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IRS sets stage to play leading role in Indian R&D space

Indian Register of Shipping (IRS), the ship classification society of India that was recently bestowed with full membership to the elite group of International Association of Classification Societies (IACS), is busy getting ready to become a premier institution of research and development (R&D) catering to all industries in the country.

The company is on the verge of signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Houston-based Viswa Lab. The Lab, headed by Dr R Vis, is an entrepreneurial team of scientists, engineers, and support professionals with a long-standing reputation for technical excellence in the field of fuel oils, lubes, hydraulic oils, environmental analysis, non destructive evaluation (NDE), and failure analysis. The lab also boasts of facilities in Singapore, Houston and Antwerp.

According to Dr R Vis, director of Viswa Lab, the joint venture programme, initially called IRS Viswa R&D Initiative, when rolled out, is envisaged to address the scientific, engineering, and technology applications across industries.

Talking about the joint programme, Captain JC Anand, chairman of IRS, said, "Viswa Lab will help us to update on R&D activities.

It will also bring people who will help build this organisation and our people will learn. The joint venture will be a separate division altogether and we will do a lot of research."

Talking about the vision behind the coming together of two companies, which over the years have established high credentials on the quality front, Dr Vis said, "The vision is to make IRS the premier R&D institution catering to all kind of industries in the country. My dream is to make it join the big league of R&D companies in the US like Battle Lab, SAIC.

"We will select the right people, identify the technologies and the areas where we want to be. In addition to being associated, I also see lot of R&D in the US which could be diverted to India for mutual benefit. If things work out nicely, there could also be a mentor strategy arrangement between those big institutions there and IRS here.

If that happens, then the free flow of technology will begin. We actually see it as a great opportunity," he added.

Talking about the R&D scenario prevailing in India, Dr Vis, who is a leading marine technocrat who has been associated with various R&D institutes in the US, including NASA, said that it is scattered over several institutions.

"There is no centralized effort except where it belongs to the government like CSIR, IIS, IITs. These institutions are very capable, have very good people. But there is a bit of bureaucracy. Here we are talking about R&D where there is a commitment to time, to quality. There is something to be delivered; only then it will have a meaning. These are the things from the commercial side that we are bringing on to the table," he said.

According to the sources close to the development, they have already identified some of the areas to act upon. Besides shipping, the areas of high potential are aerospace, alternative energy, alternative fuels, biotechnology, electronics, and offshore.

For example, pointed out Dr Vis, in aerospace engineering there are so much of electronics and control systems. As IRS is already involved in inspection, qualifying people, certifying organizations there are so many activities in these areas where it can help the industry to grow. Really, sky is the limit and I find no reason why IRS cannot be in all those areas," he added.

"My interest will be to get as much local talent as possible. But I will also bring some on assignments. For example, some Indians in the US are willing to move back to India. If they meet our criteria and IRS likes them, we will have them too," he said.

Talking about the initial investment for the venture, Dr Vis and Capt Anand said that they have not really talked on those lines. "We met in Germany and had a couple of meetings. After the MoU, we will prepare a project report in a few months. Once it is approved by the IRS board, we will kick start the joint initiative," they said in unison.

"With IACS membership, we came to have enormous responsibilities and we are looking at Dr Vis to help us to explore and exploit the emerging possibilities," said IRS chairman. "He will put the people to work for us and our people will learn and from there we will go forward," he added.

"What it does to IRS is to come out and say that we have R&D facilities not only in India but also at three-four centers across the world. IRS could use our facilities as a result of this initiative. It is a big image enhancement for them," Dr Vis said.

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