UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 04-06-2025

MERCOSUR Trade Bloc

Prelims : Current events of national and international importance

Why in News?

India and Paraguay can partner in expanding regional commerce in Latin America with MERCOSUR, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently.

- MERCOSUR is a ***South American trade bloc*.**
- **Formed in** – 1991.
- **Headquarters -** Montevideo, Uruguay.
- It is to facilitate the *free movement of goods, services, capital, and people among member countries.*
- MERCOSUR aims to create a single market, reducing trade barriers and fostering economic cooperation.
- **Members** - Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, Bolivia.
- **Decision making body -** The primary decision-making body within MERCOSUR is the *Common Market Council (CMC).*
- It serves as the highest authority for political coordination of foreign and economic policies.
- **Other important bodies**
    - **Common Market Group (GMC) -** Oversees the day-to-day operations,
    - **MERCOSUR Trade Commission (CCM)** - Manages the common commercial policy.
- **India's connection with MERCOSUR -** A framework agreement was signed between India and MERCOSUR in 2003.
- This agreement was followed by the MERCOSUR-India Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) signed in New Delhi in 2004.

Free Trade Agreement (FTA)	Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA)
It is a trade pact between two or more countries to reduce or eliminate tariffs and other trade barriers like quotas and subsidies on goods and services, aiming to facilitate trade.	It grants preferential access to certain products from other member countries, but it doesn't necessarily eliminate all tariffs.

Reference

The Hindu | MERCOSUR

Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary & Sabine's Gull

Prelims : Current events of national and international importance | Environment

Why in News?

A rare Arctic seabird, the Sabine's Gull, was spotted at Gujarat's Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary recently.

- Nalsarovar is a wetland situated in ***Gujarat.***
- It is among India's largest and ecologically significant wetland sanctuaries.
- In 1969, the Gujarat government declared as a bird sanctuary to primarily protect its bird population.
- The ***Ramsar Convention designation*** of Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in 2012 recognized its ecological importance as a wetland habitat for birds and other wildlife.
- It is home to numerous migratory and resident bird species such as flamingos, pelicans, ducks, and herons.

Sabine's Gull

- **Appearance** - It is a small and strikingly beautiful gull, notable for its sharp black hood, clean grey upperparts, white nape, and, most uniquely, its tri-colored wings marked in black, white, and grey.
- It is one of only two gull species with a black bill tipped with yellow and a forked, notched tail.
- **Breeding** - The species primarily breeds in the high-latitude Arctic regions of North America, Greenland, and Siberia, nesting near wet tundra areas.
- **Migration** - For winter, it migrates to tropical upwelling zones highly productive marine areas off the coasts of South America and western Africa.
- It does not typically pass through India during migration, making this sighting both rare and significant.
- Experts believe that the bird may have strayed from its usual migratory route.
- Such occurrences are of great interest and value to ornithologists and avian researchers.

Reference

Hindustan Times | Nalsarovar Wildlife Sanctuary

District De-Addiction Centres (DDACs)

Prelims : Current events of national and international importance | Governance

Why in News?

The Union government has invited proposals to set up District De-Addiction Centres (DDACs) in 291 "gap" districts identified by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

- **Gap districts** – It have been identified as those that currently ***have no Centrally supported infrastructure*** to treat or rehabilitate people who are dealing with substance abuse or dependence.
- **Gap Districts** - Highest number of gap districts have been identified in Chhattisgarh.
- Other states having highest gap districts are Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Assam.
- **Under** - National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction.
    - It provides for the Social Justice Ministry to support
        - Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts (IRCAs),
        - Community-based Peer Led Initiatives (CPLIs),
        - Outreach and Drop-in Centres (ODICs), and DDACs.
- DDAC is supposed to house a treatment cum rehabilitation centre, an area for drop-in centre facilities, and an area for CPLI facilities.
- The DDACs can have the capacity to house 15 or 30 patients at a time, with specific norms of minimum requirements prescribed for them.
- DDACs would conduct primary prevention activities through awareness programs among the vulnerable and affected community and engage in risk mitigation of substance use among children/adolescents/youth.
- This will include
    - Preventing substance use,
    - Identifying peer educators in the communities,
    - Implementing early prevention education,
    - Identifying adolescents or children using substances and referring them to rehabilitation centres or treatment facilities, among other activities.

The National Survey of Extent and Pattern of Substance Use 2017-18 estimated, that about 1.18 crore children and adolescents using various psychoactive substances.

Reference

The Hindu | De-addiction centres

FPV (First-person view) drones

Prelims : Current events of national and international importance

Why in news?

Ukraine targeted and destroyed more than 40 Russian aircraft stationed at 4 key air bases across Russian territory by FPV drone attack named Operation spider Web.

- First-person view means that a ***person piloting a drone can see*** what the drone sees, through a camera attached to its body.
- The live video can be seen through specialized goggles, or on smartphones and other

kinds of screens, and the drone can be manoeuvred remotely.
- Such drones are also ***used in filming and other non-defence purposes***.
- FPV drones have a much ***smaller range, of a few kilometres***.
- One major challenge is that the drones' movement through their surroundings cannot be seen by the drone operator.
- This can limit situational awareness and may lead to disorientation.
- At times, another person, a visual observer, may be needed to guide the person controlling the drone.
- Before FPV drones are deployed, a reconnaissance drone with a larger range first goes to survey the area and zero in on a specific region that needs to be targeted.
- **Key advantages -** Cost and deep strike capabilities while remaining largely undetected.

Reference

The Indian Express | FPV drones

New policies for Ladakh

Prelims : Current events of national and international importance | Governance

Why in News?

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) recently introduced new policies on reservation, languages, domicile and composition of hill councils for the Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh.

- These policies pave way to 85% of reservation for the Scheduled Tribes (ST) in government jobs.
- **Reservation based on Domicile Tag -** Only citizens who have had a continuous 15-year stay in the region, beginning 2019, will be considered domiciles.
- Any 'outsider' who settled in Ladakh after its special status along with that of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was struck down in 2019 will be considered a domicile only after 2034.
- The *J&K domicile policy* notified in 2020 removed the concept of permanent residents stating that
    - Anyone who has resided for 15 years in the UT of J&K or
    - Studied for 7 years and appeared in Class 10th /12th examination in an educational institution located in the UT of J&K or
    - Who is registered as a migrant by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner (Migrants) will be considered a domicile.
- **Reservation in Hill Councils -** One-third of the seats will be reserved for women in the hill councils.
- **Reservation based on Languages -** English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti and Purgi languages shall be the official languages of the UT.
- Currently, at least
    - 80% of vacancies are reserved for Scheduled Tribes (ST),

    - 4% for people living along the Line of Actual Control/Line of Control,
    - 1% for Scheduled Castes and 10% for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS).
- The MHA had proposed a 95% reservation in government jobs for locals in Ladakh and a one-third reservation for women in hill councils.

Reference

[The Hindu | New policies for Union Territory of Ladakh]

One Liners 04-06-2025

History, Art and Culture

End of Maratha Wars

On **June 3, 1818**, the **Maratha Wars** concluded, marking the definitive end of the Maratha Empire as an independent entity. This pivotal event cemented British paramountcy in India.

• **The Maratha Confederacy -** A powerful empire founded by Chhatrapati Shivaji, comprised influential houses like the Peshwa, Gaekwad, Scindia, Holkar, and Bhonsle. It was a significant challenge to British ambitions.

• **1st Anglo-Maratha War (1775-1782) -** This initial conflict was st largely indecisive, ending with the Treaty of Salbai and restoring the status quo.

• **2nd Anglo-Maratha War (1803-1805) -** This war severely weakened the Marathas. British victories, notably under Arthur Wellesley, led to significant territorial gains and imposed subsidiary alliances.

• **3rd Anglo-Maratha War (1817-1818)** - The final, decisive war saw the British East India Company, under Lord Hastings, crush the Maratha uprising. The Peshwa and other Maratha states were systematically defeated.

• **Impact and Legacy -** The Maratha defeat eliminated the last major indigenous challenge, paving the way for the British Raj. This outcome profoundly reshaped India's political landscape, ushering in an era of undisputed British dominance.

Geography

Paraguayan President Visits India

Santiago Peña Palacios is on his first state visit to India (June 2-4, 2025). This historic second-ever visit by a Paraguayan President aims to boost bilateral ties in trade, technology, and diplomacy.

• **About** - Paraguay Paraguay is a landlocked South American nation.

• **Capital –** Asunción.

• **Location** - Situated on the Paraguay River, mostly south of the Tropic of Capricorn.

• **Borders -** Paraguay borders Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina.

• **Major rivers -** Include the Paraguay and Paraná, with the Paraguay River dividing the country into Eastern and Western regions.

• **A top hydroelectricity** – Exporter.

• **Geographical Features** - Eastern Paraguay is part of the Brazilian Plateau, featuring the Amambay and Mbaracayú Mountains.

• **Climate** - The Eastern Region experiences a subtropical climate, while the Western Region (Chaco Boreal) is tropical.

Devastating Floods in Nigeria

Over 150 people have died in central Nigeria due to severe flooding. Torrential rain and a dam collapse in Mokwa, Niger State, are identified as the primary causes.

• **Nigeria's capital is** - Abuja.

• **Bordering countries** - Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Benin, and the Atlantic Ocean (Gulf of Guinea).

• **Major Rivers** - The Niger River is Nigeria's lifeline, flowing into the Atlantic via the Niger Delta. The Benue River is its largest tributary.

• **Delta Region & Lakes** - The Niger Delta features brackish mangroves and oxbow lakes. Man-made lakes include Kainji and Bakolori.

• **Mountains & Highlands -** The central Jos Plateau has extinct volcanoes. The Cameroon Highlands in the southeast include Nigeria's highest peak, Chappal Waddi (2,419m).

• **Plains & Valleys** - Northern Nigeria has the Sokoto and Borno Plains. The Udi-Nsukka Plateau is in the east, while the Chad Basin in the northeast is prone to waterlogging.

Polity & Governance

AyushSuraksha Portal

AyushSuraksha Portal was recently launched to boost consumer protection in Indian traditional medicine.

• **This Ministry of Ayush -** Initiative enhances transparency, combats misleading ads, and ensures product safety.

• **Purpose -** It's a centralized platform for monitoring misleading advertisements and adverse drug reactions (ADRs).

• **Legal Basis -** Developed following a Supreme Court order in July 2024, the Ministry of Ayush launched it ahead of schedule with CCRS support.

• **Integrated Authorities -** The portal integrates bodies like CDSCO's Ayush vertical and the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting for coordinated responses.

• **Training Conducted -** A **pre-launch training** in April 2025 prepared nodal officers, ensuring effective portal usage and swift regulatory action.

• **Impact -** This reflects advanced **responsible governance**, prioritizing citizen safety and boosting trust in India's traditional medicine systems.

Seva Se Seekhen" Campaign Begins

Youth volunteers are commencing a 15-day engagement at Jan Aushadhi Kendras (JAKs) as part of the Government of India’s "Seva Se Seekhen" campaign.

• **About the Campaign** - Launched in 2025, this initiative is a youth engagement and hands-on learning program, integrating young citizens into public service environments like JAKs.

• **Nodal Ministries -** The campaign is spearheaded by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

• **It aims to** - Foster experiential learning, enhance public health awareness, develop soft and technical skills in areas like inventory management, and encourage nation-building values through grassroots engagement.

• **Key Features & Roles** - The program involves five volunteers per district, placed in five JAKs, with outreach across all states and UTs.

• **Volunteers** - From MY Bharat, NSS, and pharmacy colleges will support daily operations, promote generic medicines, and manage logistics.

• **Duration** - The engagement is a 15-day structured internship providing guided tasks and observations for holistic learning**.**

International Relations and Issues

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

ADB, recently canceled a $434.25 million loan for Assam's 1000 MW Solar Power Park.

• **Reason** - This was due to protests over tribal land acquisition in Karbi Anglong, requested by the Union Finance Ministry and Assam government to prevent further conflict.

• **ADB** - Is a regional multilateral development bank fostering sustainable economic growth and poverty eradication in Asia and the Pacific.

• **Establishment** - On December 19, 1966,

• **Headquartered** - In Metro Manila, Philippines.

• **Membership -** It has 69 member countries

• **Major shareholders** - Include Japan and the USA (both 15.71%), China (6.42%), and India (6.31%).

• **Core Functions** - ADB finances infrastructure, promotes clean energy and climate resilience, alleviates poverty, and encourages regional integration.

• **Scholarship & UN Role** The ADB-Japan Scholarship Program supports postgraduate studies. ADB is also a UN observer, contributing to global policymaking.

Ukraine's "Operation Spider's Web"

Ukraine successfully executed "Operation Spider's Web," an 18-month-planned military operation using short-range, explosive-laden drones disguised in trucks.

• **Execution & Strategy** - Ukrainian agents operated across multiple Russian regions, coordinating strikes in three time zones. Drones were launched remotely, showcasing innovative, Trojan Horse-like tactics.

• **Significant Damage Inflicted** - Ukraine claims the operation destroyed 41 Russian warplanes, including Tu-95, Tu-160, and A-50 aircraft, causing an estimated $7 billion in damage.

• **Strike Locations** - Key targets included Belaya, Olenya, and Dyagilevo airbases, previously considered secure due to their distance (over 4,000 km in some cases) from the frontlines.

• **Advancement in Warfare -** The operation signifies a critical advancement in Ukraine's military strategy, employing AI-powered drones capable of autonomous target identification and engagement.

• **Cost-Effectiveness & Implications** - Each mission cost approximately $10,000, demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of drone warfare. This success highlights the increasing role of autonomous systems, potentially reshaping global military strategies.

Economy

Rural Women's Online Banking Surges

A recent Ministry of Statistics survey shows a significant increase in online banking among rural Indian women, reaching 30.0% in early 2025, up from 17.1% last year. For young women (15-24), it doubled to 51.4%.

• **Survey Scope** - Conducted in early 2025, the survey covered 34,950 households, including 19,071 rural and 15,879 urban, involving 1.42 lakh individuals.

• **Gender Disparities Persist** - Despite women's progress, a digital divide remains, with rural men at 73.3% online banking capability (up from 40.2%).

• **Urban vs. Rural & UPI's Role** - Urban online banking is 62.4%. Nationally, 48.9% use online banking. UPI is dominant, used solely by 86.7% of rural online bankers.

• **Online Purchases & Mobile Access** - 24.5% of Indian households made online purchases. This rise aligns with increased mobile phone (85.7% usage) and internet access, especially in rural areas.

• **Smartphone & Internet Growth** - Smartphone ownership is high (79.9% of mobile users), with over 90% of youth owning one. Internet usage among rural females grew to 57.6% (from 42.6%).

Environment

Jharkhand's First Tiger Safari Proposed

Jharkhand plans its first tiger safari near Palamau Tiger Reserve (PTR) to boost tourism and wildlife education.

Tiger safaris - Offer guaranteed sightings of rescued, conflict-prone, or orphaned tigers in naturalistic enclosures, unlike traditional wild safaris. The concept was refined through NTCA Guidelines (2012, 2016) and Supreme Court directives (2024).

• **Legal Framework & Types** - Governed by the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, NTCA, and CZA, safaris must be *outside* core and buffer zones. "Captive safaris" house rescued tigers, while "wild safaris" (e.g., Ranthambore) involve traditional open reserves with no guaranteed sightings.

• **Palamu Tiger Reserve (PTR) -** Established in 1974, PTR is Jharkhand's only tiger reserve, located in Latehar district on the Chhotanagpur Plateau.

• **Flora & Fauna** - Predominantly Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous forests with dominant Sal. Key fauna include Bengal Tiger, Asiatic Elephant, Leopard, and Sloth Bear.

• **Historical Significance** - PTR was a Project Tiger site in 1974 and hosted the world's first pugmark-based tiger census in 1932 by J.W. Nicholson.

Miscellaneous

World Bicycle Day

World Bicycle Day, celebrated annually on June 3 since its UN declaration in 2018, champions the bicycle as an affordable, eco-friendly, and healthy transport mode.

• **Origins & Timeline** - Professor Leszek Sibilski spearheaded the initiative from 2015, leading to the UN adoption on April 12, 2018, recognizing the bicycle's global impact.

• **2025 Theme** - Is pending, but past themes focused on "Cycling for a better future" and "Healthier cities."

• **Purpose & Objectives** - The day promotes health, eco-friendly transport, inclusivity, and cycling-friendly urban planning, aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals.

• **Significance in Daily Life** - Cycling offers health benefits (e.g., preventing diabetes), economic advantages, zero pollution, and increased accessibility for various populations.

• **Celebrations & Benefits** - Typically marked by rallies and awareness campaigns, cycling also offers psychological benefits like stress reduction and improved self-esteem.

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