

EVOLVING CHAIR: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF POST

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The Government on Wednesday announced the appointment of former Eastern Army Commander Lt. Gen. Anil Chauhan, 61, as the [next Chief of Defence Staff \(CDS\)](#), nine months after the untimely death of India's first CDS, Gen. Bipin Rawat in December 2021. He could be in office for almost four years. His appointment is until further orders, or when he turns 65. Lt. Gen. Chauhan will pick up the stalled process of transformation and reorganisation of the armed forces and bring in synergy that was envisaged along with the creation of the post. An ambitious component of the new vision is the proposed reorganisation of the armed forces into integrated theatre commands, which is yet to get the required consensus among military leaders. When the office of the CDS was created in 2019, its mandate was to ensure "jointness" of the three services in operations, logistics, transport, training, support services, communications, repairs and maintenance, within three years of the first CDS assuming office. That ambition was disrupted by [the death of Gen. Rawat](#), and then the delay in the appointment of his successor. Lt. Gen. Chauhan has served a range of command, staff and instrumental appointments including that of Director General of Military Operations, and brings hope and experience.

The nine months and changes in eligibility criteria it took before the appointment could be made point to the fact the CDS is still an evolving institution. The arbitrary changes which expanded the pool of eligible candidates for appointment as CDS may have diminished the dignity of the evolving office. In 2019, the Ministry of Defence was reorganised and a new department of military affairs was carved out with the CDS as its secretary. That did not, however, ensure clarity in terms of functions and roles across the Defence Ministry. The CDS is also the Principal Military Adviser to the Defence Minister and Permanent Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, which requires him to straddle administrative and operational functions. More clarity is needed regarding the functions of the CDS, particularly his relationship with the Service Chiefs in terms of operational roles and administrative duties. While the big focus is likely going to be the theatrisation process, the other tasks before him would be to bring in fiscal prudence and optimisation in utilisation of the defence budget especially given the tough economic outlook. The war in Ukraine has also underscored the need to accelerate the effort to build indigenous capacities in defence manufacturing and resilient logistical chains to be prepared for future wars effectively.

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