**Syllabus subtopic:** Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** About Ajanta and Ellora Caves, UNESCO World Heritage Sites; ecological and other threats faced by our historical monuments

**News:** Two tourist visitor centres set up at Ajanta and Ellora caves by the Maharashtra government with funding from the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) have been shut due to their pending water and electricity dues worth ₹5 crore, an official said.

**About the two centres and their objectives**

The centres, which were **supposed to serve as a one-stop location** for all **information about history and importance** of these **world famous UNESCO heritage sites**, have replicas of some sculptures located inside the caves.

The State set up the two centres, having facilities like audiovisual presentations and library, in 2013 for which ₹125 crore was spent in two phases, the official said. A big chunk of this fund came from JICA.

These centres have replicas of sculptures in Ajanta and Ellora caves. Using multimedia, these facilities make tourists understand the Jataka tales. This helps reduce the time spent by visitors in the caves, which will in turn help in the longevity of these monuments.

**Why are the centres closed now?**

The facilities ran smoothly for sometime but have been closed since September last year as **they do not have water and power supply**. The dues of these two centres are now running into ₹5 crore.

The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) demanded funds from the government five to six times to clear the dues. The MTDC needs around ₹10 crore to clear all the dues and to make these centres operational, the official said, adding the government should sanction regular funds for these facilities.

**What it may lead to and way ahead?**

The Japanese government spent money on this project. If these centres remain
closed for a long time, their whole purpose becomes meaningless. This will also affect the image of our country and the State. The government should plan something concrete for the sustainability of such centres..

People travel thousands of miles to visit Ajanta and Ellora caves. They prefer to spend time in the caves rather than seeing their replicas (at the tourist visitor centres).

These centres surely help elderly tourists who cannot walk for long. But to make these facilities sustainable, the commercial angle also needs to be looked into. There should be additional facilities like a cafeteria, hotel, and a hub to showcase local items.

**About Ajanta and Ellora Caves**

Rock-cut cave architecture occupies a very important place in the Indian Art tradition. From the humble beginnings at the Barabar Caves, they evolve into spectacular caves at Ajanta and Ellora. Both these caves have been accorded the UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

**Table summing up the contrasting features are as follows**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Ajanta Caves</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ellora/Elura/Verul Lena Caves</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Near Aurangabad district of Maharashtra</td>
<td>North West of Aurangabad district of Maharashtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeline</strong></td>
<td>Constructed between 2\textsuperscript{nd} Century BC to 6\textsuperscript{th} Century AD</td>
<td>Constructed between 6\textsuperscript{th} Century AD to 10\textsuperscript{th} Century AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of caves</strong></td>
<td>30 caves with one incomplete so sometimes considered 29.</td>
<td>100 caves with 34 open for public. Caves dedicated to Hinduism are more followed by Buddhist caves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cave 10 is the only Chaitya while rest are viharas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religions</th>
<th>Entirely Buddhism</th>
<th>Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patronage</td>
<td>Satavahanas, Vakatakas and Chalukyas</td>
<td>Rashtrakutas, Kalachuris, Chalukyas and the Yadavas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronology of Construction</td>
<td>2nd-1st Century BC – Hinayana Phase</td>
<td>550 – 600 AD – Hindu Phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th – 6th Century AD – Mahayana Phase</td>
<td>600 – 730 AD – Buddhist Phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major attraction</td>
<td>Paintings, architecture and sculptures</td>
<td>Architecture and sculptures. Especially the Kailashnath temple.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**About UNESCO world heritage sites**

A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of special cultural or physical significance.

The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.

Each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located and UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.
Selection of a site:

To be selected, a World Heritage Site must be an already classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance (such as an ancient ruin or historical structure, building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, mountain, or wilderness area). It may signify a remarkable accomplishment of humanity, and serve as evidence of our intellectual history on the planet.

Legal status of designated sites:

UNESCO designation as a World Heritage Site provides prima facie evidence that such culturally sensitive sites are legally protected pursuant to the Law of War, under the Geneva Convention, its articles, protocols and customs, together with other treaties including the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and international law.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is the nodal agency for forwarding any request for World Heritage status to any Indian site whether cultural or natural.

Based on the proposals received from the Central or State Government agencies as well as management Trusts, etc., and after their due scrutiny, the Government forwards the nomination dossiers to the World Heritage Center.

There are 38 World Heritage Sites located in India. These include 30 cultural sites, 7 natural sites and one mixed-criteria site. India has the sixth largest number of sites in the world.

Note: to know more about UNESCO world heritage sites in India, click on the following link below:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_World_Heritage_Sites_in_India