

POLITY

ECONOMICS

TECHNOLOGY

ECOLOGY

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Saini takes over as Haryana CM after BJP-JJP alliance splits up

CONTEXT: Haryana State BJP president and MP, Nayab Singh Saini, was sworn in as the new Chief Minister of the State after Manohar Lal and his Council of Ministers resigned on Tuesday.



The new Chief Minister inducted five MLAs — Kanwar Pal, Mool Chand, Banwari Lal, Jai Parkash Dalal (all from the BJP) and Ranjit Singh (Independent) — into the Cabinet. Governor Bandaru Dattatreya administered the oath of office and secrecy to all of them.

HARAYANA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

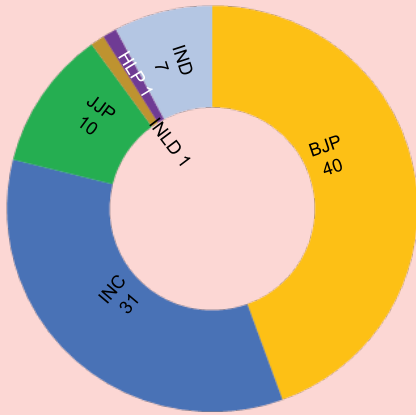


FIGURE: Pie chart representation of seats won to the Haryana Legislative Assembly in 2019 Assembly elections. Parties Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), Jannayak Janata Party (JJP), Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), Haryana Lokhit Party (HLP) and Independents (IND).

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Inflation still at 5.1%, but food prices rise

CONTEXT: India's retail inflation remained virtually unchanged at 5.09 % in February, fuelled by food primarily by vegetables, which rose at a seven-month high pace of 30.25 %.

RETAIL PRICE INFLATION

The National Statistical Office (NSO), Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) collect price data from selected 1114 urban Markets and 1181 villages covering all States / UTs through personal visits by field staff of Field Operations Division of NSO, MoSPI on a weekly roster to prepare All India Consumer Price Index (CPI) on Base 2012=100 and corresponding Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) for Rural (R), Urban (U) and Combined (C) for the month of January 2024 (Provisional).

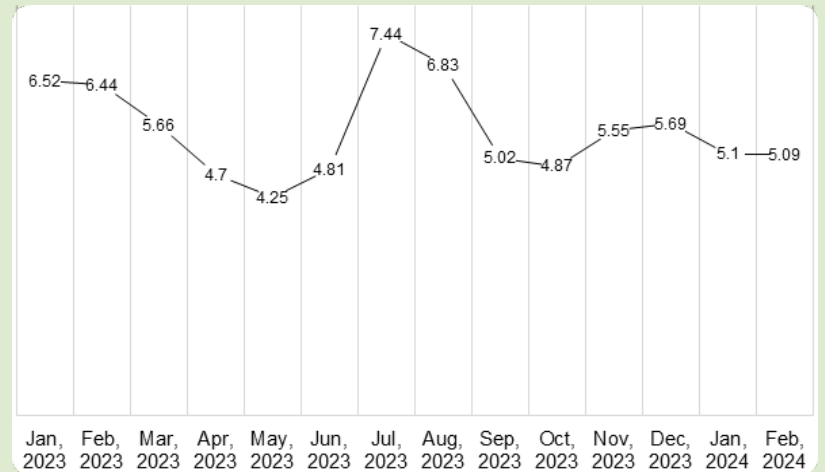


FIGURE: Line chart representation of retail price index-based inflation rates. Inset. Bar chart representation of the of All India Retail Price Indices for food articles and Rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for February, 2024.

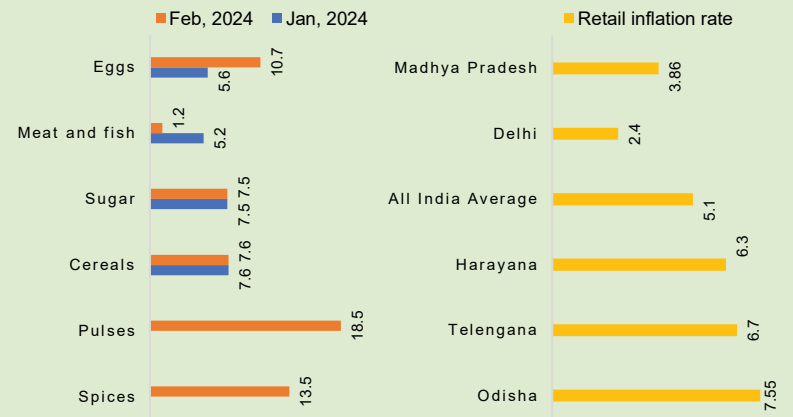


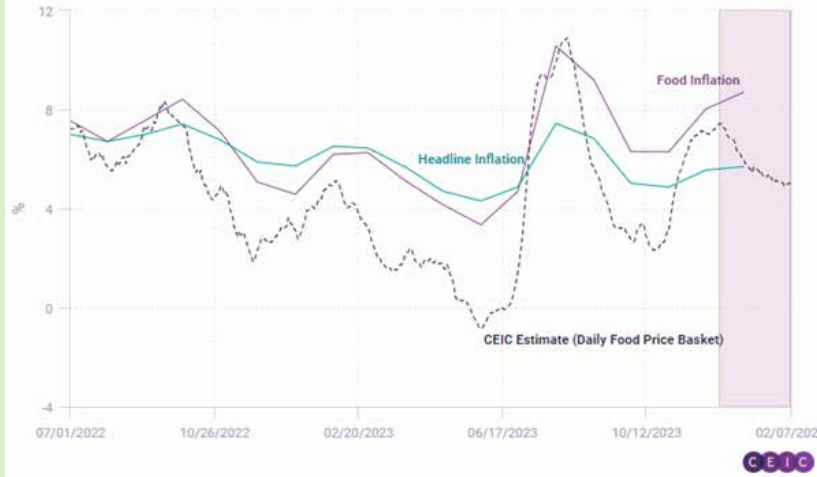
FIGURE: Column chart representation of All India Consumer Price Indices based rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for February, 2024.

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Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) accelerated from 9 % in January to 9.2 % for urban residents. Rural India experienced an 8.2 % uptick in February, compared with 7.9 % in the previous month. Retail inflation stayed higher in rural India, unchanged from the 5.34 % recorded in January, while urban inflation eased slightly from 4.9 % to 4.8 % in February. Most economists expect inflation to stay in the 5.1 % - 5.2 % range in March as well.

Cooling Food Price Growth in India Hints at Inflation Easing Ahead of RBI's Meet...

Daily Food Price Basket vs Actual Monthly Data, % y/y



Over the projection

Core inflation, excluding food and energy costs, remained below 4 % for the third month in a row. The current bout of inflation is purely food-driven, and will persist in the coming months as onion prices have bounced higher. The average year-on-year inflation in the fourth quarter of 2024 over the 5 % may further postpone RBI to cut interest rates.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

SBI submits electoral bond data to Election Commission

CONTEXT: The State Bank of India (SBI) submitted the details of electoral bonds purchased and encashed since April 12, 2019 to the Election Commission (EC), a day after the Supreme Court directive.

The Supreme Court, while striking down the electoral bonds scheme as unconstitutional in February, had directed the SBI to submit electoral bonds data to the EC. The top court dismissed a plea filed by the SBI seeking time till June 30 to submit the data. The court asked that the data be submitted to the EC by Tuesday. The EC was in turn asked to publish the information on its website by 5 p.m. on March 15.

SC rejects plea

The SBI had sought an extension saying it needed time to match the buyers of the bonds with the political parties that encashed it. To this, the top court said the information on purchasers of bonds, the denomination of the bonds, and the bonds redeemed by the respective political parties were easily available and did not need matching. The first sale of electoral bonds took place in March 2018. Bonds worth ₹ 16,518 Cr. had been issued by the SBI since the inception of the scheme in 2018.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

‘Citizenship comes under domain of Centre, State governments have no role in CAA implementation’

CONTEXT: Union Government officials clarified that issues related to the implementation of citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 is exclusively under the purview of the Union Government.



The citizenship applications processed under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) has been assigned to the Postal department and Census officials, both under the Centre. The responsibility for conducting background and security checks falls on Central security agencies like the Intelligence Bureau (IB).

The MHA on Monday notified the Citizenship Amendment Rules, 2024 that would enable the implementation of the CAA, passed by the Parliament four years ago. The legislation facilitates citizenship to undocumented people belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Parsi, Christian and Jain community from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who entered India on or before December 31, 2014 and fast-tracks the process by reducing the eligibility to five years’ continuous stay.

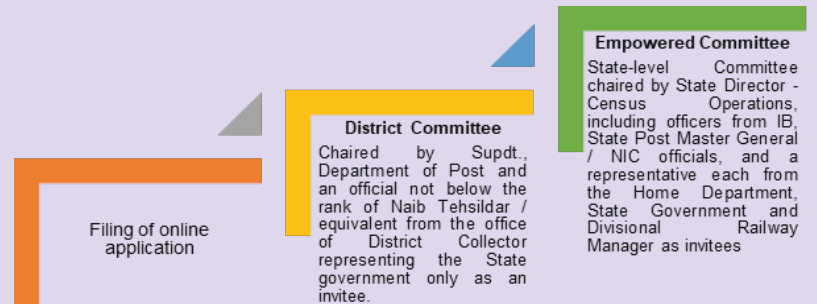


FIGURE: Schematic representation of the filing of applications.

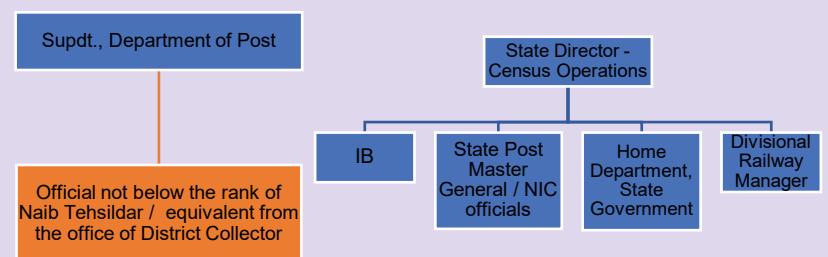


FIGURE: (L) Structure of the District Level Committee (B) Structure of the State Level Committee

FILING APPLICATIONS: The registration requires a payment of ₹ 50. There are several categories for citizenship under Section 6B of the CAA that are to be filled by applicants; also several documents are to be uploaded in definite format along with submission of affidavit and eligibility certificate [to establish faith] that are to be issued by local institutions. The final number of applicants will be available once the forms have been completely filled and submitted on the portal.

DISTRICT LEVEL COMMITTEE: Besides submitting the documents online, which includes those issued by the government authorities in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, the applicant will have to appear before the district-level committee in person. The applicant will be intimated through e-mail/SMS, the date and time on which the applicant would be expected to visit the DLC [District-Level Committee] in person along with originals of all the documents attached with the application for verification. The Designated Officer will administer “Oath of Allegiance” to the eligible applicant and the digital copies will be forwarded to the empowered committee which will take the final decision.

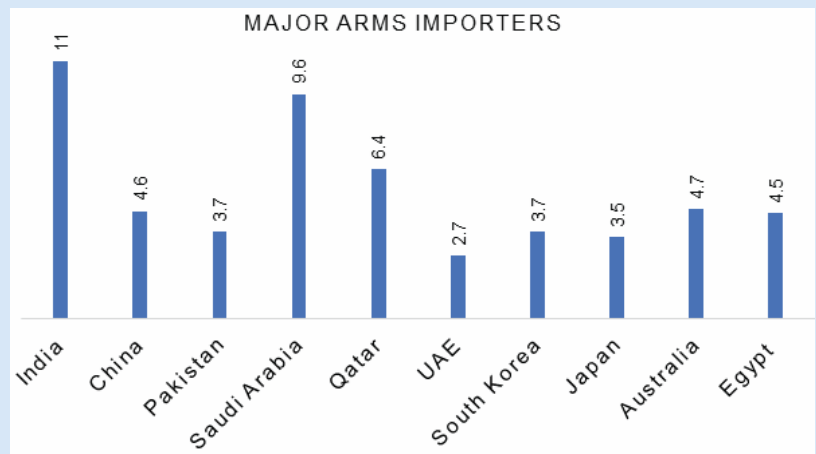


FIGURE: Column chart country wise representation of share of arms imported.

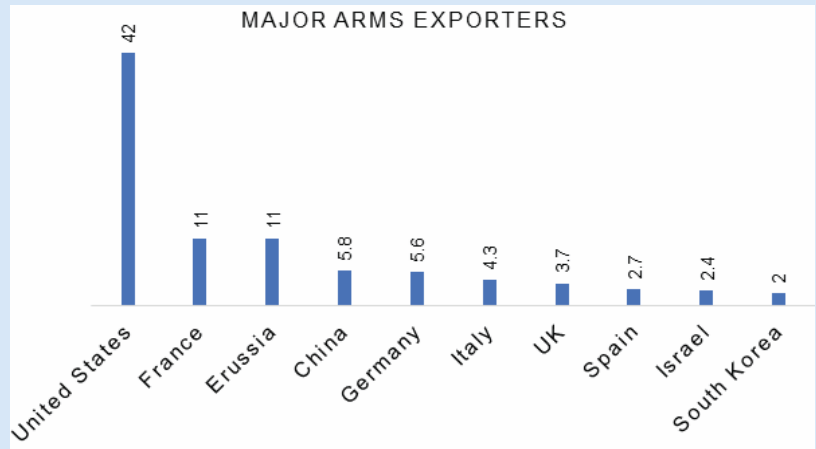


FIGURE: Column chart country wise representation of share of arms exported.

In the interim Budget presented in February for financial year 2024-25, the total allocation for the Defence Ministry was ₹ 6.2 lakh crore, of which the capital allocation for new procurements was ₹ 1.72 lakh crore, 5.78 % higher than the Budget Estimates of last year. Although Russia remained India’s main arms supplier, accounting for 36 % of its arms imports, this was the first five-year period since 1960-64 when deliveries from Russia made up less than half of India’s arms imports.

Europe is responsible for about a third of global arms exports, including large volumes going outside the region, reflecting Europe’s strong military-industrial capacity. France, the second largest arms supplier imported 42 % of its arms to states in Asia and Oceania, and 34 % to West Asia. The largest single recipient of French arms exports was India, which accounted for nearly 30 %. The increase in French arms exports was largely due to deliveries of combat aircraft to India, Qatar and Egypt. European arms imports with many high-value arms on order — including nearly 800 combat aircraft and combat helicopters are likely to remain at a high level.

At the same time, arms imports by European countries increased by 94 % between 2014-18 and 2019-23, which comes against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. Over half of arms imports by European countries, 55%, in 2019-23 were from the U.S., up from 35 % in 2014-18.

Arms exports by the world’s largest supplier, the U.S., grew by 17% between 2014-18 and 2019-23, while those by Russia fell by more than half. France emerged as the world’s second largest arms supplier as its exports grew by 47 %. The U.S. had increased its

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

‘India was the top arms importer in 2019-2023’

CONTEXT: India was the top arms importer in the world in the period 2019-23, with imports having gone up by 4.7 % compared with the period 2014-18, according to Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).



SUMMARY: India was the world's top arms importer from 2019 to 2023, with a 4.7% increase in imports compared to 2014-18, according to Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Although Russia remained the main supplier, its share dropped below 50 % for the first time since 1960-64, while the share of U.S. increased to 17 %. Nine of the top 10 importers were in Asia, Oceania, or the Middle East, with Ukraine becoming the fourth largest importer in 2022-23. In the same period, European arms imports increased by 94 %, largely from the U.S. France emerged as the second largest arms supplier, with 42 % of its exports going to Asia and Oceania, and 34 % to the Middle East., while Russian exports declined. Europe's strong military-industrial capacity led to a third of global arms exports, with the U.S. expanding its role as a major arms supplier.

global role as an arms supplier — an important aspect of its foreign policy — exporting more arms to more countries than it has ever done in the past.

India seems to have come back to the top slot in arms imports after briefly ceding space to Saudi Arabia in the past. Imports of Pakistan, the fifth largest arms importer in 2019-23, went up by 43%, with China supplying as much as 82 % of all its arms imports.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Govt. issues marketing code for pharmaceutical firms

CONTEXT: The Department of Pharmaceuticals issued the Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP), 2024, specifying the rules for the use of the words “safe” and “new” for drugs, and further refrained medical representatives from using any form of bribery or deception to secure a meeting with healthcare professionals.

medical representatives to not employ any inducement or subterfuge to gain an interview, and that they must not pay, under any guise, for access to a healthcare professional.

Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP), 2024 - Guidelines

1. Allow well-defined, transparent, and verifiable guidelines adhering to Continuing Medical Education (CME) for engagement of the pharmaceutical industry with healthcare professionals.
2. Prohibits events related to engagement of the pharmaceutical industry with healthcare professionals in foreign locations.
3. Prohibit granting cash or monetary grants to healthcare professionals or their family members.
4. Prohibit gifting by pharmaceutical companies or their agents.
5. Prohibit offering pecuniary advantage or benefit in kind to those qualified to prescribe or supply drugs.
6. Restricts promotion of a drug aligning with the terms of its marketing approval.
7. Prohibits promotion of drugs before receiving marketing approval from the competent authority.

Claims for ‘Usefulness’, ‘Safe’ and ‘New’: Drug claims must be based on current evaluation of all available evidence.

1. The term 'safe' must not be used without qualification.
2. The term 'new' cannot be used for drugs or interventions available or promoted in India for more than a year.
3. Prohibit statements categorically denying side effects, toxic hazards, or risk of addiction.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Closed and insular

CONTEXT: In recent Portugal elections, both centre-right Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Party won 29 %, with the Social Democrats leading by a narrow margin of 2,058 votes, while far-right Chega party which campaigned on promises to address issues such as immigration, law enforcement, and sex offender policies garnered 18 %, making it the third largest party in Portugal.

SUMMARY: In the recent Portuguese elections, both the center-right Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Socialist Party (PS) won 29% of the vote, with the PSD leading by a narrow margin of 2,058 votes. The far-right Chega party, campaigning on promises related to immigration, law enforcement, and sex offender policies, garnered 18% of the vote, making it the third-largest party. Portugal, known for its stable democracy, faces a rising trend of far-right populist parties in Europe. Chega's rapid rise, from 7% in 2022 to 18% in the latest elections, marks it as a significant political force. Chega's leader, André Ventura, sees the vote as a victory for the right wing and is open to coalition talks, but PSD's leader, Luís Montenegro, has ruled out any alliance with Chega. The Socialist government, led by Prime Minister António Costa, collapsed due to investigations into handling of mining and hydrocarbon projects. Despite Costa's leadership during COVID-19 and economic growth, structural issues like low wages, high inflation, and housing prices remain challenges. The new Prime Minister will need to address these challenges while managing the rise of the far-right.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Indian troops begin Maldives withdrawal after govt. order

CONTEXT: Indian troops stationed in the Maldives have begun withdrawing from the island nation, its defence authorities said, in line with President Mohamed Muizzu's 'India out' promise to his supporters.



SUMMARY: Last month, a technical team from India was sent to the Maldives to replace troops stationed there to operate India-gifted aircraft and choppers, following bilateral discussions. Indian troops stationed in the southernmost atoll of Addu have started leaving the Maldives, with all military personnel expected to withdraw before May 10. This move comes as the Maldives aims to strengthen ties with China, as agreed during President Muizzu's state visit in January. The Maldives Defence Ministry signed an agreement with China for military assistance and stronger bilateral ties, enabling the Maldives to receive non-lethal military equipment and training. China has expressed support for the Maldives' sovereignty and cooperation with other countries. Additionally, the Maldives has acquired surveillance drones from Turkiye for patrolling its exclusive economic zone.

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Number of poor people increase in Sub-Saharan Africa

In the grip of poverty

The charts were sourced from the World Bank's data blog titled "Accelerating Poverty Reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa Requires Stability" authored by Johannes Hoogeveen, Johan A. Mistiaen and Haoyu Wu. Additional data was accessed from the World Bank's Poverty and Inequality Platform



Chart 1: The chart shows the number of poor people below the \$2.15/day line (2017 PPP)

■ Sub-Saharan Africa ■ South Asia
 ■ West Asia & North Africa ■ Europe & Central Asia
 ■ Latin America & Caribbean ■ Other high-income countries

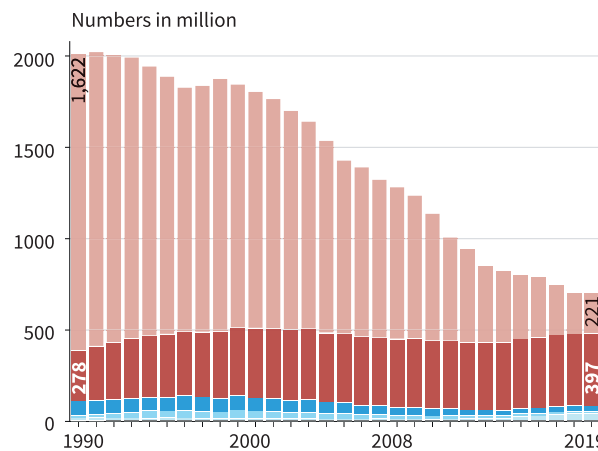


Chart 2: The chart shows poverty in terms of percentage of population. Poverty in terms of the percentage of population reduced from 53.8% in 1990 to 35.4% in 2019 in Sub-Saharan Africa. The corresponding number for South Asia fell from 49.8% to 10.5%

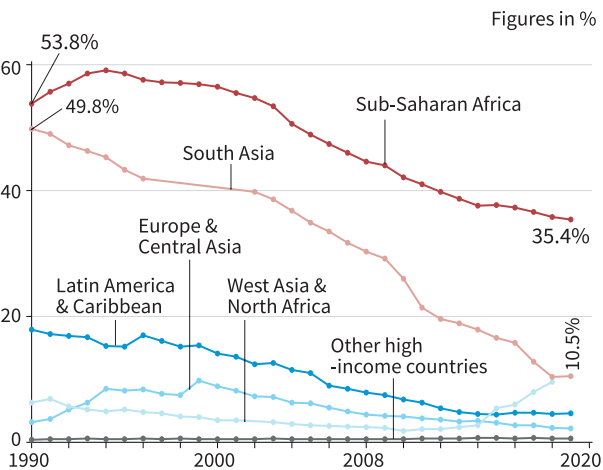
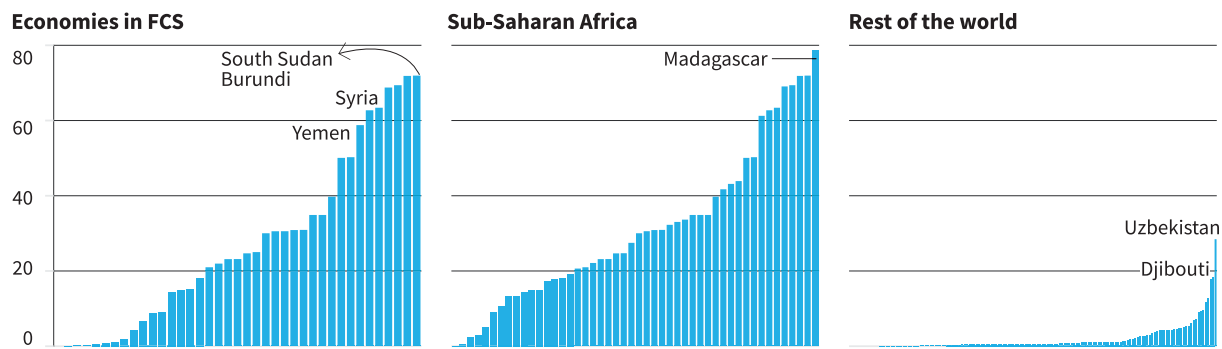


Chart 3: Countries with their latest estimated poverty rate (as a % of population), according to World Bank Data, in FCS nations, nations in Sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world



ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Jan. industrial growth slows to 3.8%

CONTEXT: India's industrial output growth slowed to 3.8 % in January, from an upgraded uptick of 4.24 % in December, with the manufacturing sector's growth slowing to 3.2 %, from 4.5 % a month earlier, and consumer non-durables slipping into contraction for the second time in three months.

Slowing down

Growth in India's industrial output dropped slightly in January compared with a 4.24% uptick in December

- Computers, electronics and optic products witnessed the steepest fall of 11.9% among the 23 manufacturing sectors



- Production of wearing apparels and electronics dropped 17.5% and 14%, respectively, between April 2023 and Jan. 2024

- Electronics' performance seen as a disappointment since it was covered under the Production-Linked Incentive scheme

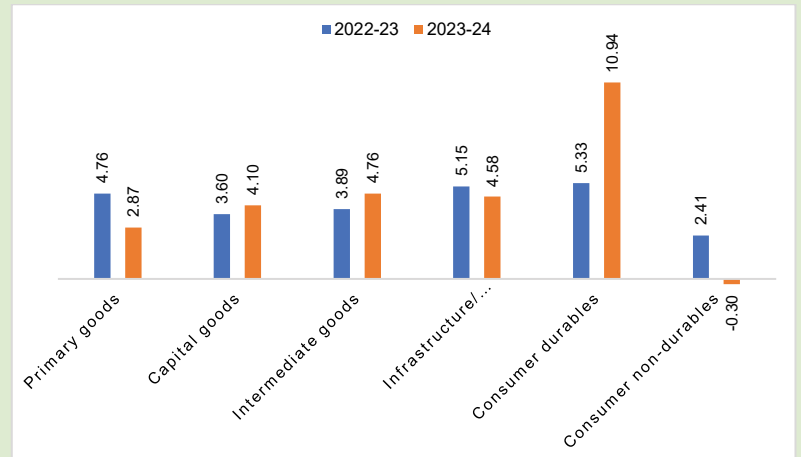


FIGURE: Column chart representation of sector-wise growth.

Eight of the 23 manufacturing segments tracked by the National Statistical Office to compute the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) recorded a contraction in January, with computers, electronics and optic products seeing the steepest fall of 11.9 %, while pharmaceuticals' output remained flat compared with last January. Between April 2023 and January 2024, electronics and computers have now contracted 14 %, second only to the 17.5 % drop in output of wearing apparel over the same period. On the other hand, other transport equipment grew 25.3 %, fabricated metal products rose 21.4 %, followed by motor vehicles.

Electronics' performance remained a disappointment as it was also covered under the Production-Linked Incentive or PLI scheme.



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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Intra-group caste variances, equality and the Court's gaz

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court of India is set to deliver a judgment in *State of Punjab vs Davinder Singh*, addressing whether State governments can sub-classify within Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for public employment recruitment.

SUMMARY: The case involves a circular issued by the Punjab government in 1975, which reserved 50% of the seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the state for Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs, with the other half open to all remaining SC groups. The Punjab and Haryana High Court struck down this notification in July 2006, following a Supreme Court judgment in 2004 in *E.V. Chinnaiah vs State of Andhra Pradesh*.

In the *Chinnaiah* case, a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court quashed the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Act, 2000, because it violated Article 341 of the Constitution. Article 341 gives the President of India the authority to notify a list of Scheduled Castes for each state, and specifies that only Parliament can modify this list.

The Andhra Pradesh law attempted to create four separate categories within the President's list of Scheduled Castes, each with its own quota based on relative backwardness. However, the Supreme Court ruled that the state government did not have the authority to make such changes to the list, as Article 341 of the Constitution specifies that only Parliament can modify it. The Court referenced B.R. Ambedkar's warning about the risk of allowing state governments to amend the list for purely political reasons.

Despite the 1975 circular being struck down, the Punjab government enacted a new law in 2006, the Punjab Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act, which again gave priority to Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs. The High Court also declared this law unconstitutional. However, in August 2020, the Supreme Court expressed doubts about its earlier judgment in the *Chinnaiah* case. This led to the formation of a seven-judge Bench for a fresh hearing on the issues raised.

The Supreme Court, while questioning the existing view on sub-classification within Scheduled Castes, cited its judgment in the *Indra Sawhney* case, which arose from the Mandal Commission's report. In this case, a nine-judge Bench held that sub-classifications within socially and educationally backward classes (OBCs) for government services were permissible. The majority opinion

supported Justice Chinnappa Reddy's judgment in *K.C. Vasanth Kumar & Another vs State of Karnataka (1985)*, which argued that sub-classification could be justified if there were significant differences in backwardness among groups. This approach aimed to prevent more advanced groups within the backward classes from dominating reservations, ensuring equitable distribution of benefits.

EQUALITY AND CASTES

At the heart of the issue is the Constitution's commitment to equality, outlined in Articles 14 to 16. These articles promise substantive equality, acknowledging historical discrimination based on caste. Therefore, the constitutional vision emphasizes considering group interests to ensure equal treatment. Reservations are viewed not as conflicting with equality, but as a tool to advance and strengthen this goal.

Since its judgment in *State Of Kerala & Anr vs N.M. Thomas & Ors (1975)*, the Supreme Court has recognized that governments not only have the power to make reservations but also a duty to ensure substantive equality. Therefore, if the Government of Punjab finds, based on its studies, that its current reservation measures have not adequately benefited Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs, it is constitutionally obligated to correct this.

Article 341 does not prohibit sub-classification within Scheduled Castes, as it only restricts State governments from modifying the President's list of SCs. States can still provide special measures for certain castes within this list without excluding others. This interpretation aligns with the Constitution's equality code.

SUB-CLASSIFICATION

The Punjab law does not modify the President's list of Scheduled Castes but accounts for inter se backwardness within that list by providing greater preference to Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs. This sub-classification aligns with the Constitution's allowance for reasonable classifications to achieve equality. The Court will need to assess if Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs are distinguishable from other castes within the President's list and if the extent of preferential treatment granted to them is rationally connected to the law's objective of ensuring fair treatment.

The Supreme Court should acknowledge and uphold the power of governments to make reservations and their duty to ensure equality, as recognized in the *N.M. Thomas* case. States should be seen as having the authority to provide special measures for the most discriminated castes within SCs and STs, as this helps realize the concept of equal opportunity.

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