

India's Higher Defence Organisational Structure Dilemma: The Way Forward

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Introduction

The present Higher Defence Management (HDM) structure in India is a product of partial and half-hearted implementation of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) decision of 2002. The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), a crucial element, remains unfulfilled, jointness/integration is a distant dream and the military vs. bureaucracy confrontation issue stands unaddressed.¹ This paper attempts to analyse the prevailing situation and suggests a way forward.

Parameters for a Viable HDM

The parameters used in formulating the structure are as follows:-

- (a) The National Security Council (NSC) directive of 17 May 2000. Please see **Appendix**.²
- (b) The CCS approved Group of Ministers recommendations on HDM.
- (c) The system as it has evolved since the CCS decision of 2002.
- (d) Naresh Chandra Committee report.
- (e) CDS is essential but with following caveats:
 - (i) Prime Minister (PM) Nehru's commitment to Parliament, in 1953, in introducing a UK type Defence Council concept.

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(ii) The bait offered under the Naresh Chandra dispensation, of a toothless Permanent Chairman Chief of Staff Committee, is considered impracticable.

(iii) Premature introduction of CDS would be catastrophic and will lead to a false sense of complacency among the uniformed fraternity.

Further, it is important to ensure an enabling environment before creating the post of CDS. For this it is incumbent to pass an Act of Parliament, similar to the US Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1984 – so that the system is not open to manipulation by the political/bureaucratic/military leadership of the time. In addition, the following steps and actions need to be taken:-

- (a) Introduce the concept of a Defence Council (DC).
- (b) Eliminate all ambiguity over the chain of military command, over Strategic Force Command (SFC), vis-à-vis National Security Adviser (NSA).
- (c) Re-designate Defence Secretary as the Principal Civilian Adviser to Defence Minister without upgrading his status any further.
- (d) Revisit the Ministry of Defence Allocation/Transaction of Business Rules 1961 and remove obvious anomalies. The CDS / Chiefs of Staff must have a formal role and responsibility for defence of the Country.
- (e) The CDS ought to be the professional head of the Armed Forces and the Principal Military Adviser to the Defence Minister and the Government.

The UK Model 1986

The Hastletine Reform (1986),³ in the UK HDM system, has been used as a model. The system in vogue, at the time, is illustrated at **Figure 1**. The DC is chaired by the Secretary of State for Defence (Defence Minister) with the respective service Ministers (Ministers of State), CDS, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Service Chiefs (COS), Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS), Chief Scientific Officer, Chief Procurement Officer and the Second Permanent Under-Secretary of State, as members. The Admiralty/

Army/Air Force Boards were chaired by the Minister responsible for respective Service with the COSs and their Principal Staff Officers (PSO) as members. It became the responsibility of respective Executive Committees to manage the individual Service affairs and execute all the decisions of the DC and the Service Boards.

Proposed Indian Model

The UK model has been used to suggest an HDM structure for India. Incidentally, it was also a term of reference in the NSC Directive of 17 May 2000 which is at the **Appendix**. The proposed HDM arrangement that has emerged in the process is illustrated at **Figure 2**. It would be observed that the existing system has been retained with a few changes. The main addition is the insertion of the DC and its associated Service Boards.

The core of the proposed HDM structure comprises the National Security Council (NSC) which is chaired by the PM with some of his cabinet colleagues and the CDS as its members. This needs to be institutionalised under an Act of Parliament. The NSC would be assisted by the following three institutions:-

- (a) **The NSC Secretariat** – will have the National Security Adviser (NSA) as its head. The Services and the bureaucracy are suitably represented herein. Like in the US system, the NSC secretariat would be required to prepare brief outline plans and coordinate development of National Security Policy and put up preferred options to the NSC. It closely follows up the progress of NSC recommendations through the CCS. It also monitors the implementation of the CCS decisions and regularly provides a feedback to NSC/CCS/PM's Office. The NSA is also the National Security Adviser to the PM/NSC and has the Intelligence Coordination Group under him.
- (b) **The Strategic Policy Group (SPG)** – with the Cabinet Secretary in the chair has among others the VCDS, Vice Chiefs of the three Services and various Secretaries of the Government of India as members.
- (c) **National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)** – is a rotating think tank with eminent scientists, academicians, economists, retired civil servants/defence officers and analysts etc. as members.

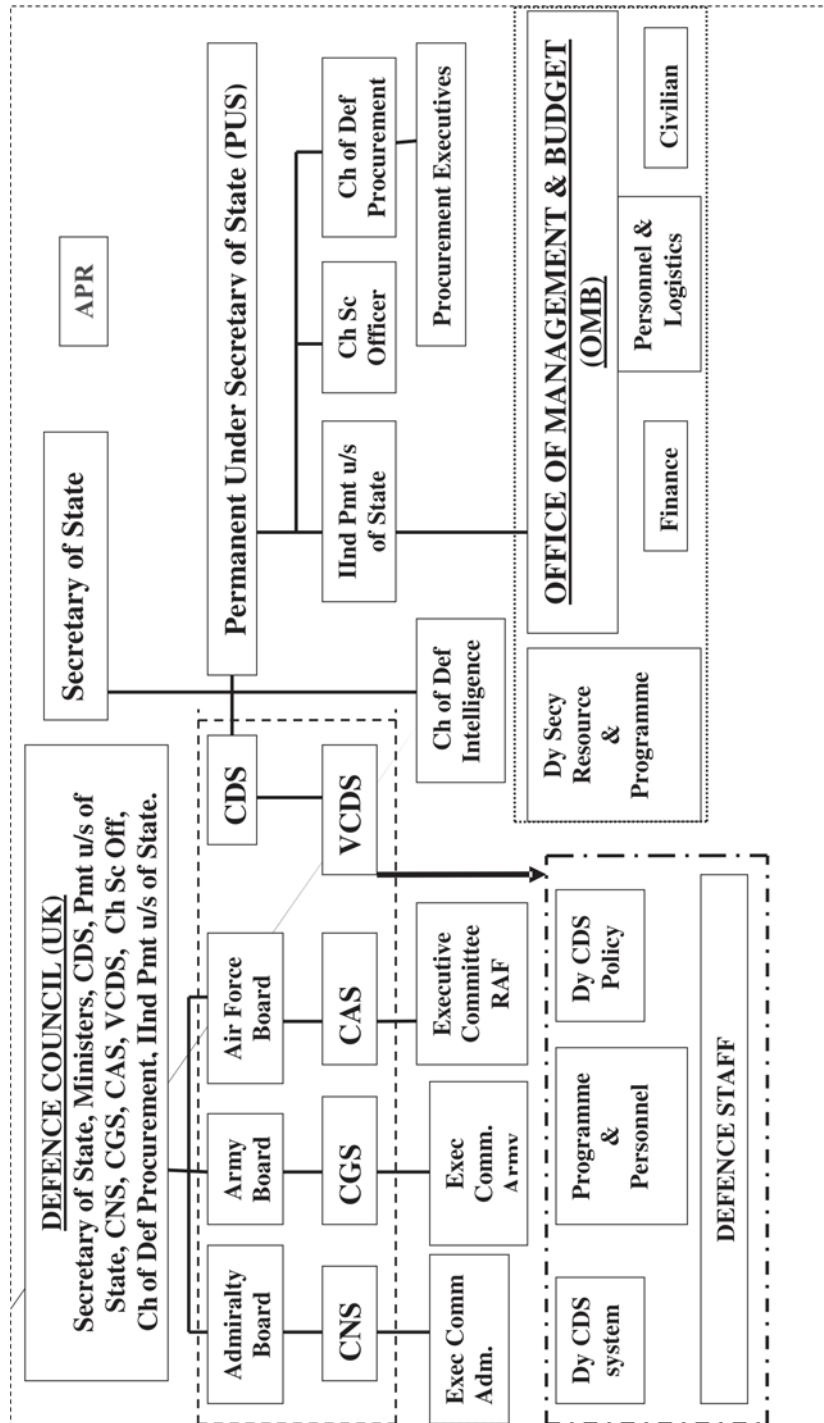
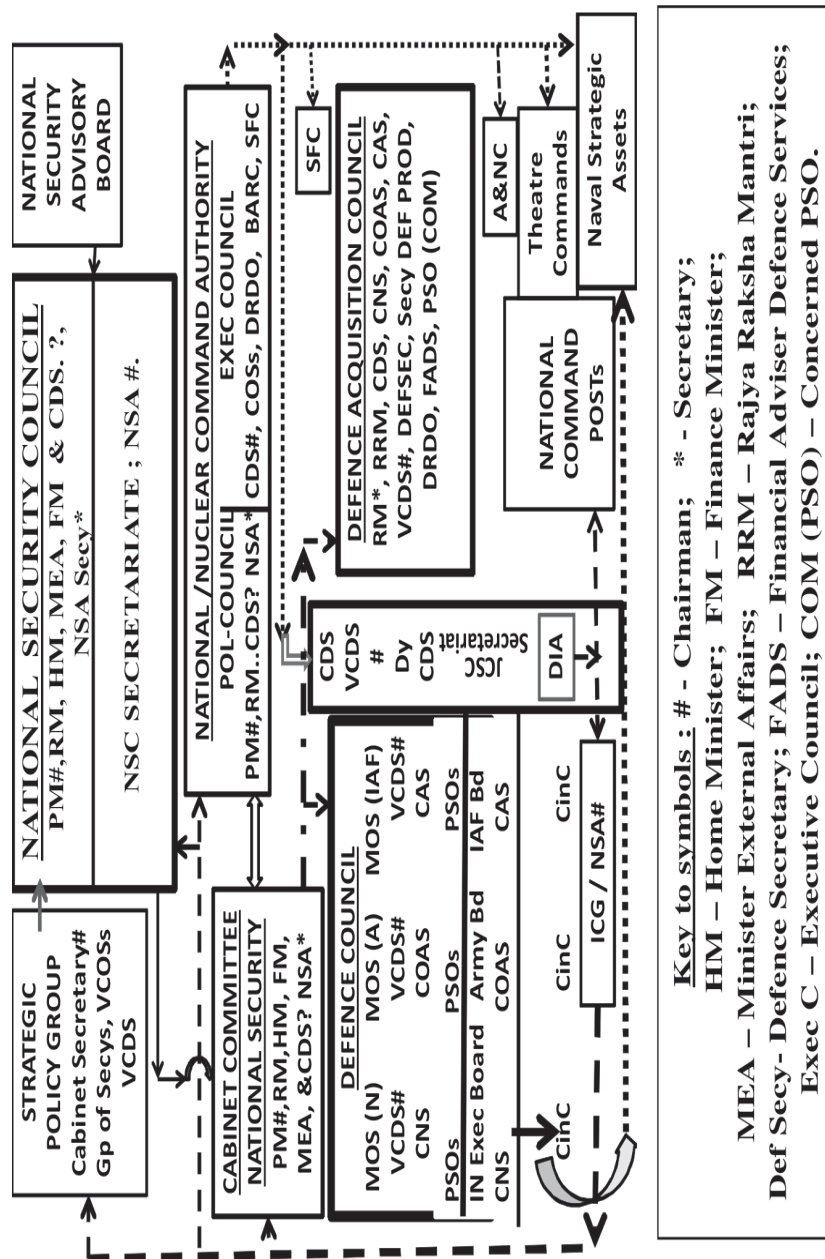


Figure 1 : Post Hastleline Review - 1986



Under the above scheme – the proposals along with NSC recommendations would be put up to the CCS for approval. The CCS is chaired by the PM – the CDS is available for consultation. The attendance of CDS is justified due to the inherent inadequacies in the Indian environment.⁴ The CCS decisions are taken forward by the Raksha Mantri (RM)/National Command Authority (NCA)/DC/DAC, as appropriate. The Service Chiefs will continue to have direct access to the PM/RM and may be called upon to attend CCS and NSC meetings, when required.

The NCA with the PM in the chair is the sole entity empowered to authorise use of nuclear weapons. In the structure proposed here – the NCA comprises the Political Council and the Executive Council. The Executive Council carries forward the NCA decisions and is chaired by CDS. The COSs, SFC, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) are members of the Executive Council.⁵

In the existing system, the role of the NSA as the projected chairman of the Executive Council of the NCA has been a bone of contention with the military establishment from the very inception. On the issue, there was so much of hue and cry in the public domain that on 6 February 2005 a press clarification had to be issued.⁶ Since then the issue had been lying dormant. It seems to have resurfaced in the context of INS Arihant (nuclear submarine).

In the above context, interestingly, late Shri Brajesh Mishra, the first NSA, is reported to have said that a powerful NSA, who is not accountable to Parliament, is not acceptable in the Indian system.⁷ He further added that, at the time the NCA was formed, the government never envisaged the NCA Executive Council to be headed by the NSA.

The NCA Executive Council (EC) is meant to take forward the decisions of the Political Council. On the same rationale as for the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) and the proposed DC, where RM is the chairman - the EC of the NCA could also have been chaired by the RM. How an erstwhile bureaucrat nominee can be put in that position is not at all logical. The NSA has no constitutional position or legal authority to issue executive operational orders to the military/SFC. Under the present dispensation, in the absence of a CDS he seems to have assumed the role of the latter with attendant ramifications. The handling of

the crisis emerging from the terrorist attack on Pathankot Air Base is a case in point.

The institution of NSA was presumably born out of the US NSA concept. Though the US NSA is generally perceived as a very powerful entity – in fact the NSA does not figure anywhere in the US chain of command. Such an improvisation created to solve what is apparently a lacuna in the Indian political *DNA* – could result in generating fresh fault lines in the traditional military command and control arena. Under the umbrella of secrecy – we are likely to once again produce another monster that we may not be able to contain.

Half of the proposed overall HDM organisation is already serviced by the DAC subset and the linked Boards dedicated to Acquisition/Defence Production/Research and Development functions. To complete PM Nehru's commitment to the Parliament – what remains, is the commissioning of the DC. The DC chaired by RM and assisted by the respective Service Boards will be responsible for ensuring efficient functioning of the Armed Forces.

In the proposed structure considered here, a substantial portion of the Cabinet Committee decision of 2002 has been retained. Several checks and balances are embedded into the system. At one stage, the smaller Services had a genuine fear of losing their identity and their specialised skills – being subsumed under an overwhelming olive green culture. To safeguard this fear – the CDS is to be appointed on a rotational basis – as is done presently, in the case of the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). At the same time, to maintain a balance, the VCDS must have a minimum tenure of two years.

Also, in cases when the CDS is from the Navy or the Air Force, the VCDS necessarily has to be from the Army. The centrality of the VCDS in the system should also not be missed. To provide for continuity, VCDS is not only the Secretary to the COSC, he is also the head of the COSC/CDS secretariat and coordinates the working of the functional heads, for example Deputy CDSs (Policy, Planning and Force Development)/(Doctrine and Training)/ (Intelligence), etc. A Deputy CDS (Logistics) has been added here to facilitate implementation of the integration of logistics and the Revolution in Military Logistics (RML), which is a fundamental necessity. VCDS is also the secretary of DC and a

member of the respective Service Boards. This would maintain the inter-service equation in equilibrium and provide continuity in situations where the tenure of the CDS is inadequate, due to the rotating nature of the chair.

The tiered intelligence sharing arrangement with the National Command Post (NCP), CCS, SPG and NSC have been shown. The interactive process between the NSC, CCS, NCA, NCP, SPG, NSAB, the SFC and Theatre Commands etc. have also been illustrated.

It would be observed that the CDS is represented, at the apex level, in all the defence related decision making bodies. This is essential in the Indian environment.⁸ All the COSs and VCDs are members of the DC, DAC and SPG. The Army's huge size and role differential (i.e. not expeditionary in nature compared to all major powers) has been factored in.

The reason for the DC model not seeing the light of day, so far, can be attributed to the then COSs not being in favour of such an arrangement. They were opposed to their Principal Staff Officers (PSOs) being directly exposed to the respective MOS, on a regular basis. To achieve military-cum-bureaucracy amity, such fears have to be shed.

The launching of the DC, therefore, should under no circumstances be delayed any further. In the absence of the CDS, as an interim measure, it is proposed that the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (CIDS) be upgraded to a four star flag officer with two hats; one as the Secretary to the COSC and the other as the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) with independent charge of SFC and other Unified/Specified/Special Forces/Andaman and Nicobar Commands etc.

Coordination of military's participation in National Disaster Management is part of CIDS's charter too. For the second function he would be directly responsible to the DC for staff and administrative roles and to the NCA through the Chairman COSC for operational matters. The elevation in rank of the CIDS and adopting an unorthodox dual cap solution has been necessitated by:-

- (a) Insufficient progress having been made, in implementing the CCS decision of 2002.

- (b) To meet the inter-service rivalry, turf war and overcome the infirmity of the Chairman COSC to intervene affirmatively, the DC would have to regularly review the progress and arbitrate, to resolve the priorities.
- (c) The compulsions arising out of delay in the appointment of a CDS.
- (d) In any case, the structure in its stabilised state would have VCDS in the rank of a four star flag rank. This is the prevailing practice even in the case of a small organisation, as in the UK.
- (e) The employment of one authority having to wear two hats, in such circumstances, is not an uncommon occurrence in other countries - with a high degree of success.

Way Forward

The ultimate objective would be to adopt the universally accepted practice of further streamlining the HDM structure by embracing the concept of three functional divisions:-

- (a) Operations Division.
- (b) Staff Division.
- (c) Support Division.

The above is typically represented by the UK organisational structure of mid-20th century.⁹ Considerable improvements in efficiency and financial saving have been reported by all countries that have adopted similar dispensation.

Intra-Service Quandary

Resistance to change is a natural phenomenon. Army's *Transformation Study Report* and Navy's *User Maintainer Concept* fell victim to parochial vested groups, from within. With minimal structural changes, the Navy's existing system can easily be tweaked to accommodate the changes to get to the ultimate solution.¹⁰

There is a misconception that interchange of personnel between the MoD and Service HQs per se is the ultimate solution. The dismal performance of the Directorate of Standardisation,

working as a part of the MoD for the last half a century and the non-productive results from the Service Technical Managers working under the Secretary Acquisition, are clear indications of what to expect from such a solution.

The really successful defence model of an integrated organisation is the Director General Advance Technology Vessel (DGATV) under the DRDO umbrella. The model has worked smoothly with a professional team, predominantly comprising of naval personnel, with integrated finance and commercial support. DGATV is also fully empowered and designated a *Secretary to the Government*. This is a model to be emulated. The success is also attributable to the embedded cross links with the top political leadership, NHQ, DAC, DRDO, BARC and its private sector partners

In context of those who consider using of alien role models as objectionable – one must not forget that the genesis of the present structure itself is of colonial inheritance. Use of the UK model, as a benchmark here only follows the NSC directive on the subject.

Conclusion

The principal of overall structure has been outlined here and the first phase has been detailed. If implemented seriously, the first phase should lead to CDS being in the saddle in a couple of years. The political leadership has to bite the bullet and take the lead role same as done by all the major global players. In parallel, the intra-service reforms need to be pursued in earnest by the respective Services. In that context, a degree of integration between the Services is a *sine-qua-non* without which the desired degree of hard power synergy cannot be achieved. Army must take the requisite initiatives to set the ball rolling. Only then shall we be able to go forward.

Endnotes

¹General NC Vij, *Twentieth Colonel Pyaralal Memorial Lecture*, USI 28 Sept 2016.

² Para 2 (a) of NSC directive C-180/1/2000-NSCS (CS) OF 17 May 2000

³ Rear Admiral AP Revi, *Restructuring India's Military – Out of Box Option*, Chapter 2, pp. 96-120, Gyan Book Pvt. Ltd, June 2012, Global scenario on the phased development of HDM systems discussed in depth.

⁴ AP Revi, *Fault lines in the Civil Military Framework in India & the Way Forward*, Defence Studies vol. 14 issue. 2, June 2014, p 136.

⁵ Dr R Chidambaram, 'Clarification on Role of NCA Executive Council', Pioneer newspaper, Delhi. (6 Feb 2005).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Brajesh Mishra, former NSA, <www.dnaindia.com/india/1336787/report-scrap-nationalsecurity-advisor-s.post-brajesh-mishra>. Accessed 23 May 2013.

⁸ Revi, *loc.cit.*, p 136.

⁹ Rear Admiral Revi, *op.cit* Figure.2.20, p.106, 2012

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Figure 6.46, p 234, 2012

There have been reports in the media that some reforms in the Defence Sector are under active consideration of the Government. One of these reports appearing in the Mail Today, New Delhi, December 28, 2016 said, ".....a position of similar stature (COAS) to be created soon, sources told Mail Today on Tuesday."

Though a speculation so far, it is quite possible that some such measure may be announced by the Government by the time this Issue of the Journal reaches the readers. In the event, the article "*India's Higher Defence Organisational Structure Dilemma : The Way Forward*" by Rear Admiral AP Revi (Retd) may appear dated. However, the above article analyses the logic and necessity for reforms in the Higher Defence Organisation which have become overdue; hence the article would still be relevant to the general discourse on this important issue which concerns national security.

Editor

Appendix

No. C-180/1/2000-NSCS(CS)
Cabinet Secretariat
(National Security Council Secretariat)

New Delhi, May 17, 2000

Subject : Task Force for Review of the Management of Defence

It has been decided with the approval of the Group of Ministers (GOM) constituted vide Cabinet Secretariat letter No.141/2/1/2000-TS dated April 17, 2000 to set up a task force to review the management of defence and, in particular, to consider the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee in this regard and formulate specific proposals for GOM's consideration.

2. The terms of reference of the task force shall be as under:-

(a) To examine existing organisations and structures and recommend such changes, as considered necessary, for improving the management of the country's defence. Since accountability to Parliament constitutes the basic feature of Government of India, the task force, while making its recommendations, will examine the evolution and the changes in this respect that have taken place in other parliamentary democracies. In particular, the UK model should be studied closely.

(b) While considering (a) above, to also examine the changes required in the management structure in the emerging security scenario having regard to the nuclearised environment, revolution in military affairs, information revolution and other similar developments.

(c) In the context of (a) and (b) above, to examine the apex decision making structure and the interface between the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces Headquarters and recommend appropriate measures for redressing such deficiencies as may be identified; in this process the task force may also recommend measures for more efficient coordination between the political executive, the various departments of the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces as also to examine the desirability, necessity and modalities of setting up an integrated command structure for the Armed Forces.

(d) To recommend such organisational and other changes as considered appropriate to bring about improvements in the procurement processes. While making its recommendations, the task force will also keep in view the imperative of ensuring accountability for proper expenditure of public funds, as also the need to have time bound decisions.

(e) To recommend measures for improving cost-effectiveness in management of defence.

(f) To examine impediments to modernisation and to recommend appropriate measures for their removal and in this context, to examine how a true partnership can be established between the Services and the DRDO so as to ensure that the latter gets full backing and funding from the Services and the former get the indented equipment they require without delay.

(g) To examine the issue of developing interface and synergy between the Civil and Defence, Research, Development and Production facilities.

(h) To consider measures for development of country/region specialisation along with language skills and to recommend steps for networking with think-tanks.

3. The composition of the task force will be as under:-

Shri Arun Singh	- Chairman
Vice Admiral (Retd) PS Das, PVSM, UYSM, VSM	- Member
Lt. Gen. SS Mehta, AVSM*, VSM	- Member
Air Marshal TJ Master, AVSM	- Member
Vice Admiral A. Prakash, AVSM, VrC, VSM	- Member
Shri Narendra Singh Sisodia	- Member
Shri Dharendra Singh - Member	Shri SK Misra - Member
Dr AS Bains	- Member
Shri G Prakash	- Member
Vice Admiral Madanjit Singh, AVSM	- Member
	Secretary

4. The task force may engage such consultants for its assistance as it may consider essential with the concurrence of the NSCS.
5. The task force should interact with key officials from all concerned Ministries/Organisations/Agencies, the other three task forces set up by the GOM and such experts as it may wish to consult. The task force may also review earlier reports on the subject commissioned by the Government, if considered relevant.
6. The task force will submit its report/reports within 3 months from the date of its constitution. The task force may also submit interim reports for urgent consideration of the GOM, if considered expedient.
7. The task force will be serviced by the National Security Council Secretariat which will also provide it requisite facilities and administrative/secretarial support.

Sd/-
(Satish Chandra)
Secretary, NSCS