

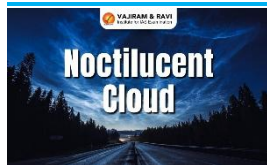
WHAT IS THE KANWAR YATRA?



- It's an annual pilgrimage, held in the Hindu month of Shravan (typically July–August), where Shiva devotees (known as Kanwariyas), primarily in North India, fetch holy water from the Ganges River and carry it back to their local Shiva temples (often barefoot and walking distances of hundreds of kilometers).
- They visit the temples to offer holy water to Lord Shiva, especially on the auspicious day of Shivratri during the month of Shravan.
- What happens at Kanwar Yatra?
 - The term “Kanwar” refers to a special carrying apparatus, typically a bamboo pole, with two equal loads (usually pots filled with Ganga water) suspended from either end.
 - This pole is balanced on the pilgrim’s shoulder “Yatra” simply means a journey or procession.
 - Thus, the Kanwar Yatra literally means the “journey with the Kanwar.”
 - The core ritual of this pilgrimage is to collect sacred water, known as “Gangajal,” from River Ganga, particularly from places like Haridwar, Gaumukh (the source of the Ganges glacier), Gangotri in Uttarakhand, and Ajgaibinath Temple in Sultanganj, Bhagalpur (Bihar).
 - The devotees then return by carrying Ganga water in kanwars to seek the blessings of Shiva.
 - The water is offered to Shiva temples, including the 12 Jyotirlingas across India and other shrines like the Pura Mahadev Mandir and Augharnath in Uttar Pradesh, the famous Kashi Vishwanath temple, and the Baba Baidyanath Temple in Deoghar, Jharkhand. The ritual is known as Jal Abhishek.
 - Devotees often carry the holy water to offer at temples in their towns and villages.

- Many pilgrims believe that once the pot is filled with holy water, it should not touch the ground.
- While carrying the water, devotees walk barefoot; some complete the pilgrimage by lying flat on the ground. Modern times have seen some adaptations, with some using cycles, motorbikes, or even vehicle convoys for parts of the journey, though the purists still prefer walking.
- Kanwariyas typically dress in saffron-colored robes, a color associated with renunciation and spirituality in Hinduism.
- Many observe fasts during the pilgrimage, and the consumption of food, water, and salt is restricted.

WHAT ARE NOCTILUCENT CLOUDS?



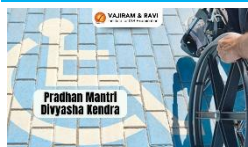
- They are thin, wispy clouds that glow with a blue or silvery hue at night when illuminated by sunlight from below the horizon.
 - **Horizon** refers to the apparent line that separates the Earth from the sky—specifically, the point below which the Sun appears to set.
- The name 'noctilucent' is derived from the Latin words "nocto" and "lucent" which translates to "night" and "shining" respectively.
- They are sometimes referred to as **polar mesospheric clouds**.
- Most of our planet's clouds form in the Earth's troposphere. Noctilucent clouds are located in the third layer of Earth's atmosphere, the **mesosphere**, making them **Earth's highest clouds**.
- They only appear during the summer months, and only at latitudes between about 45 and 80 degrees north or south of the equator.
- In the Northern Hemisphere, they can appear from the end of May to the beginning of August, with sightings more likely during June and July.

- In the **Southern Hemisphere**, noctilucent cloud sightings are **much rarer**, but they can be visible from the **end of November** to the **beginning of February**, with sightings most likely during December and January.

How are noctilucent clouds formed?

- They are **formed of ice crystals**; in the **summer** the **mesosphere** becomes **cold enough** to allow ice to form on **suspended dust particles** floating in the atmosphere.
- The **dust particles** may originate from **micrometeorites falling to Earth** from space, or the **dust left over from volcanic eruptions**.
- Humans have also accidentally seeded our own noctilucent clouds through the **exhausts of rockets** propelled into space.
- The **ice crystals** that form **reflect the sunlight** when the **Sun hits them from below**, causing the clouds' characteristic shimmer.

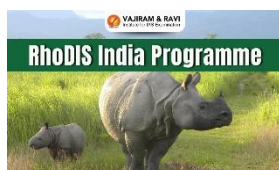
PRADHAN MANTRI DIVYASHA KENDRA



- It is a **unique initiative** aimed at providing **integrated services under one roof**—including assessment, evaluation, counselling, distribution, and post-distribution care—for eligible **Divyangjan** (persons with disabilities) **and elderly beneficiaries**.
- These centres are being **established through ALIMCO** (Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India), a Central Public Sector Undertaking under the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD).
- The newly established PMDK at Badaun would provide assistive aids and appliances under the ADIP Scheme for Divyangjan and the **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY)** for senior citizens.
- Devices such as tricycles, wheelchairs, hearing aids, walkers, artificial limbs, and mobility support accessories would be offered **free of cost to eligible beneficiaries**.

- **Significance:** It significantly reduces the travel and logistical challenges faced by local beneficiaries, offering them accessible, dignified, and timely services at the regional level.

RHODIS INDIA PROGRAMME



- The **Rhino DNA Index (RhODIS) System** is a wildlife forensics tool that was specially developed for investigating **wildlife crime cases**.
- In 2016, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India in partnership with **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)**, the Forest Departments of **Assam, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh** and WWF India launched this programme.
- The programme seeks to **improve the crime investigations** scientifically and provide technical support for the scientific management of India's rhino population.
- The **protocol standardised** for the RhODIS India analysis, **approved by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change**, will be followed for creating the DNA profiles from these samples.
- RhODIS uses a DNA indexing system whereby genetic sequences are created to get a signature unique to each individual rhino.
- **Significance:** It has proven to be a successful tool in aiding crime investigation and strengthening legal presentations.

What is a Rhino horn?

- It is **made of keratin**.
- It is chemically complex and contains large quantities of **sulphur-containing amino acids**, particularly cysteine, as well as tyrosine, histidine, lysine, and arginine, and the salts calcium carbonate and calcium phosphate.
- Rhino horns are **similar in structure to horses' hooves**, turtle beaks, and cockatoo bills.
- Three of the **five rhino species** have **two horns**, whilst the others – **Greater one-horned rhinos and Javan rhinos** – have only **one horn**.

INDIANS LOSING RS 1,000 CRORE EVERY MONTH TO CYBER FRAUDS

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) estimates that over half of the ₹7,000 crore lost to cyber scams in India from January to May 2025 originated from Southeast Asia.

Countries like Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand are key sources, with scams often operated from high-security centres controlled by Chinese networks. These centres reportedly use trafficked individuals, including Indians, as forced labour in running these fraud operations, according to the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C).

Stock Trading and Investment Scams

- These scams promise high returns on stock market investments, cryptocurrency, or other financial products.
- Victims are contacted through social media, WhatsApp, or fake investment apps.
- Scammers pose as financial advisors or representatives from trading firms. They convince people to deposit money in fake accounts or platforms showing fake profits.
- Once a large amount is invested, the scammer disappears.

Digital Arrest Scams

- In these scams, people are tricked into believing they are under investigation by government agencies like the CBI, Income Tax Department, or Police.
- Victims receive fake calls or video calls where scammers, often wearing uniforms, say the person's identity or bank account is linked to crimes like money laundering or drugs.
- They are threatened with arrest unless they pay a fine or security deposit immediately.

Task-Based and Investment-Based Scams

- These scams involve fake job offers or freelance work, where the victim is asked to complete small tasks and gets paid at first, building trust.
- The scam starts with simple tasks like liking YouTube videos or rating apps. Victims are paid small amounts at first.
- Later, they are asked to invest money to get larger commissions. Once a big investment is made, the scammer vanishes.

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Southeast Asia-Based Cyber Scams

- MHA has estimated that over half of ₹7,000 crore lost to cyber scams from January to May 2025 originated from networks based in Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand.
- India faces an average monthly loss of ₹1,000 crore due to such scams, according to the I4C.
- **Chinese-Controlled Scam Centres and Trafficked Workers**
 - The scams are reportedly operated from high-security compounds controlled by Chinese operators, where trafficked individuals, including over 5,000 Indians, are forced to work.
 - People from Africa, East and Southeast Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, Europe, and the Americas have also been identified in these centres.
- **Scam Hotspots**
 - Through intelligence inputs and survivor testimonies, the Indian government has identified at least:
 - 45 scam centres in Cambodia
 - 5 in Laos
 - 1 in Myanmar
- **Agents Recruiting Indians for Cyber Scam Work**
 - The Indian government has tracked down several agents hiring Indians for these operations.
 - These agents are from Maharashtra; Tamil Nadu; Jammu & Kashmir; Uttar Pradesh; Delhi.
- **Government Response**
 - The Centre formed an inter-ministerial panel, identifying loopholes in banking, immigration, and telecom systems.
 - The CBI has registered FIRs against PoS agents for issuing ghost SIM cards linked to these scams.

GOVERNMENT BACKS NEW SO₂ EMISSION NORMS

- The Union Environment Ministry has defended its order revising sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emission norms for thermal power plants, countering claims of regulatory dilution.
- The ministry cited research from IIT Delhi, NEERI, and others, noting no major public health concern from current ambient SO₂ levels and highlighting that sulfate aerosols from SO₂ contribute minimally to PM_{2.5} pollution.
- FGD systems, which cut sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions from coal plants, were made **mandatory in 2015**.
- Yet, only 8% of India's 180 coal plants have installed them so far, with delays attributed to high costs and limited availability.
- **Rationale Behind the Policy Shift**
 - According to the Ministry, India's ambient SO₂ levels have been declining, with 2023 measurements across 492 cities showing compliance in all but two.
 - Indian coal naturally has low sulphur content, leading to relatively lower SO₂ emissions.
 - Studies have found no major difference in SO₂ concentrations between cities with and without FGD-fitted plants.
 - The Ministry noted that eliminating all SO₂ emissions would only marginally improve particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) levels, while retrofitting all plants would cost around ₹2.54 lakh crore — a disproportionately high investment for limited environmental benefit.

Global Standards Context

- The Ministry also highlighted that India's annual SO₂ standard (50 micrograms/cubic metre) is stricter than those of countries like Japan and Australia.
- Given these factors, the revised norms aim to balance public health priorities with economic and operational realities, focusing regulatory efforts where they are most needed.

MHADEI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY



- It is located in the northern part of **Goa** in the **Western Ghats**.
- It spreads over an area of 208 sq.km. and derives its name from the **Mhadei river**, which flows across this Sanctuary.
- There are a number of **picturesque waterfalls** within the sanctuary boundaries. The most prominent are the **Vazra Sakla Falls** and the **Virdi Falls**.
- The **three highest peaks of Goa**, **Sonsogod** (1027 m), **Talvche Sada** (812 m), and **Vagheri** (725 m), are located within this Sanctuary.
- **Flora:**
 - The sanctuary's dense forests are **predominantly semi-evergreen** and **moist deciduous**, hosting trees like **teak**, **sal**, and **bamboo** along with **medicinal plants** and **orchids**.
 - The sanctuary is particularly well-known for its **sacred groves** that protect rare and indigenous trees.
- **Fauna:**
 - Its fauna includes **Bengal tigers**, **black panthers**, leopards, sloth bears, gaur (Indian bison), and a variety of deer.
 - The sanctuary is a huge attraction for herpetologists since it contains a large variety of snakes, including all of the '**big four**' of **Indian venomous snakes**, which are the **Indian krait**, **Russell's viper**, **Saw-scaled viper**, and **Spectacled cobra**.
 - It boasts over **250 bird species**, including the **Malabar trogon**, **great pied hornbill**, and **Nilgiri wood pigeon**, many of which are **endemic to the Western Ghats**.
 - The **cliff face near the Vazra Falls** is notable for being the **nesting grounds of the critically endangered Long-billed vultures**.



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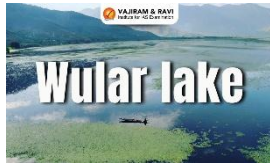
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WULAR LAKE



- It is the **largest freshwater lake in India** and the second largest freshwater lake in Asia.
- **Location:** It is located in the Bandipore district of **Jammu and Kashmir**.
- It is fed by the **Jhelum River**.
- The lake lies at an altitude of 1,580 m on the foothills of Haramuk Mountain.
- It is spread over a total area of 200 sq.km., covering almost 24 km in length and 10 km in breadth.
- The lake basin was **formed as a result of tectonic activity**.
- It is also said to be a remnant of Satisar Lake that existed in ancient times.
- This lake also has a small island in its centre called **the 'Zaina Lank'**. This island was constructed by **King Zainul-Abi-Din**.
- In 1990, it was **designated as a Wetland of International Importance** under the Ramsar Convention.

Ecological Significance of Wular Lake

- The area is **important for wintering**, staging and breeding birds.
- **Fauna:** Terrestrial birds observed around the lake include the black-eared kite, Eurasian sparrow hawk, short-toed eagle, Himalayan golden eagle, Himalayan monal, etc.
- It is an important habitat for fish, accounting for 60 percent of the total fish production within the state.