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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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SOURCES



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GS II

1. The poll promise of affordable housing

Source: The Hindu, Page 10

Prelims: PMAY-U and PMAY-G

Mains: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors

News: In the ongoing election campaign, among various poll promises are those pertaining to affordable housing.

Current housing scenario in India

- According to a Government of India report in 2012, an estimated 18.78 million more houses were required to cater to the housing demand in the country. India's urban housing shortage rose by 54% from 2012 to become 29 million in 2018.
- As per the government's definition, affordable housing properties are those with an area not more than 60 sq.m, with the price capped at ₹45 lakh.
- The share of affordable housing in overall sales during the first half of 2023 saw a sharp decline, to approximately 20%.
- Reasons:
 - High cost of land and construction materials
 - The low-income class cannot afford the house unless the charges are subsidised.
 - Urban congestion and lack of proper housing

Policies Implemented

- Right to housing: Right to life under Article 21 by the Supreme Court.
- 1985: Indira Awaas Yojana, focussed on Urban Housing.
- 2005: Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)
- 2008: Urban housing interventions such as the Rajiv Awas Yojana and Rajiv Rinn Yojna.
- The Housing for All schemes (2015-22) were launched with two wings under these: Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin) and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban).

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U)	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G)
Launched in June 2015 to tackle urban homelessness.	Launched in 2016 to tackle rural homelessness.
The PMAY-U promised houses for 1.18 crore families by December 2024.	The PMAY-G promised houses for 2.95 crore families by March 2024.
It extended up to December 31, 2024 – with all verticals except Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme – to complete houses sanctioned up to March 31, 2022.	The scheme offers ₹1.3 lakh for each unit constructed under the scheme, with a 60:40 funding split between the Centre and State.
As of March 2024, it has only achieved around 67% of its target, that is, around 80 lakh.	As of April 30, 2024, a total of 2.6 crore houses have been completed.



GS III

2. Panel flags poor progress in reversing coal mining damage in Meghalaya

Source: The Hindu, Page 4

Prelims: Rat-Hole Mining

Mains: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation

News: High Court of Meghalaya's appointed panel flagged the lack of progress in restoring the environment damaged by rat-hole coal mining in Meghalaya.

Rat-Hole Mining

- Rat-hole mining involves digging small tunnels large enough for a person to crawl through to extract coal.
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned rat-hole mining in 2014, and retained the ban in 2015. The ban was on grounds of the practice being unscientific and unsafe for workers.



Issues due to Rat-Hole Mining

- Piling of coals along roadside have caused severe issues of air and water pollution.
- Rat-hole mining in Meghalaya had caused the water in the Kopili river (it flows through Meghalaya and Assam) to turn acidic.
- Flooding of mines during the rainy season, and sudden collapse due to unscientific digging has caused loss of life to individuals.

Suggestions by Panel

- Steps need to be taken by the departments concerned for restoring the mining-affected ecology of Meghalaya with ₹400 crore in the MEPRF and another ₹100 crore with the Central Pollution Control Board.
- Suggested conduct of the drone survey (to locate deposits of coal illegally mined) immediately after the completion of the transportation of re-assessed or re-verified inventoried coal.



3. NH construction slows as funds go scarce, hybrid annuity model falters

Source: The Hindu, Page 13

Prelims: About Hybrid Annuity Model, EPC and BOT Models

Mains: Investment Models.

News: From 34 km per day in FY24, the pace of national highway construction is expected to slow to 31 km per day in FY25.

Reasons for Delay

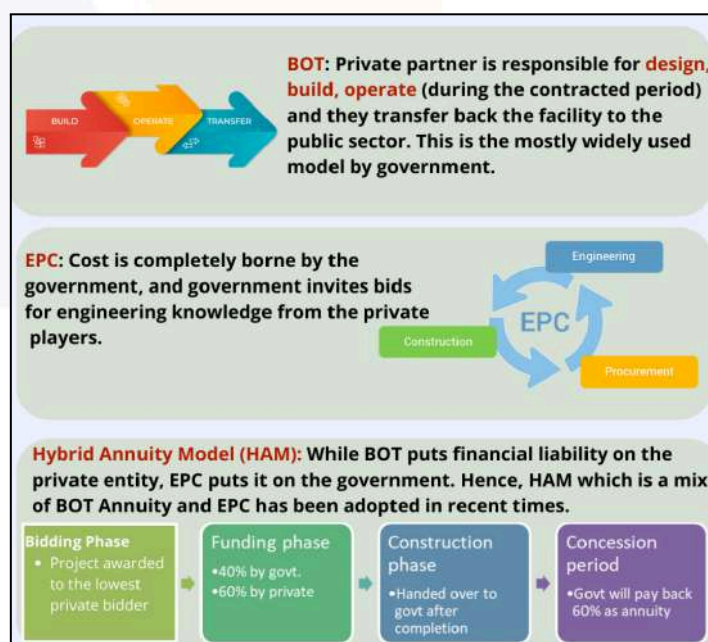
- Influx of mid-level developers with moderate credit profiles.
- Drastically expanded pool of bidders led to lower bids, but heightened the execution risks.
- Projects under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) haven't taken off as anticipated
- Land acquisition hurdles and delays in handover of the contract letter to the successful bidder.
- Unexpected events such as COVID-19, post-bidding commodity price hikes, prolonged monsoons, and stringent debt terms.

Suggestions

- Stepping up project supervision
- Exploring alternative funding sources such as multilateral organisations
- Simplifying approval processes
- Addressing regulatory hurdles
- Nurturing collaboration among stakeholders

About Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM)

- In technical terms, hybrid annuity stands for a combination in which the government makes payment in a fixed amount in the beginning and then in a variable amount at a later stage.
- The Indian model HAM is a combination of BOT and EPC Models.
- The model has been introduced by the government in order to overcome the limitations of the previous PPP models in road construction.
- The government will give 40% of the Project Cost as Construction Support during the construction period, and the remaining 60% as annuity payments to the concessionaire throughout the operations period, plus interest.



4. How is India streamlining the pharma sector?

Source: The Hindu, Sunday Edition

Prelims: Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), India's Pharma Sector

Mains: Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth.

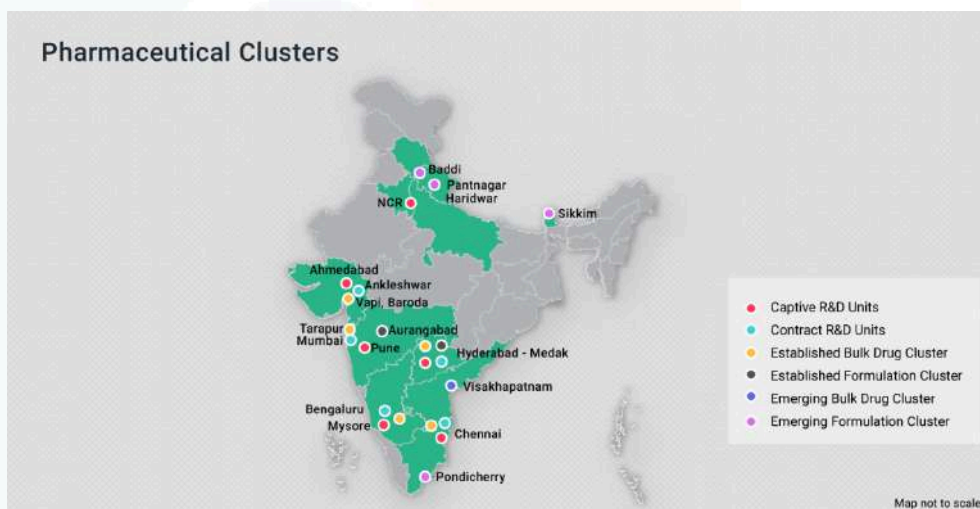
News: India's drug regulator, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), has withdrawn powers delegated to State licensing authorities to issue NOCs (no objection certificates) for manufacture of unapproved, banned or new drugs for export purposes.

India's Role in Pharma Sector

- The Indian pharma industry ranks 3rd globally in pharmaceutical production by volume.
- The Indian pharmaceutical industry supplies 62% of the global demand for vaccines and is a leading supplier of DPT (diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus), BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin, used primarily against tuberculosis), and measles vaccines.
- At least 70% of WHO's vaccines are sourced from India.

Recent Steps Taken

- The Indian government cracks down on 18 drug companies for poor quality manufacturing.
- Direction by CDSCO to pharmaceutical companies to get their NOCs from the zonal offices of CDSCO online before applying for manufacturing licence.



Challenges faced

- Tackling intellectual property rights
- Lack of research and development
- A series of scandals, including a WHO investigation into four contaminated cough syrups.

Suggestions

- Understanding the political, economic, technological, environmental, and legal factors
- Adapting to changes in external factors
- Navigating regulatory requirements
- Leveraging technology advancements
- Aligning their strategies with the evolving needs of the pharmaceutical industry



Editorials, Opinions and Ideas

5. Investment lessons from the India-EFTA trade deal

Source: The Hindu, Page 8

The article discusses the recent Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed between the India and European Free Trade Association (EFTA), comprising Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. It forms an important part of your International Relation part under General Studies Paper II.

What makes this FTA different from others?

- The India-EFTA FTA includes a detailed investment chapter, which is missing in the other recent Indian FTAs.
- EFTA countries are legally obligated to make an honest effort to invest \$100 billion and generate one million jobs in India.
- India has agreed to include issues such as environment and labour, which it has traditionally opposed incorporating in trade agreements.



Divergence between Trade and Investment

- There is an inextricable linkage between trade and investment.
- FTAs routinely contain binding rules on both trade and investment. India's FTAs signed in the first decade of this century with countries such as Japan, Korea, Malaysia and Singapore are based on this economic logic.
- India departed from this model as part of its FTA 2.0 approach. India decoupled international trade law from international investment law. This is evident in its FTAs with Australia, Mauritius, and the UAE.
- India-EFTA FTA contains an investment chapter within the trade agreement. Hence, it can be said that India has decided to move away from the decoupling of trade and investment law in its FTAs and is going back to the previous model.

Suggestions

- India needs a clear FTA policy, especially in dealing with international trade and foreign investment laws.
- India should negotiate trade and investment as part of one comprehensive economic treaty.
- India should consider expanding the scope of investment issues from mere facilitation to effective protection, with an efficacious dispute settlement mechanism under international law.



InBrief

6. Govt. to spend ₹2 cr. per km on roads along China border

Source: The Hindu, Page 4

News: The government is likely to spend over ₹2 crore on each kilometre of road to be constructed along the China border in Uttarakhand and Sikkim under the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP).

Vibrant Village Programme (VVP)

- It is a Centrally sponsored scheme, announced in the Union Budget 2022-23 (to 2025-26) for development of villages on the northern border, thus improving the quality of life of people living in identified border villages.
- It will cover the border areas of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Ladakh.
- It will cover 2,963 villages with 662 of them to be covered in the first phase.
- Vibrant Village Action Plans will be created by the district administration with the help of Gram Panchayats.
- There will not be overlap with the Border Area Development Programme.

7. What is DigiLocker?

Source: The Hindu, Page 11

News: Students from the State Board of Tamil Nadu can get their 2024 results from DigiLocker, this facility is coming soon to the students of the CBSE board.

About DigiLocker

- DigiLocker is a flagship initiative launched in 2015 of the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) under Digital India programme. DigiLocker aims at 'Digital Empowerment' of citizens by providing access to authentic digital documents to citizen's digital document wallet.
- According to Information Technology (Preservation and Retention of Information by Intermediaries providing Digital Locker facilities) Rules 2016, issued documents in the DigiLocker system are deemed to be at par with original physical documents.
- DigiLocker has standard security measures in place including 2048 Bit RSA SSL encryption, multi-factor authentication (OTP verification), consent systems, timed log outs, and security audits.



8. United Nations Forum on Forests

Source: PIB

News: India participated in the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), held at the UN Headquarters in New York from May 6th to 10th May 2024.

About United Nations Forum on Forests

- The UN Forum on Forests is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with universal membership.
- Since its establishment in 2000, the Forum has set many milestones including the first UN Forest Instrument in 2007, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) in 2015, and adoption of the first UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 and its six Global Forest Goals in 2017. 2024 marks the 19th session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF19).
- The key outcomes of the session will be a High-Level Segment declaration and an omnibus resolution, which will include the outcome of the midterm review as well as the new Quadrennial Programme of Work of the Forum for 2025-2028.

9. P. vranovensis

Source: The Hindu, Page 7

News: Researchers from Princeton University in the U.S. reported that after *C. elegans* worms ate a disease-causing strain of bacteria, its offsprings inherited the 'knowledge' to avoid making the same mistake — up to four generations.

About Bateria P. vranovensis

- *Pseudomonas vranovensis* is a disease-causing bacterium found in *C. elegans*'s natural environment.
- *P. vranovensis* makes a small RNA molecule called sRNA. When the worms ingest this strain, they also take in the sRNA. The sRNA then alters the worm's feeding behaviour such that, from that point on, the worms 'know' to avoid feeding on this bacterium.

10. Gold ETFs see first outflow after March 2023

Source: IE, Page 11

News: Gold Exchange Traded Funds (ETF) witnessed a net outflow of Rs 396 crore last month, making it the first with- drawal after March 2023.

About Exchange Traded Funds(ETFs)

- A collection of securities that trades on an exchange similar to stocks is known as an exchange-traded fund (ETF).
- The first ETF was the SPDR S&P 500 ETF (SPY), which tracks the S&P 500 Index.

Pros and Cons of Exchange-Traded Funds	
	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower costs Diversification and risk management Tax benefits Easy to trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially higher costs Limited control Tracking error



Daily Quiz

1. Recently, Affordable housing schemes were in the news. In this respect, consider the following statements:

1. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) was launched in 2016.
2. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Rural (PMAY-R) was launched in 2015.

Which of the above given statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

2. "This is an interstate river in Northeast India that flows through the states of Meghalaya and Assam and is the largest south bank tributary of the Brahmaputra in Assam. Recently, Rat-hole mining in Meghalaya has caused the water in this river to turn acidic." Identify the river.

- A. Kopili
- B. Umngot
- C. Digaru
- D. Kishnai

3. Which of the following can be the reasons for delay in national highway construction in India:

1. Influx of mid-level developers with moderate credit profiles.
2. Reduced expanded pool of bidders led to higher bids.
3. Projects under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) not taken off
4. Land acquisition hurdles
5. Delays in handover of the contract letter to the successful bidder.

Choose the correct options:

- A. 1, 2, 3, 4 only
- B. 1, 3, 4, 5 only
- C. 1, 2, 3, 5 only
- D. 1, 2, 3, 4 and

4. Recently, Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), has withdrawn powers delegated to State licensing authorities to issue NOCs (no objection certificates) for manufacture of unapproved, banned or new drugs for export purposes. Consider the following statements regarding The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation(CDSCO)

1. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation(CDSCO) is under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
2. CDSCO is responsible for approval of Drugs, Conduct of Clinical Trials, and laying down the standards for Drugs.

Which of the above given statements is/are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

5. Recently, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was signed between the India and European Free Trade Association (EFTA). In this regard, choose the correct option that includes the group of countries which are part of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

- A. Iceland, Liechtenstein, Germany and Switzerland
- B. Poland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland
- C. Iceland, United Kingdom, Norway and Switzerland
- D. Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland



6. Recently, the Government is planning to construct infrastructure along the China border in Uttarakhand and Sikkim under the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP). In this regard, choose the incorrect option:

- A. Vibrant Village Programme is a Centrally sponsored scheme, announced in the Union Budget 2022-23.
- B. Vibrant Village Programme will cover the border areas of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Ladakh.
- C. Vibrant Village Action Plans will be created by the district administration with the help of Gram Panchayats.
- D. Vibrant Village Programme will work in coordination with the Border Area Development Programme.

7. Consider the following statements regarding DigiLocker:

- 1. It is a flagship initiative launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY).
- 2. Documents issued in the DigiLocker system are deemed to be at par with original physical documents.

Which of the above given statements is/are incorrect?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

8. Recently, the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) was held at the UN Headquarters in New York. United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) acts as a functional commission of which of the following organisations?

- A. United Nations Economic and Social Council
- B. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- C. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- D. United Nations Division for Sustainable Development

9. Which of the following terms correctly defines "P. vranovensis", recently in the news?

- A. A discovered fossil of dinosaur
- B. A newly discovered Beetle species
- C. A disease causing bacteria
- D. A iron digesting stomach enzyme

10. "It refers to investment funds that are traded on stock exchanges, holding assets like stocks, commodities, or bonds. It allows investors to diversify their portfolios with ease, as they can buy and sell shares throughout the trading day. It's a popular choice for both individual and institutional investors seeking market exposure."

Which of the following correctly describes the above description?

- A. External Commercial Borrowings
- B. Commercial Bills
- C. Exchange Traded Funds
- D. Participatory Notes

Solutions

Answer 1: D

Solution 1:

- Statement 1 is incorrect: Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) was launched in 2015.

- Statement 2 is incorrect: Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Rural (PMAY-R) was launched in 2015.

Hence, Option D is correct.



Answer 2: A

Solution 2:

- The description matches the river Kopili. It was recently in the news due to its acidic nature, caused primarily by rat hole mining in Meghalaya region.

Hence, Option A is correct.

Answer 3: B

Solution 3:

Reasons for Delay in Highway Projects

- Influx of mid-level developers with moderate credit profiles.
- Drastically expanded pool of bidders led to lower bids, but heightened the execution risks.
- Projects under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) haven't taken off as anticipated
- Land acquisition hurdles and delays in handover of the contract letter to the successful bidder.
- Unexpected events such as COVID-19, post-bidding commodity price hikes, prolonged monsoons, and stringent debt terms.

Hence, option B is correct.

Answer 4: C

Solution 4:

- Statement 1 is correct: The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) is under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- Statement 2 is correct: CDSCO is responsible for approval of Drugs, Conduct of Clinical Trials, and laying down the standards for Drugs.

Hence, option C is correct.

Answer 5: D

Solution 5:

- European Free Trade Association (EFTA) consists of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland

Hence, option D is correct.

Answer 6: D

Solution 6:

- Vibrant Village Programme will not overlap with the Border Area Development Programme.

Hence, option D is correct.

Answer 7: D

Solution 7:

- Statement 1 is incorrect: DigiLocker launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY).
- Statement 2 is incorrect: Documents issued in the DigiLocker system are deemed to be at par with original physical documents.

Hence, option D is correct.

Answer 8: A

Solution 8:

- The UN Forum on Forests is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with universal membership.

Hence, option A is correct.

Answer 9: C

Solution 9:

- *Pseudomonas vranovensis* is a disease-causing bacterium found in *C. elegans*'s natural environment.

Hence, Option C is correct.

Answer 10: C

Solution 10:

- Exchange Traded Fund refers to investment funds that are traded on stock exchanges, holding assets like stocks, commodities, or bonds. It allows investors to diversify their portfolios with ease, as they can buy and sell shares throughout the trading day. It's a popular choice for both individual and institutional investors seeking market exposure.

Hence, option C is correct.





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