

Topic: The OROP Struggle

One Rank, One Pension is an old demand of Indian military personnel. The term means armed forces personnel holding the same rank and same length of service will get the same pension, regardless of the last drawn pay. The Indian government accepted the demand in 2014. In its July 2014 Budget, Government of India allocated 1000 crore for this scheme. Due to some technical calculations and interpretations to be concluded by the related ministry there was a delay in the implementation of the scheme in 2014. Recent meetings have been on the positive note indicating that the scheme will be implemented before the approval of budget of India 2015-16.

'OROP' implies equal amount of pension for having served in the same rank and also having rendered the same length of service

Why it is being demanded

- Civilian employees retire at 60. Military personnel retire much earlier (based on rank) when family liability is maximum and 2nd career is difficult
- Sepoys retire at 35-38; NCOs & JCOs at 40-45 (Only 10% of sepoy become JCOs)
- Most officers retire in early-50s (just a few become Lt-Generals/Air Marshals/Vice-Admirals to serve till 60)
- Terms and conditions of military service much tougher than civilian government employees
- Soldiers undergo hardship postings, with risk to life and restriction of fundamental rights
- Successive pay commissions have widened gap between veterans who have retired earlier and those who retire later

Thousands of ex-servicemen converged in the national capital to protest against the delay on the part of the government in announcing a firm timeline for the implementation of the One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme. Others have gone on a relay-hunger strike across the country, saying they would do so till their demand is met. In the run-up to the 2014 elections and after, the Bharatiya Janata Party held out several assurances on OROP, raising expectations among the community of veterans. OROP is meant to bring parity among retired military personnel based only on rank and tenure and irrespective of the date of retirement. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi accepted in his **"Mann Ki Baat"** broadcast, the government had underestimated the complexity of the process. One of the major concerns of the government as it works out the details relates to similar demands that could potentially come from the Central police and paramilitary forces. The logic of OROP stems from the fact that unlike in other government services where the retirement age is 55, 58 or 60, in the military services a soldier retires around 35. So extending the scheme to non-military cadres will nullify its very rationale.



Topic
Introduction

In order to pre-empt any legal issues in the future, the government is working to call it military pension, making it a provision that applies only to the armed forces. Another issue relates to allocating finances for the immediate rollout phase and making the necessary provision for enhancements in future. Wary of any bid by the government to redefine OROP, veterans are demanding that it stick to the accepted definition.

The scheme, once implemented, is expected to benefit two and a half million ex-servicemen and women immediately. While the veterans' anguish over the delay is understandable, they should appreciate the complexity of the process. Also, with OROP being one of the BJP's top election promises, commitment for its implementation had been reiterated at the highest level by Mr. Modi. The issue, pending for four decades, has seen more progress in the last one year than over the last few decades. So while keeping up pressure on the government, it would be wise to give it room to work out the details. The government, on its part, should realise that these veterans fought for this country while in service, and it is indeed their legitimate right. In addition, they represent a strong voter base, as the last Lok Sabha elections proved. This is pertinent as protesting organisations have announced they would agitate in Bihar, where Assembly elections are due this year. The government should come out with a clear road map in the interests of the nation as well as its own. The existing mismatch between expectations and delivery could prove problematic in more ways than one.

The numbers involved

- 24.25 lakh registered ex-servicemen
- Over 13 lakh serving military personnel
- Rs 8,300 crore estimated cost of OROP

Problems Involved

Financial: Grant of full OROP will further bloat the govt's pension bill

Administrative: Huge task to pass all the benefits, with no cut-off date, to all living ex-servicemen

Legal: Will lead to similar demands by other govt employees, especially paramilitary forces.

Read further:

<http://www.oneindia.com/feature/narendra-modi-government-implement-one-rank-one-pension-a-1491456.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Rank,_One_Pension

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/one-rank-one-pension/listshow/47494802.cms>

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-orop-struggle/article7322625.ece>