

AIR Spotlight - Agneepath Scheme

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panelists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, Agnipath Defence Policy Reform is discussed in detail.

Participants:

- Rtd. Lt General Sanjay Kulkarni, Defence Specialist
- Moderator Ajay Banerjee, Journalist

Context:

The government has launched the Agnipath Defence Policy Reform, which is a recruitment scheme, expected to provide job possibilities for the country's youth.

What exactly is the Agnipath scheme?

- The government recently announced its new Agnipath scheme for recruiting soldiers in all three services - Army, Navy & Airforce.
- The soldiers recruited under the new recruitment reform plan are going to be known as Agniveers.
- Approximately 45,000-50,000 soldiers will be recruited every year under the new scheme, with the majority 75% being recruited only for 4 years.
- The remaining 25% of the total annual recruits will be able to continue for another 15 years, under permanent commission.
- Only personnel below the rank of officer (those who do not join the forces as commissioned officers) will be affected by this scheme.

Eligibility criteria

- The age limit to apply for the scheme is between 17.5 to 21 years. The upper age limit has been relaxed from 21 years to 23 years for 2022-23. This will, however, be a one-time allowance.
- Medical and physical fitness criteria shall be met in accordance with existing rules, and recruitment would be done on an 'All India All Class' basis.

Know more about the [Agnipath Defence Policy Reforms](#) in the link.

Significance of the Scheme for Agniveers

- After being picked, candidates would go through six months of training before being deployed for three and a half years. In the beginning, they would be paid Rs 30,000 which will go up to Rs 40,000 by the end of the 4th year.
- 30% of their pay will be set aside in a Seva Nidhi scheme, to which the government will contribute an equivalent amount every month. At the end of the four years, each soldier would receive a lump sum payment of Rs 11.71 lakh, which will be tax-free.
- They will also get Rs 48 lakh life insurance cover. In case of death, the payout will be over Rs 1 crore, including pay for the unserved tenure.
- The 25% of the batch, who are re-selected will not be eligible for retirement benefits for the first four years.
- The government also asserted that it will expand job prospects and that soldiers will be able to find work in a variety of industries as a result of their abilities and experience gained during their 4-year service.
- They will be given skill certificates as well as bridge training. The focus will be on fostering entrepreneurship.

How will the scheme benefit the armed forces?

- It is a fantastic opportunity to tap the [demographic dividend](#) of the country.
- The move will result in substantially lower permanent force levels for the country's roughly 13-lakh-strong armed forces. As a result, the defence pension expense will be significantly reduced, which has been a big issue for governments for many years.
- It will help in the youthful profile of the three forces.
- The average age in the military is 32 years old today, but the scheme predicts that it will drop to 26 in six to seven years.
- A young military will help to learn new technology. In addition, a merit-based selection process for 25% of the Agniveers who will be permanently absorbed will increase the quality of permanent soldiers.

Criticism

- Soldiers in the Agnipath system may be hesitant to take chances since they know they will only be called up for a brief length of time. They may be fearful of danger or bodily harm while on duty.
- The 'All India All Class' intake mechanism and the option of four-year short-term contractual recruiting are causing concern among retired Army commanders. They believe that this new policy would be detrimental to Nepal-India ties because it would reduce their intake.
- New recruits have a four-year service time, which is far too short, and those who want to serve the country longer should be retained.
- The Army recruits around 50,000 soldiers per year, give or take 10%. According to this estimate, it will rise to 1-1.5 lakhs per year. As a result, the intake and recruiting models will be skewed.

Way Forward

- After 4 years, the Agniveers need to be infused into the civil society where they can contribute immensely towards the nation-building process.
- The infusion of disciplined, motivated and skilled 'Agniveers' back into society after military service, would be a great asset for the nation as it will be a "win-win proposition".
- The scheme will increase employment opportunities with new skills in different sectors.
- The scheme will give a better opportunity to the youth who choose to serve the nation.
- It will have a positive impact on the human resources management of the armed forces.

