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TODAY'S ANALYSIS

(13 January 2025)

TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES
- SILVER NOTICE OF INTERPOL
- MCQs



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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

- In **January 2025**, Southern California, particularly **Los Angeles**, is facing some of the most destructive wildfires in recent history.
- **Palisades fire, Eaton fire, Sunset fire, Hurst fire, and Lidia fire** have claimed **10 lives**, forced **over 130,000 people** to evacuate, and destroyed many homes, including those of high-profile celebrities like **Paris Hilton, Adam Brody, and Billy Crystal**.
- **What makes these fires particularly alarming is that they are happening in winter, a time not typically associated with wildfires in California.**

So, why are these fires occurring in winter, and why are they so fierce and destructive?

- This event is **getting attention not only for its unusual timing but also because of several factors** that have combined to make this wildfire season so deadly.

KEY FACTORS BEHIND SEVERITY OF WINDS

Although the **exact cause of the fires is still under investigation**, experts believe there are **three key factors that have contributed** to the intensity and rapid spread of these wildfires:

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1. Wet Weather Followed by Extremely Dry Conditions

- **Wet Winters of 2022-2023:**

- Southern California experienced **unusually wet winters** in **2022** and **2023**, which resulted in an abundance of **vegetation—trees, shrubs, and grasses grew thick and healthy.**
- This lush landscape created an abundance of fuel for wildfires.

- **Dry Winter of 2024:**

- However, the **current winter (2024) has been exceptionally dry.**
- This means the **vegetation that grew during the wet seasons has now dried out completely**, creating **highly flammable kindling** for wildfires.
- **Dry vegetation is much more susceptible to burning**, helping fires spread faster.

- **Rainfall Statistics:**

- According to **NASA**, **Southern California** has received very little rain since **October 2024.**
- **Daniel Swain**, a climate scientist, stated that this winter has seen the **driest start to the water year** on record.

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- For example, **Los Angeles International Airport (LAX)** recorded just **0.03 inches** (0.08 cm) of rain since **October 1**, making it the **driest start** in **National Weather Service** records dating back to 1944.

2. The Role of Santa Ana Winds

• What Are Santa Ana Winds?:

- The **Santa Ana winds** are strong, dry winds that blow across **Southern California** from **October to January**.
- These winds occur when **high-pressure systems** in the **Great Basin desert** create a clockwise air circulation, which **pushes dry air towards the coast**.
- These **winds are common in this season**, but this year they have been **unusually strong**.
- **How Santa Ana Winds Impact Wildfires:**
 - As the winds blow across the **Sierra Nevada** and **Santa Ana Mountains**, they pick up speed and dry out, becoming **hot and fast-moving**.



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- Once they **reach Southern California, they carry flames across the region**, helping the fire spread quickly.
- These **winds also dry out the vegetation even more**, making the forests, grasslands, and shrubs more **flammable**.
- **Intensity of Winds:**
 - The strong **Santa Ana winds** have been crucial in the spread of the current wildfires.
 - These winds, combined with dry vegetation, have allowed flames to spread quickly across **populated regions** like **Hollywood Hills** and **Los Angeles**, making it difficult for firefighters to keep up.

3. The Impact of Climate Change

- **Global Warming and Wildfires:**
 - Experts agree that **climate change** is contributing to the growing **frequency** and **intensity** of wildfires globally.
 - In California, **rising global temperatures** are causing **warmer springs** and **summers**, and triggering **early snowmelt** in the mountains.
 - These conditions extend the **fire season** and increase the opportunities for wildfires to ignite and spread.

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- **Longer Wildfire Seasons:**

- A **2021 study** in *Nature Scientific Reports* found that California's **wildfire season** has grown **longer** in recent decades.
- The study showed that the **annual wildfire season** has lengthened by several weeks over the past **20 years**, with the peak fire season shifting from **August** to **July**.
- This is largely due to **warmer temperatures** and **earlier snowmelt**, which result in **drier conditions** for longer periods.
- These longer dry seasons make it easier for vegetation to dry out and catch fire.

- **More Intense Fires:**

- As a result of **warmer temperatures** and **longer dry seasons**, the vegetation in California faces more **moisture stress**, making it more vulnerable to burning.
- Fires are not only starting earlier but are also becoming more **intense as hotter, drier conditions** create a perfect environment for wildfires to thrive.

- **Global Warming and Extreme Weather:**

- **Climate change** is causing more **extreme weather events**, and California's wildfires are part of this global trend.

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- The growing threat of wildfires due to climate change has placed additional pressure on **firefighting efforts**, as fires grow **larger**, more **frequent**, and harder to control.

WHY ARE THESE FIRES SO DANGEROUS?

The combination of dry vegetation, strong winds, and climate change has created an ideal environment for wildfires to spread rapidly. The following factors make these fires particularly dangerous:

- **Rapid Spread:**

- The **Santa Ana winds** have helped the fires spread quickly.
- Once the fires started, the winds pushed flames rapidly through dry vegetation, reaching **populated areas** like **Hollywood Hills**, where they damaged homes, including those of **Paris Hilton** and **Adam Brody**.

- **Difficult to Control:**

- The fires have spread so rapidly and with such intensity that **firefighters** have struggled to keep up.
- As a result, over **130,000 people** have been forced to evacuate from the affected areas.

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- **Health and Safety:**

- The thick smoke from the fires has contributed to **poor air quality**, impacting the health of **residents** and **firefighters** in the area.
- The scale of the disaster has also put immense pressure on emergency services and complicated **rescue operations**.

PINK FIRE RETARDANTS

As the wildfires rage across Southern California, authorities have been using **planes** and **helicopters** to drop **large amounts of pink fire retardant** in an attempt to control the spread of the flames. This method has been widely used, but concerns about its **environmental impact** are growing.

What is Pink Fire Retardant?

- **Composition:** The pink fire retardant, such as the **Phos-Chek** brand, is made from a mix of chemicals, primarily **ammonium phosphate**.
- These **chemicals help stop the spread of fires by coating plants** and making it harder for fires to burn by limiting the oxygen they need to sustain.
- **Why is it Pink?:** The **pink color** is added to **make the fire retardant visible**.

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- This helps firefighters see **where the retardant has been dropped** and **plan their next steps** in fighting the fire.

HOW PINK FIRE RETARDANTS WORK?

- **Fire Suppression:** Pink fire retardant is sprayed ahead of the fire to coat vegetation, **slowing the fire's progress.**
- By creating a barrier, it gives firefighters time to manage the fire.
- **Effectiveness:** While the fire retardant does help slow down fires, its **effectiveness** is unclear.
- Studies show that its success depends on factors such as **weather, terrain,** and **vegetation.**
- A **U.S. Forest Service** study found that the conditions where retardants work best are becoming rarer due to **climate change.**
- **Difficulty in Measuring Success:** Since fire retardants are used along with other firefighting methods, it's hard to measure how much of a difference they actually make in putting out the fire.

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ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Though pink fire retardants are useful in controlling fires, they raise several **environmental and health concerns**:

- **Toxicity of Heavy Metals:**

- Pink fire retardants contain **chromium** and **cadmium**, two heavy metals linked to **cancer** and damage to the **kidneys** and **liver**.
- A **2024 study** by the **University of Southern California (USC)** found that **850,000 pounds** of these toxic metals have been released into the environment since **2009**.

- **Harm to Aquatic Life:**

- **When fire retardants wash into rivers and streams**, the heavy metals can harm or kill **fish** and other **aquatic life**.
- These **chemicals disrupt ecosystems and can also affect water quality**, making the water **unsafe for both wildlife and humans**.

- **Soil and Long-Term Pollution:**

- Fire retardants can also affect the soil.

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- The chemicals can seep into the ground and remain there for years, harming plants and soil health.
- They can also lead to **algal blooms** in water, further polluting the environment.
- **Ongoing Environmental Damage:**
 - Fire retardants **don't break down quickly**, meaning they stay in the environment, continuing to pollute the soil and water.
 - From **2009 to 2021**, over **440 million gallons** of fire retardant were used across U.S. lands, releasing more than **400 tons of heavy metals** into the environment.
 - As wildfires become more frequent and intense due to **climate change**, the use of fire retardants is expected to increase. **More than 440 million gallons** of fire retardant have been used across the U.S. from **2009 to 2021**, raising concerns about the long-term environmental impact of these chemicals.

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SILVER NOTICE OF INTERPOL



- In January 2025, Interpol issued its first-ever **Silver Notice** to help trace illicit assets that have been moved across borders.
- This new type of notice is part of a pilot project that involves **52 countries**, including **India**, and aims to locate and recover the hidden wealth of criminals involved in serious offenses like corruption, fraud, and drug trafficking.

ABOUT INTERPOL

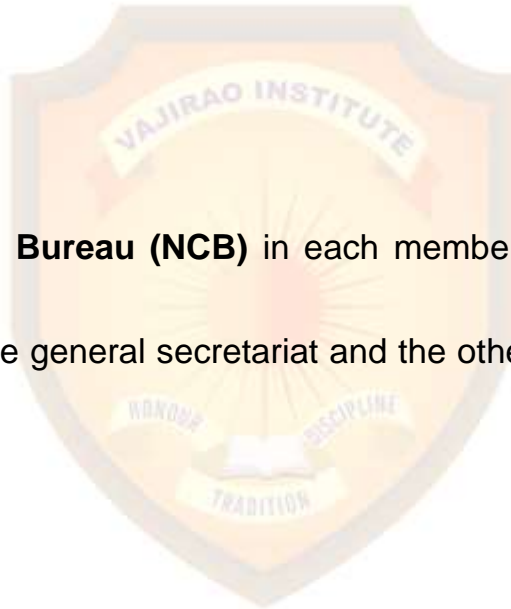
- It is an international organization **facilitating international police cooperation** against terrorism, trafficking, & other crime.

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- **Governance:** All decisions regarding the activities of **INTERPOL** are made by the General Assembly which is its supreme governing body which meets annually.
- **Status:** It is '**NOT**' a unit or part of united nation system. It is an **independent international organization**.
- **HQ:** Lyon in **France**.
- **Founded in:** 1923.
- It has a **National Central Bureau (NCB)** in each member country, which is the central point of contact for both the general secretariat and the other NCBs around the world. For India, NCB is the CBI



ABOUT NOTICES

It issues **8 type of notices** (7 of which are colour-coded) which are in the form of **alert/requests** allowing police in member countries to share critical crime-related information.

- **Red Notice**
 - To **seek the location and arrest of a person** wanted by a judicial jurisdiction or an international tribunal with a view to his/her extradition.
 - It is the "**closest instrument to an international arrest warrant**".

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- **Blue Notice**

- To **locate, identify or obtain information** on a person of interest in a criminal investigation.

- **Green Notice**

To **warn about a person's criminal activities** if that person is considered to be a possible threat to public safety.

- **Yellow Notice**

To **locate a missing person** or to identify a person unable to identify himself/herself.

- **Black Notice**

To **seek information on unidentified bodies**.

- **Orange Notice**

To **warn of an event, a person, an object or a process** representing an imminent threat and danger to persons or property.

- **Purple Notice**

- To **provide information on modus operandi, procedures, objects, devices or hiding places** used by criminals.

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- **Interpol-UNSC Special Notice**

- To inform Interpol's members that an individual or an entity is subject to **UN sanctions**.

WHAT IS SILVER NOTICE?

The **Silver Notice** is a **new tool introduced by Interpol to locate assets linked to criminal activities**. This includes properties, vehicles, businesses, and financial accounts that have been illegally moved to other countries to hide them, especially in **tax havens**.

- The Silver Notice allows countries to request information from other nations to help **track down these assets**.
- It will help locate and identify wealth linked to crimes such as **fraud, corruption, drug trafficking, and environmental crimes**.
- Countries can use this information to make formal requests for **seizure, confiscation, or recovery** of the assets, based on each country's own laws.
- The Silver Notice will **specifically focus on criminal assets** and is part of the broader system of notices that helps Interpol facilitate international cooperation in criminal investigations.

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FIRST USE OF SILVER NOTICE

- The very first **Silver Notice** was issued on the request of **Italy**.
- **Italy** asked Interpol to help trace the assets of a senior mafia member who had **hidden wealth abroad**.
- This marks the **beginning of the Silver Notice's use** in international crime-fighting.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR INDIA?

India is one of the **52 countries** participating in the **pilot project**. For India, the Silver Notice is particularly important **because it can help track down economic offenders who have illegally transferred their wealth to other countries**. Many criminals assume that by moving their wealth to **offshore tax havens**, they can **hide** it and avoid being caught.

- **India has several fugitive economic offenders** who are believed to have **moved illicit wealth** outside the country.
- The Silver Notice can help **trace and recover** these assets, which could be used to bring these criminals to justice.
- Officials believe that the Silver Notice will assist in uncovering **hidden wealth** linked to crimes, including **corruption, money laundering, and fraud**.

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THE PILOT PROJECT

- The **pilot project** will run at least until **November 2025**, allowing countries to request a total of **500 Silver Notices**.
- These requests will be divided equally among the participating nations.
- Interpol will carefully review each Silver Notice to make sure that it is **not misused for political purposes**.
- For now, the **details of the notices** won't be made public, ensuring that sensitive information remains confidential.

HOW DOES THE SILVER NOTICE WORK?

- **Countries involved** in the **project can request information about assets linked to criminals who have committed serious offenses**, such as fraud, drug trafficking, and environmental crimes.
- The Silver Notice can also be **used to locate hidden assets in foreign countries and may lead** to efforts to **seize** or **recover** these assets.
- Countries can then use the information for **bilateral engagement**, which means they can work together to request the **seizure** or **confiscation** of the assets, depending on each country's laws.

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THE BIGGER PICTURE: WHY SILVER NOTICE MATTERS?

- Interpol's Silver Notice is a **powerful new tool** in the global fight against organized crime.
- By targeting the **financial assets** of criminals, it aims to weaken criminal networks, many of which rely on the illegal profits they make from **money laundering** and other serious crimes.
- **99% of criminal assets** are currently **unrecovered**, and this new notice system is designed to make it easier to track down these funds.
- For countries like India, where **black money** and **economic offenders** are major issues, the Silver Notice represents a **strong step forward** in efforts to recover hidden wealth and hold criminals accountable.

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MCQs

1. Which of these winds are associated with the ongoing wildfires in USA?

- (A) Chinook
- (B) Santa Ana winds
- (C) Norther
- (D) Sirocco

Ans. (B)

2. Which of these factors are responsible for the ongoing wildfires in California region?

1. Increased intensity of offshore local winds
2. Climate Change
3. Wet winter

- (A) Only 1 & 2
- (B) Only 2
- (C) Only 1
- (D) All of the above

Ans. (A)

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3. Which chemical composition is found in Pink Fire Retardants?

- (A) Ammonium Nitrate
- (B) Ammonium
- (C) Nitrogen
- (D) Ammonium Phosphate

Ans. (D)

4. Consider the following statements about INTERPOL and mark the correct one:

1. INTERPOL is a body under the UN.
2. It is headquartered in Paris.

- (A) A: Only 1
- (B) B: Only 2
- (C) C: Both 1 & 2
- (D) D: Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (D)

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5. Consider the following statements wrt Silver Notice and mark the correct one:

1. The Silver Notice is a new tool introduced by Interpol to locate assets linked to criminal activities.

2. Italy is the first country to request the issue of Silver Notice.

(A) Only 1

(B) Only 2

(C) Both 1 & 2

(D) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (C)



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