

AGNEEPATH : A RECRUITMENT SCHEME

On June 14th, 2022 Government of India introduced a new recruitment scheme, Agneepath, for the recruitment of soldiers, will know as Agneeveer, below the rank of commissioned officers into the three services of the armed forces. The Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh and three service chiefs at a joint press briefing described it as a major defence policy reform to usher in a "new era" in the human resource policy of the three services. The scheme comes into immediate effect and will govern the enrollment for the three services, implying that the existing framework of soldiers recruitment will cease to exist.

The latest initiative is the brainchild of former Chief of Defence Staff Bipin Rawat and former COAS Gen Manoj Mukund Naravane. They witnessed substantive manpower shortages in the army. Taking lessons from the Indo-China war of 1962 where officers were recruited on an emergency basis, the army floated this proposal to the government in 2020. The army stopped its recruitment due to the humanitarian catastrophe of covid-19 and conducted only four recruitment rallies in 2021-22. Agneepath scheme may make up for the shortfall of more than one lakh General Duty soldiers and Junior commissioned officers in the army.

An Agneeveer's enrollment will be taken by Centralized system rallies and Interviews. Candidates falling under 17.5 years to 21 years of age will be eligible to apply, the government has given a one-time waiver on the upper age limit of two years i.e 23 years for the first recruitment. The education qualification of General Duty Soldier will be class 10. Selected Candidates will serve the nation for four years which includes six months of training and three and a half years of service. Agneeveer will get the initial salary of ₹30000 along with additional benefits which will rise to ₹40000 by the end

of four years of service. Also, 30% of their salary is deducted under Seva Nidhi Programme and the same amount will be contributed to the programme by the government. After four years of service around tax-free ₹,11.71 lakh as Seva Nidhi Package will be provided. Additional that they will get ₹.48 lakh life insurance for four years and in case of death, the payout will be over ₹1 crore including pay for unserved tenure. After a tour of duty, 25% of the batch will be recruited back into their respective for a period of 15 years. The remaining will be provided with priority in different state government jobs like CAPF, Assam Rifles etc.

The scheme will benefit the average age of armed force personnel which is currently 32 years expected to come down to 26 years. Currently, the army spends 30% of the budget on pensions for veterans and spends ₹5.12 crore on an officer deployed in the Short Services on commission, for four more years jumps up to ₹6.93 crores. With tour down the duty of three-year cost come to ₹80-₹90 lakhs, for those serving five years in the army, it may go further more than ₹1 crore which is still substantially less than ₹5.12. crores. With the current proposal to recruit 100 officers and 1000 jawans. India will save ₹11000 crores, over a period of time India plans to fill 40 % of soldiers through this process, the saving will be enormous and will be used for a modernization programme for the army.

Looking forward to the future the short military services will result in the inculcation of patriotism, teamwork, enhancement of physical fitness, ingrained loyalty and universal availability of youth in critical situations like internal, external or natural threats. This scheme also provides a great platform for youth to learn a skill like self-defence, sports, discipline, time management and physical well-being.