

Govt revamps DRDO: Key body reconstituted, to set agenda

The reconstituted DSTMC is a high-profile body that will chart the future of DRDO laboratories in synergy with the science and technology department

By Shishir Gupta

The Narendra Modi government has taken its first steps towards restructuring and revamping the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) by reviving the defunct DRDO Science and Technology Management Council (DSTMC) under the chairmanship of principal Scientific Advisor K Vijay Raghavan and doubling the financial powers of the secretary, DRDO, to Rs 150 crore.

According to a July 3 notification accessed by Hindustan Times, the reconstituted DSTMC is a high-profile body that will chart the future of DRDO laboratories in synergy with the science and technology department.

The other members of DSTMC are secretary, DRDO; chairman, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO); chairman, Atomic Energy Commission; and secretaries of the department of science and technology, and department of earth sciences.

Instead of retired officers as in the past, chairmen of defence public sector undertakings like Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, Bharat Electronics Ltd, BEML Ltd and Mishra Dhatu Nigam Ltd are members, along with the directors of Indian Institutes of Technologies at Delhi, Kharagpur, Madras and Bombay.

This high-power Council will do a review of the functioning of all 42 laboratories of the DRDO and existing science and technology laboratories so that there is no overlap of work and synergy between the defence, space, atomic energy and educational institutions involved in high-end research. The Council will also decide on research and development priorities in the defence sector. This means it will be this council that will set the agenda for the DRDO to engage in top end technologies or functional day-to-day technologies.

The Council's recommendations will be sent to the defence ministry.

The Council will also look into personnel management of 7,500 scientists in the DRDO laboratories and explore the idea of lateral induction of talent for a limited period from IITs and other Indian institutions. The total strength of DRDO is 30,000 personnel with even secretary, DRDO, having limited financial powers. This has now changed.

According to another notification, the powers of the secretary, DRDO have been enhanced for sanctioning projects and competitive procurement to Rs 150 crore from the existing Rs 75 crore. The financial powers of director general (DRDO) have been enhanced from Rs 25 crore to Rs 75 crore. Financial powers of directors of laboratories have been enhanced from Rs 2 crore to Rs 5 crore. In single tender cases, the powers of secretary, DRDO, have been enhanced to 75 crore, DG (DRDO) to Rs 37.5 crore and lab directors to Rs 2.5 crore. The powers of DG for sanctioning research and development projects at universities and the indigenous defence industry have been enhanced to Rs 5 crore. The powers in case of post contract management and maintenance support have been delegated to DG (DRDO) on par with the armed forces.

"The setting up of the Council and the empowerment of DRDO secretary are all designed to boost indigenization and promote domestic industry to build high-end platforms in order to reduce global reliance for military hardware," said a senior defence ministry official.