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NITI Aayog Report Maps the Obstacles to Doing Research and Development in India

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NITI Aayog Report Maps the Obstacles to Doing Research and Development in India

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

*A NITI Aayog report on “Ease of Doing Research and Development in India” maps systemic obstacles to research across funding, human resources, institutional processes, translational capacity, access to resources, regional disparities and governance. Its headline recommendation is to raise **Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD)** from about **0.64 per cent** to at least **2 per cent of GDP over the next four to five years**. As background, the report was released on **April 9, 2026**, not this week.*

A NOTE ON TIMING: THIS IS NOT A FRESH RELEASE

This report was not released this week, and it is carried here as standing background rather than as an event of the day.

As background, NITI Aayog released two reports, “Ease of Doing Research and Development in India” and the “Survey Report on Ease of Doing R&D in India”, on **April 9, 2026** in New Delhi. They were unveiled by NITI Aayog Vice Chairman **Suman Bery** and Union Minister of State for Science and Technology **Dr Jitendra Singh**.

The report re-entered news coverage in late August 2026, which is why it is being written about now. An earlier version of this article could not confirm the release date and said so; that gap has since been closed against the Press Information Bureau record, and the correct background date is April 9, 2026.

The material below is exam-relevant regardless of the date, because India’s R&D architecture is a standing GS3 theme rather than a news event. But a candidate should not describe this report as an August 2026 release.

THE CORE PROBLEM: GERD

GERD, meaning **Gross Expenditure on Research and Development**, is the standard international measure of a country’s total R&D spending as a share of GDP.

COUNTRY OR GROUP	APPROXIMATE GERD AS A SHARE OF GDP
Israel	Above 4 per cent
South Korea	Above 4 per cent
United States	About 3.4 per cent
China	About 2.6 per cent
South Korea	About 5.3 per cent
India	Around 0.64 to 0.7 per cent

India's figure has been broadly stagnant for years despite repeated policy targets, which is the fact the report is organised around.

The Composition Problem Behind the Level Problem

The share figure understates the difficulty, because **who spends** differs fundamentally. In most advanced economies, **business enterprise funds the majority of R&D**. In India, government has historically funded the larger share, with private sector contribution far below the OECD norm.

That has two consequences. Government funding is bounded by fiscal space and competes with welfare and infrastructure. And research funded by government but not pulled by industry demand tends to stop at publication rather than reaching commercialisation, which is the **translational capacity** gap the report identifies.

THE INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

BODY OR SCHEME	DETAIL
ANRF (Anusandhan National Research Foundation)	Created by the ANRF Act, 2023 , subsuming the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB); the Prime Minister is ex-officio President
ANRF corpus	₹50,000 crore for 2023-28 , of which about ₹36,000 crore is expected from non-government sources
RDI scheme	Research, Development and Innovation scheme, with a ₹1 lakh crore corpus for private-sector-led research
NEP 2020	Recommended the creation of a National Research Foundation
Vigyan Dhara	Consolidated scheme of the Department of Science and Technology

The design intention of ANRF is visible in its funding structure: **more than two-thirds of its corpus is meant to come from outside government**, which is an explicit attempt to fix the composition problem described above.

WHAT THE REPORT IDENTIFIES

The obstacles are mapped across seven areas: **funding, human resources, institutional processes, translational capacity, access to resources, regional disparities and governance**. The recurring themes in the reporting are:

- Complex and repetitive grant application processes
- Delays in evaluation
- Rigid financial rules governing how grant money may be spent
- Low researcher density
- An underdeveloped postdoctoral ecosystem, with fellowship delays and unfilled positions
- Concentration of funding in a small number of elite institutions

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Process reform may bind harder than budget size. This is the report's most useful implication. A researcher who receives a grant but cannot spend it flexibly, must re-apply annually, waits months for evaluation and navigates procurement rules designed for construction contracts, loses research time that no additional allocation recovers. Rigid **General Financial Rules** compliance is a real constraint on scientific work, and it costs nothing to fix relative to doubling GERD.

Concentration risk defeats the ecosystem objective. If competitive research funding clusters in a handful of elite institutions, the stated aim of broadening India's research base fails at inception, because state universities and newer institutions never accumulate the track record that competitive grants reward. This is a **Matthew effect**: initial advantage compounds. Correcting it requires deliberately ring-fenced capacity-building funding, not merely open competition.

The postdoctoral gap is the long-run bottleneck. Research output is produced disproportionately by early-career researchers. Without a stable, well-paid postdoctoral stage, the most productive researchers either leave for abroad or exit research for industry and administration. **Researcher density per million population** is the indicator to watch, and India's is far below comparator economies.

The 2 per cent target needs a demand-side story to be credible. Raising GERD from about 0.64 to 2 per cent over four to five years cannot be done from the public budget alone. It requires private R&D to rise several-fold, which happens when firms face competitive pressure to innovate and when public procurement

creates guaranteed demand for domestically developed technology. **Defence, health and energy procurement** are the obvious levers, and a target unaccompanied by them is an aspiration rather than a plan.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 (Science and Technology): Achievements of Indians in science and technology; **indigenisation** of technology and developing new technology; awareness in the fields of IT, space, computers, biotechnology.

GS Paper 2 (Governance): Issues relating to development and management of human resources.

Prelims focus: GERD's full form and India's approximate share of GDP; ANRF created by the ANRF Act, 2023, subsuming SERB, with the Prime Minister as ex-officio President; the ₹50,000 crore corpus and its non-government component; NEP 2020's National Research Foundation recommendation; NITI Aayog's non-statutory, non-constitutional character.

Mains angle: Argue that India's research problem is **compositional and procedural before it is fiscal**. The evidence is that GERD has stagnated across periods of both fiscal stress and fiscal comfort, which suggests the binding constraint is not the availability of money but the structure of who funds research and how that money can be used.

Way forward: Simplify grant administration and move to multi-year block funding with outcome reporting rather than annual re-application; ring-fence a share of competitive funding for institutions outside the established elite; build a properly paid national postdoctoral fellowship at scale; and use **public procurement** in defence, health and energy to create the demand pull that would draw private R&D spending upward.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

THE REPORT:

NITI Aayog, “Ease of Doing Research and Development in India”; press coverage appeared August 24, 2026

Maps obstacles across funding, human resources, institutional processes, translational capacity, access to resources, regional disparities and governance

Background: released April 9, 2026 by NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Suman Bery and Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh; two reports, the main report and a survey report

Headline recommendation: raise GERD from about 0.64 per cent to at least 2 per cent of GDP over four to five years

The report finds close to 80 per cent of ANRF funding is concentrated in the IITs

Comparators: South Korea about 5.3 per cent, Israel above 4 per cent, USA about 3.4 per cent, China about 2.6 per cent

GERD:

Gross Expenditure on Research and Development, as a share of GDP

India: about 0.64 to 0.7 per cent; Israel and South Korea above 4 per cent; the United States and China above 2 per cent

In most advanced economies business enterprise funds the majority of R&D; in India the government share is larger

ANRF:

Anusandhan National Research Foundation, created by the ANRF Act, 2023

Subsumed the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB)

The Prime Minister is ex-officio President

Corpus ₹50,000 crore for 2023-28, with about ₹36,000 crore expected from non-government sources

RELATED:

RDI scheme corpus: ₹1 lakh crore for private-sector-led research

NEP 2020 recommended a National Research Foundation

Vigyan Dhara is the consolidated DST scheme

NITI Aayog was constituted by Cabinet resolution on January 1, 2015; it is neither constitutional nor statutory

Sources: NITI Aayog, ThePrint

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