Agnipath Scheme

Why in news?

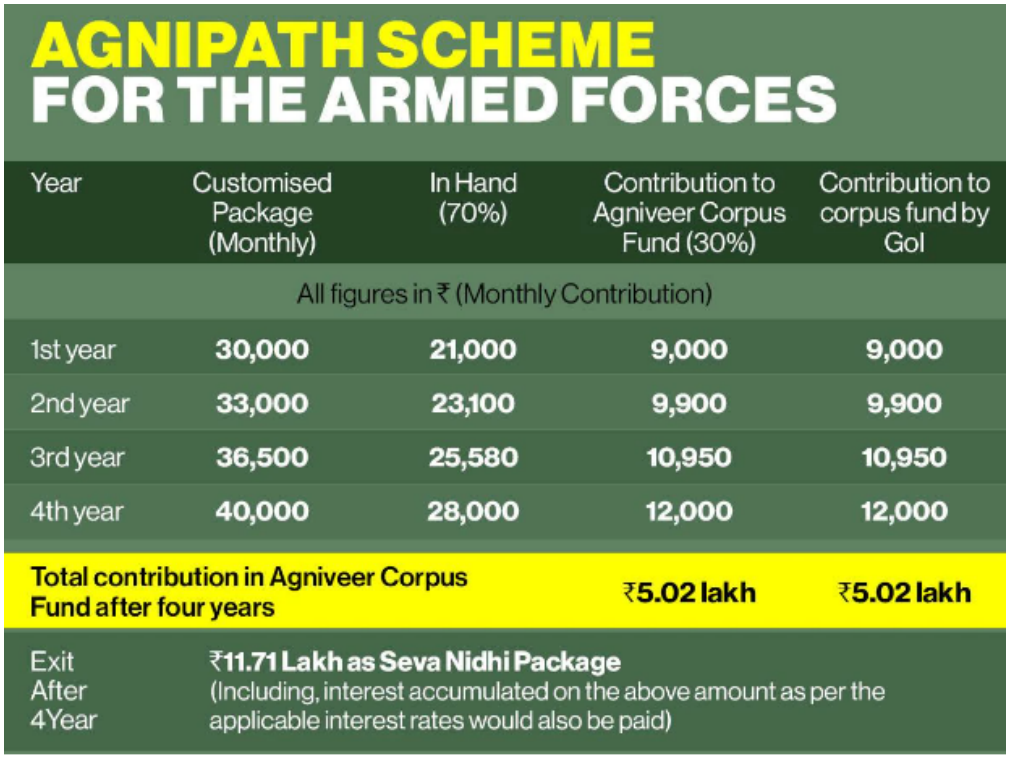
Recently, government's ambitious Agnipath scheme has faced opposition from political parties and armed forces veterans.

What is the Agnipath scheme?

- It is about recruiting personnel *below officer ranks* like *soldiers, airmen, and sailors* who *are not commissioned officers* to the Indian Armed Forces.
- **Announced in - *2022***, after military recruitment was paused for two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Broad objectives –** To enhance youthful profile of Armed Forces so that they at their *fighting best at all times* with increased risk taking ability and to *use emerging modern technologies*.
- To provide abilities and qualities such as *discipline, dynamism, motivation* and work-skills so that the youth remains as asset.
- **Key features** – It is a pan India merit based recruitment.
- It has a *tenure of four years*.
- It provides opportunity to apply for enrolment in *permanent cadre.*
- Based on merit and organizational requirement, *upto 25%* of Agniveers selected through central, transparent, rigorous system after four years.
- Age limit for applicants range from *17.5 years to 23 years*.
- Once selected they would go for *training for six months* and then will be deployed for three and a half years.
- In includes recruiting sailors, airmen, and soldiers, except the technical cadre of the medical branch.
- *Women* are also recruited ensuring gender equality.

How are Agniveers compensated?

- **Composite annual package** – The 1st package is approximately Rs.4 Lacs and upgradation upto approximately Rs.6 Lacs.



- **Allowances** – Risk & hardship, ration, dress, travel allowances are provided.
- **Severance package** – 30% of the monthly emoluments to be contributed by individuals and the same amount will be contributed by the government to 'Seva Nidhi' fund.
- A corpus of approximately Rs.11 Lacs is given after four years of service, which is also exempted from income tax.
- **Death compensation** – Non-contributory life insurance cover of Rs. 48 Lakh and additional ex gratia of Rs. 44 Lakhs for death attributable to service.
- It also provides unserved portion upto four years including 'Seva Nidhi' component.
- **Disability compensation –** The compensation is based on the % of disability laid down by medical authorities.
- One time ex-gratia of Rs. 44/ 25/ 17 Lacs for 100%/ 75%/ 50% disability, respectively.

What benefits are envisaged to be accrued from the scheme?

- It would be a win-win situation for the Armed Forces, Nation, individuals and the society at large.
- **Nation** – It helps in national integration based on unity in diversity with equal opportunity to youth including women from all regions.
- It promotes nation building through empowered, disciplined & skilled youth with military ethos in civil society.
- **Armed Forces** – It improves battle preparedness through transformative evolution with energetic, diverse, more trainable and resilient youth suited to the changing dynamics.
- It ensures selection of the best with rigorous and transparent selection process.
- Armed Forces will be empowered with *youthful profile* by optimal balance of youth an experience by bringing down the *average age down to 26 years* from current 32 years.
- It endeavor to harness benefits of skill India by induction from Tech Institutions.

- **Individuals** – It promotes smooth integration of trained personnel into society with *skill sets, certification and diplomas/ higher education/ credits*.
- It provides a platform for the youth to fulfil dream of joining the Armed Forces and serve the nation.
- It will imbibe armed forces *ethos, courage, camaraderie* commitment and teamwork in the youth.

What are the issues with this scheme?

- **Lack of pension** – Unlike soldiers in regular service, Agniveers do not draw pensions post-retirement.
- Only the 25% of Agniveers who get absorbed into the forces after four years will receive pensionary benefits.
- **Decrease permanency –** It will reduce the number of permanent armed forces.
- **Lack of benefits** – It creates a lesser cadre of soldiers, who work on the same tasks as those with full commission, but with lesser pay, benefits, and prospects.
- **Disparity –** It has caused significant disaffection among those who see military recruitment as a path to economic stability and upward mobility.

What lies ahead?

- The Forces too are carrying out an ***internal assessment*** on the impact of the scheme, based on which they will make recommendations to the government on possible changes.
- All three services are have submitted their observations to the Department of Military Affairs.
- The government has recently indicated that it is *willing to alter the scheme if required*, but without compromising on the Armed Forces' youthful profile.

References

1. Indian Express | Issues with Agnipath Scheme
2. Agnipath Brochure| Key features of Agnipath Scheme
3. Agnipath| Benefits of Agnipath Scheme

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