

SCIENCE AND TECH AWARDS TO GET PADMA-STYLE MAKEOVER INTO RASHTRIYA VIGYAN PURASKAR

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The Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar awards will be announced annually on May 11, which is National Technology Day, and will be awarded on National Space Day, August 23. Illustration for representation purpose only.

Nearly a year after the Union Government decided to cut the number of prizes annually awarded by its science-affiliated Ministries, it has instituted the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar (RVP) — 56 prizes to felicitate scientists, technologists and innovators. Akin to the prestigious Padma awards, these awards will not include any cash component; instead, they will likely bestow only a certificate and medallion on the awardee, sources confirmed to *The Hindu*.

According to the proposal seen by *The Hindu*, which is yet to be made public, the RVP will comprise three Vigyan Ratna awards, as well as 25 Vigyan Shri, 25 Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar, and three Vigyan Team awards.

These prizes will be awarded annually for physics, chemistry, biological sciences, mathematics and computer science, earth science, medicine, engineering science, agricultural science, environmental science, technology and innovation, atomic energy, space science and technology, and a 13th category, simply called 'Others'.

"It may be ensured that each domain may be represented. Adequate representation of women may also be ensured," said the proposal forwarded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

The 56 proposed awards are a stark reduction from the almost 300 science prizes that used to be given by Union Ministries. In their previous avatar, the prizes also had a significant cash component. The Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (SSB) awards, given by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) since 1958, now includes 5 lakh per winner, as well as a salary perk. In fact, the government announced the names of 12 winners of the SSB awards just last week, after a year's delay. The National Technology Awards, given to teams by the Technology Development Board (a DST entity), also include cash prizes worth 25 lakh.

The new awards will also be open to persons of Indian origin (PIOs), though a maximum of one such may be awarded the Vigyan Ratna, while three PIOs each can be selected for the Vigyan Shri and the VY-SSB. However, PIOs will not be eligible for the Vigyan Team awards.

The Vigyan Ratna awards shall be for “lifetime contributions along with excellence made in any field of science”, the Vigyan Shri for “distinguished contribution to any field”, and the SSB for “exceptional contribution by young scientists”. The team awards shall be for three or more researchers who have made an “exceptional contribution as a team”. There are no age limits for any prizes except the SSB, for which recipients must be 45 years or younger.

The awards will be announced annually on May 11, which is National Technology Day, and will be awarded on National Space Day, August 23. These are the days on which India successfully conducted its second nuclear test in 1998, and then catapulted the [Chandrayaan-3's Vikram lander on the moon this year](#).

The RVP awards, which will commence from 2024, will be conferred by the President of India or the Vice President, according to the proposal. A committee will be constituted every year, comprising the Secretaries of six science Ministries, up to four presidents of science and engineering academies, and six distinguished scientists and technologists from various fields. The CSIR will coordinate the administration of the awards process for two years, after which it will be taken over by the proposed National Research Foundation.

The RVP awards are a major truncation of the nearly 300 awards that were given by scientific Ministries, though most of these were internal awards. The DST, for instance, used to award 207 prizes, of which four were national awards, 97 were private endowment awards, 54 were lecture or scholarship awards, and 56 were internal awards. The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) used to give 25 performance awards, conferred by public sector units, and 13 “non-core” domain awards.

Last year, an MHA-constituted committee decided to do away with all the atomic energy awards, and replace them with “an award of very high stature.” As per the latest recommendation, all internal awards of departments will be discontinued, save one award of the DAE in the name of Homi Jehangir Bhabha with a maximum of 30 recipients. Internal awards given by the Department of Space, the Indian Council of Medical Research, and the Ministry of Earth Sciences have also been rescinded.

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