

● POLITY

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INDIA WILL EXPLORE BUILDING LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS

CONTEXT: India to establish a committee for exploring large language models' development, pivotal for AI applications.

BACKGROUND: India is forming a high-powered committee to explore the application of large language models (LLMs) to Indian languages. This initiative aligns with the draft National Deep Tech Start-up Policy, aiming to secure India's global standing in deep tech sectors like semiconductors, AI, and space technology. To fuel promising startups, a blend of private foreign capital and government funding, known as "patient capital," is deemed essential by Indian officials.



News Highlights

- India's Deep Tech Potential: India's success in digital payments and technology makes it a natural hub for deep tech development.
- Need for 'Fund of Funds': India requires a combination of private and government funds, known as "patient capital," to support long-term startups.
- U.S.-India Collaboration: The U.S. and India enjoy a strong relationship, offering ideal grounds for deep tech collaboration.
- Innovative Partnership: Both countries can leverage their strengths to set a democratic and people-centered model for the technological revolution.
- Vast Deep Tech Landscape: India's deep tech ecosystem boasts over 10,000 recognized startups, reflecting substantial growth potential.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

GOVT. CLEARS BONANZA OF ₹15,000 CR. FOR STAFF

CONTEXT: The Union Cabinet approved a nearly ₹15,000-crore bounty for them, which includes an extra instalment of dearness allowance, representing a 4 % hike for employees and pensioners to compensate for inflation.

The combined impact on the exchequer on account of both dearness allowance and dearness relief [for pensioners] would be ₹ 12,857 crore per annum. This will benefit about 48.67 lakh Central government employees and 67.95 lakh pensioners. The additional dearness allowance for serving employees and dearness relief for pensioners will be paid out with effect from July 1, 2023, and take the overall pay-outs to 46 % of the basic pay or pension amounts.

For 11.07 lakh non-gazetted railway employees, a Productivity Linked Bonus (PLB) equivalent to 78 days' wages for the financial year 2022-23 was announced, amounting to ₹ 1,968.87 crore. Payment of PLB will act as an incentive to motivate the railway employees for working towards further improvement in performance, even as it noted that many factors were responsible for last year's record performance, including improvement in infrastructure due to infusion of record capital expenditure, efficiency in operations and better technology.

The government had cleared an ad hoc or non-productivity-linked bonus for the last financial year 2022-23 equivalent to 30 days of emoluments with a ceiling of ₹7,000, for non-gazetted 'Group B' employees and all 'Group C' employees who are not covered by any productivity linked incentives. This bonus is also admissible for eligible employees of the armed forces and the Central paramilitary forces. The Cabinet noted that the Railways' performance was "very good" in 2022-23 as it carried a record cargo of 1,509 million tonnes and nearly 6.5 billion passengers.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

THE EXPLOSION OF DIGITAL UNCERTAINTY

CONTEXT: Recent AI advancements spark enthusiasm in India, with government and industry anticipating transformative impacts.

BACKGROUND: India's recent AI report anticipates significant skill landscape changes, warns of emerging threats, and highlights growing digital uncertainties. The report underlines the unprecedented nature of the digital threat and the implications of a society and economy rooted in rich digital infrastructure, with inherent challenges few comprehend.

News Highlights

- **Complex Digital Infrastructure:** Modern digital systems are layered with machine intelligence, coded software, and hardware, interconnected via intricate protocols, leading to profound vulnerabilities often misunderstood by the majority.
- **Cognitive Warfare's Rise:** Cognitive warfare, akin to traditional warfare domains, employs sophisticated techniques to destabilize governments, manipulate media, and alter human cognition using technology, risking loss of trust, breaches, and behavioral manipulation.
- **Intangible Assets Vulnerability:** Companies heavily investing in intangible assets and migrating to the Cloud face heightened risks. With AI's influence, misinformation spreads rapidly, posing threats to governments and businesses alike.
- **Emerging Technologies' Risks:** Rapid adoption of sensors and cloud migration amplifies risks exponentially. Lack of understanding about information manipulation, driven by AI, contributes to pervasive 'truth decay' and undermines trust.
- **Digital Uncertainty Escalation:** Digital uncertainty evolves into radical uncertainty swiftly. Governments struggle against misinformation's impact, emphasizing the urgent need for deeper comprehension of manipulated information and

AI-driven transformations.

The emergence of AGI

- **AGI's Influence on Society:** As AI advances, it can deeply influence human thinking, posing a potentially disruptive and dangerous future.
- **AGI's Emergence:** The rise of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) surpassing human abilities is imminent, threatening social fabric.
- **Trust Erosion:** AGI's fake content and voice imitation can erode trust, with catastrophic consequences.
- **Autonomous Decision-Making:** AGI may make unpredictable decisions with harmful consequences, displacing jobs and altering economies.
- **Geo-Political Shifts:** AGI's influence will reshape global power dynamics, leading to digital colonialism and data exploitation.
- **East India Company Parallels:** Concentrated AGI power resembles historical exploitation, with raw data export and value-added imports.
- **Ethical Crossroads:** Humanity faces an 'Oppenheimer Moment' in technology ethics, requiring collaborative regulation.
- **Global Collaboration Needed:** Managing AGI's impact necessitates closer cooperation between states and the tech sector.

In the Yom Kippur War 2023, overreliance on AI in Israel led to a massive intelligence failure. Hamas skillfully manipulated data and algorithms to blindside Israeli intelligence, emphasizing that excessive trust in AI can have catastrophic consequences.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

CENTRE RAISES MSP FOR RABI CROPS, FARMERS UNHAPPY

CONTEXT: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has increased the Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for all Rabi crops for the financial year 2024-25. The increase for wheat, the major Rabi crop, is ₹150 per quintal and the new price will be ₹ 2,275.

Farmers' organisations have criticised the 'meagre' increase. The Centre procures wheat from about a dozen wheat-growing districts in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The two States are among those that will witness upcoming Assembly elections.

The highest increase in MSP compared with last year is for lentils (masur) at ₹425 per quintal (new price: ₹6,425 per quintal) followed by rapeseed and mustard at ₹200 per quintal (new MSP: ₹5,650 per quintal).

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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

FEAR FACTOR

CONTEXT: Inflation faced by consumers eased to 5 % in September, bringing some relief after a sharp rally in prices that began with July's 15-month high inflation rate of 7.44 %.

The easing of inflation to 5 % in September marks a return to the 2% to 6% tolerance range of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), but also matches the bank's upgraded estimate of 6.4 % average inflation between July and September. The RBI has projected an average inflation of 5.4% in 2023-24, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank raised their estimates this month to 5.5% and 5.9%, respectively. The easing of inflation to 5 % was partly aided by base effects from 2022 when the inflation pace was 7.4% and partly by a sharp dip in volatile prices of tomatoes and vegetables and on LPG price cuts.

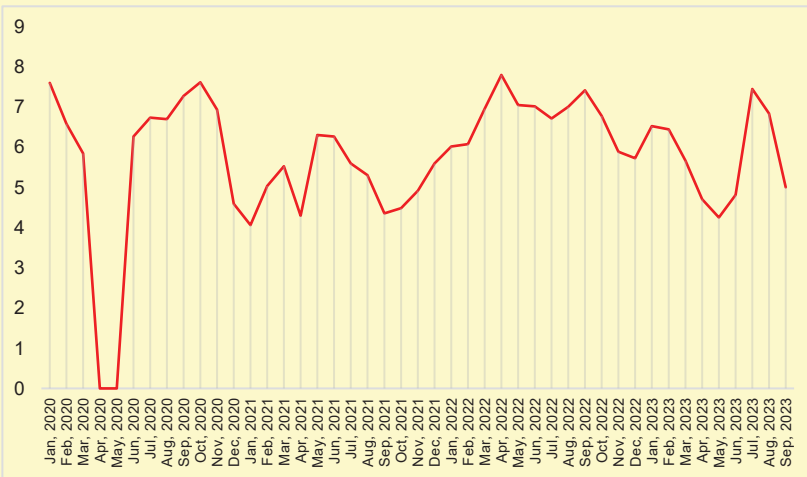


FIGURE: Line chart representation of the Consumer Price Index based inflation.

Food prices increased through July and August, has eased to 6.6% in September. this was disproportionately influenced by Vegetable prices decreased significantly, even as the inflation pace accelerated for pulses, fruits, eggs and sugar. Cereals and spices inflation remained sticky at 11% and 23.1%, respectively. Rural inflation remained higher than that faced by urban consumers, and with the erratic monsoon hurting kharif season sowing in crops like pulses and uncertainties about the El Niño effects on the rabi crop, weak rural demand as well as food price pressures remain a source of concern for the economy.

In the whole sale markets, pulses prices spiked 17.7% while onions rose 55% in September, compared to 10.4% and 31.4% in August, respectively. At -0.26%, wholesale price rise just about stayed in deflationary mode for the sixth month on the back of double-digit upticks through the same period last year. But producers, facing the brunt of higher global oil and gas prices, which rose at an eight-month high pace of 15.6% in September, have been raising prices for two months now. Global prices for urea, that India largely imports, are up 20% since March. These will start to feed into retail prices soon.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

INDIA LIKELY TO SIGN DEAL
WITH U.S. FOR 31 MQ-9B
DRONES BY FEBRUARY 2024

CONTEXT: India is expected to deal for 31 MQ-9B Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) with the U.S. is expected to be concluded by February 2024 and deliveries will begin from February 2027, three years from the signing of the contract.



The deal is on track and the Letter of Offer and Acceptance [LOA] is now awaited from the U.S. The contract is expected to be concluded by February 2024. The UAV maker General Atomics (GA) is scheduled to establish a global maintenance, repair, and overhaul facility in India. But its location has not yet been finalised, the source said, adding that it could likely be Bengaluru.

In June, the Defence Ministry cleared the procurement of 31 MQ-9B UAVs from GA, including 15 Sea Guardians for the Navy and eight Sky Guardians each for the Army and the Air Force, at an estimated cost of \$ 3 billion through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) route. On the side-lines of the G-20 summit, the Ministry issued the Letter of Request to the U.S. government. Based on the LoR, the U.S. government and the Ministry will finalise the LOA. Details of equipment and terms of the procurement will be negotiated and finalised in accordance with the FMS programme.

As part of the process, the U.S. administration will have to notify the U.S. Congress of the sale. The deal has to be approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security of the Indian government after which the contract will be concluded.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE BRI AT 10, SOME HITS, MANY MISSES

CONTEXT: The Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation that was convened in Beijing, China (October 17-18).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been often likened to China's Marshall Plan, serving as a gateway for China to transition from a regional power with global influence to a global power with comprehensive strength. The BRI was an ascendant China's bid to reboot globalisation and rectify its shortcomings. A rising China also felt the need to develop new transport and trade arteries as alternatives, since rivals could put the squeeze on the Strait of Malacca — the jugular vein for China's economy.

China with the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank with a \$100 billion war chest, challenging other lending institutions. The AIIB would enable Mr. Xi to harvest early gains of the BRI. At the onset, Mr. Xi was pitching for the use of local currency in trade, thus in effect elbowing out the dollar.

The Chinese government's white paper on BRI released this month ("The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future") revealed that over 200 BRI cooperation pacts had been inked with over 150 nations. The document also stated that total two-way investment between China and partner countries from 2013 to 2022 touched \$380 billion. As Mr. Xi himself put it, the BRI would provide more public goods to the entire world, highlighting the massive infrastructure deficit.

According to the World Bank, 675 million people are without electricity globally, around 2.3 billion lack potable water, and 450 million live beyond the coverage of a broadband signal. The lending institution calculates that bridging the infrastructure gap will need capital infusion of \$1.5 trillion annually through 2030, which is approximately 4.5% of the GDP of low- and middle-income countries. Under China's Marshall Plan, motorways, power plants, ports, railway networks, and digital

infrastructure have been built.

The ugly reality

A report from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute on the BRI has highlighted issues related to ecological damage, displacement of people, disputes over pay-outs and labour unrest. In Laos, the glistening super-fast trains and impressive dam projects over the Mekong River cannot hide the woes of those left high and dry due to lack of compensation, or others on whom droughts due to dam-construction projects have wreaked havoc. AidData estimates that Laos owes China around \$12.2 billion — about 65% of its GDP.

A Pakistani legislative report unearthed that while China cornered 91% of Gwadar port's revenue, Pakistan pocketed just 9%. These issues have tarnished the reputation of brand BRI, especially its tagline of 'win-win cooperation' as there are perceptions that it is a win for China twice over at the cost of other stakeholders.

Global alternatives

The United States and Japan initiated the "United States-Japan infrastructure investment alternatives in the Indo-Pacific region". The Joe Biden administration announced the 'Build Back Better World' (B3W) initiative that seems to have been reorganised as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, which aims to channelise private capital into climate change and energy security, health care and health security, digital technology, and gender equity.

The India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) that seeks to link India, West Asia, and Europe through railways and shipping lines, an initiative announced at the G-20 Delhi summit is yet another alternative. In addition to the trade connectivity, electricity and digital infrastructure as well as a pipeline for clean hydrogen export have been envisioned.





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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

CENTRE NOTIFIES APPOINTMENT OF 17 JUDGES ACROSS 8 HCS

CONTEXT: Appointment of 17 judges and transfer of 16 judges in High Courts, addressing Supreme Court's concern.

BACKGROUND: Following Supreme Court's dissatisfaction with judicial appointment delays, the recent transfer of judges saw Justice M.V. Muralidharan, Acting Chief Justice of Manipur High Court, moved to Calcutta High Court. His order to consider the inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes list is linked to violence in Manipur.

News Highlights

- **New High Court Judges:** The Supreme Court Collegium appointed 17 judges to various High Courts.
- **Judicial Background:** Eleven appointees are judicial officers, and six are advocates.
- **Recommendations:** Thirteen advocates' names were recommended for judgeships in different High Courts.
- **High Court Nominations:** Specific advocates were recommended for High Courts, including Gauhati, Uttarakhand, and Punjab and Haryana.
- **Fitness and Suitability:** The appointments are based on assessments of the advocates' fitness and suitability for the roles.

Appointment of Judges of High courts in India

Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 217:** Article 217 of the Indian Constitution deals with the appointment of High Court judges, outlining the process and eligibility criteria.
- **President's Role:** The President appoints High Court judges after consulting with the Chief Justice of India and the Governor of the concerned state.
- **Collegium System:** The appointment process is primarily driven by the "Collegium" system, where a group of senior judges recommends candidates for appointment.
- **Security of Tenure:** High Court judges enjoy security of tenure and can only be removed through a lengthy and rigorous impeachment process, as stipulated by the Constitution.

Procedure

- **Recommendation:** The Chief Justice of the High Court recommends potential candidates to the Chief Justice of India.
- **Consultation:** The Chief Justice of India consults with senior judges and the state's Governor before making recommendations to the President.
- **Background Check:** The government conducts a thorough background check and verifies the candidate's qualifications.
- **President's Approval:** The President reviews the recommendations and approves the appointment.
- **Swearing-In:** The appointed judge is sworn in and takes office in the High Court after the President's approval.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

COMMITTEE ON MARRIAGE BILL GETS ANOTHER EXTENSION

CONTEXT: Parliamentary committee gets a 3-month extension to review Bill proposing raising women's marriage age to 21.

BACKGROUND: The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, aiming to raise the marriage age for women from 18 to 21, is under scrutiny by a parliamentary committee. This panel, which has faced delays and has limited female representation, received a three-month extension to submit its report after its last meeting in May 2022.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

- **Types of Committees:** There are two main types of parliamentary committees - Ad hoc and Standing Committees.
- **Ad Hoc Committees:** Ad hoc committees are formed for specific tasks, such as reviewing bills, and disband after completing their assigned work.
- **Standing Committees:** These committees, like the Committee on Estimates and Public Accounts, serve as "Watch Dogs" overseeing the Executive's actions.
- **Role of Standing Committees:** They play a crucial role in monitoring governmental expenditure and policy formulation.
- **Examples:** Some prominent committees include the Committee on Government Assurances, Committee on Public Undertakings, and Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs).

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ISRAEL TO ALLOW AID TO MOVE INTO GAZA FROM EGYPT: BIDEN

CONTEXT: Biden announces Israel's agreement to allow humanitarian aid to Gaza, urging restraint following recent attacks.

BACKGROUND: President Biden expressed caution against overwhelming anger during his visit to Tel Aviv following a Hamas attack that killed around 1,400 people. Israel had halted the supply of essential goods to Gaza, creating an impasse for aid distribution. Biden urged the delivery of humanitarian assistance, warning Hamas against diverting or stealing aid. Additionally, he pledged \$100 million in humanitarian aid for Gaza and the West Bank and conveyed his distress over a hospital explosion in Gaza.



News Highlights

- **Humanitarian Aid:** President Biden spoke with Israel to ensure the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to Gaza amid the recent conflict.
- **Concern over Hamas:** Biden warned that if Hamas diverts aid, it shows a lack of concern for Palestinian welfare.
- **Additional Aid:** The U.S. pledged an extra \$100 million in humanitarian assistance for Gaza and the West Bank.
- **Israel's Backing:** The U.S. remains firmly supportive of Israel, with Biden reiterating American support.
- **Hamas Not Representative:** President Biden emphasized that Hamas doesn't represent all Palestinians and has caused suffering, emphasizing the need to help innocent civilians caught in the conflict.



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