Artificial Intelligence

A* Algorithm-

- A* Algorithm is one of the best and popular techniques used for path finding and graph traversals.
- A lot of games and web-based maps use this algorithm for finding the shortest path efficiently.
- It is essentially a best first search algorithm.

Working-

A* Algorithm works as-
- It maintains a tree of paths originating at the start node.
- It extends those paths one edge at a time.
- It continues until its termination criterion is satisfied.

A* Algorithm extends the path that minimizes the following function-

$$f(n) = g(n) + h(n)$$

Here,
- 'n' is the last node on the path
- g(n) is the cost of the path from start node to node 'n'
- h(n) is a heuristic function that estimates cost of the cheapest path from node 'n' to the goal node

Algorithm-

The implementation of A* Algorithm involves maintaining two lists- OPEN and CLOSED.
- OPEN contains those nodes that have been evaluated by the heuristic function but have not been expanded into successors yet.
- CLOSED contains those nodes that have already been visited.

The algorithm is as follows-

Step-01:
- Define a list OPEN.
- Initially, OPEN consists solely of a single node, the start node S.

Step-02:
If the list is empty, return failure and exit.

Step-03:
- Remove node n with the smallest value of f(n) from OPEN and move it to list CLOSED.
- If node n is a goal state, return success and exit.

Step-04:
Expand node n.

Step-05:
- If any successor to n is the goal node, return success and the solution by tracing the path from goal node to S.
- Otherwise, go to Step-06.

Step-06:
For each successor node,
- Apply the evaluation function f to the node.
- If the node has not been in either list, add it to OPEN.

Step-07:

Go back to Step-02.

PRACTICE PROBLEMS BASED ON A* ALGORITHM-

Problem-01:

Given an initial state of a 8-puzzle problem and final state to be reached-

2	8	3
1	6	4
7		5

Initial State

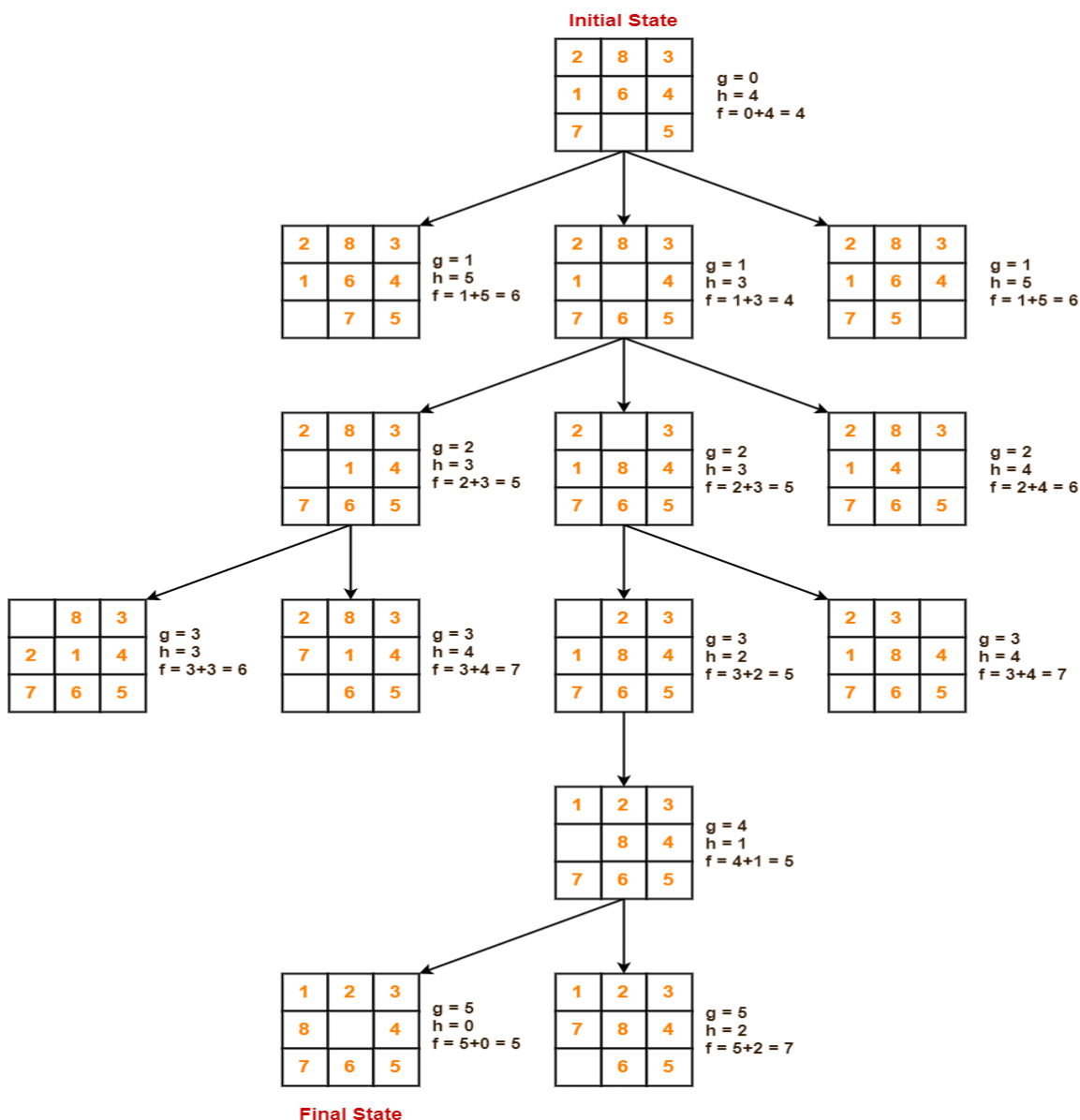| 1	2	3
8		4
7	6	5

Final State

Find the most cost-effective path to reach the final state from initial state using A* Algorithm.

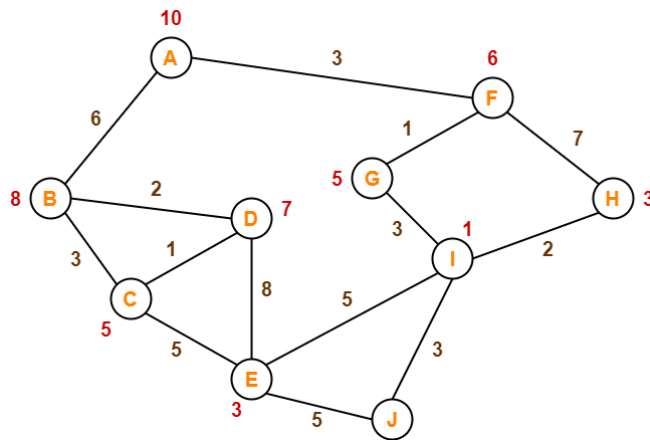Consider $g(n)$ = Depth of node and $h(n)$ = Number of misplaced tiles.

Solution-

- A* Algorithm maintains a tree of paths originating at the initial state.
- It extends those paths one edge at a time.
- It continues until final state is reached.

Problem-02:

Consider the following graph-

The numbers written on edges represent the distance between the nodes.

The numbers written on nodes represent the heuristic value.

Find the most cost-effective path to reach from start state A to final state J using A* Algorithm.

Solution-

Step-01:

- We start with node A.
- Node B and Node F can be reached from node A.

A* Algorithm calculates f(B) and f(F).

- f(B) = 6 + 8 = 14
- f(F) = 3 + 6 = 9

Since f(F) < f(B), so it decides to go to node F.

Path- A → F

Step-02:

Node G and Node H can be reached from node F.

A* Algorithm calculates f(G) and f(H).

- f(G) = (3+1) + 5 = 9
- f(H) = (3+7) + 3 = 13

Since f(G) < f(H), so it decides to go to node G.

Path- A → F → G

Step-03:

Node I can be reached from node G.

A* Algorithm calculates f(I).

f(I) = (3+1+3) + 1 = 8

It decides to go to node I.

Path- A → F → G → I

Step-04:

Node E, Node H and Node J can be reached from node I.

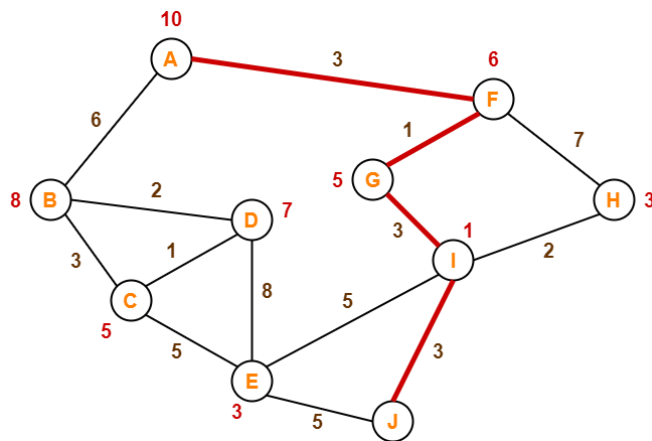A* Algorithm calculates f(E), f(H) and f(J).

- f(E) = (3+1+3+5) + 3 = 15
- f(H) = (3+1+3+2) + 3 = 12
- f(J) = (3+1+3+3) + 0 = 10

Since f(J) is least, so it decides to go to node J.

Path- A → F → G → I → J

This is the required shortest path from node A to node J.

Important Note-

It is important to note that-
- A* Algorithm is one of the best path finding algorithms.
- But it does not produce the shortest path always.
- This is because it heavily depends on heuristics.