

The Indian Express

Front Page

Soldiers exiting after 4 years will get priority in paramilitary: Centre (Page no. 3)

(GS Paper 3, Defence)

A day after the government unveiled its Agnipath scheme for short-term recruitment of soldiers, sailors and airmen as Agniveers in the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force, the Union Home Ministry announced that these personnel, upon completion of four years of service under the scheme, will get priority in recruitment for the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and Assam Rifles.

The Chief Ministers of BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Assam said Agniveers, who exit the armed forces after four years, will be given preference in police recruitment while the Haryana Chief Minister said the state will give them “preference in jobs and other works”.

The announcements came after concerns were raised on the future of those who would not be retained after their four-year stint in the armed forces.

Across the country, Army commanders held briefings to underline that the Agnipath scheme is a “transformational reform”, one that will bring paradigm changes in human resource management.

Express Network

India test fires second nuclear-capable Prithvi-II missile (Page no. 9)

(GS Paper 3, Defence)

Nearly 10 days after conducting a routine test of its nuclear-capable Agni missile, India carried out a test on its other nuclear-capable missile, Prithvi.

The government said in a statement that a “successful training launch of a Short-Range Ballistic Missile, Prithvi-II” from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur, Odisha.

“The missile is a proven system and is capable of striking targets with a very high degree of precision,” the statement said, adding that the “user training launch successfully validated all operational and technical parameters of the missile”.

Prithvi-II is an indigenously developed surface-to-surface missile, which has a range of around 250 km and can carry one-ton payload.

Editorial Page

Playing with Agni (Page no. 10)

(GS Paper 3, Defence)

The structure of the military has immense ramifications for security, and also for social organisation at large. The Agnipath scheme is a major structural reform with consequences both for the armed forces and society at large.

Some reforms and restructuring of the armed forces was overdue. Sometimes, scepticism about reforms reflects an underlying status quo bias, rather than an assessment of needs.

But it is also the case that this Agnipath is as much about creating a political illusion of reform as it is about addressing the armed forces’ needs. The spin given to the reform needs to be treated with a lot more caution.

For starters, it is being conveniently glossed over that the reform is rooted in a political economy failure. The current ruling dispensation deeply politicised the question of armed forces’ pensions by making it a central election issue.

The resulting OROP reform was a huge fiscal burden on the state. There is a lesson in this. Brazen institutional populism will always incur long-term costs for the institution; and always protecting the benefits of incumbents in that institution will come at the expense of future recruits.

A combination of political populism, and the armed forces’ own lack of creative leadership on pension issues, has led to the triumph of bureaucrats who like both the casualisation of government employment and are penny wise pound foolish.

The jobs push (Page no. 10)

(GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

That India has a jobs problem is beyond debate. In large measure, it is worsened by the underlying structure of the Indian economy. The rapidly growing services sector tends not only to be less employment intensive, but is also more geared towards absorbing the skilled sections of the labour force.

And the gig economy, which does employ the unskilled, simply doesn't create enough jobs for the millions entering the labour force each year.

The challenge has been, and continues to be, the inability to facilitate the creation of a labour intensive manufacturing sector that is able to absorb the low and semi-skilled sections of the labour force.

With the next general election less than two years away, and given that unemployment and inflation are the two biggest economic issues today, the government appears to be now moving to tackle them with some urgency.

The Centre announced plans to recruit 10 lakh people in ministries and departments over the next one-and-a-half years. The recruitment drive will ostensibly be directed towards the youth. However, this ambitious drive could be circumscribed by some fundamental constraints — the size of government, for one.

According to the report of the 7th Pay Commission, the total sanctioned strength of the central government fell from 41.76 lakh in 1994 to 38.9 lakh in 2014. In 2021, the strength of the central government stood at 34.5 lakh as per the Union budget.

Drawing closer (Page no. 10)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Connectivity between Sri Lanka and India seems set to improve, especially between the Tamil areas in the north and Tamil Nadu across the Palk Strait.

The projects to link Jaffna by air to Trichy and by boat to Karaikal on the Coromandel Coast are of a piece with India's development outreach to Sri Lanka that focuses on building long-term infrastructure projects in the island nation, besides aid for emergency needs such as fuel, food and essential medicines.

Multiple transport links existed between India and Sri Lanka until the 1980s when the civil war severely curtailed exchanges and transactions.

Before that, a cyclonic storm in 1964 destroyed the Pamban Bridge and the railway terminus and jetty at Dhanushkodi that forced the government to end the popular "Boat Mail", which connected Chennai and Talaimannar in northern Sri Lanka via Rameswaram through a rail link and a ferry.

Since the war ended in 2009, transportation has been a key area that India-Sri Lanka ties have focussed on, with railways and ports in focus — IRCON, an Indian Railways subsidiary, restored the Colombo-Jaffna railway line, which was opened for the public in 2014, and has since expanded to Kankesanthurai beyond Jaffna. However, air connectivity from Indian cities has so far been restricted to Colombo.

Idea Page

Good and Bad freebies (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 2, Governance)

The newly elected Punjab government's announcement of providing up to 300 units of free power to every household has raised questions: What constitutes "freebies"? Should they be encouraged?

There is, in fact, no consensus on the definition of a "freebie". It is almost a pejorative term. They constitute a sub-set of goods and services distributed by the government.

In India, policymakers have drawn on budgetary resources for providing support to low-income households for augmenting their consumption of selected goods and services, and also offering incentives to support selected categories of investors and producers.

The economic objectives in these two categories are quite different. The first category would include the free or subsidised provision of foodgrains and services such as health and education.

The Punjab government's announcement of free power falls in this category. Sometimes, these are also referred to as "freebies", depending on the type of commodity provided.

These may be distinguished from budgetary support for incentivising investment or production. Examples of the latter group include the central government's recent initiative for production-linked incentives to various sectors and tax concessions.

In the past, incentives in the form of reduction of corporate taxes have been offered to promote investment in general, or in certain regions such as backward areas.

Inflation's uneven toll (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

Inflation is back with a vengeance in India. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) show an upward rising trend, annually, at 13.11 per cent and 6.07 per cent respectively.

Inflation is here to stay because it has much to do with the decline in value of the rupee that has fallen to its lowest, which makes imports of oil and gas more expensive.

The war in Ukraine has the same effect and pushes the price of some food items upward.

This upsurge of inflation is affecting the poor more than any other social group because some of the commodities whose prices are increasing the most (like petrol and certain food items) represent a larger fraction of the budget of the most vulnerable sections of society.

For instance, WPI and CPI inflation rates of food were at 8.5 per cent and 5.9 per cent, respectively.

Recently, the State of Inequality in India report showed that an Indian making Rs 3 lakh a year belonged to the top 10 per cent of the country's wage earners.

Explained Page

Hate speech, IPC Sec 295A, and how courts have read the law (Page no. 13)

(GS Paper 2, Governance)

The debate surrounding the comments by BJP spokespersons Nupur Sharma and Naveen Jindal have put the spotlight on the law that deals with criticism of or insult to religion.

Provisions in the Indian Penal Code (IPC), primarily Section 295A, define the contours of free speech and its limitations with respect to offences relating to religion.

India does not have a formal legal framework for dealing with hate speech. However, a cluster of provisions, loosely termed hate speech laws, are invoked. These are primarily laws to deal with offences against religions.

Section 295A defines and prescribes a punishment for deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.

Section 295A is one of the key provisions in the IPC chapter to penalise religious offences. The chapter includes offences to penalise damage or defilement of a place of worship with intent to insult the religion (Section 295); trespassing in a place of sepulture (Section 297); uttering, words, etc, with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person (Section 298); and disturbing a religious assembly (Section 296).

The govt jobs situation (Page no. 13)

(GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

Following a review of the "status of human resources in all departments and ministries" by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, his office tweeted that the PM had "instructed that recruitment of 10 lakh people be done by the Government in mission mode in next 1.5 years".

Over the last few years, the central government has been going slow on recruitments to regular posts. Its representatives have instead pointed to employment generation through Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyaan (GKRA), Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana (ABRY), Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) and Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), Mudra loans, Stand Up, etc.

But the yearning for government employment remains strong across the country, seen periodically in the waves of applications whenever posts are advertised, and in the proliferation of coaching classes for competitive exams for jobs of all categories.

Why the UAE has 'suspended' re-export of wheat from India (Page no. 13)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

The United Arab Emirates' decision, reported on Wednesday (June 15), to "suspend" re-export of wheat and flour from grain originating in India is basically an assurance that whatever it imports will be used only for domestic consumption.

"India doesn't want its wheat exported to Dubai or Abu Dhabi to go out to other countries, whether as grain or flour. It would want that wheat to be consumed locally, including the migrant Indian workers in UAE.

This will, in turn, allow India to provide an exception to its wheat export ban and ship out some quantities to the Gulf federation. India, on May 14, banned export of all wheat, except against outstanding contracts backed by already-issued letters of credit and to countries on case-to-case food security considerations.

India exported 4.71 lakh tonnes (lt) of wheat valued at \$136.53 million to the UAE in 2021-22. That constituted about 6.5 per cent of its total 72.35 lt shipments of the cereal worth \$2,120.27 million last fiscal.

Economy

Inside PLFS:low quality unpaid work ,gains agri share up ,manufacturing down (Page no. 15) (GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

Labour indicators recorded a sharp, all-round improvement in 2020-21 (July-June) compared with the previous three years, data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO).

The annual report of the Periodic Labour Force Survey for July 2020 to June 2021 showed that the unemployment rate, as per usual status (reference period of last 365 days preceding the survey), eased to 4.2 per cent from 4.8 per cent in 2019-20.

As per the current weekly status (reference period of one week) — contrary to perceived expectations of a likely hit on jobs — unemployment rate eased to 7.5 per cent in 2020-21 from 8.8 per cent.

But there is a catch: while the overall employment situation showed improvement, the rise was seen mostly in low-quality, unpaid work.

The unemployment rate of 4.2 per cent in 2020-21, the lowest since the first PLFS showed an unemployment rate of 6.1 per cent in 2017-18.

According to the report, the labour force participation rate (LFPR), or those working or seeking or available for work in the labour force, was the highest in four years at 39.3 per cent in 2020-21, as was the worker population ratio (WPR) at 36.3 per cent. WPR is defined as the percentage of employed persons in the population.