

A SHOT FOR SCIENCE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR MINISTRY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues relating to Growth & Development - Public Finance, Taxation & Black Money incl. Government Budgeting

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The [Budget](#) speech in the year preceding a general election is usually one that seeks to appease as wide a swathe of society as possible. It follows that ministries that fund the bulk of research and development (R&D) too would see a healthy jump in allocation. The Ministry of Science & Technology has [received an allocation of 16,361.42 crore](#) this year, on paper an impressive 15% increase from the previous estimate. However, between 2021-22 and 2022-23, the Ministry had seen a 3.9% decrease. The bulk of the hike has gone to the Department of Science and Technology (DST) — 7,931.05 crore, up 32.1% from last year. It was 2,683.86 crore for the Department of Biotechnology, or DBT (a nominal hike of 3.9%), and 5,746.51 crore (1.9%) for the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR). The Deep Ocean mission — which includes among other components developing a deep-submersible vehicle — and the National Research Foundation have got substantially higher hikes than in previous years, a sign that they are the Centre's immediate focus.

There were multiple references in the Budget speech for investing in dedicated centres for excellence in 'Artificial intelligence' research, initiatives to scale up technology to produce laboratory-made diamonds and a centre for research in sickle cell anaemia. While all of these efforts could be spread out across multiple arms of government, none of the budgetary allocations suggests a significant scale up of basic research. As with previous governments, this government too has not succeeded in increasing the percentage of spend on research and development to beyond 1% of GDP. While different countries define R&D spends variously, a rule of thumb suggests that developed and technologically advanced countries spend over 2% of their GDP on R&D, and India, according to a 2022 estimate by the Global Innovation Index, continues to hover around 0.7% despite being among the world's largest producers of scientific literature. While funds are not the only challenge to research and development in India, the lack of significant raises across departments shows that the absorptive capacity of scientific institutions in the country is limited. A major challenge continues to be research scholars not getting promised funds on time and the wait for the quality equipment required by researchers, continuing to be mired in a maze of bureaucratic whimsy. The bulk of research continues to be funded by government and the participation of the private sector has grown only incrementally. In the next few years, the government must not only increase the size of the funding pie but also ease the procedures to make the most efficient use of it.

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