

SLATE

# All you wanted to know about NITI Aayog

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The winds of change sweeping across the corridors of power since Narendra Modi took charge at the Centre have dislodged not just bureaucrats, but also institutions once regarded as key pillars of governance in the country. Among the big moves of the government was to consign to history the more than six decades old Planning Commission, and to usher in its place a brand new NITI Aayog. Earlier this month, the NITI Aayog's governing council held its first meeting.

## What is it?

For starters, NITI Aayog is a catchy acronym in keeping with the Centre's penchant for alphabet soups pregnant with symbolism. NITI is short for National Institution for Transforming India. In Sanskrit and Hindi for which the new dispensation has a soft spot, NITI means policy and Aayog means commission. Ergo: the Planning Commission has been replaced by the Policy Commission.

But the change in the NITI Aayog's functioning isn't restricted to a new name. This new economic think-tank, manned by domain experts, has been constituted to provide strategic and technical advice to the Centre and the State governments on key policy matters. The Planning Commission also did this but allegedly in a heavily centralised, big-brother way suited to a command economy. With the Indian

economy becoming more market-driven and individual States requiring a nuanced policy framework, the NITI Aayog has the mandate to give individual States much more say in their planning and development process. It hopes to replace the one way Centre-to-State flow of policy with 'cooperative federalism'. The NITI Aayog will now recommend policies. Their implementation will be up to the governments. Importantly, unlike the Planning Commission, the NITI Aayog does not have the power of allocating central funds to States. This will now be done by the finance ministry.

The governing council of the NITI Aayog has on board the chief ministers of all the States and lieutenant governors of the Union Territories. This council, in its first meeting, decided to undertake a review of centrally sponsored schemes — whether they should be continued, transferred to States or scrapped.

**Why is it important?**

A distinguished think-tank with strategic vision and expertise and the courage to offer objective advice to the government is imperative in any democratic setup. This is especially so for India given its mind-boggling complexity and diversity. The NITI Aayog, by giving States more control, may also prevent ivory tower policymaking and give it a greater grassroots flavour.

**Why should I care?**

It's almost always about the economy, stupid. Government policies touch our lives in a myriad ways. More jobs, better salaries, less inequality, lower prices, more choice as consumers, old-age benefits — all this and much more depends on the decisions and policies of the powers-that-be. Sane, logical advice based on unbiased data and ground realities enhance the quality of these decisions and policies.

**Bottomline**

Whether you call it the NITI Aayog or the Planning Commission, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Most of India's problems originate not from the lack of elaborate plans, but for the lack of seriousness in implementation.

*A weekly column that puts the fun into learning*

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**Rasheeda Bhagat**

Rasheeda Bhagat is an Editorial Consultant with Business Line and writes on politics, interesting people, gender, conflict, social and human interest/rights issues, travel and lifestyle.

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This one is definitely a change for better. It is high time you stop highlighting just problems and po

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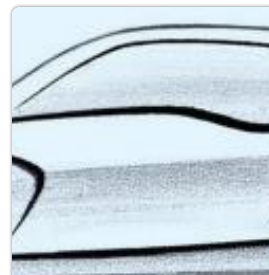
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