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# Cabinet approves Bill for National Research Foundation to make research more equitable

Bill will establish National Research Foundation and pave the way for more private-sector participation in research funding; as much as ₹36,000 crore is expected from the private sector as investment into research over five years

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Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting and Youth Affairs & Sports Anurag Singh Thakur addresses a press conference on Cabinet decisions, in New Delhi. | Photo Credit: PTI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the National Research Foundation (NRF) Bill, 2023, in the Parliament. The Bill, after approval in the Parliament, will establish NRF, as an apex body to provide “high-level strategic direction” to scientific research in the country as per recommendations of the National Education Policy (NEP), at a total estimated cost of ₹50,000 crore from 2023-28, a press statement from the Department of Science and Technology (DST) noted.

The DST would be an “administrative” department of NRF that would be governed by a Governing Board consisting of eminent researchers and professionals across disciplines. The Prime Minister will be the ex-officio President of the Board and the Union Minister of Science & Technology and Union Minister of Education will be the ex-officio Vice-Presidents. NRF’s functioning will be governed by an Executive Council chaired by the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, the statement added.

The proposed Bill also repeals the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) established by Parliament in 2008 and subsumes it into the NRF.

Science Minister Jitendra Singh briefed reporters on Wednesday and said that, among other things, the NRF was meant to ensure that scientific research was conducted and funded equitably and greater participation from the private sector was forthcoming. “Right now, we have eminent institutions like the IITs and IISc that get a bulk of research funding but State universities get very little... about 10% of the research funds. The NRF will correct this,” he said on Wednesday. He added that when the NRF begins to function, close to ₹36,000 crore is expected to come from private sector (as investments into research). “The IITs do not need to depend on NRF because they have the infrastructure and the resources. But an innovative person, in a village, who wants to establish a start-up needs the money. The NRF will prioritise research funding and the Executive Council will decide on what areas need support,” said Mr. Singh.

The government will contribute ₹10,000 crore over five years, he added. The DST, the main source of funds for several autonomous research bodies, will continue to get the budget they annually receive. “The DST also funds several scholarships and capacity building

programmes. They will continue doing so,” he added. The DST this year was allotted Rs 6,000 crore.

A senior official in the DST said that a Bill was necessary because current laws made it hard for private research organisations to contribute to a funding body such as the NRF.

NRF will forge collaborations among the industry, academia, and government departments and research institutions, and create an interface mechanism for participation and contribution of industries and State governments in addition to the scientific and line Ministries. It will focus on creating a policy framework and putting in place regulatory processes that can encourage collaboration and increased spending by the industry on R&D, the press statement noted.

“The decision by the Union Cabinet to introduce the NRF Bill in Parliament is a most welcome step. The efforts made by higher education institutions to enhance the research ecosystem on their campuses will get an impetus. NRF will provide an excellent opportunity for academia, industry, and research institutions to work together on the most pressing challenges of our country to make India the frontrunner in research and innovation,” said Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar, Chairman, UGC.



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