

Mandatory military services

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In news– The news that Korean pop group BTS's Jin will soon be enlisted in the South Korean military left millions of fans sad. In this context let's look at the mandatory military services around the world.

The history of mandatory military service-

- Mandatory or involuntary military service has been around since ancient times with slaves being used for combat in almost all major civilisations.
- **In mediaeval Europe, serfs were expected to perform what was known as Corvée labour.**
- This was primarily found in feudal societies, **a type of annual tax payable as labour by the serf to the monarch, vassal, overlord, or lord of the manor.**
- **Before the 18th and 19th Centuries, the most common volunteers in combat would be mercenaries** or people paid to fight in a particular conflict.
- Today, involuntary military service is relatively rare.
- **While provisions for conscription or drafts exist in many other countries including major military powers like the United States, Russia and China, they are either meant only for times of emergency or are not enforced.**

Some of the countries that have mandatory military services-

Some of the countries which enforce mandatory military to whole age cohorts are as follows. Here, citizens are expected to spend a certain period of time in service after reaching the age of eligibility. **With the exception of North Korea and Israel, mandatory service is generally restricted to men only.**

South and North Korea

- Both neighbours have strictly-enforced laws on conscription.
- **North Korea mandates eight years of service for men and five years for women** starting at age 17.
- **South Korea mandates anywhere between 18-24 months of service**, depending on the branch one joins, for all men between the ages of 18-30 years.
- While there are provisions in the law to exempt certain individuals or allow them to fulfil shorter service times, these are contentious at best, and even popular celebrities often cannot avail of them.

Israel-

- **Israel, along with North Korea, is the only state to have mandatory military service for both men and women.**
- Depending on the branch of service and rank, citizens are expected to be in the military for a duration of 24-48 months (nine years for pilots) after which they are put in the reserves till the age of 41-51 years for men and 24 for women.

Singapore-

- **Every male citizen must mandatorily undertake National Service upon turning 18, for a period of 24 months.**
- National Service includes service to either the armed forces, civil defence, or police forces. **At the end of service, all personnel are put in the reserves till the age of 40 (50 for officers).**
- The conscription programme was **enforced in Singapore after the British decided to pull out forces from it in the 1960s.**

Angola-

- Angola has **mandatory military service for a period of at least 24 months for all men aged 18-45 years.**
- Registration is mandatory at 18. Angola's conscription

laws came up during the long-drawn civil war it witnessed between 1975 and 2007.

- Conscription was one of the main ways in which the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) fulfilled its staffing requirements during the civil war.

Colombia-

- This South American nation has had mandatory conscription for men between the ages of 18 and 24 for a period of 18 months.
- The provision for mandatory service has been in place since the creation of the republic, with an option to also serve in some civilian services (like the penitentiary service).
- However, there is an increasingly strong movement towards ending mandatory conscription.
- **In October 2022, the Colombian senate passed a law that ended mandatory conscription.** But there are many more steps in the process before this law translates to reality.

Vietnam-

- Vietnam has mandatory service for **all men between the age of 18 and 25 for a period of 24-36 months.**
- Dodgers can face criminal charges with harsh punishments.
- The **country instituted mandatory service in 1975 on the back of a decades-long civil war** which had fractured Vietnamese society.

Finland-

- Finland mandates **6-12 months of military service or border duty for all men when they turn 18.**
- After service, they are put in the reserves till the age of 60.

- **The Finnish constitution enshrines the obligation of every man to participate in national defence.**

Switzerland-

- The Swiss have **18 weeks of mandatory military training between ages 18 and 30 for all men.**
- After training, they are **liable to be recalled at most six times for a period of 19 days each over the next 10 years.** Citizens can also opt for the alternative of civilian service.
- **In 2013, a referendum to abolish mandatory service failed** with a whopping 73% of the population voting against it.

Russia-

- Russia's harsh reality of conscription dates back to the Soviet era. The Russian military is most infamous for senior soldiers exploiting (often involving physical harm) conscripted soldiers, also known as hazing.
- Under Russian law, military service for a period of 12 months is compulsory for able-bodied men aged 18 to 27 in Russia.
- However, the Russian constitution allows one to opt for a non-military form of national service if the man's "convictions or religious beliefs contradict military service". Those who avoid getting drafted can face fine or even imprisonment.

Brazil-

- Military service is compulsory for every male Brazilian citizen, according to Article 143 of the Federal Republic of Brazil's constitution.
- They have to serve in the military for a minimum of 12 months, but may choose to remain as enlisted personnel for up to 8 years.
- The service period is between 10 to 12 months.

Typically, the recruitment happens at the age of 18 years.

- Refusal to enlist is believed to result in suspension of political rights, including the right to vote or run for electoral mandates.

Iran-

- According to Iran's constitution, all men over 18 years old must serve in the military anywhere between 18 to 24 months. Conscription does not apply to women in Iran.
- But there are exemptions that can be made on health grounds. Also, male child who is over the age of 18 and with a father over the age of 60 is believed to get an exemption from getting drafted.
- Those who don't have a reason to seek exemption and are unwilling to join the military can face dire consequences, which involves losing most of their civil rights, including becoming ineligible for government jobs and a ban on leaving the country.

Turkey-

- In 2019, Turkish parliament passed a law which reduced the length of compulsory military service from 12 months to six months.
- However, anyone who wishes to extend their service for six more months is allowed to do so for a fixed wage.
- There's also an option for conscripts to undergo one-month military training, and be exempted from the rest of the five months of service by paying a little over \$5,000.
- As a rule, compulsory military service applies to all male citizens from 20 to 41 years of age.

Are there any such laws in India?

- India has never had any conscription laws, and joining the Indian armed forces has been voluntary.

- Article 23 of the Indian constitution provides a clause allowing the union government to mandate conscription to secure the nation's interest and the public's broader well-being.