

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 03-12-2023

8th WONDER OF THE WORLD

Situated in the northern province of Siem Reap in Cambodia, Angkor Wat is the largest religious monument globally, covering approximately 1,200 square meters of intricately carved bas-reliefs.



Historical Significance:

Construction: Built in the 12th century by Khmer Emperor Suryavarman II as a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu, it was later converted into a Buddhist temple by Jayavarman VII.

Transition to Buddhism:

The transition from Hinduism to Buddhism is reflected in the temple's carvings, depicting scenes from both Hindu and Buddhist mythology.

Adjacent Structures:

Angkor Wat is part of a more extensive complex that includes the Bayon Temple in Angkor Thom, featuring numerous sculptural decorations.



Archaeological Importance:

The site spans 400 square kilometers and encompasses remnants of various capitals of the Khmer Empire from the 9th to the 15th centuries, making it a significant archaeological site in Southeast Asia.

Key Features:

Architecture: Angkor Wat's architectural brilliance is showcased in its sandstone block construction and a 15-foot-high wall surrounding the city, temple, and residents, along with a wide moat for protection.

Bas-Reliefs: Scores of bas-reliefs adorn the temple walls, depicting deities and narratives from Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

Symbolism: The central temple complex's symmetry and precision feature five lotus-shaped towers representing Mount Meru, a mythical abode of gods in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology.

Interesting Facts:

Alternate Names: Angkor Wat is also known as Yasodharapura and derives its name from the Khmer word "nokor," meaning "kingdom," originating from the Sanskrit word "nagara," meaning "city."

UNESCO Protection:

Recognizing its significance, UNESCO has a comprehensive program in place to protect Angkor Wat and its surroundings.

Sunrise Spectacle: Tourists flock to witness the breathtaking sunrise over Angkor Wat's towers, which bathes the temple in stunning shades of pink, orange, and gold.

Pompeii

It is an ancient city located near Naples in Italy, known worldwide for its remarkably preserved ruins following the catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD.

Location:

Pompeii was an ancient Roman city situated near the Bay of Naples in the Campania region of Italy, close to modern-day Naples.

History:

Foundation: Founded around the 6th century BC by the Oscans, Pompeii was later influenced by Greek and Etruscan cultures before becoming a Roman colony around the 1st century BC.

Eruption of Mount Vesuvius: In 79 AD, Mount Vesuvius, a nearby volcano, erupted catastrophically, burying the city under a thick layer of ash and pumice, freezing Pompeii in time.

Key Features:

Archaeological Site: The ruins of Pompeii have been excavated over centuries, revealing streets, buildings, houses, public spaces, temples, and artifacts remarkably preserved by the volcanic ash.

Architecture: The city's structures showcase Roman architecture of the time, including impressive villas, temples (like the Temple of Apollo), theaters (such as the Large Theater and the Odeon), and the famous amphitheater (the oldest surviving Roman amphitheater).

Frescoes and Artifacts: Pompeii is renowned for its exquisite frescoes, mosaics, and artifacts that offer insights into daily life, culture, and artistry of the ancient Romans.

Santjordia pagesi



Scientists discovered the rare St. George's cross medusa jellyfish near a Japanese volcanic crater in 2002. Now they have confirmed it is a new species altogether.

It has been named as Santjordia pagesi.

Santjordia pagesi:

Santjordia pagesi is considered large at 4 inches wide and 3 inches tall, boasts a circular body with around 240 tentacles.

Its most distinctive feature is a bright red, cross-shaped stomach.

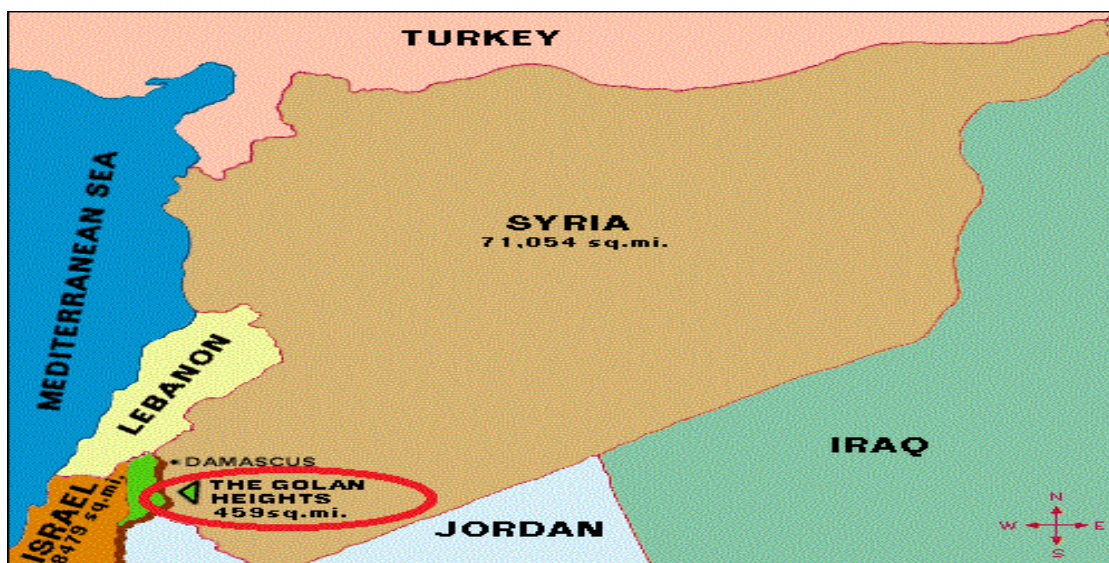
Its transparent body, resembles a cushion, with a thick white ring and vein-like structures.

The jellyfish, found at depths of 2,700 to 2,800 feet in the Sumisu Caldera near the Ogasawara Islands, has been observed pulsing its body, propelling it forward by opening and contracting the outer white ring.

The species designation pays homage to Francesc Pagès, a cnidarian researcher.

The jellyfish's distinct features suggest it may possess a novel cnidarian venom.

Golan Heights



India has voted in favour of a draft resolution in the UN General Assembly that expressed deep concern over Israel not withdrawing from the Golan Heights.

About

- It is a rocky plateau in southwestern Syria, about 60 kilometers (40 miles) south of Damascus.
- The Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee border it on the west, Mount Hermon on the north, the seasonal Wadi Al-Ruqqd River on the east, and the Yarmk River on the south.

- At its broadest point, the Golan measures approximately 44 miles (71 kilometers) from north to south and 27 miles (43 kilometers) from east to west.
- It is somewhat boat-shaped and covers 1,150 square km.

Why is the Golan Heights a source of contention?

- Syria controlled the Golan Heights until 1967.
- During the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel took the majority of the territory, occupying it and annexing it in 1981.
- After annexing the Golan, Israel offered citizenship to the Druze, but the majority declined and continued to identify as Syrians.
- Another 20,000 Israeli settlers live there as well, many of whom work in agriculture and tourism.
- Israel's unilateral acquisition was not accepted internationally, and Syria wants the region to be returned.
- Syria attempted to reclaim the Heights during the 1973 Middle East conflict but was unsuccessful.
- Since Israel and Syria signed a peace treaty in 1974, the Golan Heights has been generally peaceful.
- Israel and Syria had their highest-level discussions in 2000 to discuss the probable return of the Golan Heights and a peace accord.
- However, the negotiations failed, and subsequent talks also failed.

Why do the countries claim the Golan Heights?

- Both sides want the Golan's abundant water and naturally productive land.
- Furthermore, given Syria's civil conflict, Israel views the plateau as a buffer zone between Israeli communities and the instability in Syria.
- Israel is also concerned that Iran is attempting to permanently position itself on the Syrian side of the border to launch strikes on Israel.
- Notably, Iran is a supporter of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.



- Syria, for its part, insists that the part of the Golan held by Israel remains an occupied territory and thus demands its return.

What is the current UN arrangement there?

- A United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) is stationed in camps and observation posts along the Golan.
- This is supported by military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).
- Between the Israeli and Syrian armies is a 400-square-km “Area of Separation”.
- This is often called a demilitarized zone in which the two countries’ military forces are not permitted under the ceasefire arrangement.
- The Separation of Forces Agreement of 1974 created two lines of separation.
- Behind the Alpha Line to the west of the area of separation, Israeli military forces must remain.
- Behind the Bravo Line to the east of the area of separation, Syrian military forces must remain.
- Extending 25 km beyond the “Area of Separation” on both sides is an “Area of Limitation”.
- Here, there are restrictions on the number of troops and the number and kinds of weapons that both sides can have.
- There is one crossing point between the Israeli and Syrian sides.
- Until the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, this was used mainly by UN forces, a limited number of Druze civilians, and for the transportation of agricultural produce.

Strategic Importance

- There are more than 30 Israeli settlements in the Golan.
- The settlements are considered illegal under international law, although Israel disputes this.
- About 20,000 Syrians and 20,000 Israelis live in the Golan.

- The Syrian capital, Damascus, can be seen from the top of the Golan Hills.
- When it rains here, its water goes to the Jordan River, which supplies water in dry areas. It is believed that this water supplies one-third of Israel's water.
- Apart from this, the land here is very fertile, which is very good for farming.

KALBELIYA

The Kalbelia community, also known as the "Snake Charmers," is a nomadic tribe residing in the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, India.



Their cultural practices, including their unique dance form, music, and traditions, form an integral part of their identity.

Sage Kanifnath was offered a bowl (belia) of poison (kaal or death) by his spiritual mentor Gorakhnath.

When he drank it to the last drop, Gorakhnath blessed Kanifnath with the ability to ingest poison and handle venomous creatures.

And so, Kanifnath's followers from around the Thar desert in Rajasthan came to be known as Kalbeliyas.



They venerated snakes and made a living as snake-charmers.

Divided into two primary groups, Daliwal and Mewara, the Kalbelias traditionally roamed and practiced snake handling and snake venom trading.

Often called to rescue snakes from domestic settlements, they also caught them in the wild, and earned a livelihood showcasing their ability wherever they roamed as a nomadic tribe.

Over time, they diversified their livelihoods, engaging in agriculture, cattle rearing, and the arts.

Living nomadically in makeshift camps known as "deras," the Kalbelias have a deep understanding of local flora, fauna, and herbal remedies.

Cultural Significance

Dance and Music:

The Kalbeliya dance, also called the Sapera dance, is a captivating and rhythmic art form.

Women, adorned in vibrant traditional attire, perform this dance that mimics snake movements.

The dance involves intricate movements replicating a serpent's motion, accompanied by musical instruments like pungi, dufli, been, and rhythmic beats of khuralio and dholak.

Instruments like the pungi, dholak, and khartal accompany the dance, creating a lively atmosphere.

Recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010.

Costumes and Attire:

Women wear elaborate, colorful traditional attire symbolizing the scales of a snake.

Their clothing is adorned with mirrors, embroidery, and vibrant patterns.

Heavy jewelry, including necklaces, earrings, bangles, and anklets, complements their dance performances.

Challenges

Legislation like the Wildlife Act of 1972 banned their traditional snake handling, leading them to transition to performing arts for income.

The community's income sources, mainly from performances and tourism, are sporadic and season-specific, prompting them to engage in agriculture or cattle rearing.

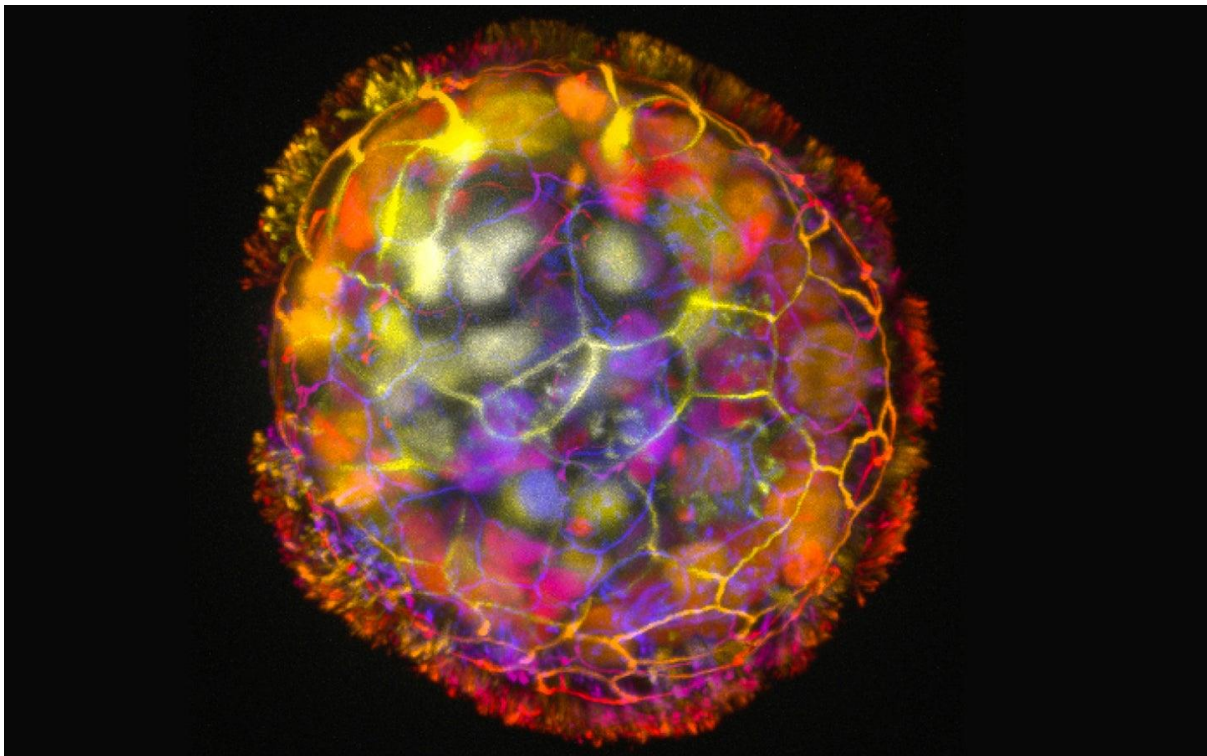
Religious and Social Traditions

The Kalbelias are predominantly Cultural Hindus, practicing snake worship, particularly honoring Nāga and Manasa, and celebrating Naga Panchami.

Unique from mainstream Hindu practices, they have distinct marriage customs, bury their dead instead of cremation, and observe different religious traditions.

Anthrobots

Recently, researchers have developed miniature robots using human cells and termed them as anthrobots.



These are constructed from human tracheal cells which are bio-robots that possess self-assembly capabilities.



These are capable of both movement and healing neurons within a laboratory setting.

They can spontaneously fuse together to form a larger structure called a superbot, which was able to encourage the growth of neurons.

Size: They are measuring between the width of a human hair and the tip of a sharpened pencil.

Structure: The anthrobots displayed diversity in structure and behavior. Some took on a spherical shape fully covered in cilia, while others resembled a football shape irregularly adorned with cilia.

These anthrobots are different from Xenobots, which are created from embryonic stem cells of frog.

Application

They hold promise for regenerative medicine, wound healing, and disease treatment.

What are Tracheal cells?

These are from the lining of the bronchi/trachea, the network of tubes used to convey air to the lungs.

They are responsible for producing lubricating mucus to keep the airways functional and they are a type of epithelial cell, a term used generally to refer to cells lining the inside or outside of the body.

These cells generate mucus and a number of other compounds, which play an important role in respiration.

Voice over 5G (Vo5G)?

Reports indicate Reliance Jio, India's largest mobile carrier, has been testing Voice over New Radio (VoNR) behind the scenes.

It is also known as Voice over New Radio (VoNR).

This standard allows voice calls over 5G networks instead of the current standard that uses 4G.



In simple terms, Vo5G takes all the improvements of 5G – speed, capacity, responsiveness – and applies them squarely to voice.

It aims to have all that infrastructure and interoperability ready well in advance.

To use Vo5G, you need three things: a phone that supports Vo5G, a carrier that offers Vo5G, and a 5G signal in your area.

How is VoNR better than VoLTE?

VoNR brings clear advances over VoLTE with 5G's substantially higher bandwidth and lower latency compared to 4G LTE.

Enhanced call quality: It utilizes more advanced audio codecs that provide superior clarity and fidelity based on 5G's increased data capacity.

Faster connection times: It promises faster call connection times, ensuring a seamless and prompt user experience.

Improved reliability:

Vo5G aims to eliminate the notorious call drop issues, particularly during transitions between 5G and 4G.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

The Central Government recently appointed seven people, including a former Delhi police commissioner, as 'special monitors' of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

About National Human Rights Commission (NHRC):

It is a statutory body established in 1993, under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.

It is the watchdog of human rights in the country.

It was established in conformity with the Paris Principles (1991), adopted at the first international workshop on national institutions for the protection of human rights.



Objectives:

To strengthen the institutional arrangements through which human rights issues could be addressed in their entirety in a more focused manner.

To look into allegations of excesses, independently of the government, in a manner that would underline the government's commitment to protect human rights.

Composition:

It includes a Chairperson and eight other members.

The Chairperson of NHRC is the retired Chief Justice of India.

Out of the eight members, four are full-time members, whereas the other four are deemed members.

Out of the 4 full time members of the NHRC:

One member should be a working or retired Judge of the Supreme Court.

Other member should be working or retired Chief Justice of a High Court.

Two members are selected based on their experience and knowledge of human rights.

The 4 deemed members of NHRC are the Chairpersons of the National Commission for Minorities, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and the National Commission for Women.

The Chairperson and members are appointed by the President on the recommendations of a six-member committee consisting of –

Prime Minister as its head
Speaker of the Lok Sabha

Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha

Leaders of the Opposition in both the Houses of Parliament

Union Home Minister

Term: The Chairperson and members are appointed for a term of 3 years or till the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier.

The chairperson and members are eligible for reappointment.



Functions of the NHRC:

Inquire, on its own initiative or on a petition presented to it by a victim or any person on his behalf, into a complaint of violation of human rights, or abetment or negligence in the prevention of such violation, by a public servant;

Intervene in any proceeding involving any allegation of violation of human rights pending before a court with the approval of such court;

Visit any jail or any other institution under the control of the State Government, where persons are detained or lodged for purposes of treatment, reformation or protection to study the living condition of the inmates and make recommendations thereon;

Spread human rights literacy among various sections of society;

Study treaties and other international instruments on human rights and make recommendations for their effective implementation;

Powers:

While inquiring into complaints under the Act, the Commission shall have all the powers of a civil court trying a suit under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.

It can summon and enforce the attendance of witnesses and examine them on oath.

It can also grant compensation to the victims of police brutality.

If necessary, the NHRC can approach the Supreme Court or the High Court for the enforcement of human rights in order to protect the rights of individuals or groups.

The NHRC has the authority to take "suo motu" cognizance of human rights violations, even if a formal complaint has not been filed.