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EDITORIAL 01

Competitive federalism: On the NITI Aayog

had for The NITI Aayog suffers from both structural and functional issues

With 10 State and Union Territory representatives **skipping** the ninth Governing Council meeting of the NITI Aayog chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi — seven of them boycotted it — the think tank's role has been called into question. The Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand did so because of concerns with the **perceived** lack of allocations and projects to their States in the Union Budget. But the boycott and, later, the walkout by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, suggest that the role of the think tank, limiting itself to an advisory body to the Union Government, has led to **disenchantment** among States, even if the protests were limited to leaders belonging to the political opposition. Constituted by the NDA government in its first term, the NITI Aayog was to replace the Planning Commission, doing away with the "top-down" approach of the earlier body, and to



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focus on “cooperative federalism”. But by limiting itself to an advisory body without any powers of resource distribution or allocation to States and other bodies and focusing on creating **indices** to evaluate States, it has led to the **unintended** consequence of “competitive federalism”; while the Finance Ministry has **unfettered** powers to decide on grants to States. In contrast, the Planning Commission, which too had its **detractors**, at least allowed for consultations with States in such matters.

It has not helped matters that the Bharatiya Janata Party has sought to seek votes in State elections on the basis of providing “double engine” governments, leading to complaints by Opposition-ruled States that the Centre has favoured those ruled by the BJP for investment projects. The fact that the NDA government now is crucially dependent upon the support of parties that rule Bihar and Andhra Pradesh — States that suffer varying developmental deficits — and the express intention of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to address their demands specifically in the Budget have not been lost on the government’s detractors. Irrespective of the merit in this contention, the fact is that consultations with States on grants and projects have become limited after the end of the Planning Commission. While the 16th

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Finance Commission is tasked with the removal of a horizontal **imbalance** among States and the Finance Ministry's focus is on macro-economic stability and the financial system, the need to address growth through infrastructure and capital investments in States is something that requires institutional backing at the Centre as well. The NITI Aayog must be re-**envisioned** to bring back some of the responsibilities that the Planning Commission States for a truer "cooperative federalism".

SUMMARY

The NITI Aayog, a think tank in India, has faced criticism for its role in promoting cooperative federalism. The think tank, which was created to replace the Planning Commission, has been criticized for its limited powers and focus on creating indices to evaluate states. This has led to a perception of competitive federalism, with the Finance Ministry having unfettered powers to decide on grants to states. The Bharatiya Janata Party's efforts to seek votes in state elections have also been criticized for favoring those ruled by the BJP for investment projects. The NDA government now relies heavily on the support of parties ruling Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, which suffer developmental deficits. The NITI Aayog needs to be re-envisioned to bring back some of the responsibilities of the Planning Commission for a truer cooperative federalism.

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Vocabulary

1. Skipping

Synonyms: Hopping, jumping, leaping

Antonyms: Walking, staying, stopping

2. Perceived

Synonyms: Observed, noticed, detected

Antonyms: Ignored, overlooked, disregarded

3. Disenchantment

Synonyms: Disillusionment, disappointment, disillusion

Antonyms: Enchantment, fascination, captivation

4. Indices

Synonyms: Indicators, signs, markers

Antonyms: Specifics, details, particulars



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5. Unintended

Synonyms: Accidental, unplanned, unintentional

Antonyms: Intentional, deliberate, planned

6. Unfettered

Synonyms: Unrestricted, unrestrained, free

Antonyms: Restricted, restrained, confined

8. Detractors

Synonyms: Critics, opponents, naysayers

Antonyms: Supporters, advocates, proponents

9. Imbalance

Synonyms: Inequality, disparity, disproportion

Antonyms: Balance, equality, symmetry

10. Envisioned

Synonyms: Imagined, envisioned, pictured

Antonyms: Disregarded, neglected, ignored

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EDITORIAL 02

Plastic mess: On India's waste problem

More efforts must be made to curb production and promote alternatives

India, like other large economies, faces a significant plastic waste problem. According to a 2020-21 report by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), four million tonnes of plastic waste are generated annually. Unfortunately, only a quarter of this waste is recycled or treated, with the rest ending up in landfills or being **disposed** of **unsustainably**. Since 2016, the Plastic Waste Management Rules have **mandated** that users of plastics are responsible for collecting and recycling their waste. These requirements, or the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) rules, were initially voluntary but are now **enforced** through an online EPR trading platform. The EPR system involves packagers, importers, and large industrial users of plastic packaging, as well as professional recyclers, registering with the CPCB. Recyclers, who have networks to collect plastic waste, recycle the waste and receive **validated** certificates for each tonne recycled. These certificates can be uploaded to a dedicated CPCB portal and



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purchased by plastic packaging companies that fall short of their annual recycling targets. In 2022-23, the CPCB estimated that certificates for nearly 3.7 million tonnes of recycled plastic were generated. However, it was discovered that not all of these certificates were **legitimate** — there were approximately 6,00,000 fraudulent certificates. Additionally, hackers reportedly stole several thousand certificates last year and sold them to companies. A criminal investigation is ongoing, and it remains unclear how much of the claimed 3.7 million tonnes was **genuinely** recycled.

In response, the CPCB has taken two significant actions. First, it commissioned an audit of nearly 800 firms, representing almost a fourth of the 2,300 registered recyclers who had traded certificates. Second, it undertook a comprehensive **overhaul** of the security features on the EPR trading platform, although this has delayed the process of filing returns for 2023-24 by several months. The CPCB has described these problems as “teething issues” associated with implementing a large-scale electronic system. While the audit is necessary, it should be a one-time initiative to avoid undermining trust in the system with annual, lengthy investigations. Although the CPCB has the authority to impose heavy fines, the process is lengthy and **fraught** with legal challenges. A market-driven

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approach to solving plastic waste has a significant but limited effect. Greater efforts must be made to curb plastic production and promote sustainable alternatives. Addressing the root causes of plastic waste and enhancing the effectiveness of recycling systems are crucial in **mitigating** India's plastic waste problem.

SUMMARY

India faces a significant plastic waste problem, with four million tonnes of waste generated annually. Only a quarter of this waste is recycled or treated, with the rest ending up in landfills or unsustainably disposed of. Since 2016, the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) rules have mandated users of plastics to collect and recycle their waste. The CPCB has taken two significant actions to address the issue: an audit of nearly 800 firms and a comprehensive overhaul of the security features on the EPR trading platform. However, the CPCB has acknowledged the challenges associated with implementing a large-scale electronic system and has imposed heavy fines. Greater efforts must be made to curb plastic production and promote sustainable alternatives, addressing the root causes of plastic waste and enhancing recycling systems.



Vocabulary

1. Curb

Synonyms: Restrain, limit, control

Antonyms: Unleash, liberate, release

2. Disposed

Synonyms: Inclined, willing, ready

Antonyms: Unwilling, averse, disinclined

3. Unsustainably

Synonyms: Unsupportably, irresponsibly, indefensibly

Antonyms: Sustainably, responsibly, defensibly

4. Mandated

Synonyms: Required, authorized, commanded

Antonyms: Optional, permitted, disregarded



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5. Enforced

Synonyms: Implemented, applied, imposed

Antonyms: Ignored, neglected, disregarded

6. Validated

Synonyms: Confirmed, authenticated, approved

Antonyms: Invalidated, disproved, rejected

7. Legitimate

Synonyms: Lawful, valid, rightful

Antonyms: Unlawful, invalid, illegitimate

8. Genuinely

Synonyms: Authentically, sincerely, truly

Antonyms: Falsely, insincerely, deceitfully

9. Overhaul

Synonyms: Revamp, renovate, revise

Antonyms: Neglect, ignore, leave

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10. Fraught

Synonyms: Laden, burdened, filled

Antonyms: Empty, clear, untroubled

11. Mitigating

Synonyms: Alleviating, easing, lessening

Antonyms: Exacerbating, worsening, intensifying

