Government Reaffirms Robust Conflict-of-Interest Safeguards under RDI Fund; Merit-Based Evaluation Anchors Funding Decisions

In the funding decisions none of the IC member is conflicted

Independent Expert Evaluation, Supermajority Approval and Conflict-of-Interest Framework Ensure Integrity of RDI Fund

Government Details Multi-Layered Safeguards Ensuring Fair, Transparent and Merit-Based Disbursement under RDI Fund

प्रविष्टि तिथि: 07 AUG 2026 3:21PM by PIB Delhi

The Government today reaffirmed that the Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund is being implemented through a robust institutional framework founded on transparency, merit-based evaluation and stringent conflict-of-interest safeguards. Addressing a press conference on "Conflict-of-Interest Safeguards and Disbursement under the Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund," senior officials of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Technology Development Board (TDB) and Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) elaborated on the governance architecture, evaluation mechanisms and institutional safeguards that underpin the Fund, reiterating that every funding decision is taken strictly in accordance with approved implementation guidelines and established due process.

The press conference was addressed by Shri Rajesh Kumar Pathak, Secretary, Technology Development Board (TDB) and Dr. Shivkumar Kalyanaraman, Chief Executive Officer, Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF).

Prof. Umesh V. Waghmare, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology and Chairperson, Technology Development Board, joined virtually and conveyed his message reaffirming the Government's commitment to transparency, fairness and ethical governance in the implementation of the RDI Fund.In his message, the Secretary stated that the Government has followed the conflict-of-interest guidelines and framework diligently and strongly believes that there have been no violations. He expressed complete confidence in the integrity and ethical conduct of the members of the expert committee and emphasised that DST, TDB and ANRF remain committed to ensuring transparency, fairness and accountability in the operations of the Technology Development Board and the RDI Fund.

Clarifying the institutional framework governing the Fund, officials explained that the RDI implementation guidelines explicitly recognise that experts capable of evaluating cutting-edge technologies often possess prior experience in the innovation ecosystem, including professional or investment associations. Accordingly, the framework is designed not to exclude domain expertise but to regulate it through clearly defined conflict-of-interest provisions. The guidelines mandate disclosure of interests, structured decision-making processes and recusal wherever a potential conflict arises, ensuring that technical expertise is retained while safeguarding the integrity of funding decisions. These provisions formed part of the approved implementation framework even before project evaluation commenced.

Officials emphasised that the mere existence of a professional or investment association with an innovation ecosystem entity does not constitute a violation of conflict-of-interest norms. What the framework requires is full disclosure of such interests and complete recusal from the evaluation and decision-making process relating to the concerned proposal. **TDB has put in place even more stringent COI policy in place whereby if an IC member owns an ETE (CEO, Founder or Shareholder) then it's the responsibility of such member to ensure no project proposal is submitted by the ETEs to TDB till he/she is the IC member**. These safeguards were implemented rigorously during the first round of project selection, and every member of the Investment Committee complied with the prescribed disclosure and recusal requirements wherever applicable.

The Government further clarified that the Technology Development Board has consistently followed similar conflict-of-interest safeguards for nearly three decades while supporting indigenous technology development. **Since its establishment under an Act of Parliament in 1996, TDB has relied upon independent expert committees rather than individual officials for evaluating technology proposals.** The same institutional principles continue to govern project selection under the RDI Fund, reinforcing continuity, credibility and public confidence in the decision-making process.

Explaining the evaluation process, officials noted that project approvals are taken collectively by an Investment Committee comprising independent external experts drawn from technology, industry and investment domains. Government officials do not determine the technical merit of proposals, and the Member Secretary of TDB has no voting rights in the Investment Committee. Moreover, approvals are granted only through a supermajority of eligible members instead of a simple majority, providing an additional institutional safeguard against arbitrary or individual decision-making. Members who declare a conflict of interest neither participate in discussions nor vote on the concerned proposal.The Investment Committee recommends the project proposals through super majority for final consideration & approval by the TDB Board.

The Government also clarified that assistance under the RDI Fund through TDB is provided for specific research and technology development projects, and not as financial support to companies as entities. TDB extends soft loans linked to clearly identified technology projects, while expenditure incurred before submission of the proposal is excluded from consideration. Further, Government assistance is released only against matching investments mobilised after project approval from eligible non-government sources. This structure ensures that public funding catalyses additional private investment while maintaining financial discipline and accountability throughout project implementation.

Addressing questions regarding prior investments made by venture capital funds or angel investor networks, officials clarified that such investments, where made before submission of a proposal, have no bearing on the Government's funding decision. Likewise, if a private investor subsequently chooses to invest in a project after it has successfully undergone technical evaluation and approval, such investment represents an independent commercial decision and does not influence the appraisal process undertaken by the Government. The evaluation framework, therefore, focuses exclusively on the scientific merit, technological innovation and innovation potential of the project under consideration. Each of the 22 companies are deep-science based companies building sovereign technologies & solving critical problems. Many of the technologies being built are first time in India and one of the very few in the world. As these deep-tech science led companies in India cannot raise debt from market during their early stage, as RDI fund is available only from TRL 4 onwards. Hence, they got equity from angel investors & funds which is good in the sense that this raises the probability of success of these companies. Many of these 22 ETEs got fund from co-investors as well as VC funds/Family offices where **none of the IC member is conflicted**. This further gives confidence to RDI fund investment.

Officials further highlighted that several of the projects approved under the present funding round had already undergone independent evaluation through national innovation platforms and expert assessment mechanisms before being considered under the RDI Fund. They also noted that a number of beneficiary companies had previously received project-based support from TDB years before attracting investments from venture capital or angel investors. This reflects TDB's long-standing role in identifying and supporting promising indigenous technologies at an early stage of development and should not be construed as preferential treatment under the present funding programme.

ANRF reiterated that conflict-of-interest management constitutes a core principle of the RDI Fund's governance framework. The implementation guidelines require Second Level Fund Managers to constitute Investment Committees in a manner that avoids potential conflicts of interest while prescribing disclosure, recusal and structured decision-making wherever necessary. These provisions, together with other governance safeguards, were incorporated into the publicly available implementation framework prior to the launch of the funding process and have been consistently followed throughout project evaluation and approval.

The Government emphasised that India's ambition to emerge as a global leader in deep-tech innovation requires the participation of the country's finest scientific, technological and investment expertise. At the same time, it underscored that such participation must be governed by transparent institutional safeguards that command public confidence. The RDI Fund has therefore been designed around internationally accepted principles of disclosure, recusal, collective decision-making and independent evaluation, ensuring that expertise is leveraged without compromising integrity or fairness.

Reaffirming its commitment to accountable governance, the Government stated that every project supported under the RDI Fund is selected through a transparent, rule-based and merit-driven process designed to advance India's research and innovation ecosystem. It reiterated that the established safeguards governing disclosure of interests, mandatory recusal, independent expert evaluation and supermajority approval provide a strong institutional framework that protects the integrity of public funding while accelerating India's journey towards becoming a global deep-tech innovation powerhouse.

*****

NKR/AK/FT

(रिलीज़ आईडी: 2295967) आगंतुक पटल : 1428