Science Governance

Why in news?

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SPARK (Sustainable Progress through Application of Research and Knowledge) is a proposed initiative to synergise science activity in India.

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Science bodies in India:

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- As for overarching bodies, we already have the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Prime Minister and the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India.
- The science departments are too different from one another to come under the purview of one “overarching” body like SPARK.
- The Department of Science and Technology and Department of Biotechnology are purely funding and outreach organisations.
- The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) has a special and tricky mandate which involves interaction with industry.
- The Department of Atomic Energy, Defence Research and Development Organisation, Department of Space and others are into mission-mode projects. However, they have remained toothless.
- Indian science is certainly not in a good state of health today.
- There is a lack of scientific expertise across all levels. We have failed in our educational system to harness the enormous latent talent in our country and build a solid foundation of science.

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How does SPARK fit in?

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- The goals of SPARK seem to be most closely attuned with NITI Aayog, and it might well be effective only within this parent organisation, taking inputs from various quarters such as industries, the ministries themselves and NGOs to make proposals, some of which could move forward to become major initiatives.
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What should be done?

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- What one needs is a management technique that effectively identifies scientific challenges and links the resulting breakthroughs with national problems.
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- Science does not end with the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research and other elite institutions.
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- Soothing yet baffling expedients to solve the problems of Indian science might make for good copy in the short run but they are not going to yield real results.
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- For example, SPARK is not even required to “closely work with industry and evolve public private partnerships”. That is the mandate of CSIR.
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- Decisions on new initiatives like SPARK should not be taken within government departments in Delhi following a proposal from one closed administrative group to another.
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- A broad-based consultation with stakeholders is a must.
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- Even if SPARK is constituted, it needs financial independence; given the relationship between the Ministry of Finance and its Department of Expenditure on the one hand and the science departments on the other, this remains a moot point.
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\n**Source: The Hindu**

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