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News: Centre clears Agnipath scheme

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday announced the ‘Agnipath’ scheme for recruitment of youth in the armed forces for four years.

About the scheme

- The Agneepath scheme is announced for the recruitment of youth in the armed forces for four years. The process of recruitment will commence in 90 days with a planned intake of 46,000 young men and women this year.
- This will be the only form of recruitment of soldiers into the three defence services from now.
- The scheme is aimed at strengthening national security and for providing an opportunity to the youth to serve in the armed forces.
- Recruits under the scheme will be known as ‘Agniveers’.
- After completing the four year service, they can apply for regular employment in the armed forces. They may be given priority over others for various jobs in other government departments.
- The move is expected to decrease the average age profile of armed forces personnel from the current 32 to 24/26 years over a period of time.

- The 'Agniveers' will receive an annual package of ₹4.76 lakh in the first year to ₹6.92 lakh in the fourth year, apart from risk and hardship and other allowances as applicable.
- Under the 'Seva Nidhi' package, they will receive about ₹11.71 lakh, including contribution and interest, on completion of service.
- The recruits will have to contribute 30% of their monthly emoluments to Seva Nidhi, with a matching contribution made by the government. There will be no entitlement to gratuity and pension benefits under the scheme.
- However, the 'Agniveers' will be provided a non contributory life insurance cover of ₹48 lakh during their service.

News: New plan to save jumbos from train hits

- With 186 elephants officially reported to have been killed in collisions with trains in the past decade, the Environment and Railway Ministries are exploring a project to minimise the number of such accidents.
- The **draft document of new plan is yet to be released.**

Existing plans to save elephants

Surakshya Portal

- Recently, **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** has launched **National Portal on Human – Elephant conflict called "Surakshya"**.
- The portal aims to **collect real-time information** and will also **manage conflicts on a real-time basis.**
- The portal will help to set **data collection protocols, data visualization tools and data transmission pipelines.**
- The National Portal was launched during the celebration of international annual event World Elephant Day 2020.
- The **World Elephant Day is celebrated every year on August 12 to create elephant conservation and share knowledge for better protection** of wild captive elephants.

Project Elephant

- Project Elephant is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 1992 to assist the States having free ranging populations of wild elephants to survive in their natural habitat.

Objectives

- To assist states having populations of wild elephants and to ensure long term survival of identified viable populations of elephants in their natural habitats.
- Addressing man-animal conflict.
- Developing scientific and planned management measures for conservation of elephants.
- Protecting the elephants from poachers, preventing illegal ivory trade and other unnatural causes of death
- The Project is being implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.
- Small support is also being given to Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.
- States are being given financial as well as technical assistance in achieving the objectives of the Project.

- There are around 32 elephant Reserves in India notified by the state governments.
- The first elephant reserve was the Singbhum elephant reserve in Jharkhand.

Plan Bee

- Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR)'s Plan Bee, involves setting up of devices (an amplifying system imitating the buzz of a swarm of honey bees) near tracks, which emit the 'buzzing' sound of swarming bees, considered as a natural repellent of elephants (elephants have a natural fear of the perilous stings of the insects).
- First one was installed near the Guwahati railway station.
- The sound is audible to elephants 600-700 meters away and thus helps them in keeping away from the tracks.
- According to wildlife experts, India has the highest number of train accidents involving elephants in the world.