Sahayak system

Why in news?

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Videos surfaced on social media over the past couple of weeks where army personnel's accused some officers treating their subordinates as "slaves".

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What is the Sahayak system in the Indian Army?

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- **Officers of the colonial period needed help when they are in battle.**
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- **To help them they were supposed to have a retinue of servants.**
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- Thus evolved the concept of 'batman', short for 'Battle Man', wherein a young soldier helped out an officer with some of his mundane activities.
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- An official list from the late 19th century mentions 39 such servants.
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- The practice has since been codified via an Army Order and other policy letters into the Sahayak system.
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- No official figure is available, but an estimated 50,000 Sahayaks serve in the Army.
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Are soldiers recruited specifically to be Sahayaks?

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- No. Unlike a chef or a hairdresser or a housekeeper, there is no trade called Sahayak in the Army.
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- The usual practice in units is to employ a young soldier, and rotate the

soldiers doing the duty of a Sahayak.
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- It is supposed to be a voluntary job.
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- If any soldier expresses a desire to not be a Sahayak, he is supposed to be excused.
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Can Sahayaks be forced to do menial jobs by officers?

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- The Army said sahayaks are not technically supposed to work in the house.
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- This was reiterated at length by the Army Chief himself.
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- But several instances have come to light in the media where soldiers have been seen to be deployed at officers' homes.
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- They have been seen washing private cars and walking officers' dogs.
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- There are frequent allegations about the abuse of the practice, but no concrete proof or data.
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- The Army insists that a Sahayak "is more like a buddy to the officer.
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How has the Army typically reacted?

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- The Army has responded by reiterating orders and guidelines on the use of Sahayaks, and by asking officers to ensure that a soldier is not employed on unauthorised duty.
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- It has also proposed the hiring of non-combatants for permanent deployment at major peace stations to perform these duties.
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- This proposal, first made in 2012, has been revived recently, and is expected to free more than 25,000 soldiers employed as Sahayaks.

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Source: Indian Express

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