Post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)

Why in News?

Prime Minister announced the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff to provide effective leadership at the top level to the 3 wings of the armed forces.

What is the office of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)?

- The CDS is a high military office that oversees and coordinates the working of the three Services.
- It offers seamless tri-service views and single-point advice to the Prime Minister on long-term defence planning and management, including manpower, equipment and strategy, and jointsmanship in operations.
- The role of the CDS becomes critical in times of conflict.

Is there any similar post in other countries?

- Most countries with advanced militaries have such a post, albeit with varying degrees of power and authority.
- The United States Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), for example, is extremely powerful, with a legislated mandate and sharply delineated powers.
- He is the most senior military officer and military adviser to the President.
- The Chiefs of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and National Guard too, are members of the JCSC.
- All, including the CJCSC, are four-star officers, but by statute only the CJCSC is designated as the “principal military adviser”.

Why had India not appointed a CDS until now?

- India has had a feeble equivalent known as the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC); but a toothless office in the manner of its structure.
- The **senior-most** among the three Service Chiefs is appointed to head the CoSC, an office that lapses with the incumbent’s retirement.
- The post did not further tri-service integration, resulting in inefficiency and an expensive duplication of assets.

When was CDS proposed?

- The first proposal for a CDS came from the 2000 Kargil Review Committee (KRC).
- The Group of Ministers Task Force that studied the KRC report proposed to the Cabinet Committee on Security that a CDS, a 5-star officer be created.
- In preparation for the post, the government created the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) in late 2002
- It eventually served as the CDS's Secretariat but remained as a yet another nebulous department within the military establishment.

What happened to the proposal?

- No consensus emerged among the tri-Services.
- The Congress, then opposition, was against the idea of concentrating too much military power in the CDS's post.
- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) opposed it subtly for the same reasons, and because it could disrupt civil-military ties in the latter's favour.
- Unlike the US and other western militaries, the Indian Services are not an expeditionary force, and for which a CDS is a necessity.

What is the case for having a CDS?

- CDS was needed to bring more coordination among the three Services.
- The KRC report said that India is the only major democracy where the Armed Forces Headquarters is outside the apex governmental structure.
- Long-term defence planning suffers as day-to-day priorities dominate.
- The Prime Minister and Defence Minister do not have the benefit of the expertise of military commanders, in order to ensure that higher level defence management decisions are more consensual and broad-based.
- The CDS is seen as being vital to the creation of "theatre commands", integrating tri-service assets and personnel like in the US military.

What are the arguments against?

- There's no clear blueprint for the office to ensure its effectiveness.
- India's political establishment is seen as being largely indifferent towards security matters, so they're incapable of ensuring that CDS works.
- Militaries by nature tend to resist transformation.
- In the Indian context, critics fear, the absence of foresight and understanding might end up making the CDS just another case of "jobs for the boys".

Who at present advises India's Prime Minister on military matters?

- In effect it is the National Security Adviser.

- This has been especially so after the Defence Planning Committee was created in 2018, with NSA as its chairman, and the foreign, defence, and expenditure secretaries, and the three Service Chiefs as members.

Source: The Indian Express

