A New Milestone of Care in Cantonments: Defence-Social Justice Ministries' MoU for Senior Citizens



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Why in News

On 16 November 2026 in New Delhi, the DGDE and the MoSJE signed an MoU in the presence of Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh and Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Dr Virendra Kumar. The aim is to establish and strengthen Day Care Centres and Senior Citizen Homes for elderly residents of cantonments and to skill-train geriatric caregivers. The occasion was special - the Defence Estates Department is celebrating its centenary, marking 100 years since its establishment in 1926.

Introduction: DGDE and AVYAY

DGDE (Directorate General of Defence Estates): The Ministry of Defence department that manages cantonment lands and the civic administration of Cantonment Boards. Some boards already run day care centres and senior citizen homes from their own budgets.

AVYAY (Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana): The MoSJE's central scheme aimed at dignified, secure and active ageing for senior citizens; this initiative will receive financial assistance under it.

Main Body: provisions of the MoU

- **Funding:** The MoSJE will extend financial assistance under AVYAY, including support for the operation and maintenance of existing Day Care Centres and Senior Citizen Homes run by Cantonment Boards from their own budgets.
- **New centres:** The DGDE has identified eight cantonments where new day care centres can open; existing day care centres in five cantonments and senior citizen homes in two cantonments will also be augmented subject to availability of funds.
- **Division of responsibilities:** The DGDE and Cantonment Boards will provide premises and basic infrastructure (electricity, water, sanitation); the MoSJE will provide financial assistance, technical guidance, training modules and operational support.
- **Caregiver training:** Young Indians will be trained in geriatric caregiving in view of the rising elderly population, creating a pool of trained caregivers.

- **Joint Working Group:** Representatives of both Ministries will coordinate, implement and monitor the initiative.
- **Social audit:** The Raksha Mantri called for social audits of the centres and homes to assess service quality.

Which cantonments are covered

- **Existing day care centres (5):** Ambala (Haryana), Deolali (Maharashtra), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh), Ranikhet and Lansdowne (Uttarakhand).
- **Existing senior citizen homes (2):** Ayodhya and Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh).
- **New centres (8):** Barrackpore (West Bengal), Belgaum (Karnataka), Jhansi (Uttar Pradesh), Khadki and Pune (Maharashtra), Secunderabad (Telangana), St. Thomas Mount (Tamil Nadu) and Delhi.
- **Caregiver training (12 cantonments):** Barrackpore, Belgaum, Jhansi, Deolali, Khadki, Pune, Secunderabad, St. Thomas Mount, Ambala, Delhi, Ferozepur and Jalandhar.

Exam relevance

For Prelims: The MoU's parties (DGDE-MoSJE), the AVYAY scheme, the 1926 centenary and the cantonment list are direct question areas.

For Mains: The 'Whole of Government' approach - combining the resources of two Ministries (defence land/premises + policy/finance); senior-citizen welfare and active ageing - GS-II examples.

Way Forward

Formation of the Joint Working Group will set the timeline for establishing the centres. Regular funding under AVYAY will reduce Cantonment Boards' dependence on defence grants and make the services sustainable; caregiver training will also open employment pathways for the youth.

Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. With reference to the DGDE-MoSJE MoU (16 November 2026), consider the following statements:
Statement 1: Its objective is to establish Day Care Centres and Senior Citizen Homes in cantonment areas
Statement 2: The initiative will be funded under the AVYAY scheme
Statement 3: The MoU was signed in the presence of the Home Minister and the Social Justice Minister

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer and Explanation

Correct answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: Day Care Centres/Senior Citizen Homes in cantonments and caregiver training are the MoU's objectives. Statement 2 is correct: financial assistance will come under the Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY). Statement 3 is incorrect: the signing took place in the presence of Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh and Social Justice Minister Dr Virendra Kumar, not the Home Minister.

Q2. Which anniversary is the Defence Estates Department celebrating?

(a) 75th

(b) 90th

(c) Centenary (100th)

(d) 125th

Answer and Explanation

Correct answer: (c) Centenary (100th)

Explanation: The department was established in 1926; in 2026 it is celebrating 100 years of institutional service.

Mains Practice Question

The DGDE-MoSJE MoU is an example of the 'Whole of Government' approach. Explain, and comment on the potential of such inter-ministerial cooperation in senior citizen welfare. (GS-II; 150 words)

Answer Outline:

Introduction: Introduce the MoU of 16 November 2026 and its objectives (day care, senior citizen homes, caregiver training).

Main Body: What 'Whole of Government' means - combining the DGDE's premises/board network with the MoSJE's scheme, funding and training; maximum utilisation of existing public resources; quality monitoring through social audits; job creation through the caregiver pool in the context of an ageing population.

Conclusion: Conclude that institutional cooperation is a sustainable route to ensuring active ageing.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Short answer: The DGDE and the MoSJE signed an MoU on 16 November 2026 under which Day Care Centres/Senior Citizen Homes will be set up in cantonments with AVYAY assistance, along with geriatric caregiver training; the signing took place in the presence of the Raksha Mantri and the Social Justice Minister.

Q: What is AVYAY?

Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana - a scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment that provides financial assistance for dignified, secure and active ageing of senior citizens.

Q: What are the responsibilities of the two sides under the MoU?

The DGDE/Cantonment Boards will provide premises and basic infrastructure; the MoSJE will provide financial assistance, technical guidance, training modules and operational support.

Q: Who will monitor the initiative?

A Joint Working Group of representatives from both Ministries will coordinate, implement and monitor it.

Sources

- PIB - MoD & MoSJE ink MoU to strengthen welfare of senior citizens in Cantonment areas (16 November 2026): https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2336804&lang=2&reg=48

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