Defence Technology Commission expected to be set up soon

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT (**Courtesy**: The **Hindu**)

The Defence Technology Commission envisaged by the Union government to provide a thrust to indigenous research and development of contemporary and futuristic defence systems is expected to be set up soon, V. K. Saraswat, Director-General of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister said on Friday.

Addressing a press conference after launching the DRDO-IIT-M Research and Innovation Centre at the IIT Madras Research Park, Taramani, Mr. Saraswat said the constitution, empowerment and functions of the Commission had reached a stage of finality and “we’re awaiting approval of the government.”

Apart from increasing self-reliance in development of defence systems, the Commission also envisages setting up a commercial arm for the promotion of DRDO products, some of which have civilian applications ranging from Dengue test kits to mosquito repellants. The DRDO has already drafted in FICCI to actively market a broad portfolio of DRDO products, Mr. Saraswat said.

The DRDO chief also offered an overview of several DRDO products that were in final stages of development or under field testing and expected to give a cutting edge to the weaponry of Army, Air Force and Navy by 2013-14.

The DRDO pipeline includes sub-sonic cruise missiles that can be launched across multiple platforms - ground, air and ship - a range of tactical missiles and next generation Future Main Battle Tanks that are more agile, have higher firepower and loaded with stealth factors.

“We have also started a project on National Mission on Development of a Power Plant and Transmission System on the tank,” he said.

According to the DRDO chief, the country had developed robust ballistic missile defence systems and achieved almost 90 per cent indigenisation in product content.

Phase I of the programme involved developing missiles that could engage targets up to a range of 2,000 km and Phase II focused on systems that could achieve precision strikes beyond that range, he said.

On the aeronautical front, indigenously developed Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas and its Naval variant were in advanced stage of development while Rustom, the Medium Altitude Long Endurance Unmanned Combat Air Vehicle (UCAV), was likely to take to the skies by 2014-15, Mr. Saraswat said.

On the Research and Innovation Centre set up in collaboration with IIT-Madras, Mr. Saraswat said it would focus on “high-end and directed research” involving DRDO projects. Among the nearly a dozen DRDO projects that have been identified as common ground of interest for DRDO scientists, IIT faculty and research students involve materials, cyber security, image processing and aerospace applications.

IIT-Madras director Bhaskar Ramamurthi said the IIT, which had a long history of collaboration with the DRDO, including the recently-trialled submarine-launched K-15 missile, envisaged the joint innovation centre as a tripartite partnership that would also involve regional industry. The facility was set up at an estimated cost of Rs. 47 crore.