



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper II

- Cannot stop reports on court observations: SC

GS Paper III

- ICMR to get a royalty from the sale of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin
- Pfizer seeks expedited nod for its vaccine
- COVAX to buy 500 mn doses from Moderna
- Factory output growth decelerates: PMI



Cannot stop reports on court observations: SC

The media cannot be stopped from reporting oral remarks made by judges during a court hearing. The honest and full reportage of these comments give the public an insight into whether judges are genuinely applying their minds to resolve their crisis, the Supreme Court told a “hurt” Election Commission of India (ECI).

Highlights:

1. The ECI had complained to the Supreme Court about certain oral comments made by a Division Bench of the Madras High Court. The HC judges had accused the ECI of being solely responsible for the super-spread of COVID and said the ECI should be charged with “murder”.
2. Soon after, the ECI had approached the HC to take back its words and restrain the media from reporting the comments as FIRs for murder were registered against the poll body officials. But the HC refused to budge, saying there were more pressing issues at hand.
3. Justice Chandrachud, flanked by Justice M.R. Shah, described the “media as a powerful watchdog”. We cannot expect the media not to report dialogues. Oral observations are as important as orders. The unfolding of the process of judicial thinking is equally of interest to the public.
4. Public interest is not limited to judgments, but also the raising of questions in a court hearing, the dialogue between the Bar and the Bench. All of these show the public whether there was a genuine application of mind by judges. Had I been in the Bar, I would be very worried if judges don’t ask questions.
5. “We cannot say that the media cannot report the contents of the discussions in a court of law. Discussions in a court of law are of equal public interest, and I would put it on the same pedestal as the final order. Discussion in the court is a dialogue between the Bar and the Bench. We wish that the media should report fully what is happening in court. It brings a sense of accountability. Media reporting would also show that we are dispensing our duties fully,” Justice Chandrachud said.
6. The ECI complained that the HC should not have accused another constitutional authority like the ECI of “murder”, Justice Chandrachud said judges were humans too. Some come reticent and other garrulous. Their comments may be borne out of frustration but were certainly made for the cause of larger public interest.



Mains:

Q. Discussions in a court of law are of equal public interest as the final order. Critically discuss the impact of live streaming of court proceedings on the judicial process and public perception of it.

ICMR to get a royalty from the sale of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin

The intellectual property governing the use of Covaxin, jointly developed by Bharat Biotech and the Indian Council of Medical Research, was "shared" and the ICMR would receive royalty payments.

Highlights:

1. The Public-Private Partnership was executed under a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the ICMR and the BBIL which includes a royalty clause for the ICMR on net sales and other clauses like prioritisation of in-country supplies. The product IP is shared.
2. It is also agreed that the name of the ICMR-National Institute of Virology (NIV) will be printed on the vaccine boxes. The same is being done now.
3. The partnership between the two organisations involves 12 activities that include clinical and preclinical studies. Five of these were funded entirely by Bharat Biotech.

Vaccine pricing

1. Covishield constitutes over 90% of the country's vaccine supply so far and has been developed as a partnership between Oxford University and AstraZeneca. Serum Institute of India is one among the many manufacturers in the world with a production licence and has to pay a royalty to a foreign company.
2. Covaxin on the other hand is almost entirely indigenous and yet is priced higher than Covishield. Both are so far being bought by the Central government for ₹150 a dose.
3. However, Covishield was first offered to States at ₹400 a dose and ₹600 to private hospitals and Covaxin was offered at ₹600 for State governments and



at ₹1,200 for private hospitals. Later Covishield's price was reduced to ₹300 a dose for States and Covaxin reduced theirs to ₹400.

Pfizer seeks expedited nod for its vaccine

Pfizer is in discussions with the government for an expedited approval pathway to make the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine available.

Highlights:

1. Right now, Pfizer colleagues at distribution centres in the U.S., Europe and Asia are hard at work rushing shipments of Pfizer medicines that the Government of India has identified as part of its COVID treatment protocol.
2. Unfortunately, their vaccine is not registered in India though the application was submitted months ago. They are discussing with the Indian government an expedited approval pathway to make the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine available for use in the country.
3. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is an mRNA vaccine.

COVAX to buy 500 mn doses from Moderna

Highlights:

1. The COVAX global programme, which has relied heavily on AstraZeneca vaccines, has struck a deal to buy 500 million doses of Moderna's COVID-19 jabs.
2. The doses will broaden the portfolio of vaccines under COVAX, which seeks to ensure poor countries have equitable access to vaccines to combat the pandemic.

COVAX

1. COVAX is one of three pillars of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, which was launched in April by the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Commission and France in response to this pandemic. Bringing together governments, global health organisations, manufacturers, scientists, private sector, civil society and philanthropy, with the aim of



providing innovative and equitable access to COVID-19 diagnostics, treatments and vaccines.

2. The COVAX pillar is focused on the vaccine. It is the only truly global solution to this pandemic because it is the only effort to ensure that people in all corners of the world will get access to COVID-19 vaccines once they are available, regardless of their wealth.
3. Coordinated by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and the WHO, COVAX will achieve this by acting as a platform that will support the research, development and manufacturing of a wide range of COVID-19 vaccine candidates, and negotiate their pricing.
4. All participating countries, regardless of income levels, will have equal access to these vaccines once they are developed. The initial aim is to have 2 billion doses available by the end of 2021, which should be enough to protect high risk and vulnerable people, as well as frontline healthcare workers.

Factory output growth decelerates: PMI

Cause of concern: IHS Markit survey shows April production, new orders expansion at 8-month lows on COVID surge. However, New export orders increased for the eighth consecutive month, the fastest since October 2020.

Highlights:

1. India's manufacturing sector activity was largely flat in April, as rates of growth for new orders and output eased to eight-month lows amid the rise in COVID-19 cases, a monthly survey showed.
2. The seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) was at 55.5 in April, little changed from March's reading of 55.4.
3. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

'Further slowdown'

1. The PMI results for April showed a further slowdown in rates of growth for new orders and output, both of which eased to eight-month lows amid the intensification of the COVID-19 crisis.



2. The surge in COVID-19 cases could dampen demand further when firms' financials are already susceptible to the hurdle of rising global prices.

Surging input costs

1. On the prices front, survey participants also signalled a steep increase in input costs, the quickest since July 2014, and upward revisions to selling prices.
2. The survey, however, noted that while output and sales increased at the slowest rates since last August due to an intensification of the COVID-19 crisis, there was a faster upturn in international orders.
3. New export orders increased for the eighth consecutive month in April and at the fastest rate since October 2020. The rise was associated with a pick-up in international demand for Indian goods, the survey said.
4. On the job front, although manufacturing employment continued to fall, the rate of contraction recorded in April was marginal and the weakest in the current 13-month sequence of job shedding, it noted.