

● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

WARMING TIES

CONTEXT: Bhutan's Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji met China's counterpart Wang Yi to discuss the border disputes. Bhutan and China do not maintain diplomatic relations. A joint statement claimed substantive progress in border talks.

Bhutan and China also signed a cooperation agreement outlining the functioning of a new joint technical team for the delimitation and demarcation of the boundary. It is true that India, given its special relationship with Bhutan, has been very wary about the possibility of the establishment of diplomatic relations and the signing of a boundary agreement. But both those outcomes increasingly appear inevitable. The Bhutanese Prime Minister noted that the two countries were inching towards the completion of a three-step road map on boundary delineation and demarcation, asserting that no agreement with China would in any way go against India's interests.

Bhutan's dependence on India would require Bhutan to take New Delhi on board in its efforts to normalise relations with China, in return guaranteeing India's security interests and red lines. Any border swaps should not allow China keeping southern Doklam's ridges that overlook India's "Siliguri corridor". Another security scenario inimical to India's interest will involve Thimphu going slow on normalising ties and opening itself up to a permanent Chinese diplomatic presence, while continuing with border talks.

A border deal that addresses Bhutanese concerns in the north while preserving India's red lines in the west will not necessarily undermine New Delhi's interests. India must approach the boundary negotiations with a greater understanding of Bhutan's reasoning, and with confidence that India's long-trusted neighbour will take both India's interests and its own into consideration before any final agreement.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

CENTRE APPROVES ₹22,303-CR. SUBSIDY ON KEY FERTILIZERS

CONTEXT: The Centre announced a ₹ 22,303-crore subsidy on phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilizers for the current rabi season.

The farmers will continue to get key soil nutrient DAP (Di-ammonium Phosphate) at the old rate of ₹1,350 a 50 Kg bag. The Union Cabinet approved the proposal of the Department of Fertilizers for fixing the nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) rates for the rabi season of 2023-24 (from October 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024) on P&K fertilizers.

Rabi boost

The Centre estimate an expenditure of ₹ 22,303 crore as subsidy on P&K fertilizers for the rabi season. In May, the Union Cabinet approved a subsidy of ₹ 38,000 crore on P&K fertilizers for the kharif season of 2023-24. Fertilizer subsidies stood at nearly ₹

2.55 lakh crore in the last fiscal as against around ₹ 73,000 crore in 2014-15.

The NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium) will be available at the old rate of ₹ 1,470 per bag and SSP (Single Super Phosphate) at around ₹500 per bag. The MoP (muriate of potash) rates will come down to ₹1,655 per bag from ₹1,700 per bag.

The Cabinet has fixed the NBS rate of nitrogen (N) at ₹47.02 per kg, phosphorus (P) at ₹20.82 per kg, potash (K) at ₹2.38 per kg and sulphur (S) at ₹1.89 per kg. For the kharif season of 2023-24, the government had a fixed per kg subsidy rate on N at ₹76 per kg, ₹41 per kg on P, ₹15 per kg on K and ₹2.8 per kg on S.



"Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." - Robert Frost

INTERNAL SECURITY

IN A FIRST, ARMY GETS VERTICAL WIND TUNNEL TO TRAIN SPECIAL FORCES

CONTEXT: The Army has installed its first Vertical Wind Tunnel (VWT) at the Special Forces Training School (SFTS) at Bakloh in Himachal Pradesh to augment the training infrastructure of special forces and combat free-fallers.

The Vertical Wind Tunnel (VWT) is set to refine the Combat Free Fall (CFF) skills of armed forces personnel. The VWT creates a column of air at specific velocities, orchestrating different CFF conditions. The system offers a controlled environment, enabling trainees to enhance their skills by simulating real-life freefall conditions.

The VWT's integration into the training curriculum at the SFTS would bring forth numerous pay-offs, the Army said the system. The Vertical Wind Tunnel (VWT) simulated varied free-fall scenarios which are crucial in assessing individual reactions to situations in an airborne-operating environment. It reduces potential instability in the air and during parachute deployment thereby assisting trainees to get used to free-fall conditions. The VWT is not only beneficial for beginners but also an exceptional resource for delivering advanced training to seasoned free-fallers and CFF instructors.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

PULSES TO BUCK RISE IN KHARIF OUTPUT

CONTEXT: As per initial independent estimates for crop output pulse, coarse cereals and groundnut output is likely to hit a three-year low this kharif season, even as overall foodgrains production is likely to rise thanks to higher rice and cereals output.

Kharif crop sowing inched up by a marginal 0.2 % at the end of September despite monsoon rainfall were 6 % below normal level. However, jute (-5.6 %), pulses (-4.2 %) and cotton (-3 %) witnessed declines in sowing along with oilseeds, which fell 1.6%.

Economists expect retail inflation for pulses to stay elevated amid the bleaker outlook for production. Pulses inflation accelerated to 16.4 % from August's 13 %. At the wholesale level, pulses prices surged 17.7 %. Pulses output is expected to

drop to a range of 6.9-7.3 million tonnes, compared with 8.24 million tonnes in 2021-22 and 7.62 million tonnes 2022-23. Within pulses, output of arhar, whose sowing dropped almost 5 %, is expected to slip only slightly from last year's 3.31 million tonnes to a range of 3.22-3.27 million tonnes. Urad and moong output can witness sharper drops.

Price level of cereals also stay elevated amid the bleaker outlook for production. In September, cereal prices for consumers rose 11 %. Total foodgrains production is expected to be in the range of 158-162 million tonnes, or 1.5 %-4 % over last year's levels. The overall output with crops such as rice and sugarcane registered improvement, while some drag will be seen with pulses, cotton and jute.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

WOMEN, MARRIAGE AND LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

CONTEXT: Women's labour force participation vital for economic growth, household empowerment, and national progress; low participation poses challenges.

BACKGROUND: Women's participation in the labour market is linked to improved economic prospects and decision-making power. Reduced female labour force participation rates have significant implications for economic progress and gender disparities. Claudia Goldin's Nobel-winning work has shed light on these disparities and their historical and contemporary causes.

Highlights

- **Global Female Labour Force Participation:** Worldwide, female labour force participation was 47.3% in 2022, with persistent declines in developing nations.
- **India's Decline:** India saw a decrease in female labour force participation from 28% to 24% between 1990 and 2022.
- **Inequality Persists:** Gender-based disparities in labour market participation continue to exist globally.

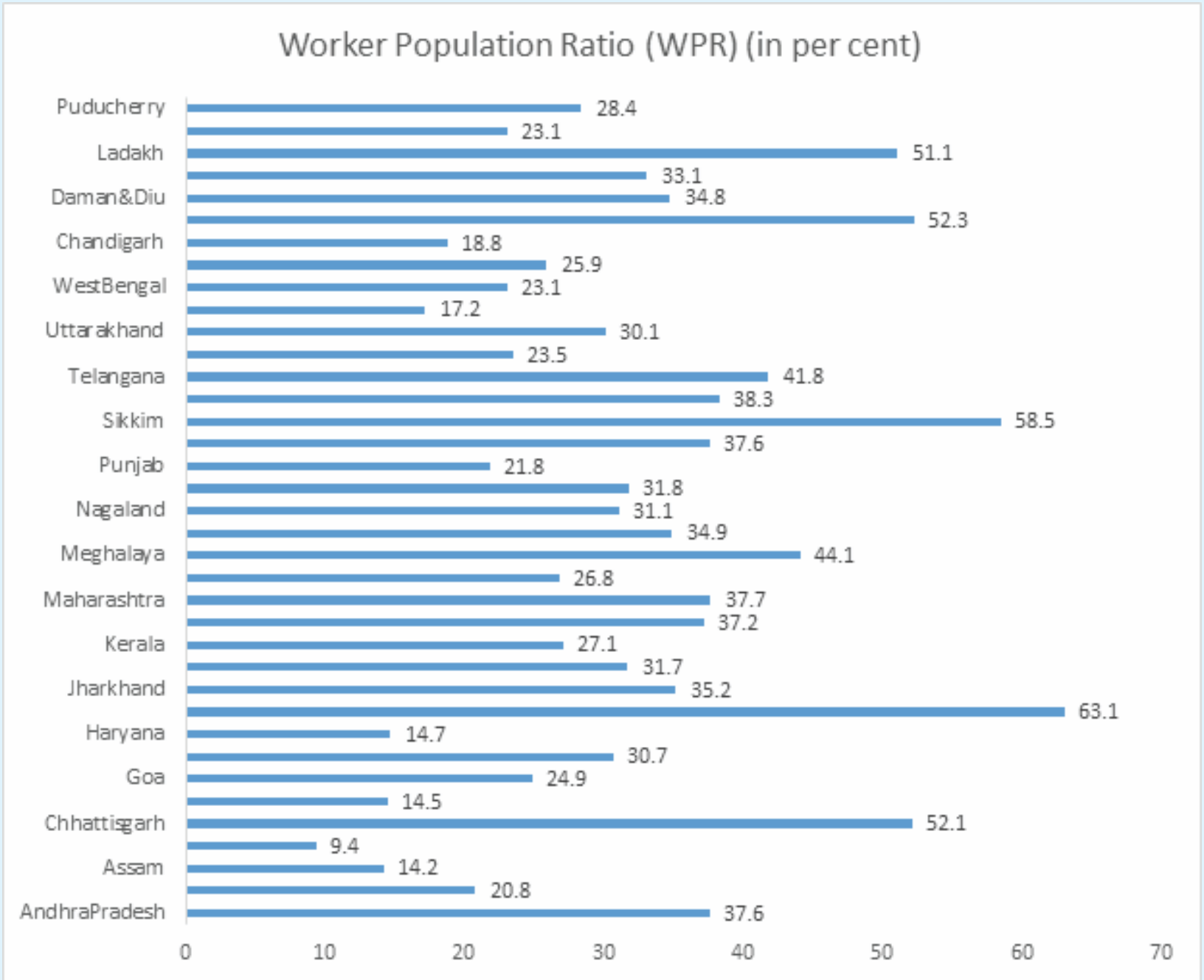
- **Economic Growth Impact:** Economist Goldin notes that female labour participation exhibits a U-shaped pattern during economic growth.
- **Marriage and Decline:** Married women often experience decreased labour force participation due to factors like limited education, family obligations, and societal norms.
- **Institution of Marriage:** Marriage amplifies domestic responsibilities and cultural barriers, hindering women's workforce participation.
- **Multiple Influences:** Various factors, including religion, caste, geography, household wealth, and societal norms, affect women's labour market entry and participation, especially after marriage.

Challenges

- **Career Resumption and Flexibility:** Upon marriage, women often seek flexible job opportunities close to home, influenced by societal constraints, impacting career choices, income, marriage age, and fertility decisions.

- Socioeconomic Divide: Upper-strata women tend to conform to traditional roles, while lower-strata women enter the labour market due to economic necessity.
- Marriage's Impact: Marriage significantly affects female labour force participation, leading to lower employment proportions.
- Decline in LFPR: In 2022-23, there was a 5% decrease in the female labour force participation rate among married women aged 25-49, primarily in the 25-29 age group.
- Education and Sectors: Less educated women are more likely to join the workforce post-marriage, with agriculture being the dominant sector for female employment in India.

The influence of social and cultural factors on women's labour force participation is evident, particularly regarding marital status in the Indian labour market. Married women exhibit the lowest participation rates, impacting India's economy significantly. To empower women during economic growth, accessible and high-quality day-care services are crucial, and government initiatives such as the National Creche Scheme should be implemented in both public and private sectors. Additionally, creating women-centric work environments, secure transportation options, and part-time job opportunities can further boost women's participation in the labour market.



“Doing nothing is very hard to do. You never know when you’re finished.”—Leslie Nielsen

SOCIAL JUSTICE

HOW BIG IS THE GENDER GAP IN EARNINGS?

CONTEXT: PLFS monitors gender earnings gap, highlights importance of considering weekly hours worked to understand disparities.

BACKGROUND: The emphasis on weekly hours worked in the latest round of data sheds light on the nuanced nature of gender

earnings inequality. Women's lower average hours worked, influenced by societal expectations and personal choices, and underscores the intricate interplay between social norms and individual decisions in shaping gender disparities in the labour force.

Income gap

Women tend to work fewer hours per week than men, influenced by various factors, including social expectations and personal choices, although these factors aren't always easily separable

Table 1: Male-Female ratio of weekly earnings

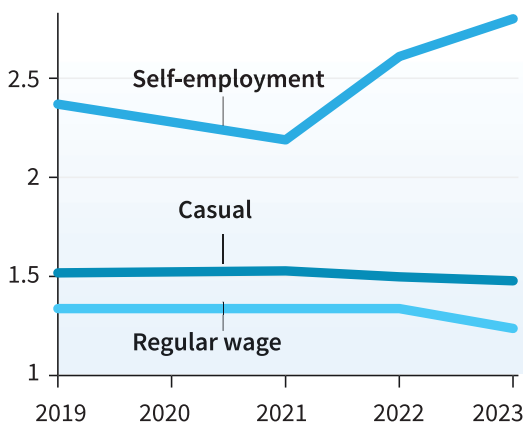


Table 2: Male-Female ratio of hours worked

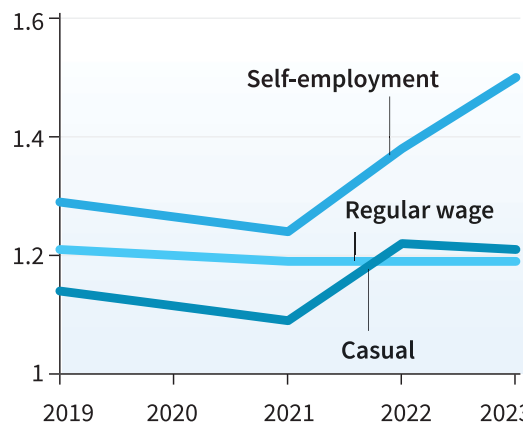
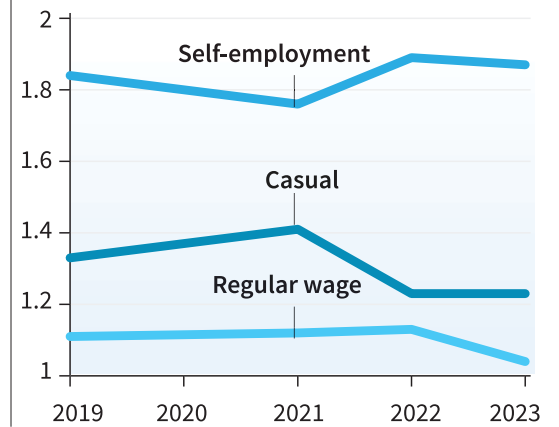


Table 3: Male-Female ratio of hourly earnings



How does the gender earnings gap differ?

- Claudia Goldin's Research: Nobel laureate Claudia Goldin's work on gender inequalities in the U.S. resonates with India's research on disparities in work and wages for women.
- Gender Wage Gap in India: Data from April-June 2019 to 2023 reveals a persistent gender wage gap, with men consistently earning more than women.
- Gap Across Employment Types: The gender wage gap is most pronounced among self-employed workers, where men earned 2.8 times more than women in 2023.
- Changing Trends: While the gap has decreased for regular wage workers, it has increased for the self-employed, indicating evolving trends in gender wage disparities.

Are there any notable differences in the average weekly work hours?

- Work Hour Disparities: Women in India work fewer hours than men across all employment types, with the largest gap seen in self-employed workers.
- Rising Gender Gap: The gender gap in work hours has grown,

especially for self-employed women, indicating a shift towards part-time work.

- Rural Self-Employment: Rural women have increased their labour force participation, but self-employed women are working fewer hours, suggesting a rise in part-time employment.
- Earnings per Hour: Calculations of earnings per hour reveal gender disparities in hourly earnings across different work categories, reflecting ongoing gender inequalities.

What is the percentage decrease in the gap in hourly earnings?

Gender earnings disparities vary significantly depending on the type of employment, with hourly earnings offering a more equitable comparison. While male regular wage workers earn more in total weekly earnings, their hourly earnings gap has decreased to around 4% in 2023. However, further research is needed to assess disparities across occupations and industries. The self-employed face a higher hourly earnings gap, largely due to changes in hours worked, driven by the rise of women in part-time work. This insight reveals the complex forces influencing inequality changes over time.



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ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

ISA TO RELEASE REPORT ON GLOBAL ADOPTION OF SOLAR TECHNOLOGY IN NOVEMBER

CONTEXT: International Solar Alliance to publish a global solar stocktake report, inspired by the UN COP initiative.

BACKGROUND: The 'solar stocktake,' scheduled for mid-November, is inspired by the UN's Global Stocktake and aims to assess progress in transitioning economies from fossil fuels to solar energy. It will scrutinize investments, focusing on ways to expand solar manufacturing beyond its concentration in China.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **ISA's Annual Meeting:** The International Solar Alliance (ISA), led by India and France, will host its sixth annual meeting in Delhi, focusing on solar expansion in Africa.
- **Global Solar Facility:** ISA has established the Global Solar Facility to boost solar investment in Africa, with plans to extend to West Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.
- **Three Funds:** The facility comprises three funds: a payment guarantee fund, an insurance fund to mitigate project risks, and an investment fund for technical assistance.
- **Renewable Energy and Solar:** India emphasizes solar energy's reliability and dependability, promoting its role in the global energy transition through ISA's efforts.

International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- **ISA's Mission:** The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is a global platform promoting solar energy to ensure energy access, security, and transition in member countries, with a focus on Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.
- **'Towards 1000' Strategy:** ISA aims to mobilize \$1,000 billion in solar energy investments by 2030, provide energy access to 1,000 million people, and install 1,000 GW of solar capacity, reducing CO2 emissions by 1,000 million tonnes annually.
- **Programmatic Approach:** ISA employs a programmatic approach with nine comprehensive programs, emphasizing Analytics & Advocacy, Capacity Building, and Programmatic Support to facilitate solar energy investments.
- **Origin and Expansion:** It was jointly initiated by India and France during COP21 in 2015, and with a 2020 Framework Agreement amendment, all UN member states can join. Currently, 116 countries are signatories, with 94 as full members.
- **Collaborative Platform:** ISA collaborates with multilateral development banks, financial institutions, public and private sectors, civil society, and international organizations to drive global solar energy adoption.

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