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16/04/2024 TUESDAY

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

POLITY

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TECHNOLOGY

ECOLOGY

Indian Officials Can 'Soon' Meet Crew: Iran

CONTEXT: The recent developments highlight India's diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions between Iran and Israel following Iran's seizure of an Israel-linked ship. Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar's discussions with both countries emphasized the need for stability in the sensitive Gulf region, reflecting India's strategic interests and concerns for its citizens and shipping routes.



Detention of Indian Crew by Iran:

- **Potential Meeting with Detained Crew:** Iran has indicated that it will soon allow Indian officials to meet with the 17 Indian crew members detained after the seizure of the Israel-linked ship, MSC Aries.
- **External Affairs Minister's Involvement:** External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar raised the issue with both Iran and Israel's Foreign Ministers, urging them to de-escalate tensions.
- **Neutrality and Concerns:** India takes a neutral position on Iranian strikes, emphasizing the importance of avoiding escalation in a region critical for the global economy. Mr. Jaishankar highlighted the sensitivity of the Gulf region, which is vital for Indian citizens, shipping routes, and oil supplies.
- **Discussion with Iranian and Israeli Counterparts:** Mr. Jaishankar discussed Iran's drone and missile attack on Israel, termed as a response to an earlier Israeli attack on an Iranian embassy. The conversation also covered the situation in Gaza and the Red Sea.
- Shared Concerns and International Response: India expressed concerns about the developments to both Iran and Israel, maintaining a balanced approach in its statements. However, Israel expressed disappointment with India's neutral stance, contrasting it with stronger condemnations from other countries supporting Israel.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS Taliban 'Committed' To Protecting Rights Of Hindus, Sikhs

CONTEXT: The Taliban are reaching out to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs who fled the country, promising to return their property seized by warlords and ensure their rights as religious minorities.



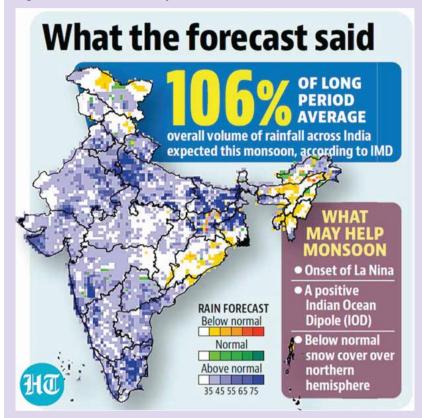
Taliban's Commitment to Minority Rights:

- **Continuous Contact and Restoration:** The Taliban's 'Justice Ministry' official stated that they are in continuous contact with Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan whose properties were usurped. They are committed to identifying and verifying claims and restoring properties to these communities.
- **Commission for Property Restoration:** The Taliban's political wing has formed a commission, led by 'Justice Minister' Abdul Hakim Sharaee, to restore properties to Hindus and Sikhs who lost them due to previous conflicts and strongmen. This initiative includes facilitating the return of individuals like Narender Singh Khalsa.
- Islamic Emirate's Commitment: The Taliban reiterates its commitment to ensuring the rights of religious minorities, citing Islamic Hanafi jurisprudence that outlines protections for minorities. They highlight a recent meeting with a delegation of Hindus and Sikhs to address their demands.
- **Positive Response from India:** India's Ministry of External Affairs views the Taliban's decision to restore property to minority communities positively, considering it a step towards protecting minority rights in Afghanistan.
- **Historical Role of Hindus and Sikhs:** The Taliban acknowledges the historical contributions of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan's commercial ties and urban centers until political disturbances in the 1980s prompted their immigration.

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India To Get Above-Normal Monsoon Rainfall: IMD

CONTEXT: The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) predicts above-average monsoon rainfall this year, bringing relief after last year's El Nino-linked drought, and expects to provide more details on regional distribution in May.



IMD Monsoon Forecast for India:

- Above-Normal Rainfall Forecast: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasts above-normal monsoon rainfall for June-September, expecting 6% more rainfall than the annual average of 87 cm during these months.
- El Nino Impact: Last year's El Nino event affected India's monsoon, reducing rainfall by 6%. This year, El Nino is expected to fade by June and progress to La Nina, potentially leading to surplus rainfall in August and September.
- Forecasting Methods: IMD uses statistical associations and a dynamical approach to forecast the monsoon. Statistical models analyze historical data and global meteorological parameters, while dynamical models simulate global weather patterns to predict future monsoon behavior.
- Updated Forecast in May: IMD will update its monsoon forecast in May, providing more information on spatial distribution and the expected quantity of rainfall in June and July, critical months for agriculture.
- Probability of 'Excess' Rainfall: Models indicate a 30% chance of monsoon rains being over 10% above normal, categorized as 'excess' by IMD standards, a significant increase from the typical 17% chance in any given year.
- Factors Favoring Rainfall: Positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) and below-normal snow cover in the northern hemisphere and

Eurasia are factors favoring plentiful rainfall in India. The IOD is expected to turn positive by August, further enhancing rainfall prospects.

CONCLUSION: the India Meteorological Department's forecast paints an optimistic picture for India's upcoming monsoon season. With the El Nino threat fading, positive climate indicators, and the potential for a La Nina event, the IMD predicts above-normal rainfall across the country. This is welcome news for the agriculture sector and millions of people who depend on the monsoon for their livelihoods. While the forecast will be further refined in May, the initial outlook suggests a positive monsoon season for India in 2024.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE Siachen: 40 Years Of Op Meghdoot

CONTEXT: The Siachen Glacier is the highest battlefield in the world, where India and Pakistan have been in a standoff since 1984.



THE GIST

- Siachen is known for being the world's highest and coldest battlefield. It sits at a very strategic location with Pakistan on the left and China on the right.
- In the 1970s and 1980s, Pakistan began allowing foreign mountaineering expeditions, resorting to cartographic aggression, to add credence to its claims over the glacier. Following intelligence inputs of imminent military action by Pakistan in early 1984, India moved to pre-empt it.
- In January 2020, then Army Chief Gen. Manoj Mukund Narvane termed Siachen as the place from where a collusive threat from China and Pakistan was maximum while stressing on the importance of keeping that particular area always in India's possession.
- Siachen Glacier Conflict: Four Decades On
- A High-Altitude Standoff
- A Ladakhi saying captures the essence of Siachen: a harsh land guarded by both friends and foes.
- The Siachen Glacier, located at 15,632 feet, is the world's highest battlefield.

Head Office:

 India and Pakistan have been locked in a standoff there since 1984, after India's pre-emptive Operation Meghdoot.

Competing Claims

- Siachen, meaning "land of roses" in Balti, is strategically located between India, Pakistan, and China.
- The Line of Control (LoC) ends at NJ9842, but the glacier itself remains unmarked.
- India claims the entire region based on the 1947 and 1949 agreements, while Pakistan interprets them differently.
- Pakistan's claim would provide them with a connection to China and threaten the Ladakh region.

Operation Meghdoot and Beyond

- In response to suspected Pakistani action in 1984, India launched Operation Meghdoot to occupy the glacier.
- Reconnaissance missions by Col. Narinder Kumar in the early 1980s aided planning.
- Indian troops captured strategic peaks and passes, including Bilafond La at 18,000 feet.
- The Indian Air Force played a crucial role in transporting troops and supplies.
- In 1987, Operation Rajiv secured Quaid Post (later Bana top), earning Subedar Major Bana Singh a Param Vir Chakra.
- A ceasefire agreement was reached in 2003, but Operation Meghdoot continues as the world's longest.

Testing Endurance

- Army posts are located at extreme altitudes, with Bana Post being the highest.
- Soldiers face harsh conditions and require specialized equipment and training.
- The Indian Air Force has deployed a range of aircraft, including Hunters, Cheetahs, and Chinooks, for support.

Change and Challenges

- Over four decades, technology and infrastructure on the glacier have significantly improved.
- Mobile connectivity, better habitats, logistics, and medical facilities enhance operations and soldier well-being.
- Climate change is impacting the glacier, with the snout receding over a kilometer since 1984.

A Complex Future

- Siachen, along with Sir Creek, has been seen as a potential confidence-building measure between India and Pakistan.
- Talks on demilitarization have stalled due to disagreements over verifying the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL).
- Recent tensions with China along the Line of Actual Control further complicate a resolution.
- Siachen's strategic importance makes it a more intricate issue than previously perceived.



POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

New Data Law, A Barrier To Journalistic Free Speech

CONTEXT: India's new data protection law, lacking an exemption for journalistic activities, could restrict journalists' ability to report by requiring consent for using personal data and allowing subjects to demand story deletion.



BACKGROUND

- India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP) Act, 2023, was passed in August 2023.
- The law focuses on user consent for processing personal data and establishes data rights and a grievance redressal mechanism.

PROBLEM: MISSING EXEMPTION FOR JOURNALISM

- Unlike previous drafts, the final DPDP Act lacks an exemption for journalistic activities from privacy obligations.
- This means journalists might need consent before using personal data in stories and may face data erasure requests.

IMPACT ON JOURNALISTS

- Journalists rely on personal data for investigative reporting, including details about public figures.
- The need for consent and potential erasure requests could hinder their ability to hold powerful individuals accountable.
- The government's power to request information from data processors could further threaten source confidentiality.

UNCLEAR RATIONALE FOR REMOVING EXEMPTION

• Three prior DPDP Act drafts included exemptions for journalism, but the final version removed it without explanation.

CALL FOR MORE ROBUST PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- The lack of transparency in the consultation process weakens public understanding of the law's impact.
- Previous consultations involved limited public participation and withheld feedback details.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Implement a truly open and transparent public consultation process for future laws.
- The government can use its rule-making power under the DPDP Act to exempt journalistic entities from its provisions.

CONCLUSION

- India needs to address the potential conflict between data protection and journalistic free speech.
- An open consultation process and an exemption for journalism within the DPDP Act's rules are crucial steps to ensure a balance.

Modi Lauds Poll Bond Scheme, Says Scrapping It Is A Mistake

CONTEXT: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has defended the electoral bonds scheme, considering it a success story in promoting transparency in political donations and countering black money in elections. However, his remarks have sparked criticism from the opposition, particularly the Congress party, which accuses the scheme of being an "extortion scheme" masterminded by Modi and criticizes the lack of transparency and alleged favoritism associated with it.



PM Modi's Defense of Electoral Bonds:

- Scheme Success Story: PM Modi views the electoral bonds scheme as successful in freeing elections from black money and promoting transparency.
- **Opposition Accusations:** Accuses the Opposition of spreading lies about the scheme and defends it as a means to ensure clean elections.
- **ED's Role:** Highlights the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) significant contribution in combating corruption, with actions taken against companies involved in electoral bond transactions.
- **Impact of Scrapping:** Warns that scrapping the scheme has pushed the country towards black money and suggests that everyone will regret this decision.
- **Improvement Scope:** Acknowledges room for improvement in the scheme and emphasizes the need for honest reflection and continuous enhancement.

PM Modi's Statements on Corruption and Opposition:

- Level Playing Field: Denies allegations of a lack of a level playing field and attributes laws regarding institutions to pre-existing frameworks.
- Corruption Combat: Stresses the need to fight corruption

vigorously and praises the ED's efforts in seizing cash and addressing corruption.

• Election Commission Reforms: Mentions improvements in appointing Election Commissioners and questions Congress's alliance with parties making objectionable remarks.

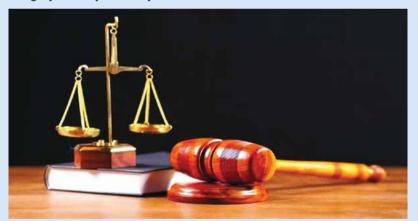
Opposition's Criticism and Response:

- Electoral Bond Criticism: Rahul Gandhi criticizes the electoral bonds scheme as an extortion scheme and accuses PM Modi of being its mastermind.
- **Money Trail:** Claims the money trail through electoral bonds reveals favors granted to donors after bond purchases, highlighting alleged misuse.
- **Damage Control:** Jairam Ramesh from Congress calls PM Modi's defense a "pathetic attempt at damage control" and alleges SBI's resistance to full disclosures.
- **Supreme Court's Role:** Emphasizes that the money trail disclosures are due to the Supreme Court's intervention and suggests attempts to delay full disclosures.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Retired Judges Raise Concern Over Undermining Judiciary

CONTEXT: The mention of a letter by 600 lawyers regarding a "particular vested interest group" pressuring the judiciary suggests growing concerns about undue influence or interference in legal matters, highlighting a broader debate about the independence and integrity of the judicial system.



Retired Judges' Concerns:

- Letter to Chief Justice: Over 20 retired judges from the Supreme Court and High Courts wrote to Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud expressing shared concerns about attempts to undermine the judiciary.
- Tactics of Misinformation: The judges highlighted escalating attempts to undermine the judiciary through tactics of misinformation and public disparagement.
- Pressure from Vested Interest Groups: Mentioned concerns raised by 600 lawyers about a particular vested interest group pressuring the judiciary, influencing the judicial process, and defaming higher courts with frivolous logic and political agendas.

- Blurring Lines in Significant Cases: Noted that the behaviour is particularly evident in cases of social, economic, and political significance, where advocacy and manoeuvring are blurred, affecting judicial independence.
- Solidarity with Judiciary: Retired judges, including Justices Deepak Verma, Dinesh Maheshwari, Krishna Murari, and M.R. Shah, assured their solidarity with the judiciary.
- Call for Fortification: Urged the top court to fortify itself against factions motivated by narrow political interests and personal gains, aiming to erode public confidence in the judicial system.
- Selective Praise and Criticism: Criticized factions for selectively praising judicial decisions aligned with their views while vehemently criticizing others, affecting the public's perception of the judiciary.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

India's Arctic Imperative

CONTEXT: India's increasing engagement in the Arctic, driven by scientific research, economic interests in sea routes and resource exploitation, and geopolitical concerns, reflects a strategic shift influenced by climate change impacts, regional developments, and potential collaborations with Arctic nations like Norway for sustainable policies.



India's Evolving Relationship with the Arctic Growing Interest

- India successfully completed its first winter expedition to the Arctic in March 2024.
- This shift in policy is likely due to:
- Scientific evidence of faster-than-expected Arctic warming and its link to India's climate.
- The potential of the Northern Sea Route for reducing shipping costs and time.
- Geopolitical concerns surrounding China's growing Arctic

investments and Russia's reliance on its nuclear deterrent on the Kola Peninsula.

India's History in the Arctic

- India's engagement with the Arctic dates back to 1920 with the signing of the Svalbard Treaty.
- Since then, India has:
- Conducted research missions in Arctic microbiology, atmospheric sciences, and geology (2007).
- Established an Arctic research base (2008) only developing nation besides China to do so.
- Gained observer status in the Arctic Council (2013).
- Set up research facilities to study the impact of Arctic melting on the Himalayas and Indian monsoon.

Debate over Economic Engagement

- There is disagreement within India regarding economic activity in the Arctic, particularly resource extraction.
- Proponents advocate for a pragmatic approach, focusing on oil, gas, and mineral exploration.
- Skeptics warn of environmental consequences and emphasize the need for a balanced policy that considers responsible resource development.

Potential for Collaboration with Norway

- Norway, the current chair of the Arctic Council, has a history of collaboration with India on climate research.
- India seeks to partner with Arctic countries on green energy and clean industries to establish itself as a responsible stakeholder.
- Collaboration with Norway could be transformative for India, enabling participation in working groups on the blue economy, infrastructure, and sustainable resource development.
- A Norway-India partnership would likely prioritize scientific research, climate protection, and crafting a sustainable economic approach that balances scientific and industrial needs.

CONCLUSION: As India navigates its evolving relationship with the Arctic, it faces a critical decision between economic gain and environmental responsibility. Striking a balance between these competing interests will require careful consideration and strategic partnerships. Collaboration with countries like Norway, which prioritise both scientific research and sustainable development, could prove instrumental in ensuring India's Arctic footprint is both responsible and beneficial for the future of the region and the planet.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

What Share Of Global Co₂ Emissions Come From Aviation?

CONTEXT: Even though aviation causes a relatively small portion of global CO2 emissions directly, its impact on warming is more significant due to additional factors at high altitudes.

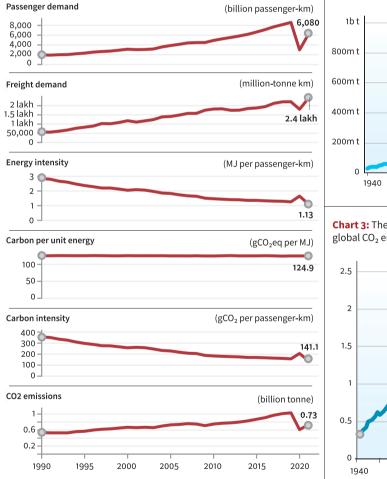
- Aviation's Carbon Footprint: Despite being highly carbon-intensive, aviation contributes only 2.5% of global carbon emissions due to low global participation.
- **Global Flying Trends:** Approximately 10% of the world population flies in most years, but this is expected to rise with increasing incomes.
- Drivers of Aviation Emissions: Increased demand and technological advancements have shaped aviation emissions over the past 50 years, influenced by factors like passenger and freight kilometers, energy efficiency, and carbon intensity of fuels.
- Calculating Carbon Emissions: Metrics such as aviation demand, energy efficiency (energy per km), and carbon intensity (CO2 per unit of energy) are multiplied to determine CO2 emissions.
- Trends since 1990:
- **Demand Increase:** Passenger and freight demand quadrupled between 1990 and 2019, with passengers traveling over 8 trillion km in 2019.
- Efficiency Improvements: Energy efficiency more than doubled, from 2.9 MJ per passenger-km in 1990 to 1.3 MJ in 2019, driven by technology and higher passenger load factors.
- Stagnant Carbon Intensity: Despite efficiency gains, carbon intensity of fuel remained unchanged, with standard jet fuel still predominant.
- Impact on CO2 Emissions:
- Emissions Doubling: Quadrupled demand combined with doubled efficiency led to emissions doubling, reaching around 1 billion tonnes in 2019.

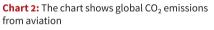
Polluted skies

Hannah Ritchie (2024) - "What share of global CO₂ emissions come from aviation?" Published online at OurWorldInData.org.



Chart 1: The charts show year-wise global aviation demand, energy efficiency and CO_2 emissions





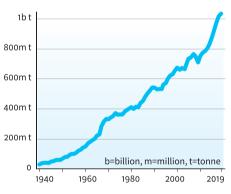
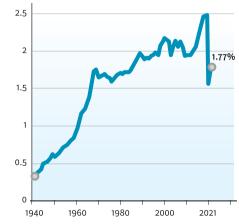


Chart 3: The chart shows aviation's share in global CO_2 emissions



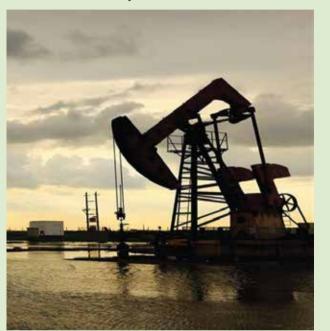
Long-Term Emissions Trends:

- Quadrupling since 1960s: Global CO2 emissions from aviation quadrupled since the 1960s, indicating substantial growth in the sector.
- Share of Global Emissions: In 2019, aviation accounted for 2.5% of CO2 emissions from fossil sources and land use, with fluctuations
 around 2-2.5% since the mid-1990s and a notable increase since 2010.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

How Does Hydrocarbon Extraction Happen?

CONTEXT: The process of hydrocarbon extraction involves drilling production wells, managing pressure and flow using advanced equipment like blowout preventers, and employing techniques such as mud-logging and pump jacks for efficient extraction, with considerations for well completion, production phases, and eventual well plugging or decommissioning to mitigate environmental impacts and ensure economic viability.



HYDROCARBON FORMATION:

- Hydrocarbons are created in underground reservoirs when a more resistant rock layer overlies a less resistant one, creating a lid that traps hydrocarbons below.
- Geological processes over millennia heat and compress organic matter, forming hydrocarbons like natural gas, coal, crude oil, and petroleum within rock formations.

LOCATION AND ASSESSMENT:

- Hydrocarbons are found in underground reservoirs, crucially trapped by geological structures.
- Petroleum geologists assess rocks for porosity and permeability to determine hydrocarbon quantities.
- Kerogen, organic matter in rocks, breaks down under pressure, yielding different types of hydrocarbons like waxy oils, oil and gas, and light oils.

EXTRACTION PROCESS:

- Drilling machines create production wells to access hydrocarbons.
- Steel casings and cement slurry protect the well and prevent fluid intrusion.
- Drilling fluid aids drilling and carries rock cuttings to the surface.
- Blowout preventers control pressure to avoid eruptions.
- Mud-logging records rock properties and cuttings depth.
- Drilling rigs, both onshore and offshore, employ sophisticated equipment for extraction.

HYDROCARBON ACCESS AND FLOW:

- Completing a well involves preparing it to drain hydrocarbons using valves and sometimes pump jacks.
- Production stages include natural flow and secondary interventions like artificial pressure to maintain production.
- Enhanced recovery methods like steam injection help extract more hydrocarbons.

WELL DEPLETION AND CLOSURE:

- Wells may be plugged or decommissioned based on economic viability.
- Improperly abandoned wells can lead to methane emissions and environmental concerns.

CONCLUSION: The process of hydrocarbon extraction involves intricate geological assessments, precise drilling techniques, and ongoing efforts to ensure environmental sustainability.

ECONOMICS

Goods Exports Hit \$41.68 BN In March

CONTEXT: India's recent trade data shows a notable increase in goods exports in March, contributing to a reduced trade deficit attributed to government efforts in import substitution, although challenges remain with declining services exports.



GOODS EXPORTS AND IMPORTS IN MARCH:

- Goods exports reached \$41.68 billion in March, a 12-month high.
- This marked a 0.67% decline compared to the same month last year.
- Imports dropped by 6% to \$57.3 billion in March.

Trade Deficit and Government Efforts:

- The goods trade deficit contracted to \$15.6 billion, the lowest in 11 months.
- Government efforts to promote import substitution and reduce inessential imports contributed to narrowing trade gaps.

- Gold imports fell sharply by 53.6% to \$1.53 billion.
- Silver imports surged by nearly 1,059% to \$816.6 million.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE AND PROJECTIONS:

- March's strong export performance, along with February's \$41.4 billion, contributed to an overall improvement in merchandise shipments for the year.
- India's full-year export figure reached \$437.1 billion, 3.1% below the previous year's record.
- Goods imports decreased by 5.41% to \$677.24 billion, helping lower India's trade deficit to \$240.2 billion for the year.

Services Sector:

- Services exports were estimated to have shrunk by 6.2% in March to \$28.5 billion.
- Service imports dropped 6.6% to \$15.8 billion.

ECONOMICS

Wholesale Price Inflation Accelerates To 3-Month High

CONTEXT: India's wholesale price inflation rose to a three-month high in March, driven by increases in food prices, particularly cereals, while deflation persisted in fuel and manufactured products, reflecting ongoing challenges in managing inflationary pressures.

Food price pressures

The food index in the WPI rose 4.65% last month led by cereal prices, which surged at a 12-month high pace of 9.04%

March wholesale inflation accelerated in paddy (11.7%), potato (53%) and onions (57%)

 Inflation in pulses and vegetables stayed elevated at 17.2% and 19.5%, respectively



Month-on-month, the WPI rose
 0.4% - the first uptick in four months

India's Wholesale Price Inflation in March:

- Quickened to a three-month high of 0.53% from 0.2% in February.
- Food index rose by 4.65%, led by cereal prices surging at a 12-month-high pace.
- Inflation in paddy, potato, and onions accelerated significantly.

Categories in Deflation:

- Fuel and power, as well as manufactured products, continued to be in deflation mode.
- Pace of price declines narrowed to about -0.8% in March.

Global Factors Impacting Inflation:

 Global spikes in crude oil and commodity prices may accelerate inflation in this quarter. • Summer heat waves could also contribute to inflationary pressures.

Month-on-Month Changes:

- Wholesale Price Index (WPI) rose by 0.4%, the first uptick in four months.
- Food index and primary articles saw increases of 1.01% and 0.9%, respectively.
- Manufactured products and fuel and power had gains of 0.21% and 0.06%, respectively.

Variations Within Food Articles:

- Prices of eggs, meat, and fish decreased by 1.86%.
- Retail prices for eggs, meat, and fish showed significant increases.
- Milk inflation eased to 4.7%, while wheat prices rose sharply by 7.43%.

Full-Year Overview:

• Wholesale prices logged deflation for the full year, averaging -0.7%.

Future Concerns:

- International commodity prices and crude oil prices are increasing, posing concerns.
- Heat wave conditions and vegetable inflation are additional factors of concern.



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