UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 09-06-2025

India’s Progress in Food Safety Standards

Why in news?

Recently World Food Safety Day was observed and the theme of this year highlights the role of science in Food safety.

- **World food safety day 2025** – Observed annually on June 7.
- **Theme (2025)** – **“Food Safety: Science in Action”**, emphasizing the role of scientific evidence and risk-based approaches in food safety.
- **India’s food safety framework –** India’s food safety regulation started with the **Prevention of Food Adulteration (PFA) Act, 1954**, which addressed food safety as a binary issue (adulterated vs. not adulterated).
- **Shift to science-based regulation –** The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, led to the formation of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).
- FSSAI adopted **risk-based regulation**, aligning with global norms like those of the **Codex Alimentarius Commission**.
- It introduced measures such as,
    - Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for pesticides
    - Safe levels for food additives and contaminants
    - Veterinary drug residue standards
- By 2020, India’s food safety standards were almost on par with those in **advanced countries**, indicating rapid progress.

Challenges in Risk Assessment

- **Lack of India-specific toxicological data** – Most standards are based on foreign data not reflective of Indian diets or environments.
- **No total diet study (TDS)** – Without this, it's hard to assess cumulative exposure to contaminants from all food sources.
- Current reliance on fragmented data weakens scientific precision.
- **Issues in Risk Communication –** Technical terms like **MRLs** (in ppm) and **ADIs** (acceptable daily intake) are hard for the public to understand and often leads to confusion.
- **Legacy issue** – Despite global scientific consensus on the safety of monosodium glutamate (MSG), India still mandates a warning label declaring it unsafe for infants.
- Such legacy regulations contribute to misinformation and consumer mistrust.

Way forward

- India-Specific Scientific Research conduct localised toxicology studies and implement

a comprehensive TDS.
- This would provide accurate data on dietary exposure to various contaminants and enhance the credibility of safety standards.
- **Improving risk communication –** Simplifying scientific language for the public.
- Increasing transparency in regulatory decisions to build consumer trust.
- **Capacity building –** Regular training for risk assessors is vital to stay current with evolving science.
- Periodic review and updating of food safety standards are necessary for sustained progress.
- **Public engagement and trust building –** Engaging openly with industry, consumers, and the public to ensure informed participation.

Reference

The Hindu| Maintaining India's progress in food safety standards

Role of Digital Literacy in Creating India's Future Workforce

Why in news?

A recent article highlights how rural India is fostering digital fluency among children through adaptive, low-resource methods.

- **Digital infrastructure in schools** – According to a recent Ministry of Education report, only 51% of Indian schools have functional computers, and 53% have internet access.
- **Digital fluency beyond infrastructure** – Even with limited resources, students are navigating the digital world **through shared devices and peer-led learning**.
- **Workforce readiness in digital economy –** As per the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2025 report, 75% of future jobs will demand digital proficiency.
- **Everyday digital engagement–** Children using their **parents' phones** to listen to teachers' voice notes.
- Siblings teaching each other how to use learning apps in local languages.
- **Blended and multimodal learning** – Learning moves across mediums such as textbooks, audio messages, peer interactions, and screen-based tools.
- This blended model reflects the future of lifelong learning in a fast-evolving economy.
- Digital literacy now means more than using devices it includes,
    - Agency and confidence
    - Curiosity and creativity
    - Problem-solving abilities
- **Impact of public-private partnerships –** Collaborative programs are helps to,
    - Train teachers in digital tools
    - Introduce STEM education in rural areas
    - Set up digital labs in under-resourced schools

With 65% of India's population under 35, there is a major opportunity to shape a

digitally empowered workforce.

- **Mother-tongue digital learning tools** – Technology enables learning in local languages, helping bridge comprehension gaps and encouraging deeper engagement.
- The rural digital learning model, led by curiosity over connectivity, is scalable and replicable.
- Children in village homes and classrooms are not just adapting to digital tools, they are shaping the future of education.

Reference

The Hindu| Digital literacy in village classroom creating India's workforce

AI Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM)

Why in news?

Recently, UNESCO and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) jointly hosted the 5th and final stakeholder consultation on the AI Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM).

- **AI Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM) –** It is a diagnostic tool by UNESCO to assess a country's preparedness for ethical and responsible AI adoption.
- It is conducted by an independent research organization supported by a national team comprising UNESCO, government bodies, academia, civil society, and private sector.
- Key Dimensions Assessed include,
    - Legal & regulatory
    - Social & cultural
    - Economic
    - Scientific & educational
    - Technological & infrastructural
- **Approach** – It combines quantitative and qualitative indicators, customized to each country's context.
- **Purpose:**
    - It identifies strengths and gaps,
    - Guides policy development
    - Promotes inclusive, safe, and trustworthy AI
- It also aims to support ethical, inclusive, and safe adoption of AI tailored to India's context.
- It includes quantitative and qualitative indicators beyond existing tools.
- It will help frame India-specific AI policy roadmap.
- **Significance to India** - It supports the India AI Mission by:
- Creating a balanced, pro-innovation policy roadmap
- Building Safe and Trusted AI systems
- Promoting governance frameworks, youth participation, and AI education
- Translates UNESCO's Global AI Ethics Recommendations into India-specific actionable

policies.

IndiaAI Mission focus on promoting indigenous frameworks, self-assessment, governance tools, provoide support to companies building foundation models, and funding for responsible AI projects.

Reference

PIB | AI Readiness Assessment Methodology

United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC)

Prelims : Current events of National and International Importance

Why in News?

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar recently announced that India has been elected to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for the term 2026-28.

- The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of ***the six main organs of the United Nations (UN).***
- **Aim** – It is responsible for coordinating the UN's work on economic, social, cultural, humanitarian, and health issues.
- **Established by** - UN Charter.
- It is to advance the 3 dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social, and environmental.
- It is the central platform for fostering debate and innovative thinking, forging consensus on ways forward, and coordinating efforts to achieve internationally agreed-upon goals.
- It is also responsible for the follow-up to major UN conferences and summits.
- **Member States -** ECOSOC is composed of 54 members, elected by the UN General Assembly for three-year terms.
- It oversees several important bodies, including the 14 UN specialized agencies, 10 functional commissions, and 5 regional commissions.
- Additionally, ECOSOC receives reports from nine UN funds and programs and issues policy recommendations.
- **Recent happenings** - India has been recently elected to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for the term 2026-28.
- Earlier, the Permanent Mission of India at the United Nations marked Dr BR Ambedkar's 135th birth anniversary with a special commemorative event at the UN headquarters in New York, attended by global leaders.
- The event centered around the theme "The timeless appeal of Dr Ambedkar's vision within the UN and beyond," underscoring his influence on both India and the global community."

Reference

Hindustan Times | ECOSOC

RBI's increase in Loan-to-Value (LTV) ratio

Prelims : Current events of National and International Importance | Economy

Why in News?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently increased the loan-to-value (LTV) ratio for gold-backed loans up to Rs.5 lakh recently.

- **Loan-to-value Ratio -** It indicates the percentage of an asset's value that a lender is willing to finance through debt.
- To calculate LTV, divide the loan amount by the lower of the property's appraised value or purchase price.
- LTV Ratio = (Loan Amount/Appraised Property Value) x 100.
- **Recent Changes by RBI** - It aims to ease credit accessibility for small borrowers.
- This means that individuals can now get a larger loan amount against the same value of pledged gold.
- Specifically, for loans below Rs.2.5 lakh, the LTV has been raised to 85%, and for loans between Rs.2.5 lakh and Rs.5 lakh, it's set at 80%.
- However, all loans above Rs.5 lakh will have an LTV of 75%, the central bank specified in its final guidelines for lending against gold and silver collateral.

- RBI decided to raise that to 85% for small loans below Rs.2.5 lakhs per borrower, including interest, in the final guidelines on gold loans.
- State-owned lenders have been including both interest and principal while making gold loans under the current LTV limit of 75%, but in the case of some non-bank lenders and smaller banks, the LTV was being stretched till 88%.

Reference

Business Standard | LTV ratio

One Liners 09-06-2025
History, Art and Culture

Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev

On June 7, 1606, **Guru Arjan Dev**, the fifth Sikh Guru, became a martyr, a pivotal event deeply influencing the Sikh faith.

• **Spiritual Contributions -** He compiled the **Adi Granth**, Sikhism's holy scripture, and completed the **Harmandir Sahib** (Golden Temple), fostering Sikh identity and growth.

• **Mughal Persecution -** Emperor Jahangir, viewing Sikhism's influence as a threat, falsely accused Guru Arjan Dev of supporting Prince Khusrau, initiating persecution.

• **Unimaginable Torture -** Imprisoned in Lahore, Guru Arjan Dev endured brutal torture, including sitting on a red-hot plate and boiling sand, yet remained steadfast in faith.

• **Sacrifice and Legacy -** He merged with the Divine in the Ravi River, becoming Sikhism's first martyr. His sacrifice inspired a shift towards a more militaristic approach (**Miri-Piri**).

• **Enduring Inspiration -** Guru Arjan Dev's legacy continues to inspire millions, symbolizing **resilience, faith, and ultimate sacrifice** for one's beliefs.

Polity & Governance

Bharatiya Bhasha Anubhag (BBA)

Recently, Union Home Minister inaugurated the BBA (Indian Languages Section) on June 6, 2025, in New Delhi, aiming to reduce reliance on foreign languages in Indian governance.

• **Implemented by -** Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)

• **Purpose -** To decrease the dominance of English in administration, promoting the use of mother tongues in decision-making and official communication.

• **Why Now?** The BBA, for which the Union Budget 2024-25 allocated ₹56 crore, was launched to empower regional languages and encourage decision-making in native tongues.

• **Historical Disparities -** Regional languages were often sidelined in national discourse. The BBA, supported by C-DAC, addresses this by enabling Centre-State communication in native languages, aligning with the National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on mother tongue-based administration.

• **Impact**- True potential is achieved when governance occurs in India's own languages, addressing language-based disparities.

International Relations and Issues

India-EAEU Free Trade Agreement Discussions Expected

Recent, Discussion concerning a free trade agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) countries are anticipated to commence this year, as stated by Andrey Sobolev, the Russian Trade Commissioner in India.

• **Eurasian Economic Union -** The EAEU is an international economic union of northern Eurasian countries. Established by a treaty on May 29, 2014, it succeeded the Eurasian Economic Community.

• **Principles -** The EAEU champions the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor. Its primary goals include boosting member states' competitiveness, fostering cooperation, and promoting stable development to enhance living standards.

• **Member States -** The union comprises five member states: Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia.

• **Governance Structure -** The EAEU's supreme authority is the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, formed by heads of member states.

• **Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) -** Based in Moscow, is the permanent supranational regulatory body. The Court of the EAEU, located in Minsk, ensures uniform application of treaties.

• **Distinctions from the EU -** Unlike the European Commission, the EEC has limited power, lacking the authority to bring non-compliant member states to court. Disputes are often resolved bilaterally. The EAEU also does not share a common currency, unlike the EU.

World Bank Finances Inga 3 Hydropower Project

The World Bank has approved $250 million in financing for the Inga 3 hydropower project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), despite civil society opposition and governance concerns

• **Grand Inga Project -** This hydroelectric project on the Congo River in the DRC is the world's largest proposed hydropower scheme. It's located 50 km upstream of the river's mouth

• **Project's Unique Site** - The site boasts exceptionally high average river flows, second only to the Amazon, and a natural 97-meter drop. This allows for diverse, lower-impact designs.

• **Enormous Power Potential** - The Grand Inga project could generate up to 40,000 megawatts (MW), more than double the power of China's Three Gorges Dam and over a third of Africa's current electricity production.

• **Phased Development** - With an estimated cost of $80 billion, the project will be developed in seven phases, starting with Inga 3.

• **Funding** - Is sourced from the World Bank, African Development Bank, and others. Inga 3, costing $14 billion, is projected to generate 4,800 MW.

• **Existing Infrastructure** - Inga 3 will be situated on the Inga Falls, already home to the operational Inga 1 (351 MW) and Inga 2 (1,424 MW) hydroelectric facilities, commissioned in 1972 and 1982 respectively.

Environment

Sindoor

On World Environment Day, the PM of India planted a **Sindoor** (Bixa orellana) sapling at his New Delhi residence, 7 Lok Kalyan Marg.

• **Sindoor Plant -** Known as **'Annatto'** in English, the Sindoor plant is a tropical shrub famous for its bright red seeds. Its globular, spiky red-brown seed pods grow in clusters.

• **Native Region and Cultivation -** Originally from **Brazil**, this plant now thrives in various tropical countries, including Peru, Mexico, Ecuador, Indonesia, India, and Kenya.

• **Ideal Growing Conditions -** Sindoor plants need a **frost-free, warm, and humid climate** with ample direct sunlight. They adapt to almost any soil type but prefer neutral to slightly alkaline conditions.

• **Diverse Applications -** The seeds yield a widely used dye in the **food, textile, paint, and cosmetic industries**. Its extracts are also a common industrial food coloring, adding yellow or orange hues to products like cheese and ice cream.

• **Traditional Use -** Traditionally, the plant's red-orange color has been used as a **cosmetic by tribal communities**.

• **New Flamingo Sanctuary**

• The Tamil Nadu government has officially designated a Greater Flamingo Sanctuary at Dhanushkodi in the Ramanathapuram district.

• **Location -** Situated within the ecologically sensitive Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, the sanctuary at Dhanushkodi.

• **Encompasses diverse** - Ecosystems, including mangroves, sand dunes, mudflats, and marshes.

• **Critical Flyway Stopover -** This newly declared sanctuary is a vital stopover along the Central Asian Flyway, crucial for thousands of migratory wetland birds, supporting 128 bird species, including Greater and Lesser Flamingos.

• **Ecological Significance -** The region boasts rich ecosystems, including mangrove forests like *Avicennia* and *Rhizophora*, which stabilize the coastline and provide essential habitats for marine life and nesting sea turtles**.**

• **Greater Flamingo** - Is a large wading bird, recognizable by its pink feathers. It is distributed across Africa, western Asia, and southern Europe, inhabiting shallow, saline wetlands**.**

• **Conservation Status -** The Greater Flamingo is listed as "Least Concern" by the IUCN and is under Schedule-II of the Wildlife Protection Act. Gujarat's state bird is the Greater Flamingo, and Kutch-Rann is known as India's flamingo capital.

Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam 2.0' Launched

On World Environment Day 2025, PM inaugurated the 2nd phase of the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign by planting a sapling at Mahavir Jayanti Park in New Delhi, urging citizens to plant trees in honor of their mothers.

• **Campaign's Goal** - Phase 2 of this nationwide initiative, which began on June 5, 2025, aims to plant an ambitious 10 crore trees across India between June 5 and September 30, 2025. It blends environmental activism with cultural sentiment.

• **Significance** - The campaign strengthens grassroots participation in environmental sustainability, boosting India's contribution to global climate change efforts.

• **Additional Green Initiatives** - PM Modi also flagged off 200 electric buses in Delhi. This move promotes green public transportation and actively combats urban air pollution.

Waste Picker App Launched on Environment Day

On World Environment Day, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched the Waste Picker Enumeration App under the National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem) NAMASTE Scheme.

• **Aiming** to - Empower waste pickers nationwide.

• **NAMASTE Scheme** - The NAMASTE Scheme a joint MoSJE and MoHUA initiative, launched in 2022, ensures dignity and safety for urban sanitation workers until 2026 across 500 cities.

• **Objectives** - Include achieving zero sanitation worker fatalities, ensuring skilled task performance, and providing alternative livelihoods, fostering worker collectivization into Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

• **Scheme Components** - NAMASTE provides Ayushman Bharat health insurance, livelihood assistance through counseling and training, and capital subsidies for sanitation machinery.

• **Waste Picker App's Purpose** - The app will profile 2.5 lakh waste pickers, providing formal identity, social protection, ID cards, health insurance, PPE, and skill development, integrating them into the circular economy.

• **Impact and Resources** - This initiative improves working conditions, enhances livelihood security, and strengthens waste picker collectives. "Resource Guide" and "Charting Change" were released to inform stakeholders about waste picker integration.

Poor Prisoner Scheme Funds

The Government of India is concerned about the underutilization of funds for the 'Support to Poor Prisoners' Scheme, launched in May 2023, to assist those unable to secure bail.

• **Aim** - This initiative provides financial aid to prisoners who cannot pay fines or bail, aiming to alleviate their financial burdens.

• **Implementation Framework** - The MHA issued SOPs, requiring district-level 'Empowered Committees' and state-level 'Oversight Committees' to sanction assistance.

• **Identification Process** - Jail authorities inform the District Legal Services Authority if undertrials aren't released within a week of bail, leading to financial status investigation and potential relief up to ₹40,000.

• **Exclusions Apply** - Prisoners accused under acts like the Prevention of Corruption Act and Prevention of Money Laundering Act are ineligible.

• **Impact on Overcrowding** - Effective implementation can reduce prison overcrowding, as undertrials contribute significantly to the national average occupancy rate exceeding 131%.

Science

Diphtheria Resurges in Europe

Western Europe is experiencing its largest diphtheria outbreak in 70 years, beginning in 2022 and primarily affecting **vulnerable populations**.

• **Diphtheria**, caused by *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*, is a highly contagious bacterial infection attacking the respiratory tract. It can cause severe complications due to toxins, with a 30% fatality rate.

• **Outbreak Snapshot -** Since 2022, Europe has seen 536 cases and three fatalities, mainly among young male **migrants**. Infections are linked to their journeys or temporary accommodations.

• **Impact on Vulnerable -** Limited healthcare access and vaccination gaps have disproportionately affected migrants and the homeless, compounding their risk.

• **Vaccination** - Is crucial for prevention. Globally, 16% of children were unvaccinated or under-vaccinated in 2023, highlighting a critical need for robust immunization.

• **Long-Term Concerns -** These outbreaks underscore the necessity of sustained public health efforts and high vaccination coverage to prevent the re-emergence of this preventable disease.

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