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Declining Scientific Temper a Cause for Serious Concern: DRDO's RCI Director

HYDERABAD: Regretting that there has been a decline in scientific temper in the country in the last three decades, India's one of the foremost scientists in navigational and avionics technology relating to missile development, Dr G Satheesh Reddy, however, is confident that the situation will reverse in the coming years.

The 52-year-old scientific adviser to the defence minister and director of DRDO's Research Centre Imarat (RCI) in Hyderabad, spoke exclusively to Rahul V Pisharody on scientific temper, scientific development and opportunities available to today's inquisitive youngsters. Excerpts:

When you took over as scientific adviser to the defence minister about eight months ago, you had spoken about bringing about a synergy between DRDO, armed forces and the private sector. How is the progress on that front?

The committees formed to formulate defence procurement procedures and guidelines on identifying strategic partners have submitted their reports. We will ask PSUs to publish online a list of all items which are being imported today so that industries can manufacture them in the country. We have made our test facilities open to our private industries. They cant invest in these facilities but have to work with there. Defence secrets will, however, be kept secret. Only the facilities will be made available to the private sector to work there. Interactions and negotiations are gong on. You may not see the results today but can see them soon.

What is the role of academia and students in the scheme of things?

We are trying to encourage them by giving good projects. We are discussing introduction of defence technologies in the curriculum of some institutes. We are also working on a mechanism to encourage innovation through an incubation centre in an institute or directly encourage an individual with a innovative idea and working in an academic institute or an industry. The mechanism may be ready in a couple of months.

To what extent is transfer of technology by foreign countries possible?

There are different scenarios here. If we just don't have a technology or a production base, then foreign company has to come here, start its own unit here and produce here. Or, if someone here has a reasonable good technology but insufficient infrastructure to come out with product, we are encouraging them to join hands with foreign companies, absorb the technology through joint venture and produce it here. Or, we have all the technology and infrastructure. Or, working on future technologies.

The new DPP says offset will no longer be applicable to defence deals worth less than Rs 2,000 crore from earlier Rs 300 crore. How can this clause help 'Make in India'?

In offset, we want manufacture along with sharing of technology. We are taking up case to case and working on each. In major contracts, at least 30 per cent of the production should be made here. In the case of items of small value, there is nothing much you can produce here.

IAF has a severe shortage of fighter jets and the government has decided to equip it with the indigenous Tejas LCA. Can Indian companies like HAL compete with foreign players?

Tejas is a good air craft and HAL is ramping up its production. HAL has taken the lead to produce Tejas and will continue to do so with other industries joining as tier-2 and tier-3 partners. HAL has its hands full.

Boeing and Lockheed Martin of US, Saab of Sweden, Dessault Aviation of France and Eurofighter are keen to set up manufacturing bases in India and even transfer technology. Will this not kill the domestic industry?

The encouragement to private industry in each sector will be very specific. The strategic partners committee has submitted its report. Partners will be identified for each area like aircraft, helicopters, ships, submarines and armed vehicles. These companies will be encouraged in that particular area to produce what we need. In the aircraft area, the industry will also involve in developing the futuristic aircraft.