● POLITY   ● ECONOMICS   ● TECHNOLOGY   ● ECOLOGY
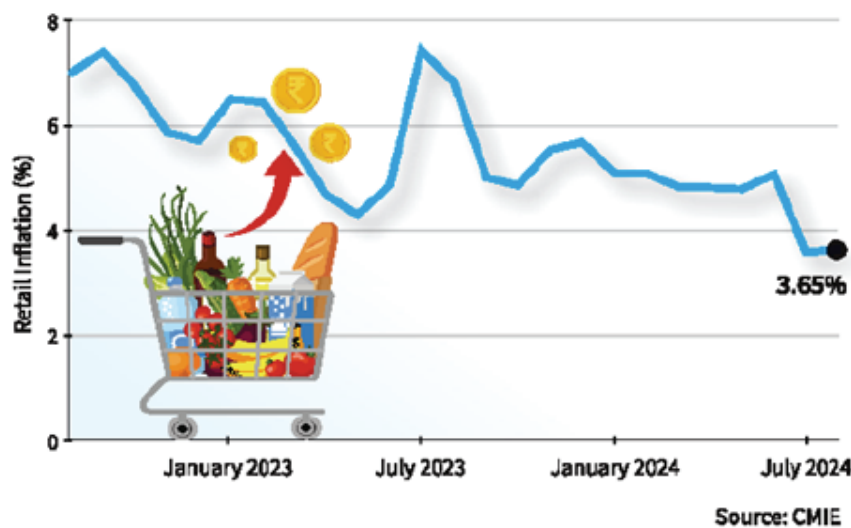
RETAIL INFLATION STAYS UNDER 4%, BUT VEGETABLE PRICES UP AGAIN

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

RETAIL INFLATION STAYS LOW

Marginally faster

India's retail inflation quickened slightly to 3.65% in August from a revised 3.6% in July. It stayed under the Reserve Bank of India's target of 4% for the second consecutive month

3.65%

Source: CMIE

India's retail inflation remained below the Reserve Bank of India's target of 4% for the second consecutive month in August. This was primarily due to the base effect from last year when prices were higher. However, food inflation, particularly rural food inflation, showed signs of increasing.

Food Inflation Rises

While the prices of tomatoes fell sharply, vegetable inflation overall rose significantly. Spices prices also declined, but pulses inflation remained high. Rural consumers felt the pinch more than urban consumers, as rural inflation was higher.

ECONOMISTS EXPECT INFLATION TO RISE

Economists predicted that inflation would accelerate as the base effect fades in the coming months. They also expressed concerns about the impact of above-normal rainfall and La Nina conditions on food inflation.

CENTRAL BANK'S STANCE

While the central bank had estimated an average inflation of 4.4% in the July-to-September quarter, the actual inflation was lower. This has led to speculation about a possible change in the monetary policy stance. However, economists have differing views on the timing of any interest rate cuts.

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

Page 01

DOVAL MEETS PUTIN, WANG IN DUAL DIPLOMATIC MISSION

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Context: The National Security Adviser Ajit Doval's diplomatic engagements with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi during the BRICS NSA meeting in Saint Petersburg, focuses on India's role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and military disengagement at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, as both nations seek to strengthen bilateral relations and regional stability.

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval engaged in key diplomatic meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the **BRICS NSA** meeting in Saint Petersburg. During his meeting with Putin, Doval briefed him on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Kyiv and discussions with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, amidst calls for India to play a larger role in the peace process. Putin emphasized security issues in bilateral relations and proposed a meeting with Modi during the BRICS summit in Kazan in October.

Doval's talks with Wang Yi centered on the four-year military stand-off at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China. Both sides agreed to work urgently towards disengagement and stressed the importance of peace at the borders for restoring normalcy in relations. The discussions also hinted at a potential Modi-Xi Jinping meeting at the upcoming BRICS summit. The meetings underscored India's diplomatic efforts in regional stability.

'ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME NOT A REASON TO BULLDOZE PROPERTY'

POLITY & GOVERNANACE

Context: The Supreme Court has reaffirmed the principle that the alleged involvement of an individual in a crime does not warrant the demolition of their property, highlighting the importance of upholding the rule of law and protecting individual rights.

The Supreme Court has ruled that alleged involvement in a crime is not a valid reason for demolishing someone's property. In a recent case, a Gujarat man's home was threatened with demolition after an FIR was registered against a family member. The court emphasised that such actions are unacceptable in a country governed by the rule of law. They ordered the authorities to maintain the status quo of the petitioner's property.

MISSION MAUSAM' TO BOOST RADAR NETWORK TO SEED, TWEAK CLOUDS

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Aim of the Mission

The ₹2,000-crore Mission Mausam aims to significantly upgrade India's weather forecasting infrastructure and conduct research into weather modification techniques.

Key Components

- **Procurement and Installation of Weather Instruments:** The mission will involve the acquisition and deployment of 60 weather radars, 15 wind profilers, and 15 radiosondes to gather data on wind speeds, atmospheric pressure, humidity, and temperature at various altitudes.
- **Cloud-Simulation Chamber:** The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune will establish a cloud-simulation chamber to study and model rain clouds with greater precision.

Weather Modification Research

- **Cloud Seeding and Tweaking:** The mission will explore techniques such as cloud seeding and cloud modification to control rainfall patterns.
- **Lightning Suppression:** Research will also focus on understanding and potentially modifying clouds to reduce their susceptibility to lightning.

Addressing India's Weather Variability

- **Expanding Radar Network:** India's vast size and geographical diversity necessitate a more extensive radar network to capture weather variations accurately. The mission aims to increase the number of weather radars from 39 to 60.

NEED TO INCREASE LCA PRODUCTION TO MEET DEMAND: IAF CHIEF

DEFENCE & SECURITY

Production Capacity Constraints

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is facing challenges in matching the production capacity of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Mk1A with the growing demand, both domestically and internationally.

Diversification and Partnerships

To address this issue, the IAF chief has suggested diversifying production lines and forming public-private partnerships or joint ventures with private companies. This would enable multiple production lines and increase the overall output.

HAL's Role

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the primary manufacturer of the LCA, is expected to take the lead in developing and implementing any new production models or partnerships.

Large-Scale Order

The IAF has placed a significant order for 83 LCA-Mk1A fighters, which will be followed by an additional 97 aircraft. However, meeting this demand within a reasonable timeframe requires a substantial increase in production capacity.

A 16-POINT DOCUMENT ON JUDICIAL VALUES WAS ADOPTED BY SC IN 1997

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Context: The recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the residence of Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud for Ganesh puja has sparked discussions about the appropriate conduct of high constitutional functionaries and the potential erosion of public trust in the judiciary.

JUDICIAL VALUES AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT

Judicial Values

The Supreme Court adopted a 16-point document on judicial values in 1997. This document outlines the expected behavior and conduct of judges, emphasizing impartiality, aloofness, and avoiding any actions that could undermine public confidence.

Concerns Raised

Critics argue that the Prime Minister's visit could compromise the judiciary's independence and erode public trust. They point to the established practices of judicial conduct, which emphasize maintaining a distance between the judiciary and the executive.

Diverse Perspectives

While some legal experts express concerns about the potential implications of the visit, others argue that it was a purely social and religious event and would not affect the judiciary's independence or its judgments.

Conclusion

The Prime Minister's visit has ignited a debate about the appropriate boundaries between the judiciary and the executive. While the judiciary is expected to maintain its independence, the extent to which personal interactions can impact public perception remains a subject of discussion.

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS
Page 04

EXPANDING AYUSHMAN BHARAT TO COVER SENIOR CITIZENS

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Context: The Indian government's decision to extend the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) to senior citizens aged 70 and above is a significant step towards providing free health insurance coverage to a large segment of the population. However, the scheme's limitations and the need for stronger primary and secondary healthcare systems raise concerns about its effectiveness in achieving universal health coverage.

AYUSHMAN BHARAT EXPANDED TO COVER SENIOR

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Key Points:
- The Indian government is expanding the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) to cover all senior citizens aged 70 and above.
- This will provide free health insurance coverage for approximately 60 million people.
- The scheme offers ₹5 lakh free health insurance cover per family.
- There is no waiting period, no cooling-off period, and eKYC is required for enrolment.
- The government will continue to fund 60% of the scheme's costs, while states have flexibility to expand or modify it.
- The scheme aims to address the specific healthcare needs of senior citizens, including geriatric care.

Concerns and Recommendations:
- While the expansion of AB PM-JAY is a positive step, it has limitations.
- The scheme currently only covers secondary and tertiary care hospitalization, excluding outpatient care, diagnostics, and medicines.
- Strengthening primary and secondary health care systems is crucial to reduce the burden on tertiary care and make the scheme more effective.
- Learning from the experiences of countries like Thailand, which focused on primary healthcare, can help India improve its healthcare system.
- Overreliance on private hospitals can lead to increased costs and potential challenges in ensuring equitable access to healthcare.

Conclusion:

The expansion of Ayushman Bharat to cover senior citizens is a valuable initiative. However, addressing the existing gaps in healthcare coverage and strengthening the overall healthcare system is essential to ensure that this scheme effectively meets the needs of the targeted population.

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS
Page 05

WHAT DOES THE DISSOLUTION OF SCOS ENTAIL?

Context: The dissolution of the Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) has raised concerns about the impact on statistical data quality and the potential delays in conducting the next census. The SCoS played a crucial role in advising the government on survey methodologies and ensuring data accuracy, and its dissolution has created a vacuum that needs to be addressed by the newly formed Steering Committee.

THE GIST

- The 14-member Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS), led by Pronab Sen, has been dissolved due to overlap with the Steering Committee for National Sample Surveys.
- SCoS advised on survey methodologies, tabulation plans, and addressed issues related to statistical surveys.
- The new 17-member Steering Committee, including four former SCoS members, will perform similar functions but with more official members.
- There is significant pressure to conduct the next census, delayed from 2021 due to COVID-19, to provide updated data for decision-making.
- Economists and policymakers recommend conducting the next census promptly to ensure accurate data for effective decision-making.

DISSOLUTION OF SCOS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CENSUS AND STATISTICAL DATA

Dissolution of SCoS

The Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) has been dissolved by the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. This decision has sparked concerns about the impact on statistical data quality and the future of the census.

Key Responsibilities of SCoS

The SCoS played a crucial role in advising the government on survey methodologies, tabulation plans, and addressing issues related to statistical surveys. Its expertise was invaluable in ensuring the accuracy and reliability of statistical data.

Formation of Steering Committee

A new Steering Committee has been formed to replace the SCoS. While it has similar responsibilities, the composition of the Steering Committee differs, with more official members.

Pressure for a New Census

There is growing pressure to conduct the next census, which was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Accurate and up-to-date data is essential for effective decision-making in various sectors.

Concerns Regarding Data Quality

The dissolution of the SCoS raises concerns about the potential impact on statistical data quality. The SCoS's expertise and oversight were crucial in ensuring the reliability and accuracy of survey data.

Need for a Timely Census

Economists and policymakers emphasize the urgency of conducting the next census to provide accurate data for informed decision-making. Relying on outdated census data can have negative consequences for policy development and implementation.

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS
Page o6

WHAT ROLE DOES CSTT PLAY IN STANDARDISING TECHNICAL TERMS?

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Context: The importance of Indian languages in technical education has grown with the National Education Policy 2020.

To support this initiative, the Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology (CSTT) plays a vital role in standardizing technical terms and offers a digital platform called "Shabd" for easy access

THE GIST

- The CSTT is responsible for developing standardised scientific and technical terminology in Indian languages.
- The CSTT launched the 'Shabd' platform, a digital glossary search website that hosts all its technical glossaries in a searchable format.
- This platform serves as a central repository for scientific and technical terms in Indian languages, allowing users to search by language, subject, or dictionary type. It aims to make terminologies more accessible and encourages feedback from users to refine translations.

STANDARDIZING TECHNICAL TERMS FOR INDIAN LANGUAGES: THE ROLE OF CSTT AND THE SHABD PLATFORM

With the National Education Policy 2020 emphasizing education in Indian languages, the need for standardized technical terminology has become more crucial.

The Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology (CSTT) plays a vital role in this endeavor.

CSTT: Championing Standardization

Established in 1961, the CSTT focuses on developing standardized scientific and technical terms across all 22 official Indian languages. They achieve this by:

- Publishing bilingual, trilingual, and multilingual glossaries, dictionaries, and monographs.
- Creating and publishing university-level textbooks through their network of Granth Academies and publication cells.
- Developing administrative and departmental glossaries used by government bodies, research institutions, and public sector units.
- Organizing workshops and conferences to promote the use of standardized terminology.

Shabd: A Digital Hub for Technical Terms

The CSTT launched the "Shabd" platform, a digital glossary search website that serves as a central repository for their vast collection of technical terms. Users can:

- Search for terms across various Indian languages, subjects, and dictionary types.
- Access the entire collection or specific glossaries.
- Provide feedback on existing translations, aiding in continuous refinement.

A Rich Resource for Diverse Fields

Shabd currently houses over 322 glossaries with a staggering 21,84,050 headwords. These terms cover a wide range of disciplines, including:

- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Medical Sciences and Engineering
- Agricultural Sciences
- Over 60 specific subjects like:

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

Page 07

- Journalism
- Public Administration
- Various scientific disciplines
- Economics and Ayurveda
- Engineering fields
- Computer Science and Political Science
- Agriculture and Culture
- And many more

Looking Ahead: Embracing Technology

With a commitment to empower Indian languages as per its mandate, the CSTT is exploring the use of AI and related digital technologies to further streamline their work in the future. Shabd serves as a valuable resource for students, educators, researchers, and anyone needing access to standardized technical terms in Indian languages.

RAILWAYS PLANS FIELD TRIALS OF HYDROGEN TRAINS BY JANUARY

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Indian Railways plans to conduct field trials of the country's first hydrogen-powered train by January 2025, with the prototype expected by December. In the initial phase, diesel locomotives will be retrofitted with hydrogen fuel cells. These trains convert hydrogen into electric energy, offering emission-free operation compared to diesel.

If successful, 35 hydrogen train rakes are planned for deployment. A pilot project for hydrogen fuel cell development has been completed, with designs approved by PESO. TÜV-SÜD has been engaged for safety certification. The initiative aligns with Railways' goal of becoming a net-zero carbon emitter by 2030.

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

Page o8

DARK PATTERNS POSE A GROWING CONCERN IN INDIA'S DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Context: The increasing use of dark patterns in India's e-commerce landscape raises concerns about consumer protection and the ethical implications of manipulative design practices. To address these issues, a combination of regulatory measures, industry self-regulation, and consumer awareness is crucial.

Dark Patterns in India's Digital Landscape

India's growing digital and e-commerce sectors, projected to reach $350 billion by 2030, face an emerging issue: **dark patterns.** These deceptive design practices manipulate users into decisions they might not otherwise make, like signing up for unwanted services or sharing personal data. Tactics include creating false urgency, hiding cancellation options, and using confusing language, undermining consumer trust.

Ethical Concerns and Global Response

Dark patterns exploit user psychology, compromising transparency and autonomy. These practices harm consumers and damage businesses, leading to lower customer loyalty and reputational risks. International regulations, such as the **Digital Services Act (DSA)** and **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** in the EU, along with privacy laws in U.S. states, combat dark patterns.

India's Regulatory Response

Recognizing the threat, India's **Department of Consumer Affairs** introduced the **Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns, 2023**, under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. These guidelines address 13 common dark patterns in e-commerce platforms. The **Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020,** also aim to safeguard consumers.

Moving Toward Ethical Design

Addressing dark patterns requires collaboration between businesses, regulators, and consumer groups. Ethical design, transparency, and education for designers are crucial. Additionally, technological solutions like browser extensions can help users detect and avoid these deceptive tactics, ensuring safer digital navigation.

> *"Doing nothing is very hard to do. You never know when you're finished."*—Leslie Nielsen