

ECONOMY

Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Shaktikanta Das, stated last week that "recurring and overlapping food price shocks" continue to be a threat to headline consumer price index (CPI) inflation.

Inflation: What Is It?

- Price increases are known as inflation, which is also known as the gradual loss of purchasing power.
- The average price increase of a selected basket of goods and services over a given time period can be used to determine the rate at which purchasing power declines.
- The increase in prices, which is frequently stated as a percentage, implies that a given amount of money can now buy less than it did in previous times.

Explain CPI.

- One price index called the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is used to track changes in the retail prices of goods and services that a specific population group in a given area consumes.
- The CPI basket, which has 460 items in the urban basket and 448 items in the rural basket, includes a wide variety of products. The cost of living or the utility that consumers obtain at a particular level of their income, prices, and preferences is thus represented by this enormous basket of goods and services.
- It is regarded as a key economic indicator and is frequently used as a deflator in national accounts, a tool for monitoring price stability, and a barometer of inflation.

Headline Inflation

- The Consumer Price Index (CPI), which is published on a monthly basis by the Bureau of Labour Statistics, measures headline inflation.
- No adjustments are made to headline inflation to eliminate extremely volatile figures, such as those that are subject to change regardless of the state of the economy.
- Changes in the cost of living are frequently closely linked to headline inflation, giving consumers in the marketplace valuable information.
- Seasonality and the frequently volatile components of food and energy prices—which are subtracted from the headline figure in the core Consumer Price Index (CPI)—are not taken into account.

Core Inflation

- The change in prices for goods and services that excludes those from the food and energy sectors is known as core inflation.
- These items are not included in this measure of inflation because of their significantly more volatile prices.
- The consumer price index (CPI), a gauge of prices for goods and services, is most frequently used to calculate it.

Current inflation situation

- According to the most recent CPI data, overall annual retail inflation for October was 4.87 percent, down from 7.44 percent in July for the third consecutive month.
- Furthermore, October saw a 43-month low of 4.28 percent for "core" CPI inflation, which does not include increases in the prices of food and fuel.
- Furthermore, considering the negative fuel and light inflation of -0.39%, the issue lies with food prices.
- Food inflation was higher than the overall CPI inflation rate, at 6.61%. However, some food ingredients are unstable, like vegetables, which can experience supply shocks during certain seasons. This can lead to high inflation, as was the case recently with onions and tomatoes in July and August.
- With the arrival of new crops, these frequently self-correct; the inflation of vegetables has already fallen, falling from 37.4% to 2.7% between July and October.

cause for concern to the government and RBI

- Prior to the national elections of the following year, the RBI and the government should be particularly concerned about the more sticky aspects of food inflation.

- These are specifically related to pulses and cereals, or dal-roti. Since September 2022, retail cereal inflation has remained in double digits for 14 consecutive months, averaging 10.65%.
- In pulses, this has been the case for the last five months, with the current inflation rate of 18.79 percent being the highest since August 2016.
- It is obvious that this is related to a subpar monsoon.
- One shouldn't hold too much hope for the rabi crop either, as the post-monsoon season (October to December) rainfall has so far been 26% below average and El Niño's effects are expected to persist through spring and beyond.

The government's endeavours and future path

- The Narendra Modi administration has done a good job of managing the relatively comfortable wheat and rice stocks with the Food Corporation of India.
- This has been accomplished by increasing open market sales to keep prices down and returning the original 5 kg/person/month quota for ration cardholders, which was 10 kg during the Covid period.
- It needs to increase supply by eliminating the 40 percent import duty on wheat and the 50–60% import duty currently applied to chana (chickpea) and yellow/white peas.

Conclusion

Farmer resistance to tariff reductions may exist, but the government should be more concerned about double-digit inflation from an economic and political standpoint.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Context: The list of crimes for which the death penalty is applicable has grown thanks to the proposed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Bill, 2023, which aims to replace the Indian Penal Code from the British era.

Death penalty

About:

- It is the harshest penalty that can be imposed on a person in accordance with an applicable penal law that is currently in effect.
- It is a tool with legal support that the government uses to end a person's life.

Evolution in India:

- Many Indians were hanged either after or even before their trials during the British Raj.
- Following its independence, India developed into a democratic nation, and the death penalty's application underwent significant reform.

Present situation:

- India has previously voted against a draft resolution on the repeal of the death penalty proposed by the UN General Assembly.
- A study by the National Law University Delhi found that, as of December 31, 2022, there were 539 prisoners in India on death row, the most since at least 2016.
- This information was found in the Annual Statistics Report 2022, which was released by Project 39A.

The 2023 Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill

- The more than 160-year-old Indian Penal Code (IPC) is set to be repealed and replaced by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023, which has been introduced in the Lok Sabha. The following changes are suggested by the bill.

IPC Section 420: Disloyalty

- Cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property are covered under IPC Section 420.
- The act of cheating is covered under Section 316 of the proposed Bill 2023, and there is no Section 420.

Sedition under IPC Section 124A

- Sedition is covered in IPC Section 124A.
- Section 124 of the proposed Sanhita pertains to the offense of wrongful restraint in the proposed Bill, 2023.

- Murder, IPC Section 302
- Section 307 of the IPC: Murderous Attempt
- Sections 375 and 376 of the IPC: Rape
- Criminal conspiracy, etc., is covered in IPC Section 120B.
- The death penalty
- A parliamentary panel report released recently states that the proposed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Bill, 2023 has raised the number of crimes that can result in death from 11 to 15.
- At least four new crimes, including mob lynching, organized crime, terrorism, and minor rape, now carry the death penalty.
- For instance, the death penalty for minor gang rape: For gang rape of women under the age of twelve, the IPC permits the death penalty. The bill permits the death penalty for gang rapes of women who are younger than eighteen.

Recommendation of a parliamentary committee report

- The parliamentary panel suggested that the Government take the matter under consideration.
- The domain experts that the committee consulted "deliberated at great length about the need to abolish the death penalty," per the panel's report.
- After reviewing the submissions on the death penalty, the Committee has come to the conclusion that the argument against the death penalty is vehement because of the potential for judicial error and the desire to spare the innocent from an execution by hanging.
- If the death penalty must be kept in place, the domain experts argued before the Committee that a more objective definition of the "rarest of rare case" doctrine should be provided.

Justifications for the Death Penalty

- **Supported by a number of organizations:** The Law Commission of India (1962) supported the continuation of the death penalty in the Indian legal system in its 35th Report, which was submitted in 1967.
- **Upholding law and order:** It was stated that "India cannot risk the experiment of abolition of capital punishment" due to the need to maintain law and order, the lack of any empirical research, and other similar considerations.
- **Serving as a deterrent:** The death penalty is a "response to the society's call for appropriate punishment in appropriate cases" as well as a deterrent.

Arguments opposing the death penalty

- **Opposite the worldwide trend:**
 - By the end of 2021, over two thirds of the world's nations had either outlawed or discontinued the death penalty in practice, according to the Amnesty Rep. ort
- **Poor people are most impacted:**
 - The impoverished in India are more impacted than the wealthy.
 - The proportion of illiterate and uneducated people who are executed by hanging is greater than that of literate and educated people.
 - It is evident that 74.1 percent of the people incarcerated in India are from economically deprived families.
- **No Reduction of the pain**
 - The goal of either hanging or a lethal injection is not to lessen the prisoner's suffering, and neither of these methods can truly do so.
 - The great suffering that is caused when a death row prisoner is killed is not something that society, as a consumer and supporter of the death penalty, wants to witness.
- **Low application of the death sentence:**
 - Based on the available data, only seven cases over the past six years have seen the death penalty upheld by the Supreme Court.

- The waiting period until the sentence is overturned or confirmed causes far more suffering than the actual imposition of the penalty.

Pardoning Powers defined in the Constitution

- **Pardon:** This means completely absolving the person of the crime and letting him go free. The pardoned criminal will be like a normal citizen.
- **Commutation:** It means changing the type of punishment given to the guilty into a less harsh one, for example, a death penalty commuted to a life sentence.
- **Reprieve:** It means a delay allowed in executing a sentence, usually a death sentence, for a guilty person to allow him some time to apply for a Presidential Pardon or some other legal remedy to prove his innocence or successful rehabilitation.
- **Respite:** It means reducing the quantum or degree of the punishment to a criminal given some special circumstances, like pregnancy, mental condition etc.
- **Remission:** It means changing the quantum of the punishment without changing its nature, for example reducing twenty-year rigorous imprisonment to ten years.

Way forward

- The Bills, which the Government has welcomed as a step toward removing the colonial essence of criminal laws, nevertheless preserve the colonial spirit of the existing laws and increase the severity of the penalties for some offenses.
- The issues that need to be addressed are the death penalty's arbitrary sentencing guidelines, its disparate and discriminatory effects on marginalized groups, the harsh realities of life there, the effects of being on death row on one's mental health, etc.
- According to the experts, in order to give victims more opportunity to voice their opinions, the quasi-judicial boards should be given the authority to exercise probation, commutation, and remission. They also suggested setting deadlines for the hearing and resolution of mercy petitions.

PRELIM FACTS

1. Walvis Bay

Context: In a strategic move as part of the Indian Navy's mission-based deployment to West Africa and the Atlantic, INS Sumedha conducted a port call at Walvis Bay.

About Walvis Bay:

- It is strategically located halfway down the coast of Namibia, with direct access to principal shipping routes.
- This strategic location has made it the gateway port for trade between landlocked African countries and the rest of the world.
- Apart from cargo transshipment, Walvis Bay is also known internationally for its commercial fishing industry.
- It is lying along the Atlantic Ocean.
- The town of Walvis Bay lies on the edge of the Namib Desert at the mouth of the intermittently flowing Kuiseb River.

2. Picocystis Salinarum

Context: Recently, a young researcher has divulged the secret of how the Picocystis Salinarum survives the harshest of conditions by resorting to physiological adaptation to highly saline-alkaline/hyperosmotic conditions.

About Picocystis Salinarum:

- It is a globally widespread picoplanktonic green algae of saline lakes.
- It is one of the smallest green algae.
- It is found in hypersaline soda lake Sambhar, Rajasthan, to survive extreme environments. Though the algae had been widely found in saline-soda lakes around the world, it was spotted for the first time in India only in the Sambhar Lake.
- The unique organism apparently enhances photosynthesis and ATP synthesis along with chaperone proteins as key response to high salinity-alkalinity.

- Enhanced photosynthetic activity exhibited by *P. Salinarum* in highly saline-alkaline condition is noteworthy as photosynthesis is suppressed under hyperosmotic conditions in most photosynthetic organisms.

Key facts about Sambhar Lake

- It is India's largest saline wetland located in Rajasthan.
- It is an ephemeral Salt Lake,
- It is also a designated Ramsar Site (recognized wetland of international importance).
- It represents the depression of the Aravalli Range.

This inland lake receives water from five rivers, namely Samaod, Khari, Mantha, Khandela, Medtha, and Roopangarh

3. Tiau river

Context: Traffickers of narcotic substances from Assam and Mizoram have used excavators to carve a 10-km path from the International Border to the nearest habitation in the neighbouring country that starts from the Tiau river, which marks India's border with Myanmar

About:

- Tiau River forms part of the international border between India and Myanmar.
- It rises near Khuangphah village of Champhai district in Mizoram.
- It ultimately merges with the Kaladan River.
- In the local language, the river is also known as Ciau River or Ciau Guun ("Guun" means river).

4. Kangri

- The Kangri, also known as Kanger or Kangid, is earthenware filled with glowing embers and encased in pretty handmade wicker baskets.
- It is a portable and moving heater that Kashmiris keep in their pheran, a long woollen cloak reaching down to the knees worn by people during the frosty winters.
- A pot can hold about 250 grams of charcoal, and the fire, lasts for hours, under a pheran.
- It keeps people warm during the harsh winter months, when temperatures can drop below minus 20 degrees.

How is it made?

- It is known for its outer shell made of willow wicker reeds that grow abundantly in the wetlands of north Kashmir's Ganderbal district.
- These reeds can reach eight feet in height and are harvested during autumn, just before demand for the fire pots swells.
- These then go through a multi-layered process of scraping and peeling to get rid of the bark, soaking, boiling, and drying before they are ready to be woven around a bowl-shaped clay pot.
- The earthenware is decorated with colourful threads, mirrorwork, and sequins and is about six inches (150 mm) in diameter.

5. Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP)

- Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) was launched in 2010 under the Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) by the World Bank to save wild Tigers.
- Under GTRP Tiger Range Countries (TRCs) committed to doubling wild Tiger populations by 2022.
- Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) evolved under the Global Tiger Initiative in 2010.
- The St Petersburg Declaration in 2010 saw 13 Tiger range countries commit to reversing the decline of the species population and double their numbers by 2022.
- Retrospective analysis shows mixed results: success in South Asia and Russia, alarming decline in South East Asia.
- Challenges include lack of Tiger governance, habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, and prey depletion.
- GTRP 2.0 aligns with the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), providing an opportunity for TRCs to integrate Tiger conservation with global goals.
- Anticipated outcomes include cross-sectoral conservation, increased investment, habitat protection, conflict management, and reduced wildlife trade.

- The GBF, endorsed by 188 countries including all TRCs, coincides with the early phase of the new Global Tiger Recovery Program (2023-2034).
- This presents a special chance for TRCs and institutions to harmonize Tiger conservation with the global framework's goals

6. India signed \$400 million loan with Asian Development Bank (ADB) for subprogram 2 of the Sustainable Urban Development and Service Delivery Program

- The Program aims to support the government's urban reform agenda for improving the quality of urban life through
 - Creation of high-quality urban infrastructure
 - Assured public services
 - Efficient governance systems
- Sub-programme 2 supports the reforms initiated by the states and the urban local bodies (ULBs) in operationalising the national flagship programme of Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0
 - AMRUT 2.0 is targeted for universal access of water supply and sanitation and to ensure urban water security through reducing water losses, recycling treated sewage for non-domestic use etc.
- Earlier ADB had approved Subprogram 1 in 2021 with a financing of \$350 million.
 - While Subprogram 1 established national-level policies and guidelines to improve urban services, Subprogram 2 supports investment planning and reform actions at the state and ULB levels.
- Need for such program
 - Urbanization in India: Urban population 2nd largest in the world at 498 million in 2021, is projected to increase to about 600 million by 2030.
 - Insufficient urban service delivery: Indian cities score low on the Ease of Living Index.
 - Insufficient urban investments and low financial capacity of urban local bodies.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Despite a number of obstacles and restrictions, parliamentary committees constitute a vital component of Indian democracy. Talk about the function and difficulties faced by India's parliamentary committees.

Introduction

A group of MPs nominated by the Speaker/Chairman or appointed or elected by the House makes up a Parliamentary Committee. They rely on Articles 105 and 118 for their authority. They play a variety of duties and functions that improve the caliber and efficacy of the legislative process, making them a vital component of Indian democracy.

Some of the responsibilities and roles of parliamentary committees are:

- They offer legislative knowledge and oversight of the government's proposed laws and policies.
- They conduct a thorough analysis of the bills and make recommendations for changes based on their conclusions.
- Representing the interests and viewpoints of various parties, geographical areas, and societal segments, they function as a miniature parliament.
- They give the MPs a forum for discussion, deliberation, and consensus-building.
- They keep an eye on the executive branch and hold it responsible for its output.
- They keep an eye on how the ministries and agencies carry out their budgets, plans, policies, and legislation.
- They also look into important and publically interest topics.
- They make the legislative process more transparent and open to the public.
- They ask citizens, civil society organizations, professionals, and stakeholders for their thoughts and recommendations on a range of topics.

The obstacles and constraints encountered by legislative committees:

- **Low referral rate:** Very few bills are sent to committees for additional review. A lot of laws are passed in the house without enough consideration or debate.

- **Nature of suggestions:** The committees lack the authority necessary to carry out their recommendations. They are not required to be adopted or carried out by the government. Additionally, the committees lack a follow-up system to monitor the progress of their recommendations.
- **Time and resource constraints:** The committees have a lot of bills and topics to address in a short amount of time. They frequently lack the manpower, funding, data, and knowledge necessary to carry out in-depth investigations.
- **MPs' low attendance:** For a variety of reasons, including competing schedules, political pressure, disinterest, or incentives, MPs' attendance at committee meetings is frequently low.
- **Too many ministries under one committee:** Departmental standing committees are tasked with supervising an excessive number of unrelated or incoherent ministries and subjects. As a result, the committee work lacks specialization, depth, and focus.

Some of the potential actions to enhance parliamentary committee performance are:

- **Increasing the rate of referrals:** More bills ought to be sent to the committees for in-depth analysis and review. It would be desirable to alter the rules and procedures to require or mandate the referral of all measures to the committees.
- **Increasing the committees' authority:** The committees should have greater authority to impose their recommendations or request answers from the government. It is imperative to hold the government responsible for its decision to adopt or reject the committee's recommendations.
- **Giving committees more time and resources:** In order for the committees to carry out their task efficiently, they need to be given additional time and resources. Sufficient personnel, data, information, and research assistance should be made available to them. They ought to be let to use contemporary tools and technologies as well for their work.
- **Increasing MP attendance:** By offering rewards, sanctions, or recognition, it is possible to increase MP attendance at committee sessions. It is also necessary to educate the MPs on the value and advantages of committee work.
- **Rationalizing the number of ministries under a committee:** In order to guarantee concentration, breadth, and specialization in the committee's work, the number of ministries and subjects under a committee should be lowered or rationalized. Subjects ought to be arranged in groups based on coherence or relevance.

Conclusion

In order to improve the legislative processes in India, parliamentary committees are essential to democracy. They have obstacles to overcome, but the function and importance of the parliament in Indian democracy can be enhanced and revitalized by fortifying and reorganizing the committees.

MCQs

1. Consider the following statements regarding 'Picocystis Salinarum'
 1. It is a globally widespread picoplanktonic green algae of saline lakes.
 2. It is one of the smallest green algae.
 3. Usually, it is found at the volcanic sites and as of now there is no evidence of presence of these algae in India.
 How many of the given statements are correct?
 - a) Only one
 - b) Only two**
 - c) All three
 - d) None
2. Recently, 'Walvis Bay' was in the news. It is located in which part of the world?
 - a) Middle East
 - b) West Europe
 - c) West Africa**
 - d) North America
3. 'Kangri' is an integral part of Kashmiri culture. It is a
 - a) Traditional Bangle
 - b) Firing Pot**
 - c) Music Instrument
 - d) Traditional Cuisine
4. Consider the following statements
 1. It forms part of the international border between India and Myanmar.
 2. It rises near Khuangphah village of Champhai district in Mizoram.
 3. It ultimately merges with the Kaladan River.

4. In the local language, the river is also known as Ciau River or Ciau Guun ("Guun" means river).
The above-mentioned statements refer to which one of the following rivers?
a) Salween River
b) Tiau River
c) Subansiri river
d) Barak River
5. Consider the following statements about Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)
1. The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 replaced the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954.
 2. The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the administrative Ministry of FSSAI.
 3. State Food Safety Index and Eat Right India Movement are the initiatives of FSSAI.
- How many of the statements given above are correct?
a) Only one
b) Only two
c) All three
d) None of the above
6. Consider the following statements about Global Positioning System
1. GPS is a satellite navigation system, used to determine the ground position of an object.
 2. It is a US-owned utility that provides users with Positioning, Navigation, and Timing (PNT) services.
 3. To provide PNT services of India ISRO has established a regional navigation satellite system called NavIC.
- How many of the statements given above are correct?
a) Only one
b) Only two
c) All three
d) None of the above
7. North Kivu, recently seen in news located in which of the following country?
a) Israel
b) Palestine
c) Democratic Republic of Congo
d) Egypt
8. Consider the following statements:
1. Minimum Support Price (MSP) may be both lower or higher than the prevailing market price of the particular crop.
 2. All food grain procurement operations in India are undertaken by the Food Corporation of India (FCI).
- Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2
9. Kherson region, recently seen in news is located in
a) China
b) United States
c) Ukraine
d) Turkey
10. Which one of the following represents the correct chronological order of capturing the Kondaveedu Fort?
a. Reddi dynasty- Vijayanagara empire- Golconda Sultans- French
b. Gajapati Dynasty- Hoysala Dynasty- Chola Dynasty- Vijayanagara Empire
c. Wodeyar Dynasty- Nizams of Hyderabad- Maratha Empire- British East India Company
d. Gupta Empire- Mewar Dynasty- Delhi Sultanate- Mughal Empire