UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 26-04-2025

Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)

Prelims – *Current events of national and international importance| Indian Polity and Governance.*

Mains (GS II) – *Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government.*

Why in News?

Recently, Prime Minister convened an urgent CCS meeting at his residence following the Pahalgam terrorist attack.

> *A Cabinet Committee is extra-constitutional and are not mentioned in the Indian Constitution.*

- CCS is a high-powered committee responsible for ***debates, discussions and appointments*** of/ in the *national security bodies.*
- Major decisions with respect to significant appointments, issues of national security, and defence expenditure are taken by the CCS.
- The CCS discusses and takes decisions on urgent concerns on ***India's national security.***
- The CCS brainstorms on issues relating ***to law and order and internal security***.
- It also considers matters relating to *atomic energy.*
- **Structure and Composition – Members -**
  - Prime Minister **(Chairperson)**
  - Defence Minister
  - Home Minister
  - Finance Minister
  - External Affairs Minister
- It can also include the defence chiefs and other senior bureaucrats, depending on the situation and the nature of the discussion.
- The National Security Advisor (At present - Ajit Doval) acts as ***secretary-level coordinator.***
- The Cabinet Secretariat maintains records of all CCS meetings.

> *CCS meetings have been called during major events in India's history, including the wars with Pakistan, the Kargil conflict and the Kandahar hijack.*

Recent decisions made by CCS after the Pahalgam attack

- Suspension of Indus-water treaty - The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 will be held in abeyance with immediate effect, until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism.
- **Closure of Attar-wagah border -** The Integrated Check Post Attari will be closed with immediate effect.
- **Visa suspension -** Suspension of SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) visas.
- **Diplomatic measures -** The Defence/Military, Naval and Air Advisors in the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi are declared Persona Non Grata. They have a week to leave India.
- India will be withdrawing its own Defence/Navy/Air Advisors from the Indian High Commission in Islamabad.
- Five support staff of the Service Advisors will also be withdrawn from both High Commissions.
- The overall strength of the High Commissions will be brought down to 30 from the present 55 through further reductions.

Reference

Indian Today | Cabinet Committee on Security

New Method to Estimate Helium Abundance in the Sun

Prelims – *Current events of national and international importance.*

Why in news?

Recent Study conducted by researchers from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), reliably estimate Helium abundance in the Sun.

- **Helium** – It is the *2nd most abundant* element in the Sun after Hydrogen.
- But the accurate measurement of helium abundance in the Sun's photosphere has been a longstanding challenge.
- Traditional estimates relied on *indirect methods*, such as:
  - Extrapolation from hotter stars.
  - Measurements from the solar corona and solar wind.
  - Seismology studies of the Sun's interior.
- **Reason** - Helium does ***not produce observable spectral lines*** from the Sun's visible surface (photosphere).

New Methodology

- They analyzed *high-resolution solar spectrum data* from
  - Neutral magnesium (Mg) atomic lines and magnesium hydride (MgH) molecular lines.
  - Neutral carbon (C) atomic lines and hydrocarbon (CH and C_2) molecular lines.

- **Relative consistency** - The technique is based on the principle of *elemental abundance consistency* between atomic and molecular forms of the same element.

Key Findings

- The research confirmed a helium-to-hydrogen ratio of approximately 0.1.
- It also confirmed that for *every 10 hydrogen atoms* in the Sun, there is about 1 helium atom.

Significance

- This could be a major step in assessing the opacity of the Sun's photosphere.
- Validates previously assumed helium abundance values with direct evidence.
- Estimating accurate models of solar structure and evolution, as helium content significantly influences a star's lifetime, energy production, and evolutionary path.
- Solar helium measurements help constrain theories about Big Bang nucleosynthesis and the early universe's elemental production.

Reference

PIB| New Method to Reliably Estimate Helium Abundance in the Sun

SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme

Prelims – *Current events of international importance.*

Mains (GS II) –*Important International Institutions | India and its Neighbourhood.*

Why in News?

In the aftermath of the terror strike in Pahalgam, the Indian government has announced that Pakistan nationals will not be permitted to travel to India under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES).

- **Launched in -** 1992.
- **Launched by -** The 4th Summit of SAARC launching the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) in 1992, allowing select individuals to ***travel within the region without visas.***
- **Visa Exemption Sticker -** This travel document is known as the SAARC Visa Exemption Sticker.
- **Eligibility -** It is given to individuals falling under *24 specific categories*, such as dignitaries, judges, parliamentarians, senior officials, business persons, journalists, and sports personalities.
- The Visa Stickers are issued by the ***respective Member states*** to the entitled categories of that particular country.
- **Validity -** 1 year.
- **Administered by** - ***Immigration Authorities of respective Member states.***
- It was to ensure that their travel is not limited to any specific cities and would save

them from the hassles like police reporting and filling of extra forms on entry in any of the *8 SAARC countries.*

Other Visas

- In 2015, India decided that citizens of SAARC countries are eligible for a Business Visa to India for a period of up to 5 years, or for a shorter duration based on specific requirements.
    - However, this does not apply to nationals of ***Nepal, Bhutan, and Pakistan.***
- ***Citizens of Nepal and Bhutan*** did not require a visa to visit India.
- In the case of Pakistani nationals, only certain categories were eligible for a multiple-entry Business Visa, limited to a *maximum duration of one year* and restricted to 10 places within India.
- Later, India issued revised instructions allowing a multiple-entry Business Visa for up to 3 years for special category Pakistani businessmen with verified financial standing and business credentials.
- These visas are restricted to *15 designated places* in India.
- Among SAARC countries, Sri Lankan nationals were eligible for the ***e-Tourist Visa*** facility.
- Indian nationals, in turn, do not require a visa to travel to Nepal and Bhutan, while all other SAARC member states provide Business Visa facilities to Indian citizens.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
• It is an ***economic and political regional organization*** of countries in South Asia. • **Secretariat** - Kathmandu, Nepal, • **Established with -** The signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on December 8, 1985. • **Members (8) -** Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. • **Areas of Cooperation -** SAARC focuses on various areas like trade, education, health, and infrastructure development. • **Objectives** - To promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life. • To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials. • SAARC also aims to strengthen cooperation with other developing countries and to cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

References

1. The Hindu | SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme
2. Business Today | SAARC visa exemption scheme

Tamil Nadu's ban on egg mayonnaise

Prelims – *Current events of international importance.*

Mains (GS III) – *Food processing and related industries in India.*

Why in News?

The Tamil Nadu government has banned the manufacture, storage, distribution, and sale of mayonnaise made using raw eggs, citing public health risks.

- **Mayonnaise –** It is described as a semi-solid emulsion containing egg yolk, vegetable oil, vinegar, and other seasonings.
- Egg yolks (and some seasoning, if one wants) are stirred together with oil to create a thick pale-yellow sauce. In the end, a dash of acid is added.
- The protein in the egg acts as an emulsifier (a substance that binds two immiscible liquid to form a stable mixture) for the oil and water, also from the egg (some 50% of the yolk is water).

Health Risks associated with Mayonnaise

- Eggs are known to ***carry innumerous pathogens***, which are usually neutralized in the cooking process (through the application of heat). But mayonnaise uses raw eggs.
- This is especially relevant in Indian conditions, where improper preparation and storage amid hot and humid weather creates additional risk of contamination by microorganisms, especially *Salmonella* and *E Coli.*
- **Salmonella –** These are bacteria that can cause severe illness if consumed.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), they are a leading cause of foodborne illness, hospitalizations, and deaths worldwide.
- Warm, humid weather is the ideal condition for salmonella to grow. Symptoms of salmonella infection include watery diarrhoea, vomiting, and stomach cramps.
- **E coli –** These are bacteria which can cause infections in the gut, urinary tract, and other parts of the body.
- While most E Coli strains are harmless, they are in fact important to the digestive process certain kinds can cause severe illness.
- **High-risk groups -** While these bacteria can affect everyone, it poses more acute risks to certain groups such as immunocompromised individuals, children, and the elderly.
- **Significance of the ban -** It will likely force food businesses to switch to eggless or pasteurized-egg versions, at least until a comprehensive risk assessment is done.

States	Banned food items
Telangana	Egg-mayonnaise
Tamil Nadu	Gutka and Paan masala
Punjab	caffeinated energy drinks
Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Himachal Pradesh	Cotton candy and Gobi Manchurian contains Rhodamine B
Karnataka	Artificial food colors

Reference

The Indian Express | Tamil Nadu banned egg mayonnaise

Reasons behind the recent spike in gold prices in India

Prelims – *Current events of national and international importance.*

Mains (GS II) – *Economic Development | Issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth.*

Why in News?

In the domestic market, gold breached the psychological level of Rs 1 lakh per 10 grams, while gold prices hit a fresh record high of 3,500 dollars per ounce in the international market recently.

- **Tariffs imposed by U.S. -** Experts attribute the global economic uncertainty caused by the tariffs imposed by US as the primary reason behind the recent spike in gold prices.
- US investors are also importing large quantities of gold from the international markets China, London, and other countries like to hedge against a potentially higher tariff regime.
- **Fluctuations in Major currencies -** Recent fluctuations in the values of major currencies, including the ***US dollar and the euro***, have prompted businesses to invest in gold to hedge their currency assets.
- **Surge in demand -** The ongoing global tariff and trade war has led to a surge in demand for gold by investors, fund managers, and central banks alike.
- There is also a surge in demand for gold through ***Gold Exchange-Traded Funds, or ETFs***, as these funds are attracting higher investments.
- **Domestic reason –** Gold prices have also risen in the domestic market due to the ongoing marriage season, which typically leads to a spurt in gold demand.

India is the 2nd-largest gold market in the world, after China. According to a World Gold Council report, the value of total gold demand in India increased by 31% in 2024, compared to 2023.

Quick facts

• **Gold Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs)** – These are investment vehicles that allow individuals to gain exposure to gold without needing to physically store or handle the precious metal.
• They are traded on stock exchanges like any other share, and their value fluctuates based on the market price of gold.
• Each unit of a gold ETF typically represents a specific amount of gold, often one gram.
• **Exchange-Traded Fund –** It is a type of investment fund that can be bought and sold on a stock exchange throughout the day, like a stock.
• ETFs hold a basket of underlying assets, such as stocks or bonds, and are designed to track a specific market index, sector, or commodity.
• They offer a diversified investment in a single trade and are often more cost-effective than buying individual securities.

Reference

Hindu Business line | Uncertainty is driving gold prices