

GOVERNMENT E MARKETPLACE SCIENTIFIC PROCUREMENT: ECONOMY NEWS: Rules eased for scientific equipment purchase to boost research: Minister

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Government of India has exempted scientific institutions from using the GeM portal for procuring research materials, restoring autonomy and addressing long-standing concerns about quality, flexibility, and experimental reproducibility. This reform is a major boost to India's R&D ecosystem, enabling timely, high-quality scientific procurement critical for global competitiveness and innovation.

Context and Policy Shift

- The Government of India has introduced a **landmark policy change** allowing scientific institutions to **bypass the Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** when procuring research materials and equipment.
- This move has been welcomed by the scientific community as a **restoration of institutional autonomy** and a step toward **removing procedural bottlenecks** in India's research ecosystem.
- The change marks a **reversal of the 2020 mandate**, which required **all government-funded institutions** to procure through the GeM portal.

Limitations of GeM in the Research Context

- **Lowest Cost Bias:**
 - The GeM platform emphasizes procurement based on **the lowest bid**, often ignoring **essential quality parameters** critical for scientific experiments.
 - For example, the same chemical like **sodium chloride** can have **varying levels of purity**, which affects experimental accuracy.
- **Compromised Experimental Fidelity:**
 - Research experiments demand **fidelity to specific materials and instruments** to ensure **reproducibility**.
 - Forced substitutions under GeM rules result in **experimental failure**, wasted resources, and **loss of credibility** in research outcomes.
- **Mismatch with Specialised Needs:**
 - Scientific work often requires **custom-built or precision equipment**, including **reagents, microchips, lab hardware, and biological tools**.
 - These are often **not listed or available** on GeM, which primarily hosts **generic suppliers and commercial products**.
 - Consequently, GeM becomes **incompatible with the dynamic and evolving needs** of researchers.

Systemic Impediments to Scientific Autonomy

- **Ignored Ground Realities:**
 - India lacks a strong domestic industry for **high-end scientific equipment**.
 - Despite this, the **blanket application of GeM** was enforced, disregarding **existing structural and industrial limitations**.
- **One-Size-Fits-All Approach:**
 - The 2020 mandate failed to differentiate between **routine office supplies** and **high-precision research tools**, applying a **standard procurement logic** to dissimilar needs.
 - This "hammer-and-nail" approach undermined the **complexity of scientific procurement**.
- **Consequences of Policy Delay:**
 - The delay in recognizing GeM's unsuitability for research led to:
 - **Delays in project timelines**
 - **Underutilization of research grants**
 - **Lower innovation output and publication rates**
 - **A decline in India's global R&D competitiveness**

Restoring Institutional Autonomy & Long-Term Vision

- **Procurement Autonomy Reinstated:**
 - The exemption allows institutions to choose vendors based on **trust, quality, past collaboration, and scientific merit**.
 - Ensures better alignment with **global scientific practices** and improves **collaborative potential**.
- **Leadership by Scientists in Ministries:**
 - Unlike other ministries, India's science and research departments are **led by scientists and domain experts**, not generalist bureaucrats.
 - This leadership model recognizes that science **requires flexibility, innovation, and expert oversight**, not rigid control.
- **Vision for Science-Driven Nation-Building:**
 - This correction acknowledges the need to **liberate science from bureaucratic barriers**.

- Supports India's foundational philosophy that **science should be nurtured**, not regulated like procurement of chairs and paper.
- Paves the way for **international collaboration, higher quality research, and greater innovation** from Indian institutions.

Source: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Jun/16/rules-eased-for-scientific-equipment-purchase-to-boost-research-minister#:~:text=The%20limit%20for%20direct%20purchases,lakh%20to%20Rs%201%20crore.>