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What is the news?

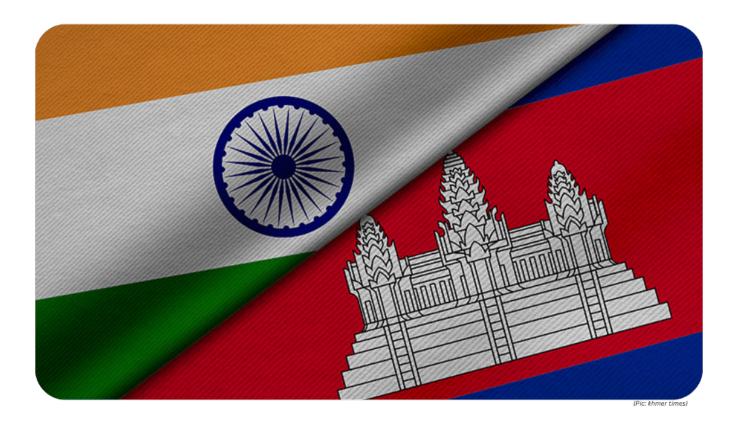
 Recently, the magnificent Angkor Wat in Cambodia has been bestowed with the esteemed honor of being recognized as the 8th wonder of the world, surpassing the renowned Pompeii in Italy.

- The recent acknowledgment of Angkor Wat as the 8th Wonder of the World is a true testament to the incredible architectural skills and cultural wealth of the Khmer Empire.
- The temple complex is truly breathtaking, surrounded by the vibrant Cambodian forest. It has always fascinated both history enthusiasts and adventurous explorers. The intricate carvings, towering spires, and sprawling moats of this place truly capture the grandeur of a time long past.

Background on Angkor Wat:

- Angkor Wat, which was constructed in the early 12th century by King Suryavarman II of the Khmer Empire, holds the distinction of being the largest religious monument on Earth.
- The high point of Khmer architecture and ancient temple construction art is marked by this.
- The temple was initially constructed as a place of worship for Lord Vishnu in the Hindu tradition.
 However, over time, it underwent a transformation and became a Buddhist temple in the following centuries.
- It showcases a flawless composition, intricate decorative details, beautiful bas-relief sculptures, and impeccable architectural proportions.
 The Angkor complex, spanning 400 square

kilometers, has held the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage Site status since 1992. The Cultural Ties between India and Cambodia:



- The historical connections between Indian and Cambodian cultures are deeply rooted in their shared traditions of religion, architecture, art, and language.
- During the early medieval period, the influence of Indian culture, religion, and architecture spread across Southeast Asia through trade routes.
- The ongoing interactions between individuals and the thriving practice of Buddhism serve as a bridge connecting different civilizations.

Strategic Significance:

- There is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the cultural and tourism connections between India and Southeast Asia.
- Collaborative UNESCO projects offer a wonderful opportunity to safeguard and revive precious heritage sites throughout Southeast Asia.
- Addressing the increasing soft power and cultural influence of China in the region.
- India can proudly showcase its enduring cultural connections with Southeast Asia by appreciating the recent recognition of Angkor Wat. Additionally, it gives India the opportunity to create a story of cultural connections and mutual prosperity with a region that is deeply connected to India's history.

About Angkor Wat:

Angkor Wat is a truly magnificent temple complex:

 Angkor Wat is an impressive temple complex situated in Siem Reap, Cambodia. It serves as a remarkable example of the Khmer Empire's architectural genius and cultural heritage. Angkor Wat was built in the 12th century by King Suryavarman II. • It was not only a temple but also a place where the Khmer king was laid to rest. Today, this magnificent structure stands as the largest religious monument on Earth, spanning across a vast expanse of more than 400 acres (160 hectares).

A Symbol of Khmer Grandeur:

 The design of Angkor Wat draws inspiration from Hindu cosmology. The central temple symbolizes Mount Meru, which is believed to be the mythical dwelling place of the gods. The temple complex is encircled by a beautiful moat and a set of concentric walls. These walls guide you towards the heart of the sanctuary, which stands tall at an impressive height of 650 feet (196 meters).

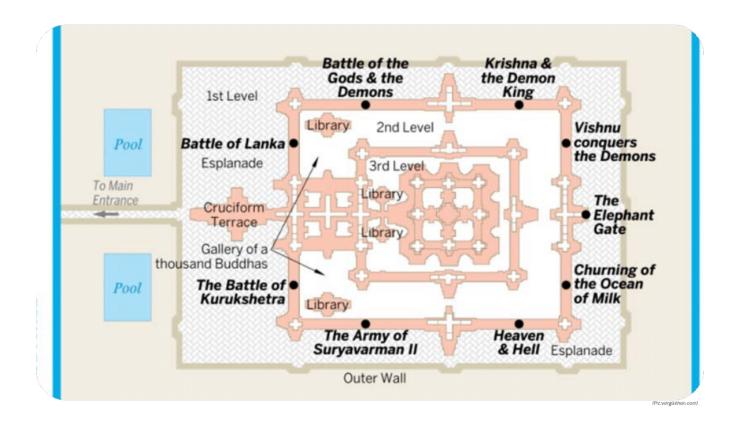
The intricate architectural details are truly fascinating:

• The walls of the temple are beautifully decorated with detailed bas-reliefs that portray captivating scenes from Hindu epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These carvings offer us a fascinating glimpse into the religious and cultural practices of the Khmer people.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site:

 In 1992, UNESCO recognized the exceptional value of Angkor Wat by designating it as a World Heritage Site. This prestigious title acknowledges the incredible artistic and intellectual achievements of humanity that are embodied in this magnificent structure. The site has received a lot of attention for conservation efforts, and it continues to be a favorite spot for tourists, drawing in millions of visitors annually.

Layout and Structure:



• The temple complex is designed in a grid pattern, featuring a central sanctuary that is encircled by a series of walls and moats arranged in concentric fashion. The outer wall is quite large, measuring 1,024 meters by 802 meters. It encloses a spacious area of 82 hectares (203 acres). The inner wall is quite large, measuring 515 meters by 405 meters. It encloses an expansive area of 20 hectares (49 acres). The central sanctuary is quite impressive, with dimensions of 65 meters by 55 meters. It reaches a height of 65 meters, which is equivalent to 196 feet.

Architectural Features:

The temple is mainly built using sandstone, while some laterite and brick are also utilized for foundations and support structures. The walls are beautifully decorated with detailed bas-reliefs, and the towers have elegant lotus-shaped finials on top. The layout and architecture of the temple are known for their sense of balance, symmetry, and harmony.

Symbolic Meaning:

 Angkor Wat is believed to symbolize Mount Meru, which is a mythical dwelling place of the gods according to Hindu cosmology. The central sanctuary, with its majestic towers, symbolizes the highest point of the mountain. The walls and moats surrounding it symbolize the vast seas that encircle it. The way the temple is designed and built also represents the strength and prosperity of the Khmer Empire.

Cultural Significance:

 The Khmer Empire greatly valued Angkor Wat for its significant contributions to their religious and cultural practices. The temple played a significant role in hosting various religious ceremonies and festivals, while also serving as a hub for knowledge and academic pursuits. Even to this day, Angkor Wat holds a special place in the hearts of the Cambodian people, serving as a cherished symbol of their national pride.

Restoration and Conservation:

Since its rediscovery in the 19th century, Angkor Wat has been the subject of significant restoration and conservation efforts. Over the course of many centuries, the temple unfortunately fell into disrepair due to neglect, natural disasters, and looting. However, through dedicated efforts, it has been restored to its magnificent former glory. UNESCO and the Cambodian government have collaborated to create a detailed management plan for the site. This plan aims to safeguard the temple from any additional harm and enhance the experience for visitors by improving access and facilities.

Who was King Suryavarman II?

 Suryavarman II, who was also referred to as Paramavishnuloka after his passing, was a highly influential king of the Khmer empire. He held his reign from 1113 to either 1145 or 1150 AD. He is widely known for his religious reforms, building temples, and military skills, which have had a lasting impact on the Khmer Empire and the history of Southeast Asia.

The Beginnings of Life and Journey to Leadership:

 At the young age of 17, Suryavarman II took on the responsibility of ruling a kingdom that was dealing with internal conflicts and external threats. He wasted no time in asserting his authority, bringing together his power and restoring a sense of stability.

Religious Reforms and Temple Construction:

 Suryavarman II, being a deeply religious individual, played a significant role in reviving religious practices during his reign. He made a notable decision to transition the state religion from Mahayana Buddhism to Vaishnavism, a specific branch of Hinduism that venerates the deity Vishnu. The construction of Angkor Wat, dedicated to Vishnu, stands as his most remarkable achievement. It is the largest religious monument globally. The intricate carvings, towering spires, and symbolic layout of Angkor Wat are a testament to the architectural brilliance and religious devotion of the Khmer Empire.

Military Leadership and Expansion:

Suryavarman II, in addition to being a talented

military leader, was able to expand the territory of the Khmer Empire and successfully protect its borders. He managed to fend off attacks from neighboring kingdoms, such as Champa and Dai Viet.

Patron of the Arts and Sciences:

 Suryavarman II was known for his generous support of scholars, artists, and artisans, making him a great patron of the arts and sciences. He supported the creation of many temples, sculptures, and literary works, which helped to cultivate a thriving cultural renaissance in the Khmer Empire.

Legacy and Influence:

- During Suryavarman II's rule, the Khmer Empire experienced a period of great prosperity and cultural flourishing. This era was defined by a strong devotion to religion, remarkable architectural accomplishments, and a powerful military presence. His impact goes far beyond his time in power, shaping Cambodian culture and identity even now. Angkor Wat is a remarkable testament to the vision and architectural skill of its creator. Additionally, the religious reforms implemented by him have had a lasting impact on the spirituality of Cambodia.
- There is no denying the significant contributions of Suryavarman II to both the Khmer Empire and the history of Southeast Asia. He is still highly respected in Cambodian history, known for his strong faith, lasting architectural contributions,

and exceptional military skills. The king's rule had a lasting impact on the cultural scene of the region, establishing the Khmer Empire as a strong and influential kingdom.

Here are some important points to keep in mind while preparing for the exam:

- Historical Context: Understand the rise and fall of the Khmer Empire, the role of Angkor Wat as the state temple, and the impact of the temple on Khmer society.
- Architectural Significance: Analyze the temple's layout, design elements, and symbolism, highlighting its unique features and architectural innovations.
- Cultural Heritage: Explore the temple's religious significance, its role in Cambodian culture, and its impact on Southeast Asian art and architecture.
- UNESCO World Heritage Site: Understand the criteria for UNESCO World Heritage Site designation and the significance of Angkor Wat's inclusion in the list.
- Conservation Efforts: Discuss the challenges faced in conserving Angkor Wat and the ongoing efforts to preserve this architectural marvel.

Angkor Wat's designation as the 8th Wonder of the World serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving and celebrating cultural heritage. UPSC aspirants should seize this opportunity to delve into the rich history and architectural splendor of Angkor Wat, gaining a deeper appreciation for Southeast Asian culture and its enduring impact on the world.

About Cambodia.



 Cambodia is a beautiful country situated in Southeast Asia. It shares its borders with Thailand to the northwest, Laos to the northeast, Vietnam to the east, and the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest.

History.

- Cambodia boasts a fascinating and extensive history that stretches all the way back to the glorious Khmer Empire. This empire thrived and prospered for an impressive span of time, from the 9th to the 14th centuries.
- The Khmer Empire was a kingdom of great power and

influence, known for its remarkable temples like Angkor Wat, which continue to captivate and inspire people to this day. After some time, the Khmer Empire experienced a decline, leading to Cambodia being governed by various foreign powers such as Vietnam, Thailand, and France. After gaining independence from France in 1953, Cambodia unfortunately found itself caught in a prolonged civil war that spanned several decades.

 The Khmer Empire was a powerful civilization that existed in Southeast Asia, with one of its most iconic landmarks being Angkor Wat. The content will appear in a new window.

Culture:

 Cambodia is a country that is incredibly rich in culture, boasting a fascinating mix of Khmer, Indian, and Chinese influences that make it truly unique. The art, music, dance, and cuisine of a country reflect its culture. In Cambodia, the majority of the population practices Theravada Buddhism. The culture and society of Cambodia have been deeply impacted by the teachings and principles of Buddhism.

Geography:

 Cambodia is a country that showcases a beautiful blend of diverse landscapes, including majestic mountains, lush jungles, winding rivers, and vast plains. The highest point in the country is Phnom Aoral, reaching an elevation of slightly over 5,000 feet (1,500 meters).

Economy:

 Cambodia, a country in the process of development, relies heavily on agriculture as its primary economic sector. The main crop of the country is rice. In addition to that, Cambodia plays a significant role in the production of textiles, footwear, and tourism.

Tourism:

 Many people choose to visit Cambodia because it is a well-liked place for tourists. There are numerous breathtaking temples in the country, one of which is Angkor Wat, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In addition to its stunning beaches, Cambodia is also home to lush forests and warm-hearted locals.





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QuizTime:

In what century was Angkor Wat constructed?

(a) 9th century

- (b) 10th century
- (c) 11th century
- (d) 12th century
 - Answer: (d) 12th century
 - Explanation: Angkor Wat was constructed in the 12th century by King Suryavarman II of the Khmer Empire. It is the largest religious monument in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

To what deity is Angkor Wat dedicated?

- (a) Brahma
- (b) Vishnu
- (c) Shiva
- (d) Ganesha
 - Answer: (b) Vishnu
 - Explanation: Angkor Wat is dedicated to Vishnu, one of the principal Hindu gods. It features intricate carvings and sculptures depicting scenes from Hindu mythology.

Which of the following is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Cambodia?

- (a) Phnom Aoral
- (b) Angkor Wat
- (c) Mekong River
- (d) Tonlé Sap
 - Answer: (b) Angkor Wat
 - Explanation: Angkor Wat is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the largest religious monument in the world. It is a testament to the architectural brilliance of the Khmer Empire and is one of the

most popular tourist destinations in Cambodia.

What is the main religion in Cambodia?

- (a) Hinduism
- (b) Islam
- (c) Theravada Buddhism
- (d) Christianity
 - Answer: (c) Theravada Buddhism
 - Explanation: Theravada Buddhism is the main religion in Cambodia, with over 90% of the population identifying as Theravada Buddhist. Buddhism has a profound influence on Cambodian culture and society.

What is the main crop grown in Cambodia?

- (a) Rice
- (b) Corn
- (c) Coffee
- (d) Rubber
- Answer: (a) Rice
- Explanation: Rice is the main crop grown in Cambodia, accounting for over 70% of the country's agricultural land. Rice is a staple food in Cambodia and is an important part of the Cambodian economy.

Mains Questions:



Analyze the architectural features and symbolic elements of Angkor Wat, highlighting its significance as a masterpiece of Khmer architecture.

Model Answer:

 Angkor Wat, the iconic temple complex of the Khmer Empire, stands as a testament to the empire's architectural brilliance and cultural richness. Its design, inspired by Hindu cosmology, seamlessly blends intricate carvings, towering spires, and symbolic elements, creating a masterpiece of Khmer architecture.

Architectural Features:

 Layout and Structure: Angkor Wat's layout adheres to a sophisticated grid pattern, with concentric walls and moats enclosing the central sanctuary, symbolizing the transition from the earthly realm to the divine.

- Bas-Reliefs: The temple walls are adorned with intricate bas-reliefs narrating scenes from Hindu epics, such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These carvings provide a glimpse into the religious and cultural life of the Khmer people.
- Gopurams: Towering gopurams, or gateways, mark the entrances to the temple's inner courtyards. These imposing structures are adorned with elaborate carvings and serve as symbolic thresholds to the sacred spaces within.

Symbolic Elements:

- Mount Meru: The central sanctuary, with its towering spires, represents Mount Meru, the mythical abode of the gods in Hindu cosmology. The temple's layout and orientation reflect the celestial arrangement of the Hindu universe.
- Five Towers: The five main towers, arranged in a quincunx pattern, represent the five peaks of Mount Meru. The central tower, taller than the others, symbolizes the peak of the mountain and the highest realm of existence.
- Moats and Walls: The concentric moats and walls surrounding the temple complex represent the oceans and mountains that encircle Mount Meru in Hindu mythology. These features also served as defensive barriers, protecting the sacred precincts of the temple.
- Angkor Wat's architectural features and symbolic elements are inextricably linked, creating a harmonious and meaningful whole. The temple's

grandeur, intricate details, and symbolic significance make it a masterpiece of Khmer architecture, showcasing the empire's cultural sophistication and spiritual aspirations.

Discuss the impact of Angkor Wat on Cambodian culture and its role as a symbol of national identity.

Model Answer:

Angkor Wat, the awe-inspiring temple complex of the Khmer Empire, has left an indelible mark on Cambodian culture, serving as a powerful symbol of national identity and cultural heritage.

Impact on Cambodian Culture:

- Religious Legacy: Angkor Wat's dedication to Vishnu reflects the Khmer Empire's embrace of Hinduism, which continues to influence Cambodian culture today. The temple's architectural features and symbolism have permeated Cambodian art, architecture, and religious practices.
- Artistic Inspiration: Angkor Wat's intricate carvings, sculptures, and architectural motifs have served as a source of inspiration for Cambodian artists and artisans for centuries. The temple's influence is evident in traditional Cambodian dance, music, and handicrafts.
- National Pride: Angkor Wat stands as a symbol of Cambodia's glorious past and its rich cultural heritage. The temple's iconic silhouette adorns

the Cambodian flag, and it is a source of national pride and identity.

Role as a Symbol of National Identity:

- UNESCO World Heritage Site: Angkor Wat's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1992 further solidified its status as a symbol of Cambodia's cultural significance. The temple's global recognition has reinforced national pride and cultural identity.
- Tourism Icon: Angkor Wat is Cambodia's most popular tourist destination, attracting millions of visitors each year. The temple's economic importance has contributed to Cambodia's development and has introduced Cambodian culture to the world.
- Cultural Symbol: Angkor Wat's image is ubiquitous in Cambodian society, appearing on currency, stamps, and various cultural and artistic expressions. The temple's presence serves as a constant reminder of Cambodia's rich heritage and cultural identity.
- In conclusion, Angkor Wat's impact on Cambodian culture and its role as a symbol of national identity are profound. The temple's architectural splendor, religious significance, and cultural influence have shaped Cambodia's artistic expression, national pride, and global recognition, making it an enduring symbol of the nation's heritage and identity.

Relevance to the Prelims and Mains syllabus under the following topics:



UPSC Prelims:

 In the UPSC Prelims examination, Angkor Wat is typically covered in the General Studies Paper 1 section, which focuses on Indian history, culture, and geography. Questions related to Angkor Wat may assess candidates' knowledge of the temple's historical context, architectural features, cultural significance, and UNESCO World Heritage status.

UPSC Mains:

 In the UPSC Mains examination, Angkor Wat is more comprehensively covered in the General Studies Paper 1 section, which focuses on Indian and world history. Questions related to Angkor Wat may delve deeper into the temple's architectural marvels, religious symbolism, impact on Cambodian culture, and role in Southeast Asian art and architecture. Here's a breakdown of how Angkor Wat might be covered in each section:

General Studies Paper 1 (Indian History, Culture, and Geography):

Historical Context:

- Rise and fall of the Khmer Empire
- Role of Angkor Wat as the state temple
- Impact of the temple on Khmer society

Architectural Significance:

- Layout and design elements of Angkor Wat
- Symbolic meaning and representations
- Architectural innovations and achievements

Cultural Heritage:

- Religious significance of Angkor Wat
- Role in Cambodian culture and traditions
- Influence on Southeast Asian art and architecture

UNESCO World Heritage Site:

- Criteria for UNESCO World Heritage Site designation
- Significance of Angkor Wat's inclusion in the list
- Conservation efforts and challenges

General Studies Paper 1 (Indian and World History):

Comparative Analysis:

- Comparison of Angkor Wat with other ancient temples and monuments
- Analysis of architectural styles and cultural

influences

Assessment of historical significance and impact

Global Context:

- Angkor Wat's place in Southeast Asian history and culture
- Interaction between the Khmer Empire and other civilizations
- Contribution to the world's cultural heritage

Contemporary Relevance:

- Angkor Wat as a symbol of Cambodia's national identity
- Role in tourism and economic development
- Importance of cultural preservation and heritage management







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