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The Big Picture: Chief of Defence Staff: Role and Responsibility

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Recently, the Centre approved the creation of the post of **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** and **the Department of Military Affairs** as the fifth department within the **Ministry of Defence**. **General Bipin Rawat** will be appointed as the **country's first** Chief of Defence Staff. The CDS will be a **four-star General/Officer** who will act as the **Principal Military Advisor** to the Defence Minister on all tri-services (Army, Navy and Indian Air Force) matters.

Background

- Its creation was recommended in 2001 by a **Group of Ministers (GoM)** that was tasked with studying the **Kargil Review Committee (1999) report**.
After the GoM recommendations, in preparation for the post of CDS, the government created the **Integrated Defence Staff** in 2002, which was to eventually serve as the CDS's Secretariat.
- In 2012, the **Naresh Chandra Committee** recommended the appointment of a Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee as a midway to eliminate apprehensions over the CDS.
- The post of CDS was also recommended by the **Lt. General D.B. Shekatkar (retd.) Committee** (December 2016).

Role of CDS

- The Department of Military Affairs will also be **headed by** the CDS who will ensure the jointness in training, logistics and procurement of the three services. He will have the **salary and perquisites equivalent to a service chief**.
The three services, the Headquarter of Integrated Defence Staff, the Territorial Army, works relating to the Army, Air Force and Navy, and procurements exclusive to the services (except capital acquisitions), all will operate under this Department.
- The CDS will be the permanent **Chairman** of the **Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC)**. However, CDS will not exercise any military command over the three service chiefs, CDS will ensure coordination in joint operations.
As the Permanent Chairman of COSC, he will be a member of the **Defence Acquisition Council** headed by the Defence Minister and the **Defence Planning Committee** headed by the National Security Adviser.
- He will be the **military adviser to the Nuclear Command Authority** (chaired by the Prime Minister), which handles India's nuclear arsenal.

Service Conditions

- The Defence Ministry had recently amended the Army, Air Force, and Navy rules by allowing the Chief of Defence Staff to serve up to a **maximum age of 65 years**.
According to the existing rules, an Army Chief has a tenure of three years or up to the retirement age of 62 years, whichever is earlier.
- He will **not be eligible** to hold any government office **after demitting (resigning)** as the CDS.

Mandate of CDS

- **Need:** With the increasing complexity of security challenges in the modern warfare arena, there was a need for an integrated approach towards defence strategy. There are communication issues, budgetary overruns by individual commands, inter-alia which demanded joint working of Army, Navy and Air Force.
- **Jointness:** CDS will ensure and promote the **jointness** (functioning together of the three services independently) through joint planning of command operations, logistics, transport, training, communications, repairs and maintenance of the three services within three years of operation. This will ensure **close cooperation and collaboration** amongst the defence forces.
- **Integration:** There is a need for inducing integration (putting together the three Services at different levels and placing them under one commander) in different services. However, there is a **difference between integration and jointness** of command.
- **Lack of Resources:** CDS as '**first among equals**' will act as a **single point advisor** and could be held accountable for his actions and decisions taken. Restructured military commands for optimal utilization of resources will avoid **unnecessary duplication and wasteful expenditure**.
- **Expertise:** Being into the services for so long, the expertise and knowledge of CDS to deal with the adverse situations could be appropriately utilized in order to achieve the desired aims, creating an architecture for joint commands.

Responsibility of CDS

- CDS will administer the tri-services organisations/agencies related to **Cyber and Space**.
- CDS will look into monitoring of contracts, promoting the use of **indigenous equipment**, leveraging of current systems and transforming them, and prioritising the procurement of defence equipment in a better way.
- He will also **assign** inter-services prioritisation to **capital acquisition proposals** based on the anticipated budget.
- CDS will bring reforms to **augment the combat capabilities** of the forces and is expected to evaluate plans for 'out of area contingencies' for countries in India's neighbourhood.

Challenges

- Mandate for defence of the nation is still with the Department of Defence but the procurement process except capital acquisitions lies with CDS. This gives birth to dichotomy as on one hand CDS is expected to prioritise the expenditure between the three services but the wherewithal still lies with the Defence Secretary. Hence, the **budgetary power still lies with the bureaucrats** which demands timely intervention by the government.

- CDS has the mandate of **force planning** (planning associated with the creation and maintenance of military capabilities). **Changing role of warfare-** being more technology-oriented over rationalisation/rightsizing of manpower needs to be addressed properly.
- India faces frequent conflicts on its land frontiers. Balancing this realisation that **both maritime and air power are going to play an increasingly important role** in India's rise as a leading power will be among the initial strategic **challenges that would be faced by the CDS.**

Way Forward

- This is a major first step in the direction of changes but not the final step. CDS needs to work like war fighting advisor and executor through the joint commands. The single services must be evolved in a way so that it can **raise, train and sustain.**
- There will be **presence of civil and military officials** in the Department of Military Affairs but this raises a question of such presence in the Department of Defence. Hence, the **restructuring** of defence must be done in a **transparent manner** such that there is **cross-posting** of the senior military officers in the decision making in the Department of Defence as well.
- The creation of the CDS will need to be followed up with further reforms to reconfigure the armed forces to meet India's aspirations to be a global power.

This reform in the Higher Defence Management is expected to enable the Armed Forces to implement coordinated defence doctrines and procedures and go a long way in fostering jointmanship among the three Services.