



International Women's Day: Women in Armed Forces

For Prelims: India's Female Labour Force Participation, Women in Informal Economy, ILO, Global gender gap index.

For Mains: Status of Women in Armed Forces, India's Female Labour Force Participation.

Why in News?

Recently, on the occasion of **International Women's Day**, Group Captain Shaliza Dhami has been selected to take over the command of a **frontline combat unit in the Western sector** (facing Pakistan).

- She will be the **first woman officer in the IAF to command a missile squadron in the Western sector**.

What are the Key Points about International Women's Day?

- **About:** It is celebrated **annually on 8th March**. It includes:
 - Celebration of women's achievements,
 - raising awareness about women's equality,
 - lobbying for accelerated gender parity,
 - fundraising for female-focused charities, etc.
- **Brief History:**
 - Women's Day was **first celebrated back in 1911 by Clara Zetkin**, who was a German. The **roots of the celebration had been in the labour movement across Europe and North America**.
 - However, it was only **in 1913 that the celebrations were shifted to 8th March**, and it has remained that way ever since.
 - International Women's Day was **celebrated for the first time by the [United Nations](#) in 1975**.
 - In December 1977, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming a **United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace** to be observed on any day of the year by Member States, in accordance with their historical and national traditions.
- **Theme:**
 - The theme for International Women's Day, 2023, according to the United Nations is **"DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality"** and it aims to emphasize the importance of technology in bringing gender issues to light.

What is the Status of Women in Armed Forces?

▪ **Background:**

- The **Indian Air Force started inducting women fighter pilots in 2016**. The first batch had three women fighter pilots who currently fly the [MiG-21](#), [Su-30MKI](#) and [Rafale](#).
- Women officers have started taking command of **various Army units** in arms and services including **Engineers, Signals, Army Air Defence, Intelligence Corps, Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps and Electronics and Mechanical Engineers**.

▪ **Current Statistics:**

- There are **10,493 women officers serving in the armed forces**, the majority in the medical services.
- The **Indian Army**, being the largest of the three services, **has the largest number of women officers at 1,705, followed by 1,640 women officers in the Indian Air Force, and 559 in the Indian Navy**.
- In January 2023, the army deployed **a woman officer, Captain Shiva Chouhan, on the Siachen glacier for the first time**.
- In **February 2023, the army began assigning women officers to command roles outside of the medical stream for the first time**.
 - Around **50 of them are set to head units in operational areas under the Northern and Eastern Commands** responsible for guarding India's borders with China.
- The **Navy has also started inducting women officers on frontline ships, earlier a no-go zone** for women officers.
 - Many of them have been posted in the **sensitive northern and eastern commands of the Army**.

What are the Concerns Related to Gender Equality?

▪ **Global:**

- UN Secretary General stated that **Gender equality is growing more distant**. On the current track, **UN Women puts it 300 years away**.
- According to the UN, **legal restrictions have kept 2.7 billion women from accessing the same choice of jobs as men**.
 - As of 2019, **less than 25% of parliamentarians were women**.
 - **One in three women experience gender-based violence**.

▪ **India Specific:**

- According to [CMIE data](#), as of **December 2021**, while the male LFPR was 67.4%, the **female LFPR was as low as 9.4%**.
- Even if one sources data from the [World Bank](#), **India's female labor force participation rate is around 25%** when the global average is 47%.
- In the [Global gender gap index](#) (which measures progress towards gender parity), **India slipped to 135th place in 2022**.
 - However, recently the [WEF has agreed to make changes in criteria for Global Gender Gap Reports](#) by **taking into account the participation of women at panchayat level** to rank countries in its future reports. **It will better India's position at the global level**.
- As per the data compiled by the [Inter-Parliamentary Union \(IPU\)](#), of which India is a member, **women represent just 14.44% of the total members of the Lok Sabha**.
- According to a 2018 study by the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO), **more than 95% of India's working women are informal workers** who work in labour-intensive, low-paying, highly precarious jobs/conditions, and **with no social protection**.

What are the Challenges for Women in Armed Forces?

▪ **Societal Issues:**

- Composition of male officers, predominantly drawn from a rural background, with **prevailing societal norms**, troops are not yet mentally schooled to accept women officers in command of units.
- **Society has low acceptance for the women officer** who had been **caught as a prisoner of war** by an enemy country.

▪ **Physiological Challenges:**

- **Motherhood, childcare, psychological limitations** are vital factors, which have a bearing on the employment of women officers in the Army.
- It is a challenge for women to meet these hazards of service owing to **prolonged absence during pregnancy**, motherhood and domestic obligations towards their children and families especially when both husband and wife happen to be service officers.
- **Family Issues:**
 - **Armed forces require sacrifices and commitment beyond the call of duty** by the entire family of service personnel involving **separation and frequent transfers, affecting the education of children and career prospects of the spouse.**

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following gives 'Global Gender Gap Index' ranking to the countries of the world? (2017)

- (a) World Economic Forum
- (b) UN Human Rights Council
- (c) UN Women
- (d) World Health Organization

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. What are the continued challenges for Women in India against time and space? (2019)

Q. Discuss the desirability of greater representation to women in the higher judiciary to ensure diversity, equity and inclusiveness. (2021)

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