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Q20

'Sea is an important Component of the Cosmos'. Discuss in the light of the above statement the role of the IMO(International Maritime Organisation) in protecting environment and enhancing maritime safety and security.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS II · 15 marks · India and its Neighbourhood

India and its neighborhood - relations.

Core demand of the question

- 'Sea is an important Component of the Cosmos.'
- Discuss the role of the **International Maritime Organization** (IMO) in protecting the environment and in enhancing maritime safety and security

Revision summary

The IMO is the UN specialised agency that drafts maritime conventions; States enforce them.

MARPOL is the main anti-pollution treaty, including air emissions under Annex VI.

Ballast water, anti-fouling, ship recycling and the Polar Code extend environmental protection.

SOLAS and STCW are the core safety instruments.

ISPS (under **SOLAS**) and the SUA Convention address terrorism and unlawful acts at sea.

India's role is membership plus Port State Control and merchant-shipping implementation.

Introduction

The sea carries trade, food, climate, and armed risk; it is a global commons, not a national pond. The **International Maritime Organization**, a United Nations specialised agency in London, writes the technical rules that make that commons cleaner, safer, and harder to use for terror or unsafe ships.

Body**IMO as the global maritime regulator**

- The IMO sets conventions that flag States, port States, and coastal States then enforce; it does not police the ocean with its own navy.
- India is a member and a large flag, port, and coastal State, so IMO rules enter Indian law through merchant-shipping statutes and directorate circulars.

Protecting the marine environment

- The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 (MARPOL), is the core instrument on oil, chemicals, packaged goods, sewage, garbage, and air emissions from ships.

- MARPOL Annex VI addresses sulphur oxides and, with later IMO work, greenhouse-gas intensity of shipping, including the 2020 sulphur cap and carbon-intensity measures.
- The International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-fouling Systems, the Ballast Water Management Convention, and the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships extend the environmental mandate from the voyage to the scrap yard.
- The Polar Code adds environment and safety rules for Arctic and Antarctic waters, which climate change has opened to more traffic.
- **These instruments treat the sea as a shared ecological system:** a discharge in one exclusive economic zone becomes another coast's tar ball.

Maritime safety

- The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (**SOLAS**) is the basic safety treaty: construction, fire, life-saving appliances, radio, and the International Safety Management Code.
- The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) sets the human standard; most accidents are still crew and watch failures.
- The Load Lines Convention and search-and-rescue cooperation under the SAR Convention complete the safety net for cargo and persons in distress.
- Port State Control memoranda (Tokyo, Indian Ocean, and others) are how IMO standards are inspected on foreign ships in member ports.

Maritime security

- After 11 September 2001 the IMO adopted the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (**ISPS Code**) as a **SOLAS** amendment, to harden ships and ports against terrorism.
- The Convention for the **Suppression of Unlawful Acts** against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA), and its protocols, criminalise hijacking and certain violent acts at sea.
- IMO guidance on piracy (including off Somalia and in the Gulf of Guinea), on cyber risk, and on stowaways sits beside UN Security Council and naval-coalition action; the IMO's part is standards and information, not warships.
- **Safety and security meet in the same ship:** a poorly maintained tanker is both an environmental bomb and a weak security target.

Recommendations

- Support IMO greenhouse-gas measures that do not simply displace old ships onto developing-country flags without finance for transition.
- Implement the Hong Kong recycling convention in Indian yards with real labour and toxin standards, not only accession on paper.
- Use Port State Control in Indian harbours as the daily enforcement arm of **SOLAS**, MARPOL and ISPS.

Flow diagram

IMO London London -> MARPOL environment
IMO London -> SOLAS STCW safety
IMO London -> ISPS SUA security
MARPOL environment -> Flag port coastal enforcement
SOLAS STCW safety -> Flag port coastal enforcement
ISPS SUA security -> Flag port coastal enforcement

Conclusion

The IMO protects the marine environment through MARPOL and related conventions, and it enhances safety and security through **SOLAS**, STCW and the ISPS and SUA instruments. Because the sea is a shared component of the physical world, those global rules matter only when flag, port and coastal States, including India, actually enforce them.

Facts & figures

International Maritime Organization

United Nations specialised agency, headquarters in London, responsible for shipping safety, security and marine pollution from ships.

MARPOL 73/78

Main IMO convention on pollution from ships, with annexes on oil, chemicals, sewage, garbage and air emissions.

SOLAS

International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea; includes the ISM Code and, after 2002, the ISPS Code.

ISPS Code

International Ship and Port Facility Security Code; SOLAS amendment to counter maritime terrorism.

Hong Kong Convention on ship recycling

IMO convention on environmentally sound recycling of ships; relevant to India's Alang-type yards.

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