

1. Israel attacked Syria's airports

Introduction

In the ongoing conflict in Gaza between Israel and the militant group Hamas, Israeli warplanes struck two airports in Syria on October 22. Syrian state media reported that Israeli airstrikes have targeted the international airports in the capital, Damascus, and the northern city of Aleppo. The strikes killed one person and damaged the runways, putting them out of service.

This was roughly two weeks after Hamas struck Israel, in what was the biggest attack on Israel since the founding of the Jewish state in 1948.



What are relations among Israel and Syria like?

Israel has not directly spoken of its reasons for the latest attack but has previously mentioned the need to prevent another front of the fighting from opening up towards its north. It is believed that the strikes are linked to attacking the Lebanon-based and Iran-backed militant organisation Hezbollah, which has threatened to open a front of

attacks towards the north of Israel. Lebanon and Syria both border Israel in its northern region. Hezbollah and Israel have exchanged fire in the last few weeks but Hezbollah is yet to formally join the war.

Hezbollah and Israel: Historically, since the group's creation in 1982, Hezbollah has opposed Israel and Western influence in West Asia. It has also, along with Russia and Iran, supported the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in neighbouring Syria during its civil war.

Hezbollah, in turn, is supported by Iran. Hezbollah is also a Shiite organisation, and Iran's support of it reflects West Asia's two major powers and their rivalry – the Sunni Muslim-dominated Saudi Arabia and the majority Shia Muslim-dominated Iran.

Syria and Israel: Syria has opposed Israel since its formation in 1948, in line with the policy of other Arab countries for a long period. It has viewed Israeli presence and occupation to be against Palestinian and Arab interests. The two have also fought wars, including the Six-Day War of 1967 that led to Israel occupying Syria's Golan Heights – which it still controls today.

The recent strike by Israel is a warning to Syria to not enter in the ongoing war.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Indian Express and The Hindu

2. Tragic Loss of Agniveer Soldier in Siachen

Introduction

Gawate Akshay Laxman, an Agniveer soldier stationed at the Siachen glacier, the world's highest battlefield, has tragically lost his life in the line of duty, marking the first such casualty since the inception of the Agnipath recruitment scheme.

Agnipath Scheme

Agnipath Scheme (also spelled Agneepath Scheme) is a tour of duty style scheme approved by the Government of India on 14 June 2022, for recruitment of soldiers below the rank of commissioned officers into the three services of the armed forces.

All recruits are hired only for a four year period. Personnel recruited under this system are to be called Agniveers (transl. Fire-Warriors), which is a new military rank. The scheme was implemented in September 2022.

This scheme bypasses many things including long tenures, pension and other benefits which were there in old system.

Disparity in Benefits

The news of his demise has ignited criticism within the veterans' community, highlighting a notable disparity in benefits between Agniveers and regular soldiers. While the families of regular soldiers receive pensions and other entitlements in the event of a soldier's death in the line of duty, Agniveer families receive different benefits.

Agniveer Benefit Details

According to the terms of engagement for Agniveers, in case of battle-related casualties, the next of kin receive a non-contributory insurance payout of ₹48 lakh, an ex gratia payment of ₹44 lakh, and a sum equivalent to 30% of the Agniveer's salary contributed to the Seva Nidhi scheme, matched by the government with interest. Additionally, they receive the remaining salary due until the completion of the soldier's four-year tenure, which amounts to over ₹13 lakh, and a contribution of ₹8 lakh from the Armed Forces Battle Casualty Fund.

Discrepancy Highlighted

Legal expert Major Navdeep Singh (retired) has brought attention to the notable disparity in benefits. He points out that even the family of a temporary trainee civil employee, in cases such as an accident while on leave or suicide, is entitled to family pension, unlike the family of an Agniveer Battle Casualty in Siachen. This discrepancy has raised concerns and questions regarding the treatment of Agniveer soldiers and their families in the event of such tragic incidents.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

3. Uneven Distribution of Medical Colleges Sparks Debate

Introduction

Recently, Nagaland celebrated the inauguration of its first medical college at Phriebagei in Kohima, the Nagaland Institute of Medical Sciences and Research (NIMSR), which will have 100 MBBS seats for the upcoming academic session.

The government has been emphasising on an equal distribution of medical colleges across the country. In August, the National Medical Commission (NMC) introduced regulations that put a temporary halt on establishing new medical colleges and expanding existing ones in states with more than 100 medical education seats per million population. The aim is to address regional disparities in doctor availability and ensure quality education for all.

Debate Over Guidelines

These guidelines have stirred controversy, particularly in southern states that are now ineligible for additional medical education seats. While the NMC justifies its approach, states like Tamil Nadu have voiced strong opposition.

Current Distribution of Medical College Seats

The data reveals that it's not just southern states that exceed the NMC's recommended population-to-seats ratio. Thirteen states and Union Territories have crossed this threshold. Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra have the most seats, but they differ in their compliance with the new norm.

| Name of the State/UT | Total Seats | Projected population | Total MBBS seats allowed | % more than allowed |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Puducherry | 1,630 | 16,46,000 | 165 | 890.28 |
| Andaman & Nicobar | 114 | 4,03,000 | 40 | 182.88 |
| Dadra & Nagar Haveli | 177 | 6,99,000 | 70 | 153.22 |
| Sikkim | 150 | 6,89,000 | 69 | 117.71 |
| Telangana | 7,415 | 3,80,90,000 | 3,809 | 94.67 |
| Manipur | 525 | 3,22,3,000 | 322 | 62.89 |
| Karnataka | 11,020 | 6,76,92,000 | 6,769 | 62.8 |
| Tamil Nadu | 11,225 | 7,68,60,000 | 7,686 | 46.04 |
| Kerala | 4,605 | 3,57,76,000 | 3,578 | 28.72 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 920 | 74,68,000 | 747 | 23.19 |
| Chandigarh | 150 | 12,31,000 | 123 | 21.85 |
| Goa | 180 | 15,75,000 | 158 | 14.29 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 5,635 | 5,31,56,000 | 5,316 | 6.01 |
| Uttarakhand | 1,150 | 1,16,37,000 | 1,164 | -1.18 |
| Gujarat | 6,600 | 7,15,07,000 | 7,151 | -7.7 |
| Jammu & Kashmir | 1,147 | 1,36,03,000 | 1,360 | -15.68 |
| Maharashtra | 10,295 | 12,63,85,000 | 12,639 | -18.54 |
| Mizoram | 100 | 12,38,000 | 124 | -19.22 |
| Delhi | 1,497 | 2,13,59,000 | 2,136 | -29.91 |
| Chhattisgarh | 1,945 | 3,01,80,000 | 3,018 | -35.55 |
| Rajasthan | 5,075 | 8,10,25,000 | 8,103 | -37.37 |
| Haryana | 1,835 | 3,02,09,000 | 3,021 | -39.26 |
| Punjab | 1,750 | 3,07,30,000 | 3,073 | -43.05 |
| Tripura | 225 | 41,47,000 | 415 | -45.74 |
| Odisha | 2,325 | 4,62,76,000 | 4,628 | -49.76 |
| West Bengal | 4,825 | 9,90,84,000 | 9,908 | -51.30 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 4,180 | 8,65,79,000 | 8,658 | -51.72 |
| Assam | 1,450 | 3,57,13,000 | 3,571 | -59.4 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 9,253 | 23,56,87,000 | 23,569 | -60.74 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 50 | 15,62,000 | 156 | -67.99 |
| Jharkhand | 980 | 3,94,66,000 | 3,947 | -75.17 |
| Bihar | 2,565 | 12,67,56,000 | 12,676 | -79.76 |
| Meghalaya | 50 | 33,40,000 | 335 | -85.07 |
| Total | 1,01,043 | 138,81,63,000 | 1,38,816 | |

Source for seats: Rajya Sabha answer by government on March 14; Census projection for population

Shortage of Medical College Seats

Some states, including Meghalaya, Bihar, and Jharkhand, face severe shortages in medical college seats concerning their populations. For instance, Meghalaya has only 50 seats for an estimated 33.5 lakh people, while Bihar and Jharkhand have larger populations but significantly fewer seats.

Future Implementation

The NMC's ratio will apply to new medical colleges or seat increases in existing colleges starting from the 2024-25 academic year.

The NMC's Perspective

Experts agree that rationalizing the distribution of medical colleges is necessary, considering the growth of private medical colleges. The NMC defends its position by stating that it aims to provide the right teaching environment, improve the quality of education, and reduce regional disparities in healthcare professionals' availability. The guidelines are based on the World Health Organization's recommendations regarding the number of physicians per unit of population.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express