PHOTO FEATURE

NATURE’S LIGHT SHOW

Aurora
This beautiful light display occurs in the night skies of North (Aurora Borealis) and South (Aurora Australis) Poles. The interaction between the solar wind and the Earth’s magnetosphere produces charged particles, mainly in the form of electrons and protons, directed into the atmosphere due to the Earth’s magnetic field, which upon ionization and excitation emits lights of varying colours.

Zodiacal Light
Best seen in the night sky during late winters/early springs, zodiacal light is a hazy, roughly triangular glow of light extending up from the horizon. It is formed due to the sunlight scattered by millions of dust particles that circle floating around the galaxy. It appears to emerge from the vicinity of the Sun along the same plane as the band of 12 constellations known as the zodiac or elliptic.

Fire Rainbows
Also known as Circumhorizontal arc, it is a rare phenomenon that occurs due to light bursting through thin, wispy cirrus clouds at higher altitudes, only when the Sun is more than 58° high above the horizon. They are formed in summers when the ice crystals are placed just right, facing parallel to the ground and shaped as thick plates to bend the light entering from the vertical face of the crystals into the spectrum of colours.
Light Pillars
These occur at freezing temperatures where the ice crystals are formed at lower than usual elevations in the atmosphere. The lights reflected from city buildings, cars and streets through the suspended crystals appear to be beaming up to the sky but contrary to this, the light travelling into space is actually being reflected back down to the Earth, creating the illusion of pillars.

Sun Dog
Scientifically known as Parhelion, the sun dog is an atmospheric optical phenomenon that appears as luminous spots at an angle of 22° on each side of the Sun and at the same height as the Sun. It is formed by the refraction of sunlight when the sun shines through the hexagonal ice crystals of thin cirrus clouds. It is commonly observed at mid latitudes during the winter.

Compiled by Sonam Choudhary, CSIR-NISCAIR, New Delhi