

CURRENT AFFAIRS

21 September 2022



WILDLIFE PROTECTION

‘No spotted deer brought to Kuno as prey for cheetahs’

The Chital or the Spotted Deer

- ✓ IUCN status – Least Concern.
- ✓ State animal of Telangana.
- ✓ In India Chital is very widely distributed from the base of Himalayas to the steaming forests of the south except in the north east.

TOPIC: INFLATION

Rice, wheat push up inflation, but South bucks the trend

Cereal inflation highest since 2014, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh cross the 15% mark

DATA POINT

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After decelerating for three consecutive months, India's retail inflation accelerated to 7% in August 2022. A major factor behind this uptick was a reversal in retail food inflation which declined to 6.7% in July but went up again to 7.6% in August. In turn, the surge in food inflation was due to rising cereal prices which quickened to 9.5% in August – the highest since February 2014.

While overall food inflation was high, wide variations were observed across major States. Particularly, the Southern States bucked the trend and recorded very low levels of food inflation in August. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka were at the bottom of the list when major States were compared for retail food inflation. The August food inflation in these four States was 5% or less. Food inflation was lower than the national average in Telangana (6%) too.

In contrast, the western States of Gujarat (11.5%) and Rajasthan (10.4%) were at the top of the list with a retail food inflation of over 10% in August. The other States which had food inflation higher than the national average include West Bengal (10.3%), Uttar Pradesh (9.2%), Maharashtra and Uttarakhand (8.5%).

Chart 1 shows India's overall retail inflation and food and beverage retail inflation since 2019. The overall retail inflation, after accelerating to 7.79% in April 2022, softened for three consecutive months. But the trend reversed with retail inflation touching the 7% mark in August 2022. In the case of food and beverages retail inflation, after accelerating to 8.1% in April 2022 – highest in 17 months – it softened for three consecutive months. But similar to retail inflation, here too the trend re-

versed in August.

Chart 2 plots item-wise retail inflation in August 2022 for all food-related products on the vertical axis. The chart also plots the weight of those items in the inflation calculation on the horizontal axis. The retail inflation of rice and wheat/wheat flour – from sources other than PDS – which carries the most weightage among food-related items, accelerated to 6.9% and 15.7% respectively in August 2022. In August, rice inflation was highest in over 20 months while wheat/wheat flour inflation was highest since at least January 2015. In fact, wheat/wheat flour inflation has surged this financial year, with each month recording over 9% of retail inflation.

Due to rising local prices, the government imposed an export ban on broken rice on September 9 and mandated an export duty of 20% on various grades of rice. After the ban on wheat exports in mid-May, the demand for Indian wheat flour surged pushing up the local prices. So, in late August, India imposed restrictions on wheat flour too, to rein in the prices.

Table 3 shows State-wise food & beverage retail inflation in August. The southern States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka feature at the bottom of the table whereas Gujarat and Rajasthan are at the top.

Table 4 shows State-wise retail inflation in August 2022 for cereals, meat and fish and vegetables – the three sub-groups which carry the most weightage under the "food and beverage" group. Except Kerala in the cereal sub-group, the southern States recorded low-levels of retail inflation across all three sub-groups. In the cereal sub-group, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Karnataka recorded less than 3% of retail inflation. In the meat and fish sub-group, many Southern States recorded deflation. And in the vegetable sub-group, the inflation was 5% or less in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Inflation highs and lows

The charts and tables show how wheat and rice prices pushed up retail inflation in the North, East and West regions of India while the South remained relatively unscathed. The data was sourced from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation



Chart 1 | Chart shows India's overall retail inflation and food and beverage retail inflation since 2019

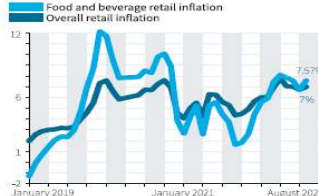


Table 3 | Table shows the State-wise food & beverage retail inflation in August. All the southern States had inflation much lower than India's average

State	Food
Gujarat	11.5
Rajasthan	10.4
W.B.	10.3
U.P.	9.2
Maharashtra	8.5
Uttarakhand	8.5
Haryana	7.6
M.P.	7.6
Odisha	7.6
India	7.6
Punjab	7.0
Assam	6.8
Himachal	6.7
Telangana	6.0
Bihar	6.0
Chhattisgarh	5.9
Jharkhand	5.8
Karnataka	5.4
Kerala	4.7
Andhra	4.5
Tamil Nadu	4.1

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Chart 2 | Chart plots item-wise retail inflation for all food-related products against their weight in inflation calculation

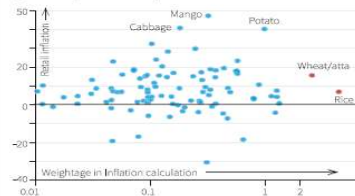


Table 4 | Table shows retail inflation in August 2022 for cereals, meat and fish and vegetables

State	Vegetables	Cereals	Meat & fish
Gujarat	27.6	12.8	3.6
Assam	26.8	1.0	4.3
Maharashtra	23.5	7.4	1.3
Uttarakhand	18.5	7.9	2.4
Odisha	18.3	4.9	0.8
W.B.	16.2	21.2	4.4
Rajasthan	15.3	18.1	5.4
Punjab	13.7	7.5	3.6
M.P.	13.5	10.1	5.0
U.P.	13.2	15.2	5.3
Chhattisgarh	9.9	3.8	2.2
Telangana	9.0	2.1	-2.1
Haryana	8.6	9.2	11.9
Kerala	6.9	14.3	-0.1
Karnataka	5.1	1.9	1.1
Andhra	4.2	3.2	-9.1
Jharkhand	3.5	11.2	2.2
Tamil Nadu	3.1	2.7	-4.5
Bihar	1.3	9.0	4.3

INDIA FOREIGN POLICY

Positioning India in a chaotic world

India's foreign policy mandarins are all set to go into overdrive in the wake of new challenges. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting (September 15-16) in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, was a test case for governments on how to deal with current conflicts and attempt new guidelines for the future. Along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi were Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese Premier Xi Jinping, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the leaders of Pakistan and other SCO nations. The special significance of this in-person SCO meeting lay in the fact that it was taking place when the world stood at the crossroads, in the wake of the Russia-Ukrainian conflict.

Mr. Xi's initial remarks to Mr. Putin on the sidelines of the conference signalled the divided nature of the world today. Even as the leaders emphasised the strengthening of their ties in defiance of the West, Mr. Xi's remarks that 'China is willing to make efforts with Russia to assume the role of great powers, and play a guiding role to inject stability and positive energy into a world rocked by social turmoil' were pregnant with many meanings. Mr. Putin's response further underlined the extent of global disruption taking place today, and the wide chasm that separated the two warring blocs.

New version of non-alignment
India's presence at the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO was significant, reflecting a desire to be a part of both blocs, without antagonising either. The justification provided is that it represented a 'new version' of Non-alignment, *viz.*, steering an independent course, despite open association with rival blocs. At the meeting, Mr. Modi made certain significant observations which mirror India's new version of Non-alignment. For instance, after refusing to take sides in the Ukrainian conflict for months, Mr. Modi told Mr. Putin that "this isn't the era of war", stressing instead that "it was one of democracy, dialogue and diplomacy". This has been interpreted as a mild rebuke of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, in his formal opening remarks at the summit, Mr. Modi thanked both Russia and Ukraine for the evacuation of Indian students from Ukraine, highlighting India's posture of equidistance between the two countries.

The philosophical underpinning for this seems to be that 'Non-alignment of the past' had not succeeded, and a way had to be found for "multiple engagements of the future". Mr. Modi's presence at this SCO summit is possibly the earliest test case of this unfolding strategy, given that it is only recently that the United States and



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With old fashioned geo-political risks jostling alongside newer political challenges, India's foreign policy planners need to refashion the way they look at issues

other western allies had complimented India for its participation in the Quad (Australia, Japan, India and the U.S.). Whether India can make out a case for 'mixing utopia with reality' under the label of 'multi alignment' is yet to be seen, but it does provide grist to an idea being floated that this provides leeway for India to play a much bigger role in 'managing conflict'.

It would be interesting to see whether this SCO summit will pave the way for India to exploit other situations created by political contradictions and use them to its advantage. A test case is India's relations with Iran which have been on the backburner for some time, following a U.S. threat to impose sanctions on India if it continued to trade with Iran. Iran's President appears to have floated a suggestion to hold a summit meeting with India's Prime Minister, and the ball is apparently in India's court. The cost to India on account of the freeze in relations with Iran has been high, including having to pay higher prices for crude and the inability to utilise the Chabahar Connectivity Project as an alternate route to Afghanistan.

As of now, all this seems at best, to be 'work in progress'. Meantime, however, India's foreign policy is increasingly appearing passive rather than active. Less important events such as abstaining from voting in the United Nations on the Ukraine issue are being touted as policy, ignoring the fact that this has contributed little to peace in Ukraine nor led to a lessening of tensions. This is also the case in our immediate neighbourhood, whether it be Sri Lanka or Afghanistan, where India's foreign policy prescriptions look better on paper than in reality. A preoccupation with Pakistan and constant references to terrorism have kept India's domestic population happy and satisfied, but this does not translate into an effective foreign policy.

Refashioning India's foreign policy has become vital at a time when India is facing a confluence of old and new situations and threats, which often intersect. Such a situation may not be unique, but the nature of rivalries and present global undercurrents makes this extremely tricky. It may require a major overhaul of how we interpret regional and international tensions that have increased. For India, this poses a whole new paradigm of challenges, and it is important for India not to become the odd man out, as patterns change. New priorities need to be devised without squandering the past inheritance of managing to remain independent of conflicting blocs.

Ties with China
Jettisoning an erroneous belief that prevails among some sections of India's foreign policy establishment, *viz.*, that the erstwhile policy of Non-alignment had done little to enhance India's image, should be the beginning, followed by deeper introspection before effecting fundamental changes in the policy of Non-alignment. While, China today presents an acute 'near-term problem' for India, it is important that India does not fall into the trap that the current adversarial relationship with China is 'carved in stone', and can or never will be altered. India's foreign policy should be creative enough to leave an opening for an improvement in India-China relations over the longer term.

Again, the intensity of the current conflict

between India and China should not lead India's strategic establishment to overlook the fact that the primary conflict between India and China is 'civilizational', and not for territory. The two countries may never have a 'lips and teeth relationship', but given the history of nations there is enough scope for India to formulate a policy that would not completely close the doors on China for all time. Hence, India's foreign policy mandarins must look for opportunities for the betterment of relations at an opportune time, which could well arise when China's economy begins to stall and India's economy (in-line with the expectations of economists worldwide) rises, moderating China's current aggressive behaviour.

Refashioning relations with China over the longer term is important, but attention also needs to be given on how to manage relations in the near term in the context of the growing closeness in China-Russia relations. As their relations become closer, they have the potential of adversely impacting the current warmth in India-Russia relations. Our foreign policy experts need to consider how best to manage the relationship with both Russia and China in the extant circumstances. The watchword here again is that there is no permanence in the nature of relationships among nations, more so with the so-called Big Powers.

Nuclear dimension

An issue that has remained on the backburner for years may now need consideration in the context of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, *viz.*, the nuclear dimension. Seldom mentioned, but present nevertheless like Bangor's Ghost, are concerns about the possible use of nuclear weapons that have been raised in the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. India, no doubt, has been a firm adherent of the 'No First Use Doctrine', and while nuclear relationships involving India, China and Pakistan have remained remarkably subdued over many years, India's strategic and foreign policy establishment cannot afford to overlook the nuclear aspect, given that the country is wedged between two active, and hostile, nuclear powers – China and Pakistan.

Nuclear stability, as we have known for some years now, could well change in the near future. What cannot also be ignored in this context is the growing sophistication of Chinese nuclear forces, and to a lesser extent that of Pakistan, which has the effect of putting India at a disadvantage with both predictable and unpredictable consequences. India's new foreign policy imperatives cannot again afford to ignore this aspect, even though at present India is the only one among the three that does not see nuclear weapons as intended for use in the event of a war. Nevertheless, it behoves India's strategic and foreign policy establishment to consider how best to prevent 'debilitating strategic instability' – with regard to China in particular – given the pace at which China's nuclear arsenal is growing.

Hence, navigating the coming decade promises to be extremely demanding, if not dangerous, with old fashioned geopolitical risks jostling alongside newer political challenges. It demands a total transformation of the way India's foreign policy planners look at issues today. It may well necessitate giving up many of the existing policy constructs, providing for a wider outreach, and ensuring that our policy is not merely in step with current needs but is always a step ahead.



GETTY IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

TOPIC: VULNERABLE SECTION

Kurmis block railway tracks demanding inclusion on ST list

Kurmi Tribe:

- ✓ Kurmi is traditionally a non-elite tiller caste in the lower Gangetic plain of India, especially southern regions of Awadh, eastern Uttar Pradesh and parts of Bihar.
- ✓ The Kurmis came to be known for their exceptional work ethic, superior tillage and manuring, and gender-neutral culture, bringing praise from Mughal and British administrators alike
- ✓ Kurmali language

Eighth Schedule

- ✓ The Eighth Schedule to the constitution of India lists the official languages of India. Although there are hundreds of languages spoken across the country, the eighth schedule recognises a total of 22 languages as the official languages.

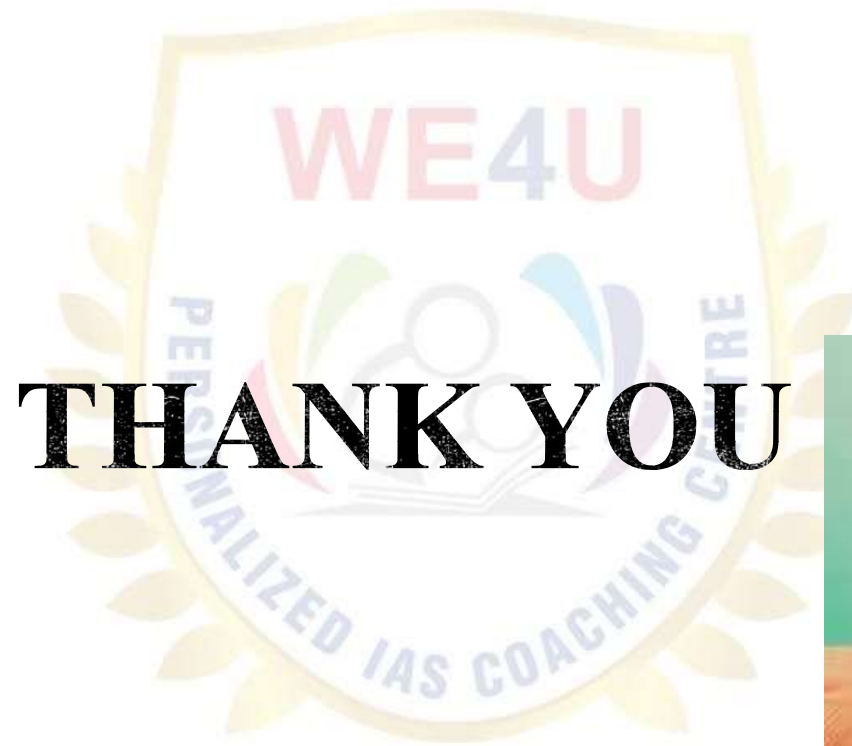
TOPIC: FAIRS & FESTIVAL

Tiwa Tribes



Crop fest: Tiwa tribesmen dancing on the occasion of the Langkhon festival in Karbi Anglong district of Assam on Tuesday. During the annual festival, farmers pray for a good harvest. RITU RAJ KONWAR

- ✓ The tribe Tiwas (Lalungs) lives both in the hills and plains of Assam and Meghalaya state. Tiwa means people who were lifted from below.
- ✓ They are recognized as a Scheduled tribe within the State of Assam.
- ✓ The hill Tiwa villagers are habitual to the Jhum cultivation, horticulture, vegetables and the crops which are cultivable in the area.
- ✓ They speak a Tibeto Burman language.



THANK YOU

