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International Day of UN Peacekeepers — Two Indian Soldiers to Receive Dag Hammarskjöld Medal

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WHY IN NEWS:

May 29 is observed annually as the **International Day of UN Peacekeepers**. The **2026 theme** is “**Invest in Peace**”. UN Secretary-General **António Guterres** will posthumously confer the **Dag Hammarskjöld Medal** on two Indian peacekeepers — **Lance Havildar Harbhajan Singh** (MONUSCO, DR Congo) and **Naib Subedar Sujit Kumar Pradhan** (UNMISS, South Sudan) — recognising Indians who died while serving with UN missions. India remains **among the top contributors** of uniformed personnel to UN peace operations — currently ranked **3rd–4th** (behind Nepal, Rwanda and Bangladesh per recent UN data).

WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF UN PEACEKEEPERS?

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Observed on	May 29 annually
Established by	UNGA Resolution 57/129 (December 11, 2002)
First observed	2003
Why May 29	Anniversary of the launch of the first UN peacekeeping mission — UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in Palestine on May 29, 1948
Purpose	Honour the ~4,200+ peacekeepers killed in service since 1948; pay tribute to currently serving personnel; raise awareness about UN peacekeeping
2026 theme	“ Invest in Peace ” — links peacekeeping to the UN’s broader Pact for the Future (Sept 2024) and Sustainable Development Goals

INDIA'S HONOUR — TWO POSTHUMOUS MEDALS

NAME	MISSION	COUNTRY
Lance Havildar Harbhajan Singh	MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission)	Democratic Republic of Congo
Naib Subedar Sujit Kumar Pradhan	UNMISS (United Nations Mission in South Sudan)	South Sudan

The **Dag Hammarskjöld Medal** is awarded posthumously to military, police and civilian personnel who lose their lives while serving in UN peacekeeping operations. It is named after **Dag Hammarskjöld**, the **second Secretary-General of the UN** (1953-1961), who himself died in a plane crash in then-Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) during the Congo crisis in **September 1961**.

Since 1948, **~180 Indian peacekeepers** have lost their lives in UN missions — **the highest from any country**.

INDIA'S UN PEACEKEEPING FOOTPRINT

INDICATOR	VALUE
Uniformed personnel deployed (recent UN data)	~5,165 (incl. police)
Global rank	3rd–4th (recent UN data: Nepal ~6,029; Rwanda ~5,880; Bangladesh ~5,568; India ~5,165)
Women peacekeepers	~155 (one of the highest among large contributors)
Active missions India is in	MONUSCO, UNMISS, UNFICYP, UNDOF, UNIFIL, MINURSO + observer missions
Cumulative contribution since 1948	~290,000+ personnel in 50+ missions
First Indian deployment	1950 , UN Korea Operations

India has provided peacekeepers to nearly every major UN mission since the 1950s — Suez (1956), Congo (1960s), Cyprus (1964), Lebanon (UNIFIL since 1998), Sudan/South Sudan, DRC, Western Sahara, and Cambodia.

NOTABLE RECENT RECOGNITION

YEAR	HONOUR	INDIAN
2025	Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award	Major Abhilasha Barak (UNIFIL, Lebanon)
2024	Captain Anjana Bhaduria — first Indian female military observer	
2023	Indian Female Engagement Team (FET) deployed to MONUSCO	

UN PEACEKEEPING — QUICK ARCHITECTURE

ELEMENT	DETAIL
Mandate origin	UN Charter Chapters VI (peaceful settlement) and VII (Security Council enforcement)
Authorisation	UN Security Council (UNSC) by resolution
Coordinated by	Department of Peace Operations (DPO) + Department of Operational Support (DOS) — both at UN Secretariat
Force composition	Troops, formed police units (FPUs), individual police, military observers, civilian staff
Active missions (2026)	~ 12 ongoing peacekeeping operations (UN GA-approved budgets for 2025-26 cover 12 missions)
Total personnel (uniformed, 2026)	~ 70,000+ globally
Budget (2025-26)	~ USD 5.4 billion (UN GA-approved, separate from regular UN budget)
Funding	Mandatory contributions by member states using a special peacekeeping scale

THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF UN PEACEKEEPING

- 1 **Consent of the parties** — peacekeeping deploys only with host-state consent.
- 2 **Impartiality** — neutrality between parties to the conflict.
- 3 **Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of mandate** — the limit is set by the SC resolution.

(Sometimes called the “**Capstone Principles**”, formalised in 2008.)

WHY IT MATTERS FOR INDIA

ANGLE	SUBSTANCE
UNSC permanent seat claim	India consistently cites peacekeeping contribution as a credential for permanent membership; backed by G4 (India, Brazil, Germany, Japan)
Soft power	Peacekeeping is among India’s most respected international credentials
Diplomatic capital	Contributions to African missions build Africa goodwill (linked to India-Africa Forum Summit framework)
Operational experience	Real-world experience for Indian military officers in complex multinational environments
Norms-shaping	India advocates for clearer rules of engagement, troop safety, and women’s participation

INDIA’S POSITION ON REFORM

- **Stronger force protection** — host-state accountability for crimes against peacekeepers.
- **Adequate equipment + training** — periodic upgrades through **Contingent-Owned Equipment (COE)** reimbursement reform.
- **Faster reimbursements** to troop-contributing countries (India is among the largest creditors of UN peacekeeping).
- **Women’s participation** — supports doubling of women in uniformed roles by 2028.
- **Mandate clarity** — opposes mandate creep that thrusts non-traditional tasks (human rights monitoring, election support) on troop contingents without commensurate resources.

INDIA’S DEFENCE COOPERATION LINKAGES

- **Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK)** — established **2000** at the **United Service Institution of India, New Delhi** — trains Indian and foreign personnel.
- **National Defence College + Defence Services Staff College** — peacekeeping doctrine in curriculum.
- **MoU framework** — India has bilateral training MoUs with multiple African and Asian partners.

WIDER SIGNIFICANCE

- **Multilateralism reaffirmed** — at a moment of strain on global institutions, peacekeeping remains a working example of **multilateral** cooperation.
- **Post-Pact for the Future** — the September 2024 UNGA Pact for the Future commits to a “New Agenda for Peace” — peacekeeping reform is part of it.
- **Africa centrality** — most current peacekeeping missions are in Africa; India’s contribution reinforces its claim to be a Global South leader.
- **Tribute and legitimacy** — honouring fallen peacekeepers strengthens domestic legitimacy of UN deployments.

WATCHPOINTS

- **Sahel withdrawals** — MINUSMA closure (Dec 2023); Sahel security vacuum.
- **DR Congo escalation** — M23 conflict raises MONUSCO casualties; India’s contingent at heightened risk.
- **Funding cuts** — US contributions under Trump 2.0 reportedly under review.
- **Mandate vs reality gap** — many missions are stretched beyond capacity.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — International Relations:

- Important International institutions, agencies and fora — their structure, mandate.
- India’s role in UN.
- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests.

GS Paper 3 — Security:

- Security challenges and their management in border areas.
- Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

Analytical hooks for Mains:

- India’s peacekeeping contribution and UNSC permanent seat claim.
- Reform of UN peacekeeping — financial, operational, normative.
- Women in peacekeeping — capacity and culture.

FACTS CORNER

International Day of UN Peacekeepers: May 29, annually (since 2003).

Established by: UNGA Resolution 57/129, December 11, 2002.

Why May 29: Anniversary of UNTSO launch (May 29, 1948) — first UN peacekeeping mission.

2026 theme: “Invest in Peace”.

Dag Hammarskjöld Medal recipients (2026, India): Lance Havildar Harbhajan Singh (MONUSCO), Naib Subedar Sujit Kumar Pradhan (UNMISS).

Dag Hammarskjöld: 2nd UN Secretary-General (1953-1961); died Sept 1961.

India’s current uniformed contribution (recent UN data): ~5,165 — currently 3rd–4th (behind Nepal ~6,029, Rwanda ~5,880, Bangladesh ~5,568).

Cumulative Indian contribution since 1948: ~290,000+ personnel in 50+ missions.

Indian peacekeepers killed in service: ~180 — highest from any country.

Active UN peacekeeping missions (2026): ~12 (UN GA-approved budgets for 2025-26 cover 12 missions).

Total global uniformed personnel (2026): ~70,000+.

UN peacekeeping budget (2025-26): ~USD 5.4 billion (UN GA-approved).

Three principles: consent, impartiality, non-use of force except in self-defence/defence of mandate.

Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK): Established 2000, New Delhi.


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Sources: *UN Peacekeeping, MEA, PIB*

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