

INTERNATIONAL RELATION
Women In Peacekeeping

Recently, many women soldiers were training to be a part of a United Nations Peacekeeping mission. For more than a decade, the United Nations (UN) has called for more participation from women in conflict prevention, post-conflict peace building and peacekeeping.

What is UN Peacekeeping?

- UN Peacekeeping began in 1948 when the UN Security Council authorised the deployment of UN military observers to the Middle East.
- UN Peacekeeping helps countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace.
- It deploys troops and police from around the world, integrating them with civilian peacekeepers to address a range of mandates set by the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly.

What is Background of Indian Women in Peacekeeping Forces?

- **Background:** For the first time in the history of UN peacekeeping, India sent an all-female Formed Police Unit (FPU) to be deployed in Liberia in 2007 after a civil war ravaged the African nation.
- **Intent:** Recently, at the UN Security Council (UNSC), Indian officials called for more female participation in public life and the elimination of violence against them as a prerequisite for promoting lasting peace around the world.
- **Significance:** In a profession that continues to be heavily dominated by men, and in a nation that is riddled with gender violence, these female police officers from India are breaking stereotypes to represent their country on the world stage.

What is the current status of Women in UN Peacekeeping forces?

- **Multi-Role:** Women are deployed in all areas – police, military and civilian – and have made a positive impact on peacekeeping environments, including in supporting the role of women in building peace and protecting women's rights.
- **Current Numbers:** According to the UN, in 2020, out of approximately 95,000 peacekeepers, women constitute 4.8% of military contingents and 10.9% of formed police units and 34% of justice and corrections government-provided personnel in UN Peacekeeping missions.
- **Global Effort Initiative:** UN Police Division launched 'the Global Effort' to recruit more female police officers into national police services and into UN police operations around the world. The 2028 target for women serving in military contingents is 15%, and 25% for military observers and staff officers.
- **UNSC Resolution:** UN Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) has called for an expansion of the role and contribution of women in its operations, including uniformed women peacekeepers.
- **Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative:** The UN Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative views the Women, Peace and Security agenda as critical to enhancing peacekeeping operations' performance. This can be achieved through supporting women's full participation in peace processes and making peacekeeping more gender-responsive, including through increasing the number of civilian and uniformed women in peacekeeping at all levels and in key positions.

Why is it important to have women peacekeepers?

- **Improved Operations And Performance:** Greater diversity and a broadened skillset means improved decision-making, planning and results, leading to greater operational effectiveness and performance.
- **Better Access:** Women peacekeepers can better access the population, including women and children - for example, by interviewing and supporting survivors of gender-based violence and violence against children - thereby generating critical information that would otherwise be difficult to reach.
- **Building Trust and Confidence:** Women peacekeepers are essential enablers to build trust and confidence with local communities and help improve access and support for local women. For example, by interacting with women in societies where women are prohibited from speaking to men.

- **Inspiring and Creating Role Models:** Women peacekeepers serve as powerful mentors and role models for women and girls in post-conflict settings in the host community, setting examples for them to advocate for their own rights and pursue non-traditional careers.

2.BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement

Recently, India, Bangladesh and Nepal finalised an enabling memorandum of understanding (MoU) for implementing the long-gestating Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA).

What is the BBIN connectivity Project?

- **Background:** The project was conceived after the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) failed to agree on a regional motor vehicles agreement at a summit in Nepal in 2014, mainly because of opposition from Pakistan.
- **Origin:** The BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between the 4 countries was signed during a transport ministers' meeting in Thimpu on 15th June 2015.
- **Objective:** Operationalising the MVA by concluding the Passenger and the Cargo Protocol will help realise the full potential of trade and people to people connectivity between the BBIN countries by fostering greater sub-regional cooperation.
- **Bhutan's Reluctance:** The BBIN project suffered a setback in 2017 when Bhutan temporarily opted out of it after being unable to get parliamentary approval for the MVA. The 3 other countries decided at the time to press ahead with the agreement.
- **Foreign Funding:** The Asian Development Bank has supported the project as part of its South Asian Subregional Economic Cooperation programme, and has been requested to prioritise about 30 road projects worth billions of dollars. The World Bank, which has estimated that the implementation of the MVA will potentially see an increase in traffic-regional trade within South Asia by nearly 60%, has also announced its interest in supporting infrastructure.
- **Persisting Issues:** There are still some agreements holding up the final protocols, including issues like insurance and bank guarantees, and the size and frequency of freight carriers into each country, which they hope to finalise this year before operationalizing bus and truck movements between them.

What are the concerns of Bhutan?

- The objections of Bhutan pertain to sustainability and environmental concerns.
- In 2020, Prime Minister Lotay Tshering held that given Bhutan's "current infrastructure" and top priority to remaining a "carbon-negative" country, it would not be possible to consider joining the MVA. Thus, the Bhutanese parliament decided not to endorse the plan.

What are the Similar Connectivity Initiatives which India is a part of?

1. Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor
2. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway
3. Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT)

Way Forward

Bhutan's concerns may be eased if India considers the inclusion of waterways and riverine channels as a less environmentally damaging substitute.

ECONOMY

First Virtual Smart Grid Knowledge Centre

Recently, the Union Minister for Power has launched the Virtual Smart Grid Knowledge Center (Virtual SGKC) and Innovation Park.

What is Virtual Smart Grid Knowledge Center (Virtual SGKC)?

- Located within the powergrid centre in Manesar (Haryana), Virtual Smart Grid Knowledge Center (Virtual SGKC) is the first of its kind initiative by the Union government.
- The initiative, as part of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav Programme, will be one of the leading Centers of Excellence globally to foster innovation, entrepreneurship and research in smart grid technologies.
- It has been established by POWERGRID with support from the Union ministry of power and technical assistance from US Agency for International Development's (USAID) for demonstration and advancement of frontier smart grid technologies.

What is the Significance of this Initiative?

- SGKC aims to be one of the leading Centers of Excellence globally to foster innovation, entrepreneurship and research in smart grid technologies and create capacities in the power distribution sector.
- It will enable a digital footprint of the physical setup of SGKC, the need for which was felt during Covid-19 pandemic.

What is a Smart Grid?

About:

- Smart Grid is an Electrical Grid with Automation, Communication and IT systems that can monitor power flows from points of generation to points of consumption (even down to appliances level) and control the power flow or curtail the load to match generation in real time or near real time.
- Smart Grids can be achieved by implementing efficient transmission & distribution systems, system operations, consumer integration and renewable integration.
- Smart grid solutions helps to monitor, measure and control power flows in real time that can contribute to identification of losses and thereby appropriate technical and managerial actions can be taken to arrest the losses.

Vision for India:

- Transform the Indian power sector into a secure, adaptive, sustainable and digitally enabled ecosystem that provides reliable and quality energy for all with active participation of stakeholders.

Benefits of Smart Grid Deployments:

1. Reduction of T&D losses,
2. Peak load management, improved QoS and reliability.
3. Reduction in power purchase cost.
4. Better asset management.
5. Increased grid visibility and self-healing grids.
6. Renewable integration and accessibility to electricity.
7. Increased options such as ToU tariff, DR programs, net metering.
8. Satisfied customers and financially sound utilities etc.

What are the Related Initiatives?

- **Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (SAUBHAGYA):**Empowering rural and urban households through access to reliable and affordable electricity.
- **Green Energy Corridor (GEC):**Synchronising grid-connected renewable energy with India's national transmission network.
- **National Smart Grid Mission (NSGM) and Smart Meter National Programme (SMNP):**Modernising India's power sector into a secure, adaptive, sustainable, and digitally enabled ecosystem.

PRELIMS FACT

SARAS 3 Telescope

Recently, the Indian researchers at RRI (Raman Research Institute) in a study using the SARAS 3 radio telescope, have conclusively denied a recent claim of the discovery of a radio wave signal from cosmic dawn. In 2018 a team of researchers from Arizona State University (ASU) and MIT in the US detected a signal from stars emerging in the early universe using data from the EDGES radio telescope.

- The Cosmic Dawn is the period from about 50 million years to one billion years after the Big Bang when the first stars, black holes, and galaxies in the Universe formed.
- The RRI is an autonomous research institute engaged in research in basic sciences. The institute was founded in 1948 by the Indian physicist and Nobel Laureate Sir C V Raman.

What are Radio Waves and Radio Telescopes?

- Radio waves have the longest wavelengths in the electromagnetic spectrum. They range from the length of a football to larger than our planet. Heinrich Hertz proved the existence of radio waves in the late 1880s.
- Radio telescopes collect weak radio light waves, bring it to a focus, amplify it and make it available for analysis.
- They help study naturally occurring radio light from stars, galaxies, black holes, and other astronomical objects.

- These specially-designed telescopes observe the longest wavelengths of light, ranging from 1 millimetre to over 10 metres long. For comparison, visible light waves are only a few hundred nanometers long, and a nanometer is only 1/10,000th the thickness of a piece of paper! In fact, we don't usually refer to radio light by its wavelength, but by its frequency.

What is SARAS-3 Radio Telescope?

- SARAS is a niche high-risk high-gain experimental effort of RRI.
- SARAS aims to design, build and deploy in India a precision radio telescope to detect extremely faint radio wave signals from the depths of time, from our "Cosmic Dawn" when the first stars and galaxies formed in the early Universe.

What are the Findings?

- SARAS 3 did not find any evidence of the signal claimed by the EDGES experiment.
- The presence of the signal is decisively rejected after a careful assessment of the measurement uncertainties.
- The detection reported by EDGES was likely contamination of their measurement and not a signal from the depths of space and time.
- However, astronomers still do not know what the actual signal looks like.

2.UPI123Pay and Digisaathi

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched new UPI services for feature phones called UPI123Pay for non internet users to make digital payments, also launched a 24x7 helpline for digital payments called 'Digisaathi'. 'Digisaathi' has also been set up by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to provide users with automated responses on information related to digital payment products and services. Presently it is available in English and Hindi language.

What is Unified Payments Interface (UPI)?

- It is an advanced version of Immediate Payment Service (IMPS)- round-the-clock funds transfer service to make cashless payments faster, easier and smoother.
- UPI is a system that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application (of any participating bank), merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.
- UPI is currently the biggest among the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) operated systems including National Automated Clearing House (NACH), Immediate Payment Service (IMPS), Aadhaar enabled Payment System (AePS), Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS), RuPay etc.
- The top UPI apps today include PhonePe, Paytm, Google Pay, Amazon Pay and BHIM, the latter being the Government offering.

What is UPI 123 Pay?**About:**

- It will work on simple phones that do not have an internet connection. As of now, the UPI features are mostly available only on smartphones.
- The UPI service for feature phones will leverage the RBI's regulatory Sandbox on Retail Payments. A regulatory sandbox usually refers to live testing of new products or services in a controlled/test regulatory environment for which regulators may permit certain regulatory relaxations for the limited purpose of the testing.
- The UPI service will enable digital transactions through a mechanism of 'on-device' wallet in UPI applications."
- The users will be able to undertake a host of transactions based on four technology alternatives including- IVR (interactive voice response) number, missed call-based approach, app functionality in feature phones and proximity sound-based payments..

Benefits:

- The new service for feature phones will enable individuals to make direct payments to others without smartphones and internet.
- Users can initiate payments to friends and family, pay utility bills, recharge the FAST Tags of their vehicles, pay mobile bills and also allow users to check account balances.
- It will allow customers to use feature phones for almost all transactions except scan and pay.
- UPI123Pay will benefit an estimated 40 crore feature phone users and enable them to undertake digital payments in a secure manner. This will bring non-smartphone users under the digital payment system.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. The ‘global rules-based order’ is an idealistic myth. Do you agree? Comment on the statement in relevance to the current Ukraine-Russia War situation. (250 words)

Introduction

Liberals believed that war could be prevented if nations agreed on set of values, mechanism to reduce conflict and also manage conflict in a certain manner without escalation of a war. If all nations agreed to this notion, then war would be impossible. A global rules-based order can also be understood, less ideologically, as a mechanism for managing competition between states with divergent values. Eg: The arms control agreements that helped keep war cold between the US and the USSR owed little to democratic values.

Body

Concise definition of rules-based order is as follows

- The rules that protect sovereignty, preserve peace and curb excessive use of power, and enable international trade and investment;
- The international standards related to health and pandemics, to transport, telecommunications and other issues that underpin the global economy.
- Thirdly, the norms that underpin universal human rights, gender equality and the rule of law.

Rules based order is an idealistic myth: Reasons

- **Defying of international institutions by powerful nations:** Threat to the Rules-based order of the world by side-lining of the Global bodies like UNSC, WTO such as USA. Eg: Pursuing unilateralism and Protectionism goes against the ideal of Rules-based international world order.
- **Self-interest reigns supreme:** India was perhaps the first victim of this situation. In a fit of idealism, Jawaharlal Nehru took the issue of the tribal invasion of Kashmir to the UN. But then geopolitics kicked in. So, at the instance of the UK, the complaint of a tribal invasion was changed into the ‘India-Pakistan Question’ in the UNSC.
- **Chinese dominance:** China lost an arbitration on the status of the South China Sea islands in 2016. China ignored the ruling of UNCLOS and there is nothing anyone can do short of war to make it dismantle its constructions. It claims almost all of South China Sea, and has been aggressive in this regard.
- **USA’s defiance:** If China ignores one aspect of the UNCLOS, the US is unique in that it has simply not ratified UNCLOS, though it claims to adhere to it.
- **Russia-Ukraine war:** Russia invading Ukraine, even without any provocation by the latter is a direct violation of sovereignty of Ukraine.

Conclusion

Realists believe that international relations are solely based on power and national interest and has no place for morality. In the words of Thucydides “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”. Singapore diplomat Bilahari Kausikan called the Rules Based Order a ‘Rashomon term’, ie its meaning depending on the perspective of the user. He concluded that it was actually a diplomatic tool ‘rather than a term with an exact or stable meaning’. And its value to diplomacy lay in its ambiguity.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Consider the following phenomena:

1. Light is affected by gravity.
2. The Universe is constantly expanding.
3. Matter warps its surrounding space-time.

Which of the above is/are the prediction/predictions of Albert Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity, often discussed in media?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3**

Q2. In the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, an initiative of six countries, which of the following is/are not a participant/ participants?

1. Bangladesh

2. Cambodia
3. China
4. Myanmar
5. Thailand

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2, 3 and 4
- c. **1 and 3**
- d. 1, 2 and 5

Q3. Consider the following statements about Virtual Smart Grid Knowledge Centre:

1. Union Minister for Power has launched the Virtual Smart Grid Knowledge Center (Virtual SGKC) and Innovation Park.
2. The initiative, as part of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav Programme

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. **Both 1 and 2**
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q4. Which among the following has launched new UPI services for feature phones called UPI123Pay for non internet users to make digital payments?

- a. PNB
- b. **HDFC**
- c. SBI
- d. **RBI**

Q5. Which one of the following is not related to United Nations?

- a. Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
- b. International Finance Corporation
- c. International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes
- d. **Bank for International Settlements**