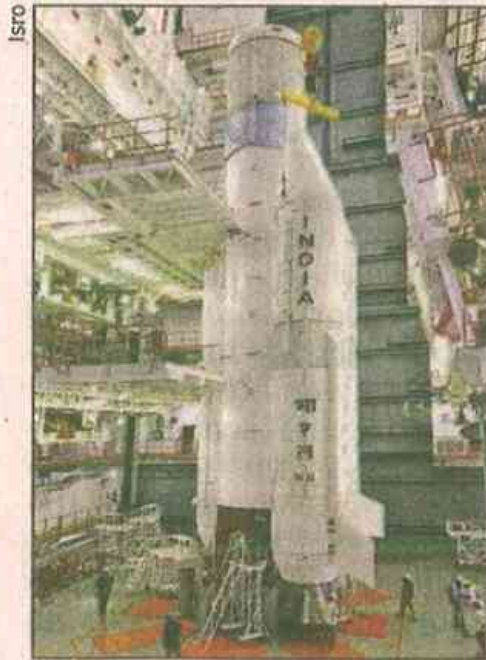
**New Delhi:** Weeks after assuming office in May 2014, PM Narendra Modi had surprised India's space scientists by asking them to develop a "Sarc satellite". Three years on, the satellite, now renamed 'South Asia satellite' after Pakistan opted out of the project, is set to take wings on May 5, taking Modi's space diplomacy to a new high.

Isro's Rs 450 crore commu-

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nications satellite (Gsat-9) will be India's gift to neighbours and marks New Delhi's attempt to get around troubled ties with Pakistan, which stalled the Saarc project.

The satellite, which will



Services offered by the ₹450cr satellite will be free for India's neighbours, except Pakistan

have a footprint across South Asia, will enable a full range of applications and services in the areas of telecommunications and broadcasting.

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# PM: Satellite a boon for region's progress

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With the launch nearing, Modi said in his radio address 'Mann Ki Baat' on Sunday that his slogan 'sabka saath sabka vikas' extended outside the country. He said the satellite would address the region's economic and development priorities. "There should be cooperation of our neighbours and there should be development of our neighbours too," he said.

Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have agreed to be part of this mission. Pakistan, whose proposal to invest in the project was rejected by India, backed out citing security reasons. It also said it did not need to be part of the initiative as it had its own space programme.

Pakistan has five satellites in space but lacks heavy duty launchers and satellite fabrication facilities. Af-

ghanistan is still to ink the deal as some technical problems have to be fixed.

"Natural resources mapping, tele-medicine, the field of education, deeper IT connectivity or fostering people-to-people contact — this satellite will prove to be a boon in the progress of the entire region," the PM said.

The South Asia satellite has 12 Ku band transponders, which India's neighbours can utilise to increase communications. Each country will get access to at least one transponder through which they can beam their own programming and there could be common South Asian programming as well.

On setting up ground infrastructure in each country for using satellite services, a senior Isro official said, "It will be done on the basis of mutual cooperation after the satellite's launch."

*(With inputs from agencies)*