



PARLIAMENT QUESTION: INITIATIVES TO HELP TECHNOLOGY STARTUPS REACH UNICORN

प्रविष्टि तिथि: 10 DEC 2025 4:35PM by PIB Delhi

The Government has been actively supporting creation of conducive ecosystem for innovators, entrepreneurs and startups through its various schemes and initiatives across the country, including in the state of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

The Government has launched the Research Development and Innovation (RDI) scheme to support cutting edge technology, deep-tech projects and startups. The main objectives of the RDI scheme are to encourage the private sector to scale up research, development and innovation (RDI), finance transformative projects, support acquisition of technologies which are critical or of high strategic importance and facilitate setting up of Deep-Tech Fund of Funds. The scheme is led by the Department of Science & Technology (DST) as the nodal department. With an outlay of Rs. 1 lakh crore in next 6 years, the RDI scheme targets sunrise sectors including energy security and transition, and climate action; deep-technology including quantum computing, robotics and space; artificial intelligence and its application in agriculture, health and education; biotechnology, biomanufacturing, synthetic biology, pharma, medical devices; and digital economy including digital agriculture.

Under the National Quantum Mission (NQM), DST has actively supported startups working in the domain of quantum technologies, specifically quantum computing, quantum communication, quantum sensing, and quantum materials & devices. The Mission is to support an expanding pool of quantum startups, provide them appropriate funding, give access to advanced infrastructure, and provide mentorship opportunities through partnerships with industry. Under NQM, financial support has been provided to seven startups in the different areas of Quantum Technologies.

DST is implementing the National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber Physical Systems (NM-ICPS), which was approved by the Union Cabinet with an outlay of Rs. 3660 crores. Under this mission, 25 Technology Innovation Hubs (TIHs) have been established in reputed academic institutions across the country. Each TIH specializes in advanced technology domains such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning (ML), Robotics, Internet of Things (IoT), Cybersecurity, Quantum Technologies, FinTech, etc. More than 800 Startups have been benefitted under the mission. I-HUB for Robotics and Autonomous Systems Innovation Foundation at Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru and IIITB Comet Foundation at International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT), Bengaluru have been established in the state Karnataka; I-Hub Quantum Technology Foundation at Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune and TIH Foundation for IOT and IOE at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay have been established in the state of Maharashtra; IHUB Drishti Foundation at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Jodhpur and BITS BioCYTiH Foundation at Birla Institute of Technology & Science Pilani have been established in Rajasthan. These six TIH have cumulatively supported 160 startups in cutting edge R&D.

DST through 'NIDHI' (National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations) program has extended end-to-end startup support to nurture startups from ideation to commercialization. It includes a variety of program components for Startups like PRAYAS - prototyping grant for early-stage innovative ideas, hand-holding support to startups through Technology Business Incubators, seed funding and acceleration support for rapid scaling of startup businesses. Under NIDHI-PRAYAS program 2,254 innovators/startups have been supported, with sanctioned funding of ₹173.27 crore. Out of these 2,254 innovators/startups, 381 are from Karnataka, 312 from Maharashtra and 56 from Rajasthan. Around Rs. 1,400 crore has been provided through NIDHI program to network of DST established academic incubators for creating an ecosystem for supporting science & technology (S&T) based startups. Over 12,000 startups have benefited from the DST supported programs. DST has established 17 incubation centres in the state of Karnataka, 14 in the state of Maharashtra, and 4 in the state of Rajasthan, to provide comprehensive support and help startups progress in their idea to commercialization journey.

The Anusandhan National research Foundation (ANRF) under DST has been able to strengthen Industry-Academia linkages through their various programs. One of the key mechanisms adopted to bridge the gap between academic research and market-appropriate products is the structured support across Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs). Under the new framework, ANRF is supporting research from basic and early-stage development, i.e. up to TRL- 4, while the RDI scheme is mandated to support projects from TRL-4 and above, to advance prototypes, pilot demonstrations, and scale-up activities. This coordinated approach enables a smooth transition from laboratory research to commercially deployable technologies.

Under the Startup India initiative launched in 2016, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has provided a platform for registering Indian startups. As on 31st October 2025, 1,97,692 entities have been recognized as startups by DPIIT which have reported to have created over

21.11 lakh direct jobs. Under Startup India initiative, the Government constantly undertakes various efforts to support startups across industries and sectors. The flagship Schemes namely, Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS), Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) and Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS) support startups at various stages of their business cycle.

The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) has been providing early-stage funding to biotech startups and entrepreneurs under Biotechnology Ignition Grant (BIG) scheme and BioNEST (Bio-Incubators Nurturing Entrepreneurship for Scaling Technologies). BIRAC has been instrumental in building a vibrant biotech innovation ecosystem in India. Through Public-Private Partnerships, it has undertaken a multitude of activities, ranging from funding high-risk translational research, supporting nascent ideas and establishing specialised bio-incubation centres. BioNEST & E-YUVA centres have supported over 2,700 incubatees & students. More than 1,300 Intellectual Properties (IP) have been filed by the incubatees, and over 800 products have been developed, reaching various stages of market deployment.

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has been providing financial and technical support under Technology Incubation and

Development of Entrepreneurs (TIDE) and Gen-Next Support for Innovative Startup (GENESIS) schemes to Deep Tech startups in the domain of Electronics and ICT domain. Department of Space (DoS) has established Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe), which is driving India's Space startup ecosystem.

Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX), was launched in 2018 to foster innovation & technology development in Defence & Aerospace by engaging industries including Startups/ MSMEs/ Individual Innovators, R&D institute and Academia. iDEX provides grants and other support to iDEX winners (Startups/SMEs) to carry out R&D which has potential for Indian Defence and Aerospace needs.

DST has supported a NIDHI Centre of Excellence in AI/ML at T-Hub, Hyderabad which is a Technology Hub established by the Government of Telangana. Similarly, Department of Biotechnology (DBT) has established Bio- Technology Parks in partnership with state governments. Such Centre-State collaboration to promote innovation in cutting edge technologies, have strengthen Unicorn growth at the national level.

The Government has also implemented periodic activities and programs with States such as State Startup Ranking, State Startup Policy, National Startup Awards etc. which have played an important role in establishing synergies between the centre and different states, and in the holistic development of the startup ecosystem in the country. The S&T based entrepreneurial infrastructure and strong support mechanisms created by the Government during the last 10 years such as translational research hubs, startup incubators, research labs, fabrication facilities, generous support from ideation to Proof of Concept (POC), seed funding to acceleration, assistance in raising external funding, etc has provided seamless opportunities to students and innovators to take up entrepreneurship as career and own innovative ventures.

The initiatives of Government have significantly strengthened India's startup and innovation ecosystem by improving access to capital, easing regulatory barriers, and expanding incubation infrastructure. They have also fostered wider economic development by promoting entrepreneurship beyond major cities. In their journey, four of the DST supported startups have reached to Unicorn status. Some of the startups supported under DST programs who have attained tangible scale are QuNu Labs, QpiAI, Ather Energy, IdeaForge, Razorpay, Uniphore, FarEye, Lauras Labs, Gupshup, Atomberg, Agnikul, Offgrid Energy Labs, etc.

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