

NITI AAYOG GOVERNING COUNCIL MEETING

- NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) is the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, established on 1st January 2015 to replace the Planning Commission. It serves as the apex body for cooperative federalism, providing strategic and technical advice to both the Central and State governments.

Composition of NITI Aayog

- NITI Aayog has a multi-layered structure designed to facilitate collaboration between the Centre and states:
- **Chairperson:** The Prime Minister of India serves as the ex-officio Chairperson.
- **Governing Council:** The Governing Council is the primary body for inter-governmental engagement and includes:
 - Prime Minister (Chairperson).
 - Chief Ministers of all states.
 - Lieutenant Governors/Administrators of Union Territories.
 - Vice-Chairperson of NITI Aayog.
 - Members and special invitees.

Regional Councils: Convened by the Prime Minister and comprising Chief Ministers and Lt. Governors of relevant states or regions, these councils address specific regional issues.

Role of the Governing Council

- **Policy Direction**
 - Setting national priorities and strategic directions for India's development.
 - Facilitating policy dialogue between the Centre and states.
 - Reviewing major policy initiatives and their implementation.
- **Cooperative Federalism**
 - Providing a structured platform for Centre-state engagement.
 - Resolving inter-state and Centre-state issues.
 - Promoting state-level innovation and best practices.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**
 - Reviewing the performance of states on various development parameters.
 - Identifying bottlenecks in policy delivery.
- **Strategic Planning**
 - Discussing long-term development goals like Viksit Bharat 2047.
 - Aligning state plans with national priorities.
 - Promoting convergence of resources and efforts.

Significance of the Meeting

- **Strengthening Cooperative Federalism**
 - The participation of all 28 Chief Ministers represents:
 - A historic milestone in cooperative federalism.
 - Reinforces NITI Aayog's role as a consensus-building platform.
 - Signals political maturity across party lines on developmental issues.
- **Focus on Grassroots Development**
 - The call for district-level GDP estimates marks a significant shift toward:
 - Granular planning and policy formulation.
 - Evidence-based decision-making.
 - Targeted interventions for backward districts.
- **Addressing Contemporary Challenges**
 - External challenges like the West Asia crisis.
 - Energy security and affordability.
 - Climate change and water conservation.
 - Technology disruption through AI.
 - Social challenges like cyber fraud and drug abuse.
- **Roadmap for Viksit Bharat 2047**
 - A structured approach with medium-term milestones.
 - Whole-of-government mobilisation.
 - State-level ownership of national goals.

INDIAN FIRMS UNDERINVESTING IN R&D - UNDERSTANDING THE STRUCTURAL AND HISTORICAL CAUSES

- India's low investment in Research and Development (R&D) is often attributed to policy and institutional weaknesses. However, the issue cannot be explained solely through economic structures or cultural factors.

Large Domestic Market - A Double-Edged Advantage:

- The “captive market” effect:
 - India's vast domestic market provides businesses with a large consumer base, reducing the pressure to compete internationally.
 - Firms can achieve growth by serving domestic demand without entering highly competitive global markets.
 - This **weakens incentives** for technological upgrading, quality enhancement, and frontier innovation.
 - Export competition has historically driven innovation in countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Germany.
- R&D version of “Dutch disease”:
 - Just as resource abundance can reduce industrial competitiveness, a large domestic market may discourage firms from investing in costly and uncertain R&D activities.
 - **Key insight:** Easy market access can diminish the urgency to innovate.

Colonial Legacy and the Weak Manufacturing Tradition:

- Impact of colonial de-industrialisation:
 - Economic historians have documented how colonial policies undermined India's indigenous manufacturing sectors, particularly **textiles**.
 - Traditional manufacturing capabilities were weakened or destroyed. Commercial communities increasingly shifted towards trade, intermediation, and arbitrage rather than production.

- **Long-term consequences:**

- The decline of manufacturing ecosystems shaped business preferences and capabilities for generations.
- Innovation-oriented industrial entrepreneurship remained limited.
- Business communities became more comfortable with **commerce** than technological production.

Democracy, Uncertainty, and Long-Term Investment:

- **High uncertainty in a complex democracy:**

- India's political economy presents **unique challenges**:
 - Large and diverse electorate.
 - Multiple layers of governance.
 - Competing stakeholder interests.
 - Security challenges from a difficult neighbourhood.
- These factors make long-term policy and economic outcomes harder to predict.

- **The R&D dilemma:**

- Research spending requires sacrificing current profits for uncertain future gains.
- In an environment of high uncertainty, underinvestment becomes a rational business response, even though it harms long-term national competitiveness.

Conclusion:

- India's R&D deficit cannot be explained by a single factor. It stems from the interaction of:
 - A large domestic market that reduces competitive pressure.
 - The historical legacy of colonial deindustrialisation.
 - Premature financialisation and short-term shareholder capitalism.
 - Political and economic uncertainty that discourages long-horizon investments.
- It demands strengthening manufacturing capabilities, promoting export competitiveness, reforming corporate incentives, and creating a **stable environment** that encourages long-term innovation-led growth.

POK PROTESTS

- PoK protests are not new. Unrest began in 2023 when residents mobilised against rising electricity bills and shortages of subsidised wheat.
- The **Mangla Dam** — a major hydropower project built on PoK's rivers — displaced local communities but the region continues to pay high power tariffs, a long-standing grievance.
- Chronic underdevelopment, heavy security deployment due to militancy, and the dominance of Islamabad-appointed bureaucrats over the Legislative Assembly have deepened public anger over the years.
- The protest movement is spearheaded by the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) — a coalition of traders, professionals, and civil society activists.

The Immediate Flashpoint: The 12 Seats Controversy

- The current flash point is a Pakistan Supreme Court verdict upholding **12 seats in the 53-member PoK Assembly** reserved for Jammu and Kashmir migrants settled in different parts of Pakistan — some in Punjab, some in Sindh, and so on.
- The polling for these seats is conducted outside PoK, and the local Election Commission has no role in it.
- In effect, out of 53 seats in the PoK Assembly, local voters directly elect only 33 members.
- Besides the 12 refugee seats, there are 5 seats reserved for women, 1 for Ulamas (religious scholars), 1 for overseas Kashmiris, and 1 for technocrats.
- **Why Do Locals Oppose These Seats?**
 - Local PoK residents argue that these 12 seats are effectively used by the federal government in Islamabad to plant its loyalists in the PoK Assembly — people with no genuine connection to Kashmir.
 - They complain that MQM members — representing Urdu-speaking immigrants — end up in their Assembly through these seats.

- There is also a **financial grievance**: the salaries and expenses of these 20 centrally-controlled representatives (12 refugee + 8 other reserved seats) are funded from PoK's own budget, even though local voters have no say in electing them.
- **India's Parallel: An Important Distinction**
 - Supporters of this reservation draw a comparison — India too has reserved seats in the J&K Assembly for people displaced from Pakistan-occupied territories.
 - However, a **crucial difference exists**: India keeps those seats **vacant**, unlike Pakistan which actively fills them.

Gilgit-Baltistan: A Parallel Crisis

- Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) — the other part of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir under Pakistan's illegal occupation — shares many of PoK's problems.
- These include: chronic underdevelopment, dominance by the federal government, and denial of full political rights.
- **Key Differences**
 - Unlike PoK, GB has a large Shia Muslim population, which has led to sectarian strife.
 - It is also more isolated — even from the Pakistani mainstream — and receives far less media attention.
 - Some sections in GB have demanded full integration with Pakistan as a province, a move Islamabad has resisted because granting full provincial status would complicate its demand for a plebiscite over the broader J&K dispute.
- **India's Position**
 - India strongly protested the recent elections held in GB.
 - MEA reiterated that the entire Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, including Gilgit-Baltistan, are integral and inalienable parts of India by virtue of the complete and irrevocable Instrument of Accession signed in 1947.

OILSEEDS KISAAN MITRA



- It is a WhatsApp-based artificial intelligence-powered advisory service. It is developed by the ICAR-Indian Institute of Oilseeds Research (ICAR-IIOR), Hyderabad.

It aimed at **strengthening oilseed (groundnut, mustard, sesame, sunflower, soybean, niger, and other oilseed crops) cultivation** and improving farmers' access to scientific guidance.

- **Features:**

- It provides round-the-clock, research-based support to **oilseed farmers in multiple Indian languages**.
- The **AI-powered chatbot responds** instantly with research-based guidance on variety selection, crop management, pest and disease control, irrigation, and post-harvest practices, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, free of cost.

- **How It Works?**

- It uses **advanced AI and a robust knowledge base** developed from the collective scientific expertise of multiple ICAR institutes.
- It understands **questions typed or sent in regional languages** and provides precise, crop-specific answers.
- Farmers need no special app or internet browser; the familiar WhatsApp interface is all that is needed.
- The **chatbot covers the entire crop cycle including variety selection, agronomic practices**, pest and disease management, irrigation scheduling, and post-harvest guidance and seed availability.
- The knowledge base has been built collaboratively with **ICAR-National Soybean Research Institute, Indore (ICAR-NSRI), ICAR-Indian Institute of Groundnut Research, Junagadh (ICAR-IIGR), ICAR-Indian Institute of Rapeseed and Mustard Research, Bharatpur (ICAR-IIRMR)** and PC-Unit (Sesame & Niger).

NETWORK SURVEY VEHICLE



- It is a specialized infrastructure management tool comprising vehicles equipped with advanced sensors and data acquisition systems.
- These vehicles systematically collect data on road inventory and condition of National Highways.
- **Key Features:**
 - It is equipped with **laser profilers, GPS and cutting-edge imaging technology.**
 - It is equipped with **advanced 3D laser-based systems** across all states and its network.
 - With advanced technology, NSV **surveys up to 300 km daily.**
 - It is usually a specialised van or SUV **equipped with multiple sensors and instruments.**
 - It consists of Laser, **Global Positioning System (GPS)**, Video image processing tools, High-resolution cameras, Inertial Measurement Units (IMU), and DMI (Distance Measuring Indicator).
- **Working of Network Survey Vehicle:**
 - The survey will capture **13 types of defects**, including crack measurement, ravelling, patch area, potholes, edge break, roughness, rutting, lane marking, etc.
 - It will also cover details like **carriageway type, road type, pavement and shoulder width**, topography, median details, right of way, utilities, land use, etc.
 - The data will be **collected for all projects involving 2/4/6 and 8 lanes** with NSV before the start of work and thereafter at regular intervals of six months.
 - Data collected through NSV survey will be **uploaded on NHAI's 'AI' based portal Data Lake**, where it will be analysed to transform data into knowledge and subsequent actionable insights.

- Raw survey data is encrypted and transmitted to the centralised NSV centre within 48 hours.
- Expert teams, strategically **deployed across five zones**, monitor and report findings systematically.
- Within 10 days, raw data is transformed into actionable insights — a process that earlier stretched to 4-6 months.

ONE STATION ONE PRODUCT INITIATIVE

The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) is promoting the products of Divyangjan artisans through the One Station One Product (OSOP) initiative.



About One Station One Product Initiative:

- It was launched in 2022.
- It is an initiative of Indian Railways.
- It aims to **enhance livelihoods through skill development for local artisans**, weavers, and craftsmen. Sale outlets are provided at stations nationwide, allotted through a tendering process.
- It leverages the extensive reach of Indian Railways to **transform stations into accessible marketplaces for regional products**.
- OSOP was scaled up **through a structured rollout**, with stalls allotted on a **rotational basis at nominal fees** to ensure wider participation.
- The OSOP initiative is **helping artisans expand their market reach** by improving visibility, creating better sales opportunities, and supporting sustainable livelihoods.
- **Implementation:** Railway divisions implement the scheme in coordination with state agencies, SHGs, and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- **Significance:** It is playing a crucial role in reviving traditional crafts that were gradually losing prominence.