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UNIFIED PENSION SCHEME

The Union Cabinet has approved a new Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) for Central government employees, offering an assured pension of 50% of the average salary drawn over the last 12 months of service.

Old Pension Scheme (OPS)

- OPS offers pensions to government employees on the basis of their last drawn salary. **50% of the last drawn salary.**
- The attraction of the Old Pension Scheme lay in its promise of an assured or 'defined' benefit to the retiree. It was hence described as a '**Defined Benefit Scheme**'.
 - E.g., if a government employee's basic monthly salary at the time of retirement was Rs 10,000, she would be assured of a pension of Rs 5,000.
- The OPS was discontinued by the Central government in 2003.
- **Concerns with the OPS**
 - The main problem was that the pension liability remained unfunded — that is, **there was no corpus specifically for pension**, which would grow continuously and could be dipped into for payments.
 - The Government of India budget provided for pensions every year; there was no clear plan on how to pay year after year in the future.

New Pension Scheme (NPS)

- As a substitute of OPS, the NPS was introduced by the Central government in **April, 2004**. This pension programme is open to employees from the **public, private** and even the **unorganised sectors** except those from the armed forces.
- The scheme encourages people to invest in a pension account at regular intervals during the course of their employment.

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- After retirement, the subscribers can take out a certain percentage of the corpus.
 - The beneficiary receives the remaining amount as a monthly pension, post-retirement.
- **Nodal agency:** Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)

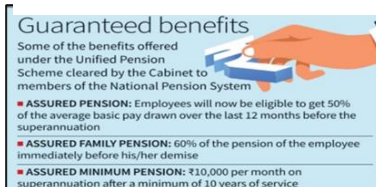
Difference between NPS and OPS

- The Old Pension Scheme is a pension-oriented scheme. It offers regular pensions to employees during retirement.
 - Thus, in OPS, **the pension amount is constant and guaranteed.**
- On the other hand, the National Pension Scheme is an investment cum pension scheme.
- Therefore, NPS doesn't guarantee fix returns as it is subjected to market volatility.
 - i.e., in NPS, contributions are defined, but benefits depend on the market.

Unified Pension Scheme (UPS)

- The Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) offers an assured pension of 50% of the average salary drawn over the last 12 months of service.

- **Key features**



- Effective from April 1, 2025, the scheme will be available to employees with at least 25 years of service.

- It will include benefits such as:

- a minimum pension of ₹10,000 for those

with at least 10 years of service,

- inflation-linked adjustments, and
- a family pension of 60% of the employee's pension after their death.

- The government will increase its contribution to the pension corpus from 14% to 18.5% of the basic pay and dearness allowance, while the employee contribution will remain at 10%.
- It will be optional for existing employees under the National Pension System (NPS.)



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WHAT IS THE VIGYAN DHARA SCHEME?



The Union Cabinet recently approved the continuation of three umbrella schemes merged into a unified central sector scheme called “Vigyan Dhara” under the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

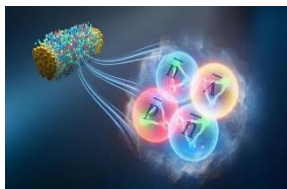
- It is a new **central sector scheme unifying three umbrella schemes of the Department of Science and Technology (DST).**
- The scheme has **three broad components:**
 - Science and Technology (S&T) **Institutional and Human Capacity Building,**
 - **Research and Development** and
 - **Innovation, Technology Development and Deployment.**
- These three schemes have been **merged into the unified scheme ‘Vigyan Dhara’.**
- This initiative, **managed by the Department of Science and Technology (DST),** is designed to enhance India's S&T capabilities through a streamlined approach.
- The **proposed outlay** for the implementation of the unified scheme ‘Vigyan Dhara’ is **10,579.84 crore during the 15th Finance Commission period from 2021-22 to 2025-26.**
- The merger of the schemes into a single scheme would enhance efficiency in fund utilization and establish synchronization among the sub-schemes/programs.
- The **primary objective** of the 'Vigyan Dhara' scheme is to **promote S&T capacity building** as well as **research, innovation, and technology development** towards strengthening the Science, Technology and Innovation ecosystem in the country.
- **Components:**
 - The scheme endeavours to **promote research in areas such as basic research with access to the international mega facilities, translational**

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research in sustainable energy, water, etc. and **collaborative research** through international bilateral and **multilateral cooperation**.

- It will also contribute to **building a critical human resource pool** to strengthen the science and technology landscape and **expand the R&D base** of the country towards **improving the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) researcher count**.
- **Focused interventions** will be taken up to **enhance the participation of women** in the field of S&T with the ultimate **goal of bringing gender parity** in Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI).
- **All the programs** proposed under the 'Vigyan Dhara' scheme would be aligned with the **5-year goals of DST** towards realising the **vision of Viksit Bharat 2047**.
- The **R&D component** of the scheme will be **aligned in line with the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)**.

ANTIMATTER



Definition: Antimatter is similar to ordinary matter but with the opposite electric charge, often referred to as "mirror matter."

- **Examples:**

- The antimatter counterpart of an electron (which has a negative charge) is the **positron**, which has the same mass as an electron but carries a positive charge.
- The antimatter equivalents of protons and neutrons are known as **antiprotons** and **antineutrons**, respectively.
- Collectively, these are known as **antiparticles**.

Antimatter Formation and Properties:

- **Creation:** Both matter and antimatter were created in equal amounts during the **Big Bang**. However, a slight imbalance allowed more matter to survive, forming the universe as we know it.



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- **Coexistence:** Matter and antimatter cannot exist together for long; they annihilate each other upon contact, releasing vast amounts of energy in the form of **gamma rays** or elementary particles.
- **Human-made antimatter:** Scientists can create antimatter particles in high-energy environments, such as particle accelerators like the **Large Hadron Collider (LHC)** operated by **CERN** near Geneva. These collisions simulate the conditions shortly after the Big Bang, allowing the brief creation of antimatter.
- **Natural antimatter:** Apart from laboratory conditions, antiparticles are also naturally produced sporadically throughout the universe.

GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT



The Great Nicobar Project is a multi-development initiative aimed at the holistic development of Great Nicobar Island, a strategic location in the southern end of the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.

- It was cleared by the **Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** in **November 2022** and is part of a broader strategy to enhance India's strategic presence and infrastructure in the region.
- The project is expected to be developed over 30 years in a phased manner.

Key objectives:

- **Strategic importance:** The project is designed to counter expansionist activities by neighbouring countries, particularly China, and to safeguard India's maritime interests by **curbing illegal activities** like poaching by the fishers.
- **Infrastructure development:** The project is valued at **₹72,000 crore** and includes key infrastructure such as the development of an **international container trans-shipment terminal**, a **greenfield international airport** with dual military-civilian functions, **township development**, and a **450 MVA power plant (gas and solar-based)**.

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Geographical context:

- **Location:** Great Nicobar Island is the southernmost island in the Andaman and Nicobar group, separated from the Andaman Islands by the **Ten Degree Channel**.
 - It is also home to **Indira Point**, India's southernmost point, located less than **150 km from Indonesia**.
- **Ecosystem:** The island features tropical wet evergreen forests, mountain ranges up to **650 meters high**, and coastal plains.
 - It also houses two national parks and a biosphere reserve, supporting endangered species like **the leatherback sea turtle**.

Impact on Indigenous Tribes:

- **Tribal population:** The island is home to the **Shompen**, a hunter-gatherer tribe, and the **Nicobarese**. An estimated 237 Shompen and 1,094 Nicobarese live in a tribal reserve covering 751 sq km, of which 84 sq km is proposed to be denotified for the project.

Environmental and seismic considerations:

- **Deforestation:** Approximately **13,075 hectares of forest land**, or **about 15%** of the island's area, is slated for diversion, with nearly **64 lakh trees** expected to be felled.
 - **Seismic risks:** The region is seismically active, having experienced a major earthquake (**9.2 on the Richter scale**) in **2004**.
 - Experts suggest a similar event may not occur for another 400-750 years, though smaller quakes are anticipated.
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INDIA TO BE FREE OF NAXALISM BY 2026

Left Wing Extremism (LWE)

- Left-wing extremism is the single internal security threat that affects the largest number of States in India.
- LWE aims to overthrow the existing democratic state structure with violence as their primary weapon, and mass mobilization and strategic united fronts as complementary components.

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- They plan to usher in So-called ‘New Democratic Revolution’ in India.
 - Left-wing extremists are popularly known as Maoists worldwide and as Naxalites in India.
 - **About the news**
 - Union Home Minister Amit Shah has set a target to eliminate Maoist activities in India by March 2026.
 - He emphasized the need for a strong and ruthless strategy for the final assault against these groups.
 - **Decline in Maoist violence**
 - The minister highlighted the significant decline in Maoist violence over the past decade, with incidents dropping by 53% and related deaths by 70%.
 - The number of LWE-affected districts has decreased from 96 to 45, and the number of LWE-hit police stations has reduced from 495 to 176.
 - **Factors behind this decline**
 - The minister noted the government’s efforts to address the security vacuum in LWE-affected areas through coordinated operations and development work.
 - He credited the joint efforts of state and Central Armed Police Forces, the National Investigation Agency, and the Enforcement Directorate for their role in combating Maoist extremism.
 - The Home Ministry's LWE Division, established in 2006, plays a crucial role in this effort, monitoring the situation and implementing countermeasures.
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WHY IS SANCTION FOR PROSECUTION NEEDED?

- Sanction for prosecuting a public servant is a crucial legal requirement designed to protect officials from frivolous or malicious lawsuits.
- This ensures that decisions made during their official duties are not constantly challenged in court without valid grounds.

Legal Framework:

- **CrPC and PCA:**
 - Both these laws require that before a public servant can be prosecuted, a competent authority must grant permission.
 - This is to ensure that the actions of public servants, especially those undertaken in their official capacity, are scrutinized before legal action is initiated.
- **Recent Amendments:**
 - The **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)**, which replaced the CrPC, retains the sanction provisions.
 - In 2018, amendments to the PCA introduced the necessity of obtaining government approval even to start an investigation, highlighting the importance of sanction before prosecuting public servants.

Role of the Governor in Cases Against a Chief Minister:

- The Governor plays a significant role in cases involving the Chief Minister.
- Since the Governor has the authority to dismiss a CM, they are also the one to grant prosecution sanctions against them.
- However, there has been debate over whether the Governor should act independently or based on the advice of the Council of Ministers.

Supreme Court's Stance:

- In the case of A.R. Antulay, the Supreme Court clarified that the Governor should exercise discretion and not merely follow the Council's advice when deciding on prosecution sanctions against a CM.
 - This discretionary power is particularly important in maintaining the balance of power and ensuring justice.
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H1N1



India has reported over 9,000 H1N1 cases and 178 deaths due to influenza A (H1N1), also known as swine flu, by the end of July 2024.

- **Nature of virus:** It is a subtype of the **Influenza A virus**, commonly known as **swine flu**. It can infect both humans and pigs, primarily causing respiratory illnesses.
- **Transmission:** The virus spreads through **respiratory droplets** when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. It can also be contracted by touching contaminated surfaces.
- **Contagious period:** The virus is contagious from the day before symptoms appear until about **four days** after they start. Children and immunocompromised individuals may remain contagious for a longer period.
- **First case in India:** The first confirmed case of H1N1 in India was reported in May 2009. Since then, the virus has caused several outbreaks, with significant case numbers recorded in 2021, 2022, and 2023.
- **Affected states:** **Punjab (41 deaths), Kerala (34 deaths), and Gujarat (28 deaths)** are the states with the highest mortality rates. The highest number of cases have been reported in Delhi, Gujarat, and Kerala.

Recent developments:

- **New Strain:** The Pune-based National Institute of Virology observed that the virus has undergone point mutations, leading to the emergence of a new strain called the **Michigan strain**, which has replaced the previously prevalent **California strain**. This shift is linked to the increased cases and mortality rates observed in 2024.
- **Mutation impact:** The virulence of the virus has remained largely unchanged, but the mutation has **rendered previous vaccinations less effective** against the new Michigan strain.