

## 'AGNIPATH WILL DEGRADE ARMY'S COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS'

<https://www.businesstoday.in/india/story/ex-navy-chief-agnipath-pension-bill-will-degrade-armys-combat-effectiveness-435855-2024-07-04>

by



**Admiral Karambir Singh,  
former Chief of Naval Staff**

Former Indian Navy chief Admiral Karambir Singh on Thursday said the new Defence recruitment scheme - Agnipath - will degrade Army's combat effectiveness and that **the only motivation driving this scheme was reducing the pension bill.**

Admiral Karambir Singh said this while replying to a tweet by Admiral Arun Prakash, retired Chief of Naval Staff, who recently wrote a column on the new scheme and said the sole litmus test for any change or reform in the military must be: **"Does it enhance or degrade combat effectiveness?"** Admiral Arun Prakash also said that economics takes a back seat to national security.

"Agree Sir. The only motivation driving the Agnipath is reducing the pension bill. **The fact that this scheme will degrade combat effectiveness is known to all who understand national security,**" said Admiral Karambir Singh, who served as Chief of the Naval Staff from May 2019 to May 2021.

The Agnipath scheme, which was rolled out in June 2022, allows youth to serve in the armed forces for four years. Under the scheme, after four years of service, 25 per cent of soldiers will be retained and the rest 75 per cent will return to civilian life. There shall be no entitlement to gratuity and pensionary benefits.

While the government maintains that this scheme has been brought in to enhance the youthful profile of the armed forces and bring about a transformational shift towards a more tech-savvy military, some argue that it has been done to save pension bills. The Agnipath scheme does not have any pension provision but Agniveers will be provided non-contributory insurance cover of Rs 48 lakhs for the duration of their engagement period in the Indian Army.

The critics, including the opposition parties that have promised to abolish this scheme if elected to power, also argue that this scheme has one major lacuna that it does not provide enough time for the training of soldiers.

In a tweet on July 2, Admiral Arun Prakash said that the Agnipath scheme had imposed huge operational handicaps on combat units, which are forced to accept barely trained recruits, fit only for sentry duties.

Maj Gen (Retd) Kuldip Sindhu appeared to agree with him. He said it reminded him of paraphrased speeches of two eminent US Senators: **"If we can't afford to suitably equip and pay our military, DON'T send them to war" & "Don't tell me we haven't the money to treat our men or provide them a dignified life when they return home battered, bruised & maimed"!**

Sushant Sareen, security analyst and senior fellow at think tank ORF, said there are serious issues with Agnipath, but India can't be spending huge amounts on pensions. "Economics cannot be entirely divorced from national security," he said in a tweet replying to Admiral Arun Prakash. "A balance has to be found else you end up without an economy and with no nation to secure - ask the Soviets. There are issues, serious ones with Agnipath. These need to be fixed. But we can't be spending huge amounts on pensions that will bankrupt the state - please take a look at Pakistan."

In a piece published last month, Admiral Arun Prakash, the former Chief of Naval Staff, said that given the transformed nature of warfare, downsizing of the Indian army, by substituting manpower with smart technology and innovative tactics, had become an imperative need. "Against this backdrop, a scheme on the lines of Agnipath, appropriately constituted, and focused on enhancing "combat effectiveness" rather than "effecting savings" or "generating employment," could have triggered a reformative process," he wrote in The Indian Express. "But a number of caveats need to be borne in mind in this context."

"Firstly, given the parlous security situation, on the country's northern and western borders as well as the ongoing domestic turbulence, this is not the best time to cast the armed forces — already short of manpower — into turmoil, with a radical and untried new recruitment system", the former Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Arun Prakash further said that such a scheme, in its present form, was suitable only for the army, whose large infantry component was not excessively burdened with technology. In the case of the Navy and Air Force, he said, **"It must be recognised that at least 5-6 years are required before a new entrant can acquire enough hands-on experience to be entrusted with the operation or maintenance of lethal weapon systems and complex machinery and electronics."**

Admiral Arun Prakash, the former Naval Chief, also suggested that there should have been a pilot project before implementing what he called a 'radical' reform. "No matter how extensively the issue was discussed in meetings or on files, a radical change of this nature should have been subjected to a trial before service-wide implementation." Ideally, he said, a few units of the regular or Territorial Army could have been earmarked as a testing ground, and feedback obtained.

**END**