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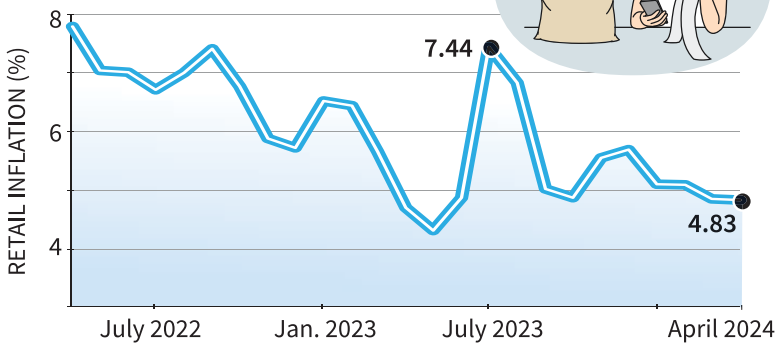
ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Food inflation scaled 4-month high in April

CONTEXT: Food inflation surged to a four-month high of 8.7% in April from 8.5% in March, with rural consumers witnessing a sharper uptick of 8.75%.

Marginal change

India's retail inflation was 4.83% last month compared to 4.85% in March



In April, Indian consumers witnessed a sharper increase in food prices, despite the overall retail inflation rate remaining nearly stable at 4.83%, similar to March's 4.85%. The disparity in inflation between urban and rural consumers continued, with rural households experiencing a 5.43% price hike, while urban consumers saw a marginal change from 4.14% in March to 4.11% in April.

Prices increased by approximately 0.5% compared to the previous month, with urban consumers experiencing a more significant rise in both overall prices and food costs. Food prices in urban India increased by 1.03% from March levels. The rise was more subdued for their rural counterparts at 0.59%. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) was up 0.6% over March for urban households, while it was 0.37% higher for rural India.

Among the major States, Odisha (7.05%), Assam (6.08%) and Haryana (6.06%) reported the highest inflation in April. In all, inflation was higher than the national average in 14 of 22 major States for which the National Statistical Office calculates inflation rates, including Gujarat (4.94%) and Kerala (4.84%). Consumers faced the lowest price rise in Delhi (2.29%).

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expects retail inflation to ease to an average of 4.5% this year from the 5.4% clocked in 2023-24, with the ongoing April to June quarter expected to see an average inflation of 4.9%. Economists don't expect any pivot in the monetary policy stance till inflation subsides to the RBI's 4% target on a durable basis, as has been stressed by Governor Shaktikanta Das.

Within the food basket, vegetables' inflation cooled marginally from 28.3% in March to 27.8%, staying in double digits for the fifth consecutive month. Pulses also reported double-digit inflation for the 11th straight month, at 16.84% in April, marginally lower than the 17.7% uptick in March. However, inflation in cereals rose to 8.63% from 8.4% in March. Fruits also reported higher price rise at 5.22%, from 3.1% in March.

The fractional decline in the headline inflation rate in April, despite the uptick in food price rise, was facilitated by a sharper drop in fuel and light prices, which were down 4.2% compared with a 3.2% decline in March, and aided by mildly lower inflation in some other items. These include clothing and footwear, pan, tobacco and intoxicants, housing, health, recreation and amusement.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Fourth phase of LS polls logs 67.7% voter turnout

CONTEXT: A voter turnout of 67.7% was recorded on Monday in the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha election in 96 constituencies across 10 States and Union Territories, as per provisional data at 11.50 p.m.



A total of 1,717 candidates were in the fray in this phase and 17.7 crore electors were eligible to exercise their franchise. With this phase, the voting process in 23 States and Union Territories and 379 seats has been completed. The last three phases are scheduled for May 20, May 25 and June 1, followed by the counting on June 4.

The highest voting percentage of 78.44 was recorded in West Bengal, where Trinamool Congress and BJP workers clashed in various parts of Birbhum and Bardhaman-Durgapur seats.

Jammu and Kashmir, which is witnessing the first election after the revocation of its special status under Article 370, recorded the lowest turnout. The Lok Sabha constituency of Srinagar

recorded a polling percentage of 37.98 % till 11.50 p.m., the highest in many decades.

The voting percentage in Maharashtra was also on the lower side at 59.64 %. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana saw voter turnouts of 78.15 % and 64.93 %, respectively. Polling also took place for the 175 Assembly seats in Andhra Pradesh and 28 of the 147 seats in Odisha.

Bihar and Odisha saw turnouts of 57.06 % and 73.97 %, respectively while in Jharkhand, the polling percentage was 65.31 %. The 13 seats in Uttar Pradesh, which went to the polls, saw a turnout of 58.05 %.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

UN-linked body defers accreditation of NHRC-India for second year in a row

CONTEXT: The Geneva-based, United Nations-linked Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) deferred the accreditation of the National Human Rights Commission-India (NHRC) for the second year in a row.



The decision, which can affect India's ability to vote at the Human Rights Council and some UN General Assembly bodies, was taken on May 1, during the meeting of the Subcommittee on Accreditation (SCA), which included representatives from New Zealand, South Africa, Honduras, and Greece.

Transparency issues

While the committee's latest report is still awaited, its previous report had cited a number of reasons for recommending the deferral, including the lack of transparency in appointing members to the NHRC, the appointment of police officers to oversee human rights investigations, and the lack of gender and minority representation on the member panel.

The NHRC's "A-status" has only been deferred once before, in 2016, but it was restored in 2017. This is the first time India's status has been suspended for two years in a row.

The NHRC was set up under the Protection of Human Rights Act, passed by Parliament in 1993. It has been accredited as an 'A' Status NHRI since the beginning of the accreditation process for NHRIs in 1999, which it retained in 2006, 2011 and in 2017 also after the deferment.

The 'A' status was deferred this time after civil society organisations and human rights activists wrote to the global body, expressing concerns about India's record.

According to six-point submission by the SCA in March 2023, the NHRC has failed to create conditions required to be "able to operate independent of government interference".

'Lack of pluralism'

The GANHRI also cited the "lack of pluralism" in the composition of the NHRC, which has just one woman in its top body right now. While the Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities Iqbal Singh Lalpura is an ex-officio member, the GANHRI had pointed out that the composition of the committee should reflect the "diversity of the society" it operated in, indicating the lack of any member representing India's largest minority religions.

Officials in the body pointed out that Rajeev Jain "qualifies as a minority", as he belongs to the Jain community. Mr. Jain's tenure is ending this month while the tenure of Justice (retd.) Arun Mishra, the current chairperson of NHRC, is ending next month. It remains to be seen how soon the new government, which is due to be formed in early June after the election will move to fill the positions.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Declining poverty ratio: a continuing trend



CONTEXT: The release of the fact sheet of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey for 2022-23 (HCES) by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) led to estimations of poverty and inequality trends by many researchers.

Trends in poverty, inequality

Some argue that in the absence of unit-level data, the estimates based on the fact sheet are provisional. While unit-level data provide more accurate estimates than the averages given by deciles in the fact sheet, the poverty numbers based on the fact sheet data may not differ too much from those of unit-level data. So, we can estimate poverty and inequality with the fact sheet data.

The estimated poverty ratios declined from 29.5 % in 2011-12 to 10 % in 2022-23 (1.77 % points per year) based on the Rangarajan Committee's poverty lines and from 21.9 % in 2011-12 to 3 % in 2022-23 (1.72 % points per year) based on the Tendulkar Committee's poverty lines. If we consider at the earlier period, the poverty estimates based on the Tendulkar Committee's poverty lines declined from 37.2 % in 2004-05 to 21.9 % in 2011-12 (2.18 % points per year).

According to the estimates on inequality provided by Subramanian, between 2011-12 and 2022-23, the Gini coefficient declined from 0.278 to 0.269 for rural areas (0.009-point decline); and from 0.358 to 0.318 for urban areas (0.04-point decline). Bansal et al also show that the Gini coefficient for rural areas declined from 0.284 to 0.266; for urban areas, it declined from 0.363 to 0.315 between 2011-12 to 2022-23.

This means poverty declined significantly between 2011-12 and 2022-23, though the rate of decline was lower compared to the 2004-05 to 2011-12 period. Inequality declined between 2011-12 and 2022-23 particularly in urban areas. It is to be noted that all these estimates depend on where the poverty line is drawn.

The NSSO has changed the reference or recall period of data collection over time to improve the reporting of consumption. Three estimates of consumption are available depending upon the recall period of different types of expenditure: uniform reference period (URP); mixed reference period (MRP); and modified mixed reference period (MMRP).

Experts say the varying reference periods for different items underlying the MMRP estimates may be expected to yield estimates that are closer to their true value. The Tendulkar Committee estimated poverty ratios on the basis of MRP for 1993-94 and 2004-05. The Planning Commission used the same methodology and MRP to estimate poverty ratios for 2009-10 and 2011-12. So, the estimates on poverty for 2022-23 (based on MMRP) are not strictly comparable with those of earlier years. However, the Rangarajan Committee used MMRP for estimating poverty ratios for 2009-10 and 2011-12. These estimates are comparable with those of 2022-23. For the sake of comparability, we cannot give up what is considered to be the appropriate mix of the recall periods. We may have to live with this problem if we are comparing periods over a long-time period.

For the 2002-23 data, there were changes in methodology such as coverage of more items, multiple visits, etc. Changes may provide better estimates, but the problem of comparability arises.

Measurement issues

There has also been some discussion on measurement issues relating to poverty lines. Mohanan and Kundu say "the Tendulkar Committee was clear that a calorie norm-based poverty line is no longer appropriate". The Expert Group (Tendulkar) did not construct a poverty line. It adopted the officially measured urban poverty line of 2004-05 based on the Expert Group (Lakdawala) methodology and converted this poverty line, which is URP-consumption based, into MRP-consumption. It took the urban poverty line as derived from the Lakdawala line as given and derived from it the rural poverty line. The urban poverty line used by the Lakdawala Committee had calorie norms and so, the Tendulkar Committee also indirectly used these norms.

In defining the new consumption basket separating the poor from the rest, the Expert Group (Rangarajan) said that it should contain a food component that addresses the capability to be adequately nourished and some normative level of consumption expenditure for essential non-food item groups besides a residual set of behaviourally determined non-food expenditure. The Group estimated afresh the poverty basket and did not simply update an old basket with new prices.

The poverty line is based on private consumption expenditure. If we take into account public expenditure, the actual well-being of the household will be higher than what is indicated by the poverty line. The HCES 2022-23 tried to get imputed values for some items of public expenditure. The value figures for items received free entirely or at low prices by the households have been imputed using an appropriate method. However, a look at the average monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) shows it captured little of the total public expenditure on subsidised and free items

given to the households. The average MPCE with imputation as compared to MPCE without imputation was only 2.3 % higher for rural areas and 0.96 % for urban.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India, Iran sign Chabahar port operation pact

CONTEXT: India and Iran on Monday signed a 10-year contract for its operation, eight years after concluding the general framework of cooperation on the Chabahar port.



A memorandum of understanding for the development of the Chabahar port by India was signed in May 2015. The contract was executed on May 23, 2016 during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Iran.

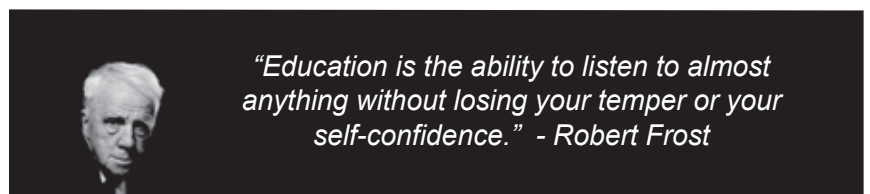
The long-term agreement was signed between Indian Ports Global Ltd. (IPGL) and Port and Maritime Organisation (PMO) of Iran, enabling operation of the Shahid-Behesti terminal. Subsequently, IPGL will invest approximately \$120 million in equipping the port. India has also offered a credit window equivalent to \$250 million for mutually identified projects aimed at improving Chabahar-related infrastructure.

The agreement heralded a new age of trade, marine cooperation, and transshipment while boosting trilateral trade between India, Iran, and Afghanistan.

As India continues to invest in Chabahar port, its efficiency and capacity will be further enhanced, solidifying India's commitment to the region's economic development. India will use the port for humanitarian aid shipments, reaffirming its commitment to support regional development beyond commercial interests.

He underscored Chabahar's significance, stating that it served as a vital trade artery connecting India with Afghanistan and Central Asian Countries.

Chabahar is a deep water port located in the Sistan-Baluchistan province of Iran.



"Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." - Robert Frost

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The impact of 50 years of vaccination on children worldwide

In the last 50 years, the lives of about 150 million children have been saved due to vaccinations against different diseases. Of these, measles vaccination alone accounts for saving 60% of lives. These are some of the findings from a new study published in The Lancet.

The decrease in deaths due to vaccine-preventable diseases can be attributed to the large-scale expansion of immunisation programmes across the globe. For instance, the measles vaccination rate increased from less than 20% in 2000 to 70% by 2021, worldwide. A similar pattern was observed in the case of vaccination against diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus (DTP3) too. The significance of vaccinations has been particularly pronounced in reducing infant mortality rates from around 10% in 1974 to 3% in 2024. The researchers estimate that 40% of this decline is due to vaccines.

Chart 1 shows the number of lives saved by various vaccinations from 1974 to 2024 across the world. Measles vaccination has had the most impact, with 94 million individuals benefiting from the vaccine, followed by tetanus (27.9 million), whooping cough- pertussis (13.17 million) and tuberculosis (10.87 million) vaccine.

Chart 2 shows the region-wise share of children fully vaccinated against measles, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The Western Pacific region saw the most drastic increase in vaccination coverage from 2% in 2000 to 91% in 2021. Rising from 15% in 2010 to nearly 80% in 2021, Southeast Asia also showed significant advancement in measles vaccination rates over the last decade.

Chart 3 shows the share of one-year-old children vaccinated against DTP3. In 2021, more than 80% of infants received the third dose of the DTP3 vaccine. Here too, the Western Pacific region showed high progress, from less than 10% in 1980 to 90% in 2021.

Chart 4 shows the estimated number of deaths caused by various vaccine-preventable diseases across years. Every year, tuberculosis claims the lives of over a million people, while hundreds of thousands still die due to measles, tetanus, whooping cough, meningitis, and hepatitis B.

Saving lives, one vaccine at a time

Hannah Ritchie (2024) - "Vaccines have saved 150 million children over the last 50 years", published in Our World in Data

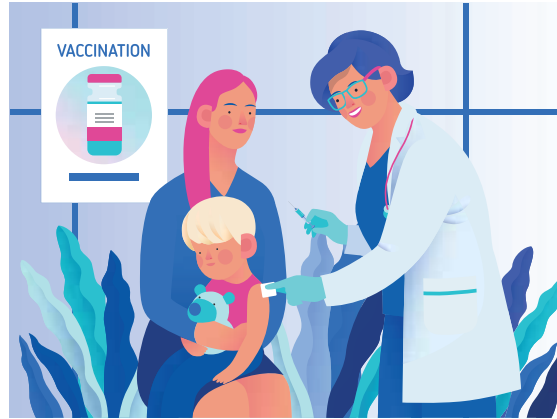


Chart 2: The chart shows the region-wise share of children fully vaccinated against measles (%)

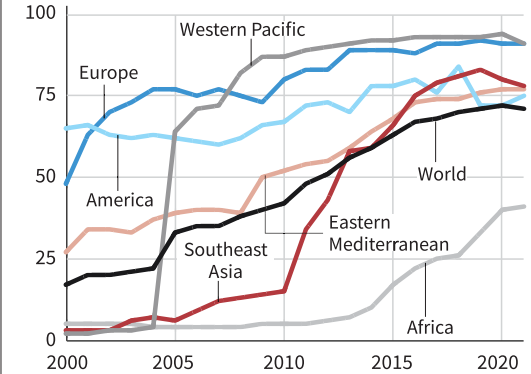


Chart 1: The chart shows the number of lives saved by various vaccinations from 1974 to 2024 across the world

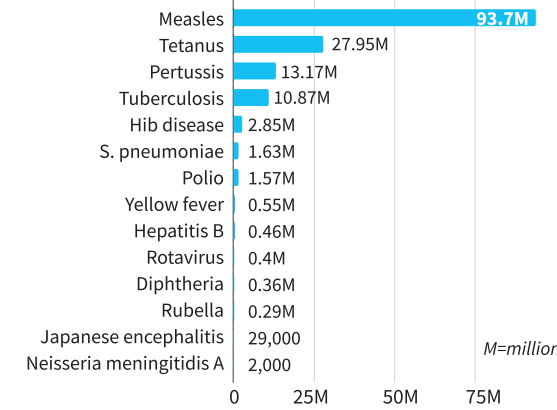


Chart 3: The chart shows the share of one-year-old children vaccinated against DTP3 (%)

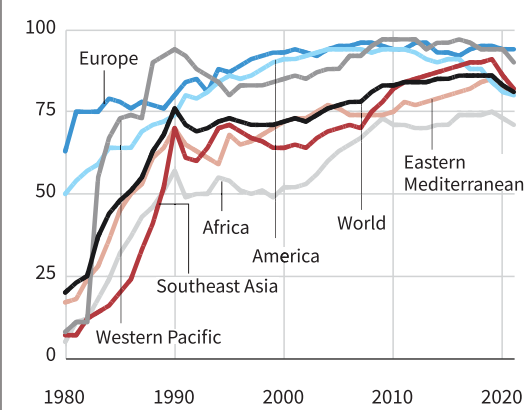
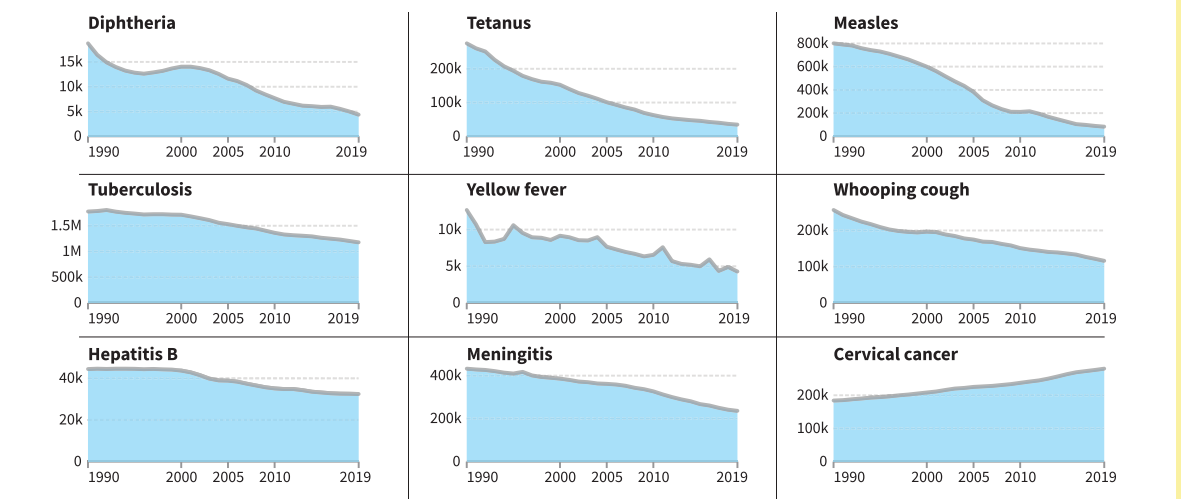


Chart 4: The chart shows the estimated number of deaths caused by various vaccine-preventable diseases across years. k=1,000



POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

What is the legal position on live-in relationships?

CONTEXT: The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court stated earlier this month that a Muslim cannot claim rights in a live-in relationship when he or she has a living spouse.

A two judge Bench of Justices A.R. Masoodi and A.K. Srivastava called such a relationship against the tenets of Islam while hearing a writ petition by Sneha Devi and Mohammed Shadab Khan. Ms. Devi and Mr. Khan had sought protection from police action after the woman's parents filed a kidnapping case against Mr. Khan.

What happened?

The couple had told the court they were adults in a live-in relationship and that they sought protection under Article 21 of the Constitution (protection of life and personal liberty). The judges, however, stated, "Islamic tenets do not permit live-in relationships during the subsisting marriage. The position may be different if the two persons are unmarried and the parties being major choose to lead their lives in a way of their own." Incidentally, Mr. Khan was married to one Farida Khatoun since 2020.

"The constitutional morality may come to the rescue of such a couple and the social morality settled through the customs and usages over ages may give way to the constitutional morality and protection under Article 21 of the Constitution of India may step in to protect the cause. The case before us is, however, different," the court said, adding, "The constitutional protection under Article 21 of the Constitution of India would not lend an un-canalised support to such a right."

What have been previous orders?

Live-in relationships with variables of marital status of the partners, their possibly different faiths, birth of children and even separation have occupied the attention of the judiciary at various levels in recent years. If in the case of Ms. Devi and Mr. Khan, only the latter was married, in another case last year, both partners were married but involved in a live-in relationship away from wedlock.

In November last year, the Supreme Court stayed orders passed by lower courts and the Gujarat High Court awarding maintenance to a woman from the man she had been living with. The top court order came after a Surat-based man challenged the High Court order arguing that their relationship could not be termed a domestic relationship as they were both married to other people at the time of cohabitation. While their respective marriages subsisted, they lived together in 2012 and had a daughter too a couple of years later. The woman had approached the judiciary as the live-in relationship did not work out, and sought relief under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. She sought maintenance too.

Interestingly in the same month, the Punjab and Haryana High Court stated that a couple living together without obtaining a divorce from their previous spouse cannot be classified as being in a "live-in relationship" or being in a union similar to marriage. The court even felt that such an arrangement would amount to the offence of bigamy under Sections 494/495 of the Indian Penal Code. In this case, the man was already married. The court refused to provide protection to the couple, stating, "The male partner is engaging in a lustful and adulterous life with the female partner without obtaining a valid divorce from his previous spouse."

What have the Courts said about live-in relationships?

India does not have any laws that directly address a live-in partnership. As per the top Court, for a man and a woman to live together is part of 'the right to life'; therefore, a live-in relationship is no longer an offence. The Supreme Court in its various judgments has stated that a man and a woman living like a husband and a wife in a long-term relationship, and even have children, the judiciary will presume that the two were married and that the same laws would be applicable to them and their relationship. The concept of a live-in relationship was recognised in Payal Sharma versus Nari Niketan by the Allahabad High Court, where the judges felt, "A man and a woman, even without getting married, can live together if they wish to. This may be regarded as immoral by society, but it is not illegal. There is a difference between law and morality."



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