

AGNIPATH SCHEME AND AGNIVEERS

Why in news?

- The death of a 22-year-old Agniveer who was deployed on the Siachen glacier has brought back focus on Agnipath, the contractual scheme for recruitment into the armed forces, and the benefits under it.

What is the Agnipath scheme?

- It was introduced in 2022 to take in recruits for the Army, Navy, and Indian Air Force (IAF) on four-year contracts, including six months of training.
 - At present, all sailors, airmen, and soldiers, except the technical cadre of the medical branch, are recruited to the services under the scheme.
- At the end of four years, up to **25% of recruits can apply to join the services on a regular basis**, subject to merit and organisational requirements.
- The scheme had also opened doors for recruitment of women as Agniveers to the IAF and Navy.
 - The Army started the process of recruiting women soldiers into its Corps of Military Police in 2019.

Why was the Agnipath scheme brought?

- **To ensure a youthful profile for the armed forces**
- **Empowered civil society**
- **To reduce the burgeoning defence pension bills**

What benefits are Agniveers entitled to?

- The remuneration of an Agniveer is **Rs 30,000-Rs 40,000 per month**, and they are entitled to risk and hardship allowances.
- The scheme also has a **Seva Nidhi contributory package**, under which the Agniveers contribute 30% of their monthly emoluments, and the government contributes the same amount.

- On completion of four years, they will receive around Rs 11.71 lakh (with interest) from the package, and this will be exempt from income tax.
- **In case of death on duty**, they will receive more than Rs 1 crore, including the Seva Nidhi package and full pay for the period they could not serve.
- In the instance of a disability, they can receive up to Rs 44 lakh depending on the extent of disability suffered, which is attributed to or aggravated by military service.

How do these benefits compare with those due to a regular soldier?

- **Starting salary**
 - The starting salary of a regular soldier, combined with military service pay and dearness allowance, comes to around Rs 40,000, whereas the starting salary of an Agniveer is Rs 30,000.
- **Eligibility for pension**
 - A soldier employed on regular service will draw a pension post-retirement, while an Agniveer will not.
 - The 25% of Agniveers who would eventually be absorbed into the forces after four years will, however, be eligible for pension after retirement.
- **In case of a battle casualty**
 - In case of a battle casualty, the family of a regular soldier gets a liberalised family pension which is equal to the last pay drawn, for life.
 - There is no income tax on this amount.
 - The family of an Agniveer is eligible only for a non-contributory insurance sum amounting to Rs 48 lakh.
- **Gratuity and insurance**
 - A regular soldier gets gratuity for 15 days per year for every year of service, and has an insurance cover of Rs 50 lakh.
 - Soldiers on regular service also get a children's education allowance up to graduation.
 - None of these are available to Agniveers.
- **Disability during service**
 - In case of suffering a disability during service, an Agniveer gets:

- an ex-gratia amount that depends on the percentage of disability suffered,
- pay for the remaining part of the four-year service tenure (if they go out of service), and
- monetary benefits under the Seva Nidhi scheme.
- A regular soldier who suffers a disability gets pension, ex gratia, as well as impairment relief as per entitlement.

CONTOURS OF JOINT THEATRE COMMANDS READY, AWAIT GOVT NOD BEFORE TWEAKS

Why in news?

- The Armed Forces have narrowed down the final contours of the integrated theatre commands.
- There is a proposal for **theatre commanders under a national defence committee** likely to be headed by the Defence Minister.
- The structures of the theatre commands are awaiting the approval of the government, based on which there may be further changes.

Theaterisation of Armed Forces

- Theaterisation is a concept which seeks to integrate the capabilities of the three services - army, air force and navy – in order to optimally utilise their resources for wars and operations.
- A **theatre command/unit** will be created by integrating elements/assets from all the three services.
 - Simply put, a theatre command deploys elements of the three services under a single, unified command structure.
- Each command is assigned a specific geographical region, combining resources of the three services for operational roles.
- As of now, almost all major countries like China, Russia, the US, the UK and France work on a theatre command concept.
 - For example, **China's Western Theatre Command** looks after the entire borders with India.

Theatre commands and India

- The **Kargil Review Committee**, the Naresh Chandra Committee and the Group of Ministers had called for structural changes in higher defence management.
- It was the **Shekatkar committee**, which had recommended the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and theatre commands.

Theaterisation model under consideration in India



- At the moment, not much details about the theaterisation effort are available in the public domain. However, experts say various models are already being discussed.
- As per media reports, **three theatre commands will be set up first** — one facing Pakistan, another opposite China, and a maritime theatre command to tackle maritime threats outside the coastal borders of the country.
- These theatre commands are likely to be located in Jaipur, Lucknow and Karwar, respectively.

Current command structure in India

- At present, India has 17 single service commands and only two tri-service commands.
- The 17 single service commands are divided as:
 - Army – 7 commands; Airforce – 7 commands; Navy – 3 commands
- **The two tri-service commands** are: Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), and The Strategic Force Command (handles the nuclear weapons).

SUBSIDY MECHANISM FOR FERTILIZERS IN INDIA

- The Union Cabinet approved a Rs 22,303 crore subsidy on P&K fertilizers for the current Rabi season to ensure farmers continue to get soil nutrients at reasonable rates despite high global prices.

Fertilizer Subsidy:

- Farmers buy fertilisers at MRPs (maximum retail price) below their normal supply-and-demand-based market rates or what it costs to produce/import them.
 - The MRP of neem-coated urea, for instance, is fixed by the government at Rs 5,922.22 per tonne.
 - Whereas its average cost-plus price payable to domestic manufacturers and importers comes to around Rs 17,000 and Rs 23,000 per tonne, respectively.
- The difference, which varies according to plant-wise production cost and import price, is footed by the Centre as subsidy.
- The MRPs of non-urea fertilisers are decontrolled or fixed by the companies.
- However, the Centre pays a flat per-tonne subsidy on these nutrients to ensure reasonable prices.

How is the Subsidy Paid & Who gets it?

- The subsidy goes to fertiliser companies, although its ultimate beneficiary is the farmer who pays MRPs less than the market-determined rates.
- Under the Direct-Benefit Transfer (DBT) system, subsidy payment to the companies would happen only after actual sales to farmers by retailers.
- Each retailer now has a point-of-sale (PoS) machine linked to the Department of Fertilisers' e-Urvarak DBT portal.
- Anybody buying subsidised fertilisers is required to furnish his/her Aadhaar unique identity or Kisan Credit Card number.
- Only upon the sale getting registered on the e-Urvarak platform can a company claim subsidy.

[UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS \(UNFF\)](#)

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is organising a Country-Led Initiative (CLI) event as part of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) from 26-28 October, 2023 at the Forest Research Institute (FRI), Dehradun, Uttarakhand.



About the United Nations Forum on Forests:

- It promotes the **management, conservation, and sustainable development** of all types of forests.
- It was **established in 2000** by the UN Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).
- The Forum meets annually at the UN Headquarters in New York, bringing together representatives of all member states and forest-related agencies for **high-level dialogue on technical matters in odd years and policy matters in even years**.
- The forum has **universal membership**, and is composed of **all Member States of the United Nations and specialized agencies**.
- **India** is a founding member of UNFF.

What is the Country-Led Initiative (CLI)?

- Its primary goal is to contribute to the discussions of UNFF regarding the implementation of **Sustainable Forest Management and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests**.
- It also aims to facilitate the sharing of best practises among UNFF member States for the implementation of SFM and UNSPF.
- This year, CLI will discuss thematic areas involving forest fires and forest certification.

VIKRAM-1 ROCKET?

Indian firm Skyroot Aerospace recently unveiled its indigenously-built Vikram-1 rocket.



Why in the news?

- Planned to be launched in early 2024, **Vikram-I will be Skyroot's second rocket**, after the successful launch of the **Vikram-S rocket on November 18 last year**, when the space start-up became **the first company to launch a private rocket from the ISRO's launch centre in Sriharikota**.

About Vikram-1 Rocket:

- Vikram-1, named after the father of India's space programme, Vikram Sarabhai, is a multi-stage launch vehicle with a capacity to place around 300 kg of payloads in low-earth orbit.
- It has been built by Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace, a space startup.
- It is an all-carbon-fibre-bodied rocket that can place multiple satellites into orbit.
- Being a solid-fuel rocket and using relatively simpler technologies would mean that launching this vehicle would require minimal infrastructure and that the rocket could be assembled and launched within 24 hours from any site.

What is Low Earth Orbit (LEO)?

- A low Earth orbit (LEO) is, as the name suggests, an orbit that is relatively close to Earth's surface.
- It is normally at an altitude of less than 1000 km but could be as low as 160 km above Earth, which is low compared to other orbits but still very far above Earth's surface.
- By comparison, most commercial aeroplanes do not fly at altitudes much greater than approximately 14 km, so even the lowest LEO is more than ten times higher than that.
- The majority of satellites are to be found in LEO, as is the International Space Station (ISS).
- In order to remain in this orbit, a satellite has to travel at around 17,500 miles per hour (7.8 kilometres per second), at which speed it takes around 90 minutes to complete an orbit of the planet.
- LEO's close proximity to Earth makes it useful for several reasons. For example, it is the orbit most commonly used for satellite imaging, as being near the surface allows it to take images of higher resolution.

WHAT IS THE PRAGATI PLATFORM?

The Prime Minister recently chaired the meeting of the 43rd edition of PRAGATI, involving Centre and State governments.



- PRAGATI stands for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation.

- It is a **multi-purpose and multi-modal platform** that is aimed at addressing common man's grievances and simultaneously **monitoring and reviewing** important programmes and **projects of the Government of India** as well as projects flagged by State Governments.
- The platform was **launched on March 25, 2015**.
- It is **designed in-house** by the PMO team with the help of the National Informatics Center (NIC).
- It is also a robust system for bringing **e-transparency and e-accountability** with **real-time presence and exchange** among the key stakeholders.
- This platform is **combined with the three latest technologies**, that are-
 - **Video-conferencing**
 - **Digital data management** and
 - **Geo-spatial technology**.
- It provides a unique combination for **cooperative federalism**. This is done by bringing the **Chief Secretaries of the states and the Secretaries of the GOI** on one platform.
- The PM can **discuss the issues at ground level** with this platform. He can **communicate with concerned state and central officials** with full information. Besides this, **he can have the latest visuals** of the information on the screen.

Main features of PRAGATI platform:

- It works on a **three-tier system**.
- The **Prime Minister will conduct a meeting every month**. He will interact with **secretaries and chief secretaries of the GOI via video conferencing**.
- It is held every month **on the Fourth Wednesday at 3.30 PM-** known as **PRAGATI Day**.
- **Issues to be flagged before the PM is picked up from the available database regarding public grievances, on-going Programmes, and pending projects**.
- **One day, Tuesday, is available to the PMO team to review the data entered by the Union Government Secretaries and Chief Secretaries**.
- The design is such that **when PM reviews the issue, he should have on his screen the issue as well as the latest updates and visuals** regarding the same.

WHAT IS A METEOR MISSILE?

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is set to make a strategic decision to bolster its acquisition of the Meteor missile.



About the Meteor Missile:

- Meteor is a next-generation, active radar-guided, beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) system.
- It is manufactured by MBDA Systems for six European nations.
- It is capable of striking different types of targets simultaneously in almost any weather.
- Primary operators: UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, France, and Sweden.

Features:

- It has a length of 3.65m and a diameter of 0.178m.
- It has a combat range of 200 km.
- Designed for a speed greater than Mach 4, the missile has a large no-escape zone.
- It is powered by a solid-fuel variable-flow ducted rocket (ramjet). It provides the Meteor missile with the capability to maintain consistent high speeds.
- Its ramjet air-breathing engine allows the missile to adjust its velocity based on its target's maneuvers.
- The missile is equipped with a blast-fragmentation warhead.
- The missile system is installed with an active radar target seeker, offering high reliability in the detection, tracking, and classification of targets.
- It is equipped with a two-way datalink, which allows the launch platform to provide updates on targets or re-targeting when the missile is in flight.
- The datalink is capable of transmitting information such as kinematic status. It also notifies target acquisition by the seeker.