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Institute of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 23 April 2025



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TERROR ATTACK ON TOURISTS IN J&K'S PAHALGAM



- Pahalgam is a popular hill station located in the Anantnag district in the southern part of the Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Kashmir.
- It lies approximately 90 km from Srinagar International Airport.

• **Tourist Attractions**

- Known as the 'Valley of Shepherds', Pahalgam offers lush mountain trails, dense forests, and the scenic Lidder River.
- Key attractions include:
 - **Amarnath Cave Temple:** A revered Hindu shrine.
 - **Aru Wildlife Sanctuary:** Home to species like brown bears and musk deer.
 - **Betaab Valley:** Named after the Sunny Deol-starrer film Betaab.
 - **Tulian Lake:** A serene alpine lake popular with trekkers.
 - **Baisaran Valley:** A picturesque meadow drawing many tourists, often called "mini-Switzerland."

Baisaran: A Scenic Gem Near Pahalgam

- Located just 5 km from Pahalgam, Baisaran is one of the region's most popular tourist and trekking destinations.
- Accessible only by foot or ponies, the lack of motorable roads made rescue operations difficult during the recent terrorist attack.

Pahalgam Terror Attack – Analysis

- The terrorist attack in Pahalgam, which killed over two dozen civilians, is the deadliest targeting civilians since the 26/11 Mumbai attacks.
- It highlights a **major internal security challenge** with significant external implications for India.

- **Tourism as a Symbol of Normalcy Disrupted**
 - Since the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, a surge in tourism to Jammu & Kashmir was viewed as a sign of peace and prosperity.
 - The attack shatters this image and revives the Valley's painful memories of violence.
- **Terror Timing and Global Attention**
 - The attack occurred while US Vice-President JD Vance was visiting India and PM Modi was on a diplomatic trip to Saudi Arabia, a timing that echoes previous incidents aimed at international publicity.
 - **March 2000:** 36 Sikhs were massacred in Anantnag just before President Clinton's visit.
 - **May 2002:** The Kaluchak attack coincided with US official Christina Rocca's visit, killing 23 people including women and children.
- **Kashmir and Pakistan's Provocative Rhetoric**
 - The attack followed a provocative statement by Pakistan Army chief Gen. Asim Munir, who called Kashmir Pakistan's "jugular vein."

A MOVE THAT ENDANGERS THE RIGHT TO VOTE

- The Election Commission of India's (ECI) initiative to link Aadhaar with voter IDs has sparked intense debate.
- While presented as a strategy to cleanse electoral rolls and bolster electoral integrity, **this policy move raises profound constitutional, legal, and ethical questions.**
- A closer examination reveals that **the proposed linkage threatens the sanctity of the democratic process, compromises the right to privacy, and risks mass disenfranchisement of legitimate voters.**

The Illusion of Voluntariness and Legal Ambiguities

- Though the ECI claims the Aadhaar-voter ID linkage is voluntary, **the process offers no genuine opt-out.**

- Citizens must either provide their Aadhaar number or declare its absence — a mechanism that coerces even reluctant individuals into compliance.
- By September 2023, over 66 crore Aadhaar numbers had been seeded into the voter database, facilitated by data-sharing practices that raise serious legal and ethical concerns.
- The use of tools like the DBT Seeding Data Viewer and the repurposing of National Population Register data demonstrate how data collected for one purpose is now being leveraged for unrelated, constitutionally sensitive applications.

Conclusion

- The Aadhaar-voter ID linkage represents a constitutional misstep with far-reaching implications.
- It imposes unjust burdens on citizens, compromises privacy, and introduces unreliable and exclusionary mechanisms into the electoral process.
- In a democracy, the right to vote is sacrosanct, any policy that endangers this right must be abandoned.
- The bipartisan support for such a constitutionally dubious initiative is not only troubling but also indicative of the need for greater vigilance in protecting democratic institutions.



EMISSIONS TRADING SCHEME (ETS)

- An Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is a regulatory tool that aims to reduce air pollution by introducing economic incentives.
 - Under ETS, a cap is imposed on the total permissible emissions.
 - Industries receive emission permits, which can be bought and sold, allowing companies to trade pollution rights.
 - This system is also referred to as "cap-and-trade".
 - Cleaner industries can sell their unused permits to polluting units, creating an economic incentive for pollution reduction.

Why is the Surat ETS Significant?

- The Surat Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) launched in **2019** is the world's first ETS focused on trading particulate pollution (not CO₂), and India's first emissions market for any pollutant.
- It targeted **342 high-emitting industries**, mainly in the **textile sector**, which used solid fuels like **coal and lignite**, and liquid fuels like **diesel**.
- The scheme was developed by the **Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB)** in collaboration with **J-PAL, EPIC, and Yale University**.

CLOUSBURST



- The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** reported **9 mm** of rainfall in 24 hours, marking a **575%** increase from the normal **2.5 mm**.

What is a Cloudburst?

- A **cloudburst** is a **localised and extremely intense rainfall event**, defined by **rainfall of 10 cm or more within one hour over an area of approximately 10 km × 10 km**.
- Even **5 cm of rain in 30 minutes** over the same area qualifies as a **cloudburst**.
- **Cloudbursts are more common in mountainous regions** due to a process known as **orographic lift**. In this phenomenon:
 - **Warm air ascends the mountain slope** and expands due to **lower atmospheric pressure at higher altitudes**.
 - As it **expands and cools**, the air **releases its moisture** in the form of precipitation.
 - When **large volumes of warm, moist air** keep rising and accumulating moisture without releasing it, it can lead to a **sudden, violent downpour**.
- Because of their **localised nature**, cloudbursts are **difficult to forecast** and can **overwhelm drainage systems**, resulting in **flash floods and landslides**.

What is a Flash Flood?

- A **flash flood** is a **sudden and rapid inundation** that occurs when **excessive rainwater** enters **streams, drains, or rivers**, often overwhelming the natural or built drainage capacity.
- These are more frequent in **mountainous regions** where the **rocky terrain absorbs little water**, causing more **surface runoff**.
- Unlike **riverine floods** in plains that cause long-term property damage, **flash floods tend to be more deadly**, often catching people off guard and leading to **loss of life**.

BAMIYAN BUDDHAS



- The **Bamiyan Buddhas**, carved in the **6th century CE**, were two **monumental statues** of standing Buddhas measuring **115 feet and 174 feet** in height, embedded into the **sandstone cliffs of Bamiyan Valley, central Afghanistan**.
- These statues are considered exemplary of the **Gandhara School of Buddhist Art**, which reflected a unique blend of **Indian, Persian, and Greco-Roman artistic influences**.
- The **Bamiyan Buddhas**, named **Salsal** (meaning “light shines through the universe”) and **Shamama** (“Queen Mother”), stood **55 metres and 38 metres tall**,
- These statues represented a **fusion of Gupta, Sassanian, and Hellenistic styles**, representing a **unique confluence of civilisations**.
- The statues represented the **confluence of cultural traditions** and were significant markers of the spread of **Buddhism** across **Central and South Asia** between the **1st and 13th centuries**.

Background of Destruction



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- The **Taliban**, a hardline group that emerged in the **1990s**, imposed an **extremist interpretation of Islamic law**, which included **banning art, education for girls, and public expression**.
- On **27 February 2001**, the Taliban officially announced its plan to demolish the **Bamiyan Buddhas**, deeming them un-Islamic.
- Over **25 days**, the statues were systematically **destroyed using explosives**, marking one of the most egregious acts of **cultural vandalism** in modern history.
- In **2003**, **UNESCO designated the Bamiyan Valley as a World Heritage Site**, despite the irreversible damage done.
- In **2021**, a **3D holographic projection** temporarily recreated the statue of **Salsal**, offering a new way to engage with the lost heritage.

KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES COMMISSION (KVIC)



- It is a **statutory body** established under the **Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956**.
- It is an apex organization **under the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises**, with regard to khadi and village industries within India.
- The KVIC is charged with the planning, promotion, organisation and implementation of programmes for the **development of Khadi and other village industries in rural areas** in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.
- At the **state level, Khadi & Village Industries Boards were set up** to effectively implement the schemes of KVIC in their respective states.
- The **objectives** of the KVIC are explained below:
 - Primary Objective: To build up an active rural community
 - Social Objective: To provide employment in rural areas
 - Economic Objective: To produce a saleable product
 - Wider Objective: To create self-reliance among the economically weaker section

The **functions** of the KVIC are as follows:

- To **build a strategic reserve of raw materials** and implements for supply to producers.
- To **create common service facilities for processing** raw materials as semi-finished goods and provisions for **facilities for marketing KVI products**.
- To **enhance the sale and marketing** of Khadi and other products of village industries or handicrafts.
- To be responsible for encouraging and **promoting research in the production techniques** and equipment employed in the Khadi and Village Industries sectors.
- To **assure the genuineness of the products and to set standards** for the quality of products from Khadi and Village Industries.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING RESEARCH INSTITUTE (NEERI)



- The CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI) is a research institute **created and funded by the Government of India**.
- It was **established in Nagpur in 1958** with a focus on **water supply, sewage disposal, communicable diseases**, and to some extent, on **industrial pollution and occupational diseases** found commonly in post-independent India.
- NEERI is a pioneer laboratory in the field of **environmental science and engineering** and is a **constituent laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)**.
- The institute's primary mission is to conduct research and development activities related to various aspects of **environmental management, pollution control, and sustainable development**.
- NEERI falls **under the Ministry of Science and Technology** of the central government.

- **Headquarters:** Nagpur
- NEERI has five zonal laboratories at Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai.
- **Organizational Expertise:** Climate/Environment, Health, Lab or Field Testing, Monitoring and Evaluation, Policy Development, Research, Standards, Technology, and Fuel R&D.

SUNRISE INDUSTRY



- Sunrise industry is a term frequently used for a sector that is developing and poised for rapid growth.
- Typically, such industries register **high growth rates** and have **numerous start-ups** and **plenty of funding**.
- Sunrise industry examples include the **alternative energy industry** highlighted in 2003 and 2007, the **social media and cloud computing industries** of 2011 and 2012, and **blockchain industries** established from 2013 to 2017.
- Other sunrise industries include information technology and clean energy.
- A sunrise industry often has a **high degree of innovation**, and its rapid emergence may **threaten a competing industry sector already in decline**.
 - The competing industry sector is commonly referred to as a **sunset industry**.
- **Life Cycle of a Sunrise Industry:**
 - As an industry grows and matures, it may pass from the **sunrise phase** to **maturity** and, finally, the **sunset stage**.
 - The **compact-disc industry** is an example of such a transition.
 - It was a sunrise industry in the 1990s when compact discs replaced vinyl records and cassette tapes, but the rapid adoption of digital media in the 21st century saw the industry move into the sunset phase.

UNPRECEDENTED SURGE IN GOLD PRICES

Reasons Behind Gold Prices Crossing ₹1 Lakh-Mark

- **Surge in Global Gold Prices**
 - Gold prices have surged globally, crossing \$3,400 per ounce, contributing to a significant rise in India.
 - This surge is attributed to a weakening US dollar, making gold more affordable for foreign currency holders.
- **Uncertainty Surrounding US Monetary Policy**
 - The rally is fueled by renewed uncertainty over US monetary policy, following President Trump's plans to overhaul the Federal Reserve.
 - His criticism of Fed Chairman Jerome Powell and calls for lower interest rates have intensified market concerns.
- **Geopolitical Tensions and Inflation Concerns**
 - Escalating geopolitical risks, such as tensions over Russia-Ukraine, and persistent inflation fears are also driving gold's safe-haven appeal.
 - The US Federal Reserve has warned that tariffs could disrupt its economic objectives, further supporting gold demand.
- **Central Bank and Institutional Demand**
 - The gold rally is further supported by increased buying from China, global central banks, and institutional investors, as well as growing concerns over the US economic outlook and debt crisis.
- **Analysts Insight**
 - Analysts highlight that escalating tariff tensions, the uncertain US economic outlook, and continued buying activity from major global players are adding momentum to gold's upward trajectory.