



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper - III

- WPI quickens to 8-month high
- Moderna says its vaccine is 94.5% effective

Prelims

- What's behind the conflict between Ethiopian govt. and Tigray rebels?
- GAIL completes Kochi-Mangaluru pipeline



WPI quickens to 8-month high

GS III: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

India's wholesale price inflation quickened to the highest level in eight months, reaching 1.48% in October 2020 as per provisional data, compared with 0% in October 2019 and 1.32% in September this year.

Highlights:

1. The WPI Food Index inflation slowed from 6.92% in September 2020 to 5.78% in October 2020, with vegetable inflation cooling down to 25.23% from 36.5% in September. Inflation in potato prices touched 107.7%, while onions registered 8.5% inflation in October.
2. August marked the first month since March that the WPI clocked positive growth, which was considered a sign of an industrial recovery with producers' pricing power returning.
3. October's numbers suggest that this trend has strengthened with manufactured group inflation hitting a 19-month high of 2.1%, and core inflation accelerated to the highest level in 18 months at 1.7%, according to a note by India Ratings and Research.

'Not yet a recovery'

1. Increase in core inflation suggests an improvement in demand conditions, which have improved after [the] COVID-related lockdown was lifted.
2. However, it will be too early to term this as a general recovery; a large part of this is due to festival-related demand.
3. Rising retail food inflation and declining wholesale food inflation is 'a nightmare for policymakers'.

Prelims:

1. WPI basics, WPI vs CPI, Monetary Policy



Prelims 2020:

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. The weightage of food in Consumer Price Index(CPI) is higher than that in Wholesale Price Index(WPI).
2. The WPI does not capture changes in the prices of services, which CPI does.
3. The Reserve Bank of India has now adopted WPI as its key measure of inflation and to decide on changing the key policy rates.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Moderna says its vaccine is 94.5% effective

GS III: Awareness in the fields of Biotechnology

Drugmaker Moderna on Monday announced that its coronavirus vaccine was 94.5% effective, based on an early look at the results from its large, continuing study.

Highlights:

1. Researchers said the results were better than they had dared to imagine. But the vaccine will not be widely available for months, probably not until spring.
2. Moderna is the second company to report preliminary data on an apparently successful vaccine, offering hope in a surging pandemic that has infected more than 53 million people worldwide and killed more than 1.2 million. Pfizer, in collaboration with BioNTech, was the first, reporting a week ago that its vaccine was more than 90% effective.
3. Longer shelf life: Moderna also said its vaccine has a longer shelf life under refrigeration and at room temperature than previously reported, which should make it easier to store and use.



4. Pfizer and Moderna each announced the findings in news releases, not in peer-reviewed scientific journals, and the companies have not yet disclosed the detailed data that would allow outside experts to evaluate their claims. Therefore, the results cannot be considered conclusive.

A new faster way of making vaccines: mRNA Vaccines

The companies' products open the door to an entirely new way of creating vaccines — and creating them fast. Both use a synthetic version of coronavirus genetic material, called messenger RNA or mRNA, to programme a person's cells to churn out many copies of a fragment of the virus. That fragment sets off alarms in the immune system and stimulates it to attack, should the real virus try to invade.

Several unknowns and Concerns

1. It will be important to determine whether the vaccines work equally well in older and younger people, experts say.
2. Researchers also want to know if the vaccines prevent people from spreading the virus — an ideal result that could help quash the pandemic.
3. Another big unknown is how long the immunity provided by the vaccines will last.
4. An additional concern is that the vaccines must be stored and transported at low temperatures — minus 20 degree Celsius for Moderna, and minus 70 degree Celsius for Pfizer — which could complicate their distribution.
5. But on Monday, Moderna said researchers had found that its vaccine had a longer shelf life in the refrigerator than previously thought: 30 days, not seven. And it will last 12 hours at room temperature, the company said.
6. So far, studies of the two vaccines have not found serious side effects, but participants have reported sore arms, fatigue, fever and joint and muscle aches that last for a day or two.

Mains:

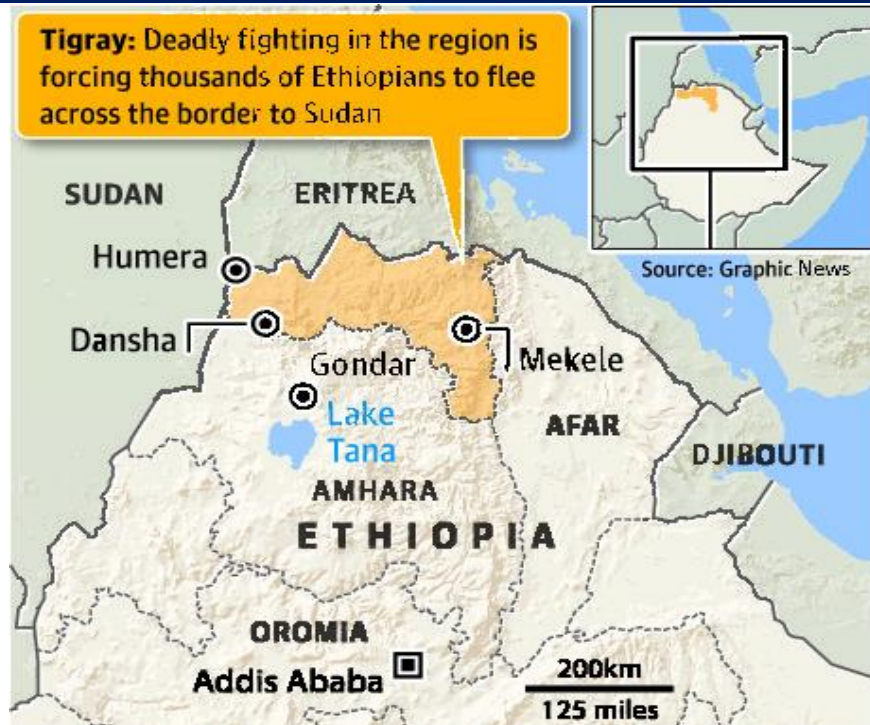
1. mRNA vaccines basics, the potential for Future.



What's behind the conflict between Ethiopian govt. and Tigray rebels?

Prelims

Ethiopia's Nobel Prize-winning Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed started a military operation in the rebellious Tigray region earlier this month. Mr Abiy has said it would be a limited campaign focusing on the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the militia-cum-political party that runs the



northern region. However, almost two weeks into the conflict, Ethiopia risks falling into an ethnic civil war with regional implications.

TPLF

The TPLF was founded in 1975 as a resistance army of the Tigrayan people against the military dictatorship. The TPLF played a crucial role in ousting the junta and they were welcomed as national heroes in 1991. TPLF leader Meles Zenawi took over as the interim President in 1991 and became the first elected Prime Minister in 1995. He is largely seen as the architect of the country's ethno-federal system and remained in power till 2012.

But over the years, the government led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition put together by Mr. Zenawi was accused of being increasingly authoritarian. In 2018, the EPRDF chose Mr. Abiy, a former military intelligence officer, to lead the government amid growing protests and a political deadlock.



Cracks in Ethno-Federal Arrangement

Though the EPRDF provided a stable rule with high economic growth for 17 years, there was mounting criticism against the country's ethno-federal arrangement. The Tigray people make up roughly 6% of the population, while the Oromos have a 34% share and the Amharas 27%. While the TPLF controlled the levers of power through the EPRDF, the Oromos alleged marginalisation.

As Prime Minister, Mr Abiy took a host of steps to cut the outsized influence of the TPLF in the government. He purged TPLF functionaries from key government posts, released political prisoners (jailed by the TPLF-led government) and promised freer media. He reached out to Eritrea, a sworn enemy of the TPLF, which shares a long border with the Tigray region.

Mr Abiy, the country's first Oromo leader, claimed that his actions are not driven by ethnic calculations but rather aimed at addressing the historic power imbalance in the country and making peace with the neighbours. But the TPLF saw his moves as hostile.

War begins

The tensions were building up for a while. When Mr Abiy formed a new political coalition, the Prosperity Party, all constituents of the EPRDF, except the TPLF, joined the new platform. The TPLF saw the formation of a new party as an attempt by Mr. Abiy to consolidate more power in hands. The party's leadership shifted from Addis Ababa to Mekele, the Tigray regional capital.

In August, when Mr Abiy's government decided to postpone parliamentary elections, citing COVID-19, the TPLF openly challenged the decision. They accused the Prime Minister of power grab and went ahead holding elections in the region in defiance of the federal government. Then on November 3, TPLF militants attacked a federal military command in the Tigray region and captured military hardware and equipment, prompting Mr Abiy to declare the military operation.



GAIL completes Kochi-Mangaluru pipeline

Prelims

The much-delayed Kochi-Mangaluru natural gas pipeline project is finally ready for commissioning as GAIL India has completed the final 540-metre treacherous stretch across the Chandragiri river in northern Kerala, according to a senior company official.

Highlights:

1. With the commissioning of the pipeline, gas demand in Kerala will touch 80-90 million cubic metres per annum from 60 million cubic metres now. Apart from huge environmental gains, the State can gain monetarily as it can get up to ₹1,000 crores by way of taxes alone.
2. The pipeline would supply gas to all seven districts it passed through in Kerala — Ernakulam, Thrissur, Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasargod — and the hilly Wayanad district.

