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National Technology Day 2026: Vigyan Tech and the Pokhran Legacy

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SCIENCE & TECH

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WHY IN NEWS

India observed its **28th National Technology Day** on May 11, 2026 with the inauguration of **Vigyan Tech 2026** – a three-day technology showcase at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. The day commemorates the **Pokhran-II nuclear tests of May 11, 1998 (Operation Shakti)** – the strategic event that catalysed India’s recognition as a nuclear-weapon state and that anchors the country’s annual celebration of indigenous innovation.

BACKGROUND: FROM POKHRAN TO A NATIONAL DAY OF TECHNOLOGY

On **May 11, 1998**, India conducted **three simultaneous nuclear detonations** at the **Pokhran test range in Rajasthan**, followed by two more devices on May 13. The five-test series was codenamed **Operation Shakti**. It was led scientifically by **Dr A P J Abdul Kalam** (then Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister and head of DRDO) and **Dr R Chidambaram** (then Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission), with the political authorisation of Prime Minister **Atal Bihari Vajpayee**.

The yields covered a thermonuclear device, fission devices, and sub-kiloton tactical designs – demonstrating a complete weapons capability rather than a single proof-of-concept. India declared itself a **nuclear-weapon state**. Sanctions followed under the US Glenn Amendment, but were progressively lifted between 2001 and 2008, culminating in the **Indo-US civil nuclear deal**.

To commemorate this scientific achievement, PM Vajpayee instituted **National Technology Day in 1999** – marked every May 11 to honour scientists, engineers, and technology institutions.

VIGYAN TECH 2026: SCALE AND SCOPE

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Venue	Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi
Duration	3 days (May 11-13, 2026)
Stakeholders	3,000+
Technologies showcased	500+
Scientific ministries	14
DST-backed deep-tech	9
Theme	“Responsible Innovation for Inclusive Growth”

The showcase brings together **DST, DBT, MoES, DAE, DRDO, ISRO, ICAR, ICMR, MeitY**, and other agencies under one roof – a deliberate signal of inter-ministerial integration that the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) is designed to deepen.

THEMATIC FOCUS AREAS

1. Artificial Intelligence

The **IndiaAI Mission** (Rs 10,371 crore, 2024) is the flagship. Highlights at Vigyan Tech 2026 include indigenous foundation models, sovereign GPU compute infrastructure, and AI applications in agriculture, health, and language tech.

2. Quantum Computing

The **National Quantum Mission** (Rs 6,003 crore, 2023-2031) targets quantum computers of 50-1,000 physical qubits and quantum communication over 2,000 km. Vigyan Tech showcases include IISc, TIFR, and IIT prototypes.

3. Green Hydrogen

The **National Green Hydrogen Mission** (Rs 19,744 crore, 2023) targets 5 MMT/year of green hydrogen by 2030 with the SIGHT incentive scheme. Vigyan Tech showcases include indigenous electrolyser stacks and pilot blending in steel and refining.

4. Deep-Tech and Semiconductors

The **India Semiconductor Mission** (ISM 1.0 Rs 76,000 crore in 2021, expanded in Budget 2026-27) and the **Deep Tech Startup Policy** anchor display fabs, compound semiconductors, and quantum-secure communication.

LINKAGE TO VIKSIT BHARAT@2047

Vigyan Tech 2026 explicitly frames innovation as the engine of **Viksit Bharat@2047** – India’s centenary vision of becoming a developed nation. The theme “**Responsible Innovation for Inclusive Growth**” signals two policy emphases:

- **Responsible:** ethical guardrails for AI, biotech, and dual-use technologies; alignment with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023
- **Inclusive:** technology that closes – not widens – the rural-urban, gender, and regional divides

This sits alongside the **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) Act, 2023**, which replaced SERB and is meant to channel Rs 50,000 crore (60% from non-government sources) into mission-mode research.

INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF INDIAN S&T

INSTITUTION	ROLE
DST (Department of Science and Technology)	Apex coordination, ANRF anchor
DBT (Department of Biotechnology)	Biotech R&D, BIRAC, Bio-E3 policy
MoES	Earth, ocean, atmospheric sciences
DAE	Civilian nuclear, BARC, IREL, NPCIL
DRDO	Strategic and defence R&D
ISRO	Space; Department of Space
CSIR	37 labs; under DSIR
MeitY	Electronics, IT, semiconductors, IndiaAI
ANRF (2023)	Cross-cutting research funding

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 – Science, Technology, Economy

- India's nuclear weapons programme and strategic doctrine
- National missions: IndiaAI, Quantum, Green Hydrogen, Semiconductor, Bio-E3
- ANRF and the research funding architecture

GS Paper 2 – Governance

- Inter-ministerial coordination on science and technology
- Public-private partnerships in R&D

Mains Angles

- 1 Examine how Pokhran-II reshaped India's strategic doctrine and its access to dual-use technology.
- 2 Evaluate ANRF as a structural reform of India's research funding – compare with the US NSF and UK UKRI.
- 3 “Responsible innovation must address access, not just safety.” Discuss in the context of India's AI policy.

FACTS CORNER – KNOWLEDGEPEDIA
POKHRAN-II (OPERATION SHAKTI):

May 11, 1998: three simultaneous devices (thermonuclear, fission, sub-kiloton) at Pokhran, Rajasthan

May 13, 1998: two additional sub-kiloton devices

Leaders: Dr APJ Abdul Kalam (DRDO Scientific Adviser) and Dr R Chidambaram (AEC Chairman);
PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee authorised

India declared itself a nuclear-weapon state; followed Pokhran-I (Smiling Buddha) of May 18, 1974

NATIONAL TECHNOLOGY DAY:

Instituted 1999 by PM Vajpayee; observed every May 11

28th edition in 2026

Theme 2026: “Responsible Innovation for Inclusive Growth”

Vigyan Tech 2026: Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi; 3 days; 500+ technologies; 14 scientific ministries;
9 DST deep-tech showcases

KEY MISSIONS:

IndiaAI Mission: Rs 10,371 crore (2024)

National Quantum Mission: Rs 6,003 crore (2023-2031)

National Green Hydrogen Mission: Rs 19,744 crore (2023); 5 MMT/year by 2030

India Semiconductor Mission (ISM): Rs 76,000 crore (2021)

ANRF Act 2023: replaces SERB; Rs 50,000 crore corpus target

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