

CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF TO AID SYNERGIES

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Bipin Rawat

In a major decision for higher level military reforms and tri-service integration, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday announced the appointment of a Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) who will be above the three service chiefs. The modalities are expected to be finalised in the next few months, defence sources said.

“I announce that there will be a Chief of Defence Staff going into the future who would be above the three service chiefs. This is going to make the forces even more effective,” he announced in his Independence Day speech from the Red Fort. The creation of the CDS will eventually lead to the formation of tri-service theatre commands intended to create vertical integration of the three forces. However, it is not clear if the CDS will be a four-star or a five-star officer.

Avoiding duplication

The CDS will be a single-point military adviser to the government and synergise long-term planning, procurements, training and logistics of the three services. This is expected to save money by avoiding duplication between the services, at a time of shrinking capital expenditure within the defence budget. “The Defence Ministry will constitute an implementation committee which will finalise the modalities which is expected to take few months,” a defence source said.

Given the time frame, the Chief of the Army Staff, General Bipin Rawat, could be the front runner to be the country's first CDS as he has tenure till December 31 and would be the senior-most officer after Air Chief Marshal B.S. Dhanoa, also the current Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), who retires on September 30.

Kargil panel

The creation of a CDS to act as a single-point military adviser to the Prime Minister on strategic issues was one of the key recommendations of the Kargil review committee on higher military reforms after the 1999 conflict. Despite much deliberation, the issue did not make progress due to lack of consensus and apprehensions from the services.

In 2012, the Naresh Chandra committee recommended the appointment of a Permanent Chairman COSC as a midway to allay apprehensions over the CDS. Currently, the senior-most of the three chiefs functions as the Chairman of the COSC but it is an additional role and the tenures have been very short.

The CDS is also one of the 99 recommendations made by the Lt. General D.B. Shekatkar (retd.) Committee which submitted its report in December 2016 and had 34 recommendations pertaining to tri-service integration.

Speaking to *The Hindu* on the announcement, Lt. Gen. Shekatkar said that with the fast-changing security and defence environment, this was the right moment for India to have a CDS. He said that during the Kargil conflict, if India had a CDS it would not have suffered so many casualties in the initial stages as the Indian Air Force took time to come in support and “so it was felt there is need for a central point authority who can advise the government”.

He added, "There are three different agencies buying the same thing. You are wasting the resources."

Positive impact

"The announcement of the institution of CDS by Prime Minister Modi has been made keeping in view of the much needed reform to streamline and further improve the coordination among the three forces and their functioning. CDS will have a long lasting and a positive impact on India's security," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in a post on Twitter.

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