

PLUTUS IAS



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1.WHO to celebrate World Antimicrobial Awareness Week

The World Health Organization is to celebrate Antimicrobial Awareness Week between November 18, 2020 and November 24, 2020. The week aims to increase awareness of global antimicrobial resistance. Also, it encourages best practices among health workers, general public and policy makers to stop the spread of drug resistance infections. This year, the World Antimicrobial Awareness Week is to be celebrated under the theme

Theme: United to Preserve antimicrobials.

What is Antimicrobial resistance?

The Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) occurs when parasites, fungi, virus and bacteria no longer respond to medicines. This makes it harder to treat as the risk of disease spread increases.

AMR in India

The main issue in India is that the antibiotics enter the food system through livestock. This further adds up to AMR in the country. This is more common in dairy and livestock.

Dairy

In 2018, the FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) found that 77 out of the 100 tested milk samples from both organised and unorganised sector had antibiotic residues beyond permissible levels. Farmers use antibiotics in cattle mainly to treat Mastitis disease which is a very common disease.

About Mastitis

The disease is caused when the animal sits on an unclean floor immediately after being milked. Also, Mastitis can occur if unclean milking equipment is used. The microorganisms enter the cattle's body through the udder. As farmers treat the animal

themselves to avoid the trouble of taking them to hospital, they tend use antibiotics frequently. By this, antibiotics enter the food system easily.

Poultry

The six important poultry producing states in India are Karnataka, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. The major poultry companies in these regions mix antibiotics in their feed to prevent diseases. There are no regulatory laws in India as far as feeds are concerned. Therefore, the manufacturers are free to mix any quantity of antibiotics with the feed.

Laws on Antibiotics in India

The antibiotics in India are under the purview of Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO). Also, under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, the antibiotics are placed under Schedule H. This makes it mandatory that the drugs can be sold only under prescription.

2.WHO: For the first time commits to eliminate cervical cancer globally

During its closing day of the 73rd World Health Assembly, on November 17, 2020, the World Health Organization released the “Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer”. The international organization aims to reduce more than 40% of new cases by 2050 by screening, vaccination and treatment.

Background

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer among women in the world. In the backdrop of COVID-19, the fight against cervical cancer has become challenging. The COVID-19 has eliminated the focus from other diseases and has interrupted vaccination.

What are the targets set?

The WHO has set to achieve the following targets under its “Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer” by 2030

- To vaccinate 90% of girls of age 15 years with the Human Papillomavirus Vaccine
- To screen 70% women of age between 35 years and 45 years using high-performance tests
- To identify at least 90% of women with cervical cancer disease.

Financial Estimates

The strategy adopted also stresses on investing in interventions to meet targets that can generate societal and economic returns by supporting the cervical cancer programme. According to the WHO, around 3.25 USD will be returned to the economy for every 1 USD invested in the cervical cancer programme.

Significance

According to WHO, the number of new cervical cancer cases are to increase from 570,000 to 700,000 between 2018 and 2030. Also, the annual number of deaths are to increase from 311,000 to 400,000. The strategy adopted will help reduce the number of cases.

Cervical Cancer in India

In India, cervical cancer contributes to 6% to 29% of all cancers in women. Also, India accounts to one-fourth of world cervical cancer deaths.

The National Cancer Registry Programme that was established by Indian Council of Medical Research acts as a surveillance system for all cancers in India.

HPV Vaccine in India

The Bivalent and Quadrivalent HPV vaccines were licensed in 2008. The nonavalent was licensed in 2018. The demonstration projects of HPV vaccines were first started in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. However, due to a few deaths in these projects, it was suspended.

Since 2016, the HPV vaccines were introduced in Punjab, Sikkim, Delhi.

3. Why did India not sign the world largest RCEP trade deal?

China and other fourteen Asian countries signed the world largest trade pact under the RCEP of ASEAN grouping. The agreement left the doors open for India. However, in 2019, India walked out of the agreement.

Why did India not sign the agreement?

- According to India, the deal does not address its demands adequately. This includes issues of market access along with a protected list of goods and services that shield the domestic economy. Under the RCEP deal, China is the major economy. This will pave the way for cheap Chinese imports to enter India. Because, if India signs the deal, it will have to remove duties that are currently imposed. This will result in mass dumping of Chinese goods and will ultimately affect domestic production. India is already facing a trade deficit of 5.8 billion USD (as of June 2020) with China.
- India was also skeptical about the fact that, under the deal, India has to open 74% of its market to ASEAN countries. On the other hand, richer economies like Indonesia are opening only 50% of their markets to India.
- Also, the RCEP deal will affect the dairy and agricultural sector of India to large extent. Countries like New Zealand are producing nine times more dairy

products than its own requirement. This will make it easier for the country to make their dairy exports to India cheaper affecting the domestic milk industry.

Demands of India rejected by the pact

India wanted RCEP to exclude the Most-Favoured Nation obligation. India demanded the exclusion especially for the countries with which it had border disputes.

How will the decision impact India?

- The experts have raised concerns that the decision will impact the bilateral trade ties of India with the RCEP members. This is mainly because the members might incline to focus on bolstering economic ties within the bloc.
- There are also concerns that the decision might impact the Australia-India-Japan network in the Indo-Pacific.
- India has trade deficit with 11 out of 15 RCEP countries. It has been facing difficulties to leverage its existing bilateral FTAs (Free Trade Agreements) with the RCEP members in order to increase the exports.

Way Forward

The doors are still open for India to join the RCEP deal. And Japan had a major role for RCEP to keep the doors open for India. The possible alternative option for India is to renew its existing bilateral Free Trade Agreements with its RCEP members. Currently, India has FTAs with members such as South Korea, ASEAN bloc and Japan. It is negotiating with members such as Australia and New Zealand. India and Singapore have completed two reviews of CECA (Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement). In 2016, India and Bhutan renewed the Trade Commerce and Transit. Also, in 2016, India and Nepal renewed the India-Nepal Treaty of Trade. Eight rounds of negotiations have been completed to review India-Korea CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement).

4.What is mRNA Technology used in COVID-19 vaccines for the first time?

Moderna, a US Biotech firm announced that its COVID-19 vaccines are 94.5% effective. The announcement comes in days after Pfizer released results showing 90% effectiveness in its own vaccine. Both the companies use mRNA technology in their vaccines. This is the first time the mRNA technology is being used to create vaccines.

How mRNA vaccines work?

Concept

The mRNA vaccine forces the healthy cells of the human body to generate copies of viral proteins. This in turn prompts the immune system to create antibodies to fight against the spike proteins (COVID-19).

Working

The mRNA sequence generated by the scientists using the technology has been coded with spike protein of COVID-19 virus. This RNA sequence is laid in a lipid coating and is injected into human body. As it is injected and arrives inside the human body, the cells read the information in mRNA sequence. They then begin to generate copies of the viral proteins. This in turn forces the immune system to produce antibodies against the spike proteins. Thus, the individual is protected when a real virus enters the body. It is to be noted that the COVID-19 enters the human body through its spike proteins. Thus, by preventing the spike proteins from entering the human body, the entire virus is prevented.

Other Vaccine Categories

While the vaccines of Moderna and Pfizer belong to replicating viral vector category, there are other types such as non-replicating viral vector category. For instance, the vaccines of AstraZeneca and Oxford University belong to the non-replicating viral vector category. These vaccines use a different virus. A weakened version of Adenovirus (a common cold virus) is used to carry the spike proteins. Adenovirus usually infect Chimpanzees. Moderna and Pfizer have developed the vaccine by genetically modifying the Adenovirus.

They are inactivated COVID-19 vaccines that were made by killing COVID-19 virus. After killing, the virus loses its capability to replicate or infect. However, their proteins are intact (spike protein in the case of COVID-19). These proteins are used to create the vaccine. These are DNA vaccines.

5.COVAXIN of Bharat Biotech enters Phase III trials: Largest COVID-19 clinical trial of India.

Bharat Biotech announced the commencement of Phase III trials of COVAXIN vaccines in India. The trials will involve 26,000 volunteers. It is to be held in partnership with the Indian Council of Medical Research. The trials are the largest clinical trials that are conducted for COVID-19 vaccine in the country.

Key Highlights

The trial is also the first phase III trail for a COVID-19 vaccine in the country. The trial has been approved by the Drugs Controller General of India. Under the trial, the volunteers will receive two intramuscular injections at a time gap of 28 days.

About COVAXIN

COVAXIN was indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with National Institute of Virology and Indian Council of Medical Research. The vaccine was developed at a Biosafety Level 3 biocontainment facility.

COVID-19 vaccine development in other countries

United States

Moderna

The Moderna biotech firm of United States is developing COVID-19 vaccine using messenger RNA or mRNA. It is to be noted that mRNA has not been approved for any disease so far. On November 16, 2020, Moderna claimed that its vaccine is 90% efficient.

Pfizer

The US Government has signed a deal with the company to buy 100 million doses for 2 billion USD. It is expected that Pfizer will distribute 1.3 billion doses by the end of 2021.

Both Moderna and Pfizer use mRNA technology. This is the first time the technology is being used in generating a vaccine.

Novavax

The Novavax is making a COVID-19 vaccine that consists of two shots and the shots are given at a time gap of 21 days.

Johnson and Johnson

The biotech firm is expected to produce 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2021. This includes 100 million doses for the US as well.

Russia

Sputnik V is the Russian vaccine that is under clinical trials in several countries including India. It is backed by Russian Direct Investment Fund

China

Three Chinese companies namely Sinovac, Sinopharm and Casino Biologics are developing COVID-19 vaccines.

6. Why did the Peruvian President Manuel Merino resign?

The Peruvian President Manuel Merino was forced out of power (meaning forced to resign).

What is the issue?

On November 9, 2020, Martin Vizcarra, predecessor of Manuel was impeached by the Peruvian Legislature. He was impeached on the grounds of unproven charges of corruption.

Vizcarra is not affiliated with any political party. Vizcarra had promised an anti-graft agenda that initiated reforms to tackle corruption in the judicial and legislative branches of the Peruvian Government. This was basically seen as threats by most of the political parties in the country.

Also, Vizcarra dissolved the 130-member unicameral legislative body in 2019 that triggered constitutional crisis in the country. This led to parliamentary elections in

January 2020. In the elections, Peru saw historic division of parties. In the end, no party received more than 11% vote in the elections.

Since the elections, Peruvian Congress had sought to remove Vizcarra from power. With Vizcarra gone, Manuel Merino, the Congress chief assumed presidency.

Peruvian Government

Peru is a unitary presidential democratic republic. It follows multi-party system.

- **Unitary:** It means the Central Government is ultimately supreme. India is unitary.
- **Presidential:** The President is the head of the government. He leads an executive branch separately. This is isolated from the legislative branch
- **Representative Democracy:** It is also called representative government or indirect democracy. Here the elected officials represent group of people. India, USA, Canada are representative democracies of the world.

Constitution of Peru

The current constitution of Peru was drafted and enacted in 1993 after the constitutional crisis in 1992. The current constitution gives more powers to the president.

Voting

Peru follows a compulsory voting system. Meaning, if a citizen belonging to eligible age of voting (18-70 years) fails to cast his or her vote, he is punishable under law.

India-Peru

India and Peru established diplomatic relations in 1963. India's interests in Peru increased after Peru became one of the fastest growing Latin American countries in 1990s.

6.WPI inflation at 1.48% in October 2020; Increased for third consecutive month

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) increased to 1.48% in October 2020. This was the highest in the past eight months.

Key Highlights

The inflation rate based on WPI Food Index fell from 6.92% in September 2020 to 5.78% in October 2020. The WPI manufacturing increased to 2.12% in October 2020 as compared to 1.61% in September 2020.

RBI views on current inflation

According to RBI, the current inflation is unrelenting. The apex bank believes that the recent measures of Government of India such as imposition of stock limits on onion traders, temporary reduction of import duties on pulses and imposition of stock limits

on imports of onions and potatoes have not kept the prices under check. Also, RBI predicts that there are possibilities for collapse of external demand due to second COVID-19 wave globally. This will further affect the exports.

Wholesale Price Index

- It represents the price of wholesale goods. It mainly focuses on goods traded between corporations. The main objective of WPI is to monitor price drifts. It helps to assess microeconomic and macroeconomic conditions of the economy.
- India faced the highest inflation rate of 34.68% in September 1974.
- The WPI is released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- The base year of Wholesale Price Index is 2011-12. Earlier it was 2004-05. It was revised in 2017.

What does WPI reveal?

When there is an upward surge in WPI, it indicates an inflationary pressure in the economy. When there is a downward surge, it says that the economy of deflating.

What are the major components of WPI?

The primary articles used to calculate WPI are divided into Food Articles and Non-Food Articles. The Food Articles include paddy, cereals, wheat, vegetables, milk, fruits, eggs, fish, etc. The Non-food Articles are minerals, oil seeds and crude petroleum. Apart from these, the WPI basket also includes fuel and power, manufactured goods. The manufactured goods include apparels, textiles, paper, plastic, chemicals, metals, cement and many more. Also the manufactured goods basket includes tobacco products, sugar, animal oils, etc.