

## IAS officer heads DRDO as lobbying delays scientist chief's appointment

**Defence ministry sources say another reason for the delay is the search panel tasked with selecting a replacement is yet to zero in on a candidate**

**New Delhi:** India's premier defence research body, the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO), has been without a full-time chief for nearly a month now. The post has been lying vacant ever since former chairman Dr S. Christopher, who also served as secretary, Department of Defence (R&D), retired on May 31 this year. Christopher's term had been extended by a year in 2017.

Despite a ready list of contenders, including the senior-most officials from the organisation, the government has failed to appoint a full-time DRDO head. Instead defence secretary Sanjay Mitra has taken additional charge as chairman, DRDO, for three months.

The norm for the appointment is for the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), which is headed by the Prime Minister, to announce the incoming DRDO chairman, a month ahead of the incumbent's retirement. This was when the posts of the DRDO chairman and Scientific Advisor to Defence Minister were rolled into one. In 2015, then Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar separated the two posts.

Sources in the Defence Ministry said a search committee set up by it to pick the most suitable candidate has been delaying the process.

The list of contenders include the current scientific advisor to the defence minister, Dr G. Sathesh Reddy, and Dr Sudhir Mishra, director general of BrahMos Missile System Division, among other director generals (DGs).

Those in the know say there was no need for a search committee, and ACC could have done the needful from among the top DGs. One reason for the delay, sources said, was hectic lobbying for the post.

"One of the primary reasons for the delay has been the hectic lobbying by various clusters to get their own as the chief. There have been numerous reports to suggest the same, and it is not entirely incorrect. The buck stops with the Defence Minister and the ACC," a source said.

### **Not the first time**

This is not the first time that the DRDO is without a permanent chief. There have been instances in the past where the incumbent secretary of defence has held additional charge of the post, most notably when Parrikar cut short the term of then DRDO chief Avinash Chander in January 2015.

In this case, however, the ACC had enough time over the past year to zero in on an appropriate candidate while Christopher was on the extension. It is learnt that Christopher was hopeful of another extension this year too, but was not given one.

Just before his retirement, Christopher addressed an audience where he said his friends in Bangalore labs say he is a superman, while someone in Chennai called him Hanuman in reference to his energy levels.

"I just met NSA (Ajit Doval) now and he says this is no age to retire," Christopher had said in the address.

He did not respond on the issue when ThePrint tried to reach out to him.

DRDO officials are of the opinion that when crucial flagship defence programmes under Make in India are struggling, there should ideally not have been a delay in the appointment of a full-time DRDO chairman.

senior official said search committees have been set up in the past as well. "But seniority is often the criteria in this kind of selections," the official said.

But while it has not appointed a chief yet, the ministry Wednesday decided to enhance the powers of the DRDO chairman, saying he/she would now be able to sanction projects and procurements up to Rs 150 crore, up from Rs 75 crore. The sanctioning power of DGs too was increased from Rs 50 crore to Rs 75 crore.

## **The contenders**

**Dr G. Satheesh Reddy**, Director General (Missiles & Strategic Systems); scientific advisor to the defence minister. In terms of seniority, as well as overall experience of service, Reddy is the top contender. An aerospace scientist, he is known for his contribution to research in missile systems and towards the advancement of aerospace technologies and industries in India. One of the youngest ever scientific advisors to the defence minister, Reddy is known for leading the conceptualisation, design, development of inertial sensors, navigation schemes, algorithms systems, calibration methodologies, sensor models, simulation along with the development of satellite navigation receivers and hybrid navigation systems, as per information available with DRDO.

**Dr Sudhir Mishra**, Director General, BrahMos Missile System Division

An eminent scientist, Mishra has contributed extensively to missile technology. He had led the successful flight test of the BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile from a Sukhoi 30 MKI fighter aircraft against a sea target.

**Dr P.K. Mehta**, Director General, Armament and Combat Engineering Systems

Mehta is currently guiding a team of scientists under the armament cluster group of labs located at Pune, Ahmednagar, Nasik, Chennai and Balasore for design and development of armament and combat systems. Mehta had been associated with the AGNI missile programme from the start. He was responsible for the design and development of all critical ground support systems that were essential for the deployment of different AGNI variants.

**Dr J Manjula**, Director General, Electronics & Communication Systems, DRDO

The DRDO website says Manjula is a specialist in the domain of electronic warfare. She had been at the Defence Electronics Research Laboratory, where she was responsible for the progress of state-of-the-art technology development and systems development for the Tri-Services in the field of Electronics Warfare. She is credited with systems for operations in plains, semi-deserts, mountains, jungles, airborne and ship-based applications.

<https://theprint.in/security/drdo-is-yet-to-get-a-full-time-chief-as-lobbying-delays-appointment/76154/>



*Fri, 29 June 2018*

## **Missile test project clears a major hurdle**

*Law Ministry gives nod for relaxation of CRZ norm*

*By T Appala Naidu*

The Ministry of Law on Thursday in principle approved the amendment to Coastal Regulatory Zone notification 2011, permitting construction of a jetty in a creek in the Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary for the proposed Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) Missile Test Launch Facility in the Gullalamoda area of Krishna district.

At a crucial meet held in New Delhi, the ministry gave the relief to the defence project as a special case, paving the way for construction of a jetty alongside the creek.

Confirming the the ministry's decision over the phone, a highly placed source in the State government told The Hindu now that a major hurdle has been cleared, the project can be speeded up.

### **Vital facility**

The jetty, a vital facility to transport all the necessary material required for the construction of the missile test launch facility, will come up adjacent to the existing lighthouse.

According to the 2011 notification, ‘tidal-influenced water bodies,’ including creeks, backwaters, lagoons and the like, shall fall in the CRZ.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has sought a ‘Wildlife Management Plan (WMP)’ from the DRDO to grant Stage II clearance for the project.

The WMP is needed to ensure conservation and protection of the wildlife in the sanctuary.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/missile-test-project-in-krishna-district-clears-a-major-hurdle/article24283170.ece>