



## NEWS: ONOS (One Nation, One Subscription)

**NEWS;** The Union Cabinet approved the ONOS scheme on November 25, 2024.

- It aims to provide universal access to scholarly journals for all public institutions in India, including universities, colleges, and research organizations.

### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

#### 1. Financial Allocation

- The scheme comes with a significant financial outlay of ₹6,000 crore, spread over three years (2025-2027).
- This amount will be paid to 30 major international journal publishers, ensuring wide access to global research.

#### 2. Current Expenditure on Journal Subscriptions

- Public institutions in India currently spend around ₹1,500 crore annually on journal subscriptions and database access.
- Including subscription to research databases, the annual expenditure is estimated to be under ₹2,000 crore.

#### 3. Primary Objective

- ONOS aims to democratize access to research by ensuring that all public institutions, irrespective of their size or financial capacity, have equitable access to scholarly publications.

### Challenges and Critiques

#### 1. Timing and Relevance of ONOS

##### • Global Transition to Open Access (OA)

- The global academic ecosystem has been rapidly shifting towards Open Access publishing.
- Currently, over 53% of all scientific research papers worldwide are freely accessible through various OA models.

##### • Major Policy Changes in Leading Countries

- The U.S. Office of Science and Technology Policy has mandated that, starting in 2026, all publicly funded research articles must be freely accessible without embargo.



- Similarly, Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship research funding program, requires funded research to be made freely available online.

- **Potential Obsolescence of ONOS**

- Given the trend towards universal OA, a significant proportion of research could be freely accessible by 2026.
- ONOS risks becoming redundant, raising concerns about the financial prudence of spending ₹6,000 crore on subscriptions.

## 2. Issues with the Commercial Publishing Model

- **Monopoly of Western Publishers**

- A few major publishers dominate the global scholarly publishing market, charging exorbitant fees for journal subscriptions.
- Publishers like Elsevier and Springer often have profit margins exceeding 30%, highlighting the exploitative nature of the system.

- **Publicly Funded Research, Privately Owned Access**

- Research funded by taxpayers is often locked behind paywalls, forcing public institutions to pay again to access it.

- **High Article Processing Charges (APCs) in Open Access Journals**

- Many journals, especially in the gold OA model, charge APCs that can reach thousands of dollars.
- Example: *Nature Communications* charges an APC of \$6,790 per article, which may deter researchers from low- or middle-income countries.

## 3. Copyright Issues and Intellectual Property

- **Loss of Author Rights**

- In the subscription model, researchers are often required to transfer copyright to publishers.
- This allows publishers to use the research for commercial purposes without the authors' consent or compensation.

- **Case Study: Taylor & Francis and Microsoft**

- In early 2024, Taylor & Francis allowed Microsoft to use its journal content to train AI models.





- Authors, who had surrendered their copyrights, raised concerns about the unpaid use of their work.
- **Need for Rights Retention Policies**
  - Rights retention allows authors to retain copyright while granting publishers limited rights to distribute their work.
  - Successful models, like those at Harvard University, enable researchers to self-archive in open repositories.

## 4. Preservation of Digital Research Content

- **Vulnerability of Digital Archives**
  - A study in the *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* found that 28% of articles with DOIs are not properly preserved.
  - Example: The discontinuation of the journal *Heterocycles* in 2023 temporarily rendered 17,000 articles inaccessible, emphasizing the need for robust preservation systems.
- **Dependence on Publishers for Preservation**
  - Relying solely on publishers risks losing access to valuable research if journals are discontinued or publishers face operational challenges.

## Missed Opportunity for Building Indigenous Publishing Capacity

- **Over-reliance on Foreign Publishers**
  - India performs much of the backend work for global publishers, yet remains dependent on them for high-quality journals.
- **Potential for Self-Reliance**
  - India has the talent and infrastructure to develop world-class journals.
  - Strengthening indigenous journals could position India as a global leader in academic publishing.
- **Importance of Preprinting and Data Sharing**
  - Preprinting allows researchers to share their findings online before formal peer review, promoting rapid dissemination of knowledge.

## Recommendations for Improvement

### Promoting Open Access (OA) Models



- **Strengthen Green OA**

- Encourage researchers to self-archive in institutional or national repositories immediately after publication.
- Mandate publicly funded research to be openly accessible, building on India's 2014 Open Access Policy.

- **Support APCs for Researchers**

- Provide financial assistance to cover APCs for Indian researchers publishing in prestigious OA journals.

## Implementing Rights Retention Policies

- **Allow Researchers to Retain Copyright**

- Enable authors to deposit their work in OA repositories, ensuring wider accessibility and compliance with global OA standards.

## Building a Self-Reliant Publishing Ecosystem

- **Elevate Indian Journals to Global Standards**

- Invest in editorial quality, peer-review processes, and visibility of Indian journals.
- Encourage international researchers to submit high-quality work to Indian journals.

- **Develop Preprint and Data-Sharing Platforms**

- Establish national platforms to facilitate early dissemination and collaboration.

## 4. Ensuring Long-term Digital Preservation

- **Create National Repositories**

- Establish secure and sustainable repositories for preserving research articles and data.
- Ensure continuous access to digital content, independent of publishers' operational status.

## Conclusion

- **ONOS's Mixed Potential**

- ONOS is a commendable initiative for democratizing access to research but falls short in addressing systemic issues like copyright retention, reliance on Western publishers, and long-term digital preservation.



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- **Need for a Comprehensive Strategy**

- By integrating Open Access, indigenous publishing, and robust digital preservation into its framework, ONOS could have transformed the scholarly publishing landscape in India.
- Without these reforms, ONOS risks being an expensive short-term solution with limited long-term impact.

**Source:** <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/indias-one-nation-one-subscription-plan-explained/article68938128.ece>

