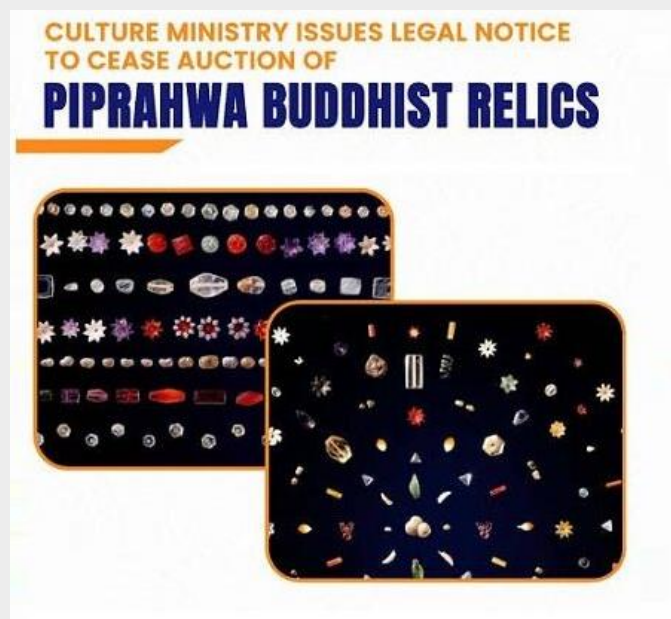


1. What are the Piprahwa relics, and why is India trying to stop their auction?**Why in News?**

India is trying to stop the auction of an extraordinary historical treasure – relics that were found more than 125 years ago at an archaeological site intimately connected with the life of Lord Buddha, which was carried away by the British colonial landowner who discovered them.



On May 5, the Ministry of Culture served notice on Sotheby's and the family of William Claxton Peppé, the man who carried out the excavation at Piprahwa in Siddharthnagar district in UP close to the Nepal border, demanding "immediate cessation" of the auction and repatriation of the relics to India.

According to the Indian legal notice, the collection includes "bone fragments, soapstone and crystal caskets, a sandstone coffer, and offerings such as gold ornaments and gemstones", which were "excavated...from the Piprahwa Stupa – widely identified as ancient

Kapilavastu", the capital of the Shakya "republic" of the 5th-6th centuries BCE where Prince Siddhartha lived before leaving home in his search for the truth.



The relics, the notice says, are an "inalienable religious and cultural heritage of India and the global Buddhist community", and their sale "violates Indian and international laws, as well as United Nations conventions".

How were the relics discovered?

In 1898, Peppé, an English estate manager and engineer, during an excavation found a stupa at Piprahwa, just south of Lumbini believed to be the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Upon further excavation, he discovered an enormous stone coffer, which contained gems, precious metals, and some of the cremated remains of the Buddha, who died about 480 BC.

William Peppé had seemingly unearthed one of the original eight stupas said to contain the ashes and bone fragments of the Buddha, distributed after his cremation. It is believed that

the Buddha's own Sakya clan had built this stupa to honour the relics of their 'illustrious kinsman' Gautama Buddha".

The British Crown claimed the found relics from Peppé under the 1878 Indian Treasure Trove Act. Most of the gems and precious metals (nearly 1,800 pearls, rubies, topaz, sapphires, and patterned gold sheets) went to what is now the Indian Museum in Kolkata.

However, a fifth of the total find — consisting of duplicates of the main collection — were retained by Peppé. It is these gems that are now being auctioned by Sotheby's.

Why are there objections to the auction?

Buddhist academics and monastic leaders have condemned the auctioning of the ancient Indian gem relics, asserting that they are part of Buddhist heritage.

It also said that Chris "lacks authority" to sell the relics and they are protected under Indian laws — the 1972 Antiques and Art Treasures Act, the 1958 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, and the 1878 Indian Treasure Trove Act.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Culture

Source: Indian Express

2. Met Gala

Why now?

The Met Gala, formally called the Costume Institute Benefit, is the annual haute couture fundraising festival held for the benefit of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute in Manhattan.



Fashion event

The Met Gala is popularly regarded as the world's most prestigious and glamorous fashion event. Attendees are given the opportunity to express themselves through fashion, often producing elaborate and highly publicized outfits inspired by the evening's theme and broader cultural context. The event is known as "fashion's

biggest night".

Personalities who are perceived to be culturally relevant to contemporary society amongst various professional spheres, including fashion, film, television, music, theater, business, sports, social media, and politics, are invited to attend the Met Gala.

The Gala is an event held annually on the first Monday of May, which marks the opening of the Costume Institute's annual fashion exhibit hosted on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Many of the attendees are depicted on the covers and pages of Fashion magazine, Vogue.

Each year's event celebrates the specific theme of that year's Costume Institute exhibition, which sets the tone for the formal attire of the night.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

3. Operation Sindoor Details

Why in News?

Two weeks after Pakistani terrorists gunned down 26 civilians near Pahalgam in Jammu & Kashmir, India responded with airstrikes on nine locations in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Codenamed Operation Sindoor, these strikes targeted the terrorist infrastructure across the border and the Line of Control (LoC).

The targets were chosen "based on credible intelligence inputs" and so as to "avoid damage to civilian infrastructure and loss of any civilian lives.

1. Markaz Taiba, Muridke, Pakistan's Punjab

● Hafiz Saeed's headquarters, nerve centre of Lashkar-e-Taiba

The Markaz Taiba in Muridke in Pakistan's Punjab province is the headquarters of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and its front, the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD). Besides being a site of training and recruitment, the sprawling 200-acre campus serves as the ideological nerve centre of the LeT. It is here that all key terror attacks of the Lashkar are planned and directed.

The facility lies 18-25 km away from the international border (IB), terrorists involved in the 2008 Mumbai attacks — including Ajmal Kasab and David Headley — were trained here.

The Markaz Taiba, as it stands today, was set up in 2000, with Osama bin Laden providing a Rs 1 crore donation for a mosque and a guest house within the campus. The complex includes multiple mosques, residential complexes (including the residence of LeT chief Hafiz Muhammad Saeed), schools, medical facilities, and farmland.

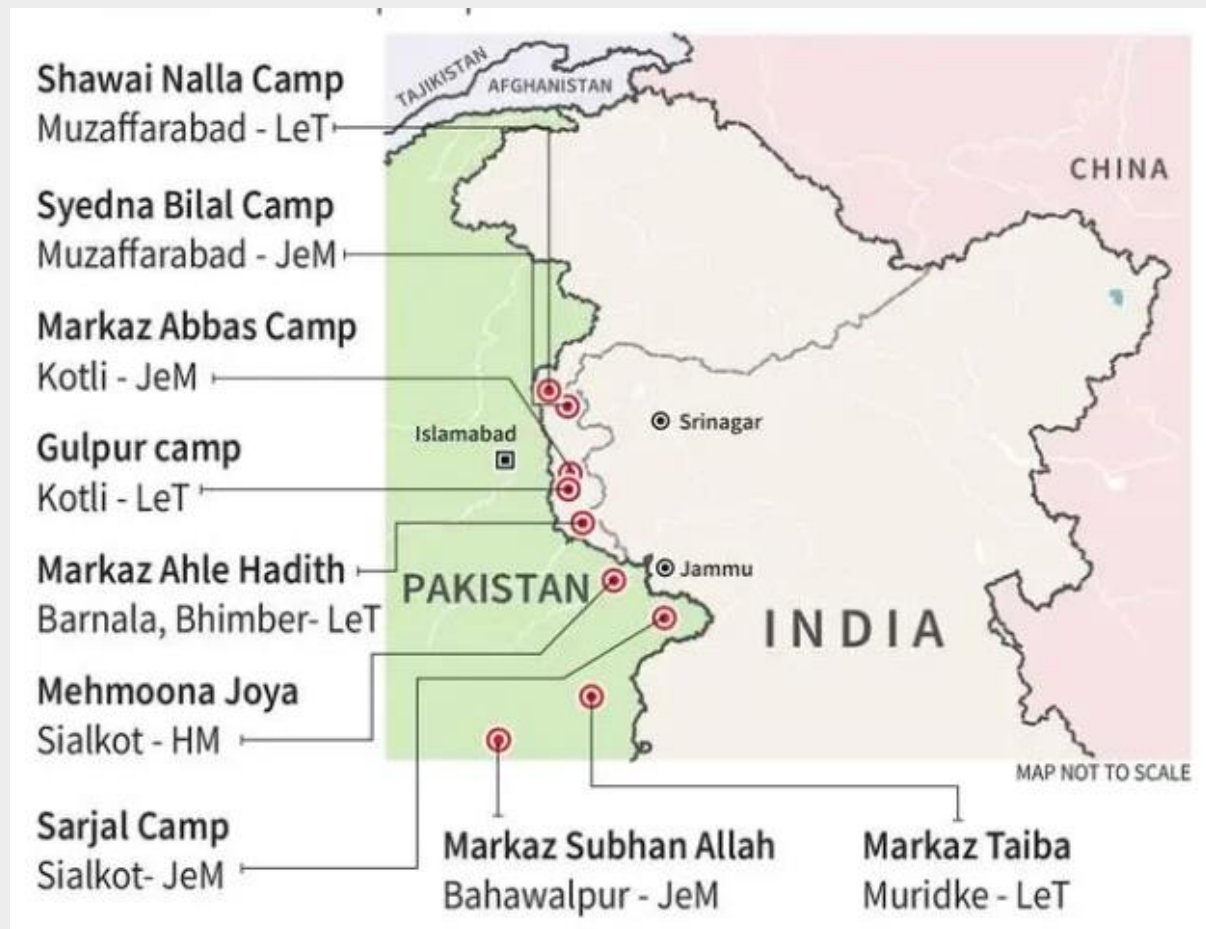
2. Sawai Nala camp, Muzaffarabad, PoK

● Major LeT camp in PoK, where Pahalgam terrorists trained

This camp in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) is located 30 km from the LoC, and is the LeT's most important training centre. The terrorists behind the attacks in Sonmarg and Gulmarg last October, and Pahalgam on April 22, were trained here. The name of this camp also came up after the 2000 Red Fort attack.

According to sources in the security establishment, the camp emerged in the 1990s, at the height of the militancy in Jammu & Kashmir. It has provided combat and weapons training, instruction in survival tactics and guerrilla warfare strategies, and ideological indoctrination to many LeT recruits over the years.

Under international pressure, the Sawai Nala camp was very briefly shut down following the 9/11 and 26/11 terror attacks. In recent times, several terrorists caught while infiltrating into J&K have named this camp as a location where they received training.



3. Syedna Bilal camp, Muzaffarabad, PoK

● Camp for Lashkar and Jaish, terrorist recruits are provided training by Pakistani special forces.

The Indian Army said that this camp was the main staging area for the Jaish-e-Mohammed in PoK, and served as a centre for weapons, explosives, and jungle-survival training. It is located on the Neelum river opposite the Red Fort in Muzaffarabad.

Intelligence sources said the camp is suspected to have come in the late 1990s or early 2000s, and that apart from JeM recruits, LeT fighters, too, are trained here. Photographs retrieved from the phones of killed JeM terrorists have indicated that the Pakistani special forces, the Special Service Group, provide training to the terrorist recruits at this site.

4. Barnala camp, Bhimber, PoK

● Close to the LoC, training camp for mountain and jungle terrain, launchpad for infiltrators

Located 9 km from the LoC in PoK, this is a training centre for weapons handling, assembling IEDs, and jungle-survival.

Security sources said the camp came up in the 1990s, and is used by both the LeT and the JeM terrorist groups. Sources said the camp specialised in preparing militants for mountainous and forested terrains which they would have to reckon with while infiltrating into J&K.

Its close proximity to the LoC also makes the Barnala camp a useful launchpad for terrorists looking to cross into J&K, or for smuggling operations.

5. Abbas camp, Kotli, PoK

● Indoctrination centre and school for fidayeen recruits, located close to Pakistani military camp

The Army said that the camp, located 13 km from the LoC in PoK and only 2 km from the Kotli military camp, is used to prepare fidayeen fighters — suicide attackers — for the JeM.

Sources in the security establishment said this camp too came up in the 1990s. It provides close-quarters battle (CQB) training, breaching and hostage-taking drills, and indoctrination focusing on martyrdom (shahadat) missions.

The camp's name has come in various terror attacks including the one on the J&K Assembly in 2001, and on the Army brigade headquarters in Uri in 2016.

6. Sarjal camp, Narowal, Pakistani Punjab

● Near International Border in Pakistani Punjab, regrouping site before specialised terror training.

This camp lies 6 km away from the IB in Pakistan's Punjab province. The Army said the terrorists who killed four J&K police personnel in March 2025 in Kathua, Jammu, were trained here.

Located inside the premises of a primary health centre in Sarjal village near Sialkot, the camp was established in the late 1990s. Due to its proximity to Punjab and the India border, Sarjal has been used as a staging ground for infiltration and coordinating logistics. It has occasionally served as a resting and regrouping site before militants are moved to more specialised camps in Muzaffarabad and Kotli.

7. Mehmona Joya camp, Sialkot, Pakistan's Punjab

● Initial induction centre for terrorists who infiltrate through Punjab and Jammu.

Hizbul Mujahideen camp lies 12-18 km from the IB in Sialkot district in Pakistan's Punjab province. This facility is used as a launchpad for Hizb terrorists to enter the Jammu region, as well as a training centre for operations and weapons handling.

Militants caught infiltrating through Punjab (Gurdaspur and Pathankot) and Jammu sectors have mentioned Mehmona Joya Camp as one of the initial induction centres, sources said. This camp emerged in the early 2000s when LeT and affiliated groups were expanding their network of tiered training camps.

8. Gulpur camp, Kotli, PoK

- Base of Lashkar units active in Rajouri and Poonch districts.

The Army said that this camp, located 30 km from the LoC in PoK, is a base of LeT units active in Rajouri and Poonch districts. Terrorists involved in the April 20, 2023 attack in Poonch, and the June 9, 2024 attack on a bus carrying pilgrims were trained here, the Army said.

Security establishment sources say the camp came up in the 1990s to provide training to terrorists. The Gulpur camp's significance lies in its location near the border, which allows infiltration into the Poonch and Rajouri regions, as well as the area's terrain, which sources said made the Kotli district conducive for training in guerrilla warfare.

Following the Indian surgical strikes in 2016 and the heightened focus on cross-border terrorism, there were reports that Gulpur and some other camps reduced overt activity. But operations likely continued in a covert manner.

9. Markaz Subhanallah, Bahawalpur, Pakistan's Punjab

- Headquarters of Jaish-e-Mohammed, base of Masood Azhar.

Markaz Subhanallah in Bahawalpur in Pakistan's Punjab province is the headquarters of the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). According to the Army, it is 100 km away from the IB, and serves as a centre for recruitment, training, and indoctrination.

Masood Azhar established the JeM in 1999, soon after his release from an Indian prison following the IC 814 hijacking. From the very beginning, the JeM maintained a base at Bahawalpur, Azhar's hometown. By 2009, this had grown into a 15-acre walled complex that reportedly had amenities such as a swimming pool and stables, and was allegedly used for terrorist training.

This complex is situated only 8 kilometres from the headquarters of the Pakistan Army's 31 Corps. Sources said the JeM facility has been associated with the 2016 Pathankot airbase attack, and the 2019 Pulwama suicide bombing, which resulted in the deaths of 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

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