

CURRENT AFFAIRS

17 August 2022



INFLATION

July wholesale inflation slows to 13.9%

WPI-based inflation eases below 14% for the first time since February; diesel inflation zooms to 72.4%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Wholesale price inflation moderated to a five-month low of 13.93% in July from 15.18% in June, driven by a lower pace of price gains in primary products, food items and manufactured products, even though fuel and power inflation resurged to 43.75% last month, from June's 40.38%.

While this was the 16th month in a row that wholesale inflation was above 10%, the reading marked the first dip below 14%-plus levels since February. The Commerce and Industry Ministry also revised May's inflation upwards to a fresh high of 16.63%, from the earlier estimated record of 15.88%.

Despite the paring of the headline inflation rate, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI)



Stubbornly high: This is the 16th straight month WPI inflation has been above 10%. ■SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

dropped only 0.13% on a month-on-month basis between June and July, as fuel and power inflation jumped 6.56% sequentially, offsetting the moderation in other categories. Within fuel and power, diesel inflation soared again to hit 72.4%,

from a four-month low of 54.9% in June. Petrol moderated marginally from 57.8% to 55.3%. The pace of price rise in LPG eased to 32% from 53.2% in June.

"Inflation in July, 2022 is primarily contributed by rise in prices of mineral oils, food

articles, crude petroleum & natural gas, basic metals, electricity, chemicals & chemical products, food products etc. as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year," noted the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade in the Commerce Ministry.

Pace slows for food items

The pace of wholesale price rise in food items dropped from 12.41% in June to 9.41% in July. This was led by a sharp drop in vegetable inflation to 18.25%, the lowest rate in at least six months, and less than a third of the 56.75% recorded in June.

Inflation in milk dropped to a four-month low of 5.45%, while eggs, meat and fish prices rose at the slowest pace in three months at 5.55%. However, cereals

(9.76%), potato (53.5%), fruits (29.44%) and paddy (3.1%) hit their highest level of inflation in at least six months. Wheat inflation hit a four-month high of 13.61%, from 10.34% in June. Manufactured products saw a broad-based dip in price rise to 8.16%, from 9.19% in July.

"The easing of wholesale inflation is primarily led by lower food, metals and chemical prices," said CARE Ratings chief economist Rajani Sinha. "If not for a sharp sequential rise in mineral oil prices and hike in electricity tariff, the fall would have been sharper," she added.

"We see a likelihood of the first single-digit WPI inflation print by October 2022, after a gap of 18 months, if the downtrend in commodity prices sustains," credit ratings firm ICRA said in a note.

- ✓ **Whole sale Inflation:**It measures the changes in the prices of goods sold and traded in bulk by wholesale businesses to other businesses.
- ✓ Published by the Office of Economic Adviser, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- ✓ It is the most widely used inflation indicator in India.
- ✓ The base year of All-India WPI has been revised from 2004-05 to 2011-12 in 2017.
- ✓ **Headline Inflation:**Headline inflation refers to the rate of change in the CPI, a measure of the average price of a standard basket of goods and services consumed by a typical family.
- ✓ **Core inflation:**Core inflation measures the change in average consumer prices after excluding from the CPI certain items with volatile price movements.

TOPIC: WILDLIFE PROTECTION

African cheetahs still stuck in transit

Unofficial deadline for translocation missed as administrative hurdles delay work

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

India's ambitious project to translocate African cheetahs has missed an unofficial deadline of August 15, though sources say the wild cats are likely to arrive here within this year.

Though agreements have been signed with both South Africa and Namibia, administrative delays, as well as the presence of leopards in the cheetahs' prospective destination—the Kuno Palpur forest reserve, Madhya Pradesh—are believed to be barriers to their arrival.

India's action plan, a long-term translocation project made public this February—on re-establishing the cheetah that has been extinct



Stumbling block: A cheetah, set to be translocated to India, being medically examined in Namibia. ■ TWITTER/@INDIAINNAMIBIA

since 1952 in India—states that a cohort of around 10-12 young would be imported as a founder stock.

The Indian High Commission in Namibia tweeted pictures on Monday of cheetahs, set to be translocated to India, being medically examined. In the case of South

Africa, a memorandum of understanding signed with the government awaited a signature from President Cyril Ramaphosa, said sources.

Many challenges

“To have the cheetahs in time for August 15, to commemorate 75 years of Inde-

pendence, was the government's hope but there are administrative challenges to such an exercise. The animals are expected to be here soon and it would still be among the fastest such translocations anywhere in the world,” a highly placed official told *The Hindu*. Once the cheetahs arrive, they are expected to be housed in ‘predator-proof’ enclosures.

However, the current enclosures have five leopards only two of whom have been translocated. “Without the complete translocation of all leopards, the cheetah cannot be introduced as they will compete for the available prey base of sambar and chital,” another official told *The Hindu*.

- ✓ **Kuno National Park** is a national park in Madhya Pradesh, India, established in 1981 as a wildlife sanctuary
- ✓ In 2018, it was given the status of a national park.
- ✓ It is part of the Khathiar–Gir dry deciduous forests ecoregion.
- ✓ **Cheetah**, a large cat native to Africa and central Iran. It is the fastest land animal/ Vulnerable
- ✓ **sambar** is a large deer native to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia that is listed as a vulnerable species on the IUCN Red List since 2008.
- ✓ The **chital** also known as spotted deer, chital deer, and axis deer, is a deer species native to the Indian subcontinent./Least concern.

TOPIC: INDEPENDENT BODIES

High points in science, technology and innovation

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research has undertaken its mission effectively since Independence

- ✓ Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is the largest research and development (R&D) organisation in India.
- ✓ Established: September 1942
- ✓ Headquarters: New Delhi
- ✓ CSIR is funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology and it operates as an autonomous body through the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- ✓ CSIR covers a wide spectrum of streams – from radio and space physics, oceanography, geophysics, chemicals, drugs, genomics, biotechnology and nanotechnology to mining, aeronautics, instrumentation, environmental engineering and information technology.
- ✓ It provides significant technological intervention in many areas with regard to societal efforts which include the environment, health, drinking water, food, housing, energy, farm and non-farm sectors.
- ✓ President: Prime Minister of India (Ex-officio)

TOPIC:ENVIRONMENT

Stepping back from an ecological abyss

There is a need to balance India's developmental needs with the sustenance of its ecological foundations



ASHISH KOTHARI

Chipko, Silent Valley, Narmada, Koel-Karo. Growing up in the 1970s and the early 1980s, many of us who were passionate about environmental issues were inspired by these and other movements. As the government too responded with a series of forest, wildlife, environment-related laws and policies, there was hope that India would be able to balance its development needs with the sustenance of its ecological foundations. As India celebrates 75 years of Independence, has that hope been sustained?

An earth under stress

The prospects today seem far gloomier than they did in the 1980s. Four hundred and eighty million Indians face the world's most extreme air pollution levels. According to NITI Aayog, "600 million people in India face high to extreme water stress... with nearly 70% of water being contaminated; India is placed at 120th amongst 122 countries in the water quality index". Land degradation and desertification are taking place over 30% of our land, according to the Indian Space Research Organisation. Average levels of land productivity are one-fourth or one-fifth of what they could be, pumping in artificial fertilizers restores a bit, but at the cost of pushing the soil further towards death. Food items in most cities have pesticide residues well above human safety levels. The World Bank – itself partly responsible for pushing India into unsustainable pathways – reported in 2013 that India was losing 5.7% of GDP due to environmental damage. The latest global environmental ranking by Yale and Columbia Universities puts India at the bot-

tom among 180 countries; while flawed in many respects, including how it lets rich countries off the hook, it is nevertheless reflective of what is happening on the ground.

Favouring corporate access All this evidence has still not penetrated the minds of politicians and economists setting development priorities. The obsession with economic growth – despite growing evidence of GDP being a very poor indicator of human well-being – treats the natural environment (and related livelihoods) as fodder for exploitation. Despite public posturing about the Sustainable Development Goals, the natural elements without which we would all be dead – land, water, biodiversity, air – continue to be ignored or mauled.

In fact, the Government is dismantling environmental and social security policies to favour corporate access to land and natural resources, such as the latest proposals to amend forest and environment laws, and the Environment Impact Assessment notification. Its priority programmes include building massive physical infrastructure that only disrupts the natural infrastructure we desperately need to protect. For instance, the 2022-23 Budget has an allocation for highways that alone is 40 times greater than the Budget of the Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change. Of what use is faster and faster mobility, if at the end of the journey we still have air and water and food that are killing us?

Given the hopeful signs of the 1970s and the 1980s, how did we come to this pass? In our book *Churning the Earth*, Aseem Shrivastava and I analysed in detail a significant turning point – the economic 'reforms' beginning in 1991. With greater integration into the global economy, the entry of multinational (and big Indian) corporations into every sector, and increasing exports of natural



S. BAMBENURUP

materials and imports of toxic waste, the issue of environmental sustainability was relegated to the background. Mining projects crept into previously safe areas including wildlife protected areas and Adivasi territories, the oceans became a target for major commercial extraction (and will be even more so with the new Deep Ocean Mission), and big infrastructure became a holy mantra.

India 75

While wildlife and biodiversity have been major sufferers, there are also severe socio-cultural costs. Over 60 million people have been physically displaced by 'development' projects in the last few decades with very poor (if any) rehabilitation, and according to the former Planning Commission, a disproportionately high percentage of these are Adivasis and Dalits. Ironically, a component of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) is new coal mining in central India, displacing already self-reliant Adivasi communities – and rendering them dependent on government and corporations.

Extreme events

The climate crisis severely compounds all this. This year's super-hot summer should be a warning, even if we have not yet learnt from earlier events of extreme temperatures, erratic rainfall, cloudbursts and cyclones. In recent trips to La-

dakh, I learnt that many villages (e.g. in Zaskar) are being abandoned due to water shortages caused by receding glaciers. A *Lancet Planetary Health* journal article says that extreme temperatures in India are responsible for 7,40,000 excess deaths annually. The majority of these are likely to be labourers, farmers, and other vulnerable sections who have to work, live, and commute in these temperatures without access to air-conditioning, appropriate clothing, etc. And we are not at all prepared, with abysmally low budgets for adaptation measures. The Climate Action Plan got a meagre ₹30 crore in the 2022-23 Budget.

Enabling sustainability

So, India's biggest challenge: can ecological sustainability be ensured while generating livelihood security and dignity for more than a billion people? Answers do exist, in thousands of initiatives across the country, as documented in the Vikalp Sangam process. Five thousand Dalit women farmers of the Deccan Development Society have demonstrated how organic, rainfed farming with traditional seed diversity can provide full food security and sovereignty.

Several hundred handloom weavers in Kachchh (Gujarat) have shown how dignified, creative livelihoods can be revived based on organic Kala cotton and a mix of traditional and new skills. Indeed, India's crafts have sustained several hundred million people in the past, and can do so again if the incredible traditional and new skills in textiles, footwear, cleaning agents, vessels, pottery, furniture, architecture and construction, water-related technologies, and a range of household items are given priority. Community-led ecotourism, such as homestays in Uttarakhand and Ladakh and Sikkim, has combined increased earnings with ecologically sensitive visitation. Community conserved areas have shown a democratic approach to wildlife protection very

different from the top-down 'protected area' model. As advocated by the United Nations Environment Programme, public transportation, organic farming, land and water regeneration, renewable energy, community health, eco-friendly construction, ecotourism, and small-scale manufacturing can significantly enhance job creation. Linking programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act with such activities, as happening in some States, also has huge potential.

Needed, a mobilisation

Such an orientation entails fundamental restructuring of economy and governance. It will mean a shift away from large infrastructure and industrialisation, replacing mega-corporations with producer cooperatives, ensuring community rights over the 'commons' (land, water, forest, coasts, knowledge), and direct decision-making powers to gram sabhas and urban area sabhas while tackling gender and caste inequities. It will entail respect for both human rights and the rights of nature. But since this will inevitably (and desirably) cut into the profits and consumerism of India's ultra-rich, and reduce the centralised power of the state, it will not happen through government action alone. It needs the collective mobilisation of industrial workers, farmers, fishers, craftspersons, pastoralists, urban and rural youth, women in all sectors, the 'disabled' and LGBTQ, and those speaking on behalf of wildlife, all of whom are marginalised by dominant elites. Then only will India finish its century of independence as a nation that has achieved genuine well-being – a real 'amrit kaal' and not the seductive but poisoned chimera promised by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget 2022-23 address.

Ashish Kothari is with Kalpavriksh, Pune. The views expressed are personal

TOPIC :LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Most councillors unaware of Area Sabhas

Survey conducted by Voice of People shows lack of awareness on government's notification

STAFF REPORTER
CHENNAI

A survey conducted by Voice of People (VoP), a citizens' collective, showed that around 90% of the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) councillors who took part in the survey were unaware that the Tamil Nadu government has notified rules for the formation of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees.

Moreover, three-fourth of the surveyed councillors said that they were not even aware what Area Sabhas and Ward Committees were. Of the 200 councillors of GCC, VoP said it reached out to 191. Only 146 attended the phone call, of which 110 of them agreed to take part in the conversation, the survey results released by VoP said.

Following a long-pending

demand by the civil society for the formation of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees to make the functioning of urban local bodies more participatory, the Tamil Nadu government notified the rules for the same in June. According to the rules, councillors are the ones to play the lead role in the functioning of the Area Sabhas and Ward Committees.

Charu Govindan of VoP said that the Tamil Nadu government has to take responsibility for the lack of awareness of the councillors.

It has to be noted that a group of organisations, including VoP, recently made an appeal to the government to make significant amendments to the newly-notified rules to make the Area Sabhas and Ward Committees

truly effective and participatory.

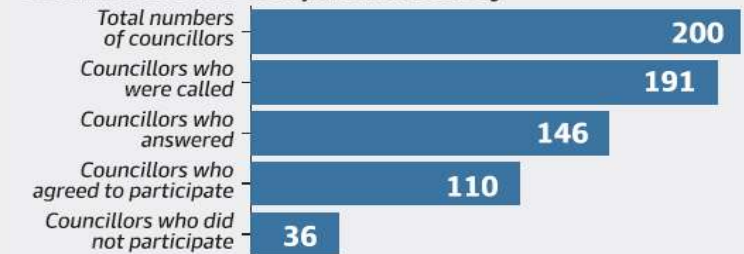
Though majority of the councillors were neither aware of the committees nor the rules, the report, however, said that most of them showed interest to learn about the rules and understand the lacunae in them. Many of them invited VoP members for an in-person discussion, the report said.

The report urged the government to prioritise educating the councillors on the composition, functions and powers of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees. If the government is really committed to people's participation, the report said that it should launch a wider campaign to make the public understand the importance and functioning of such bodies.

Low awareness

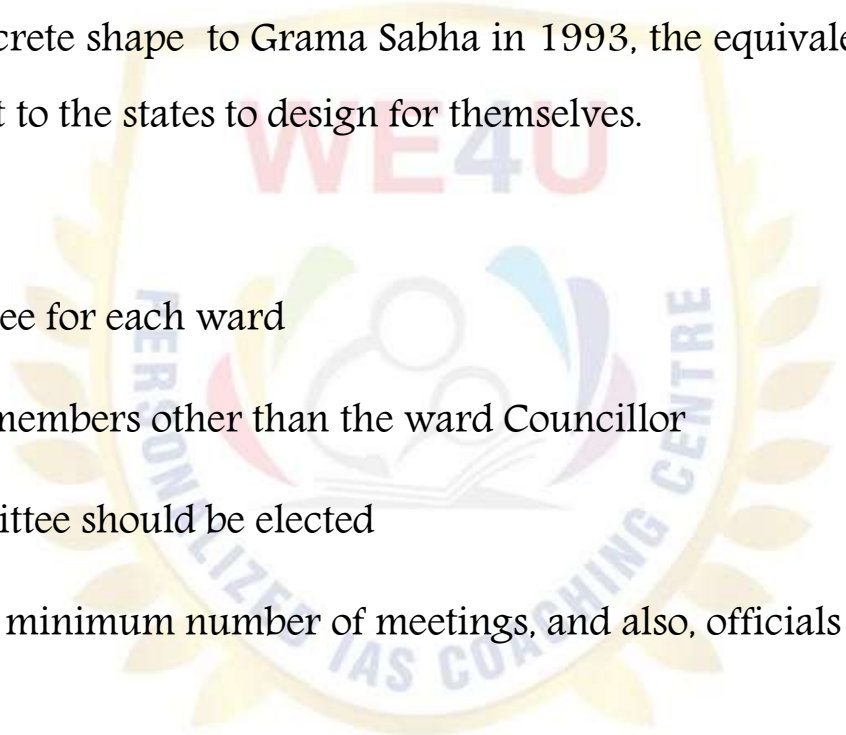
A survey conducted over phone by Voice of People showed that the majority of the councillors of Greater Chennai Corporation are unaware of the concept of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees

The graph below shows the total number of councillors in GCC and those who took part in the survey



The following graph shows the percentage of surveyed councillors who were aware of the Area Sabhas, Ward Committees and the newly notified rules, and who were not



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- ✓ While the constitution gave concrete shape to Grama Sabha in 1993, the equivalent structure for urban governance – the Ward Committee – was left to the states to design for themselves.
 - ✓ To be effective,
 - ✓ There should be a ward committee for each ward
 - ✓ A ward committee should have members other than the ward Councillor
 - ✓ The members of the ward committee should be elected
 - ✓ There should be a mandate for a minimum number of meetings, and also, officials to be part of the meeting

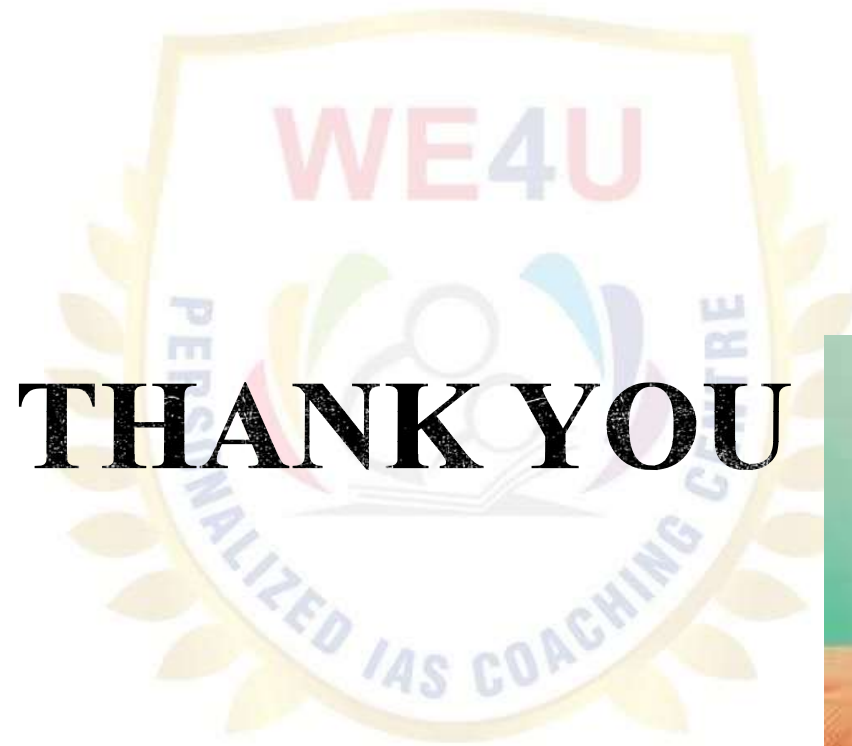
TOPIC:EXECUTIVE

Remission without reform

Premature release of prisoners must be done with discretion and wisdom

- ✓ Article 72 of the Constitution gives the president the right to grant pardons, remit, or commute the sentences of anyone convicted of any crime.
- ✓ Governors given in Article 161
- ✓ **Pardon:** It removes both the sentence and the conviction and completely absolves the convict from all sentences, punishments and disqualifications.
- ✓ **Commutation:** It denotes the substitution of one form of punishment for a lighter form. For example, a death sentence may be commuted to rigorous imprisonment, which in turn may be commuted to a simple imprisonment.

- ✓ **Remission.** It implies reducing the period of sentence without changing its character. For example, a sentence of rigorous imprisonment for two years may be remitted to rigorous imprisonment for one year.
- ✓ **Respite.** It denotes awarding a lesser sentence in place of one originally awarded due to some special fact, such as the physical disability of a convict or the pregnancy of a woman offender.
- ✓ **Reprieve.** It implies a stay of the execution of a sentence (especially that of death) for a temporary period. Its purpose is to enable the convict to have time to seek pardon or commutation from the President



THANK YOU

