

Wholesale prices remain in deflation zone in Oct.

WPI reflects an inflation of -0.52% from -0.26% in September; food index up 1.07% in October compared to last year, with food prices up 1% sequentially from September levels as well

The Hindu Bureau
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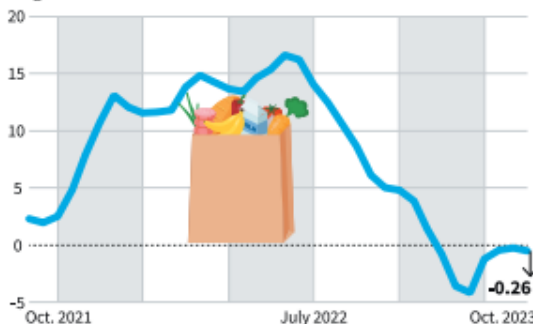
India's wholesale prices remained in deflationary mode for the seventh month in a row in October, with the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) reflecting an inflation of -0.52% from -0.26% in September.

Wholesale price inflation stood at 8.4% in October 2022, creating a high base effect for last month's index. On a month-on-month basis, the WPI was up 0.4% in October.

The wholesale food index was up 1.07% in October compared to last year, with food prices up 1% sequentially from September levels as well. But the trends within the food basket were divergent and runaway prices of some

Maintaining status quo

While wholesale inflation accelerated from -0.26% in September to -0.52% in October, it continued to be in the negative zone for the seventh time in a row



items like onions and pulses pose risks to the retail inflation trajectory.

While vegetable prices dropped 21%, inflation in paddy and cereals accelerated to 7.5% and 9.4% respectively, and pulses and

onion inflation jumped to 19.4% and 62.6%, respectively. Fruits inflation picked up to 6.3% while milk inflation is 7.9%.

Manufactured products' prices were unchanged from September levels.

Fuel and power prices rose 0.65% from September levels, but were 2.5% below last year's levels. Crude petroleum and natural gas inflation stood at -2.2% in October.

"The negative rate of inflation in October, 2023 is primarily due to fall in prices of chemicals and chemical products, electricity, textiles, basic metals, food products, paper and paper products, etc. as compared to the corresponding month of previous year," the Commerce and Industry Ministry said.

"The uptrend in domestic prices of most food items as well as an unfavourable base is projected to lead to a turnaround in the WPI to a marginal 0.1% inflation in November," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ICRA.

Justice Chandru panel calls for separate board to administer homes for children in conflict with law

Dennis S. Jesudasan
CHENNAI

The Justice K. Chandru Committee has recommended that the Tamil Nadu government pull down the existing structure of the government homes for children in conflict with law (CCL) and construct new homes that "should not look like a prison or jail".

The practice that grants preference to ex-inmates in recruitment of guards, security and gate-keepers must be stopped forthwith, it said, adding that only qualified persons should be recruited in adherence to rules and through a notified agency. "During the past six years, 176 ex-inmates have been recruited as guards, security and gate-keepers. There have been 47 cases of inmates escaping during the past 10 years," Mr. Chandru told *The Hindu*.

Inmates are being fed through the iron bars. Teachers and students are separated by iron bars. There have also been cases of suicides.

The panel further recommended that the State government establish an exclusive board to administer all government homes for CCL functioning under the Social Welfare Department and create a new directorate for running child

Advocating reforms

The Justice K. Chandru Committee, formed after the mysterious death of a 17-year-old inmate of the Government Observation Home in Chengalpattu in December 2022, has given various recommendations to the government with respect to administration of homes for children in conflict with law (CCL). Here are a few of them:



Justice K. Chandru submitting the one-man panel's report to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin at the Secretariat.

- The affairs of the homes should be monitored daily through a special monitoring room
- Each home should have a medical doctor, a psychologist and a qualified counsellor
- A training academy should be set up for staff
- Admission certificate should be given to parents of CCL
- Each home must have a de-addiction centre
- CCL should be provided with recreation facilities and allowed to play on open ground

care institutions (CCIs) for CCL by bifurcating the Directorate of Social Defence.

Panel's mandate

The one-man committee was constituted by the State government after the mysterious death of a 17-year-old male inmate of the Government Observation Home in Chengalpattu

in December 2022. Its mandate was to make recommendations for effective functioning and administration of homes in accordance with the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

Mr. Chandru submitted his report to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin at the Secretariat here on Tuesday. Chief

Secretary Shiv Das Meena and senior officials were present. Incidentally, the former judge had declined to avail himself of any transport facility, reimbursement towards his official travel and daily allowance. As part of his task, he had visited government observation homes, special homes, and places of safety in Chengalpattu, Chennai, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Madurai, Salem, Thanjavur, Tiruchi, Tirunelveli, and Vellore districts.

The report's other recommendations include the enactment of legislation for setting up the Tamil Nadu Board for Special Services for Children, which would administer all the government homes meant for CCL functioning under the Social Welfare Department. *The Hindu* accessed a copy of the report.

According to the report, the exclusive board should be an autonomous body that will establish and maintain observation homes, special homes, places of safety, and after-care homes meant for CCL and plan infrastructure for the homes and design and execute the structure. It is to have a Chairperson (Minister for Social Welfare), a Managing Director (a senior IAS officer) and five directors drawn from the

fields of children's security, education, psychiatry, and health, among others.

The Directorate of Social Defence should be bifurcated immediately, it added. The Directorate of Social Defence would continue to have governance over the CCIs meant for care and protection, while the new directorate, which is to be named 'Department of Special Services', would administer CCIs meant for CCL.

The panel further recommended that the government immediately notify the rules framed for the amendment to the J.J. Act, 2021, which had received the President's assent in September 2022. "Since a number of agencies such as JJBs, CWCs, Human Rights Commission (both Centre and State) as well as the High Court Monitoring Committee are connected to the homes, it is advisable that a nodal officer be appointed at the headquarters to interact with all the agencies and attend to issues raised from time to time," it said.

It also recommended setting up of at least one home in each district. (Assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts is available on the State's health helpline 104, Tele-MANAS 14416 and Sneha's suicide prevention helpline 044-24640050).

Bridge to nowhere

India should be forceful in articulating its position on Gaza

Two weeks after abstaining from a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution that called for a ceasefire in the Israeli strikes on Gaza, India voted in favour of five of six annual draft resolutions at the UNGA's Fourth Committee that criticised Israel for increasing settlements in the Occupied Territories, was in favour of Palestinians' right to homes and property, and supported the UN Refugee and Works Agency (UNRWA) operating in Gaza. The official explanation of the votes as "routine" affirmation of India's traditional policy has only added to the confusion over the government's stand on the crisis. Its Explanation of Vote in the original UNGA resolution in October said that India could not vote for a resolution that did not include an "explicit condemnation" of the October 7 attacks by Hamas. However, none of the six resolutions, including one in which India abstained, that discusses investigating Israel for rights violations, actually referred to the October 7 attacks. These were instead identical to resolutions that India had voted for before, and neither India nor any other country at the Fourth Committee deliberations proposed amendments. The Israeli envoy, in fact, demanded a rejection of the "anti-Israel" resolutions as they did not contain references to the current situation. Cuba argued that the resolutions were important to vote for, but that they also did not contain references to the more than 11,000 Palestinians killed, including 4,000 children, and the displaced (nearly a million). India did not propose amendments, nor did any Indian diplomat speak, although a lengthier explanation may be expected when the resolutions are put to a vote by the UNGA next month – by which time more of Gaza would have been flattened.

At a time when every day counts, New Delhi appears unwilling to exert itself to making a difference. True, the government continues to hold its traditional stand on support for the Palestinian cause and a two-state solution (which it reaffirmed during the recent India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial meeting), and that it "stands by" Israel, with "zero tolerance" for terror attacks. However, it has not joined the call for a ceasefire or explicitly asked for an end to the strikes on civilian targets, where Israel claims it is hunting for Hamas fighters and searching for hostages. Nor has it named Hamas for the terror attacks or changed Indian law, as the Israeli Ambassador to India called for, to designate Hamas as a terror group. More than a month after Israel's reprisals began, the government must explain its position on the conflict, including where, if anywhere, India could play a role in alleviating the situation. The upcoming Voice of Global South and G-20 virtual summits may present the opportunity to articulate options for ending the violence, recovering Israeli hostages, as well as post-conflict scenarios for Gaza and Palestinians. India's voice, once known for being forceful and balanced on such issues, must not be replaced by an expedient silence.

What India can expect from the 'Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar' awards

As India revamps the way it recognises good science, the country must also ensure the new system represents both the aspirations of scientists and the nature of contemporary science practice, and ensures that the challenges that beset the older crop of awards aren't carried forward

Karishma Kaushik

Recently, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research announced the winners of the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (SSB) awards for 2022. The announcement was highly anticipated not only due to the nearly year-long delay in declaring the results, but also because it came amid the government's plans for a major revamp of the structure of science and medicine awards.

In September 2022, the Ministry of Science and Technology discontinued nearly 300 existing science awards - with the exception of the SSB awards - while reports emerged of a draft plan to replace them with a smaller set of "highly deserving" awards.

A new system of awards

The new system, called the 'Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar' (RVP), includes a bouquet of awards: Vigyan Shri, Vigyan Yuva Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar, Vigyan Team, and Vigyan Ratna. The government has expressed an intention to keep the RVP at par with the Padma and other national awards.

The new awards will be open to an expanded group of "scientists, technologists and innovators (or teams) working in government, private sector organisations or individuals working outside any organisation". The RVP will be given across 13 scientific domains, including basic sciences, applied sciences, medicine, and engineering. The award announcement stated that "representation from each domain/field, including gender parity will be ensured".

Like the Padma awards, the RVP awards will invite nominations for some time, and be evaluated by a RVP Committee comprising "the Principal Scientific Adviser to Government of India and ... Secretaries of Science Departments, members of Science and Engineering Academies" and noted science/technology scholars.

Differences from older awards

The newly proposed RVP structure is significant for many reasons. In a welcome step to move beyond recognitions largely restricted to scientists with regular positions in academia, the new awards are also open to innovators and technologists, including those in industry, and with diverse, non-regular affiliations.

The new awards will also have expanded eligibility criteria, including technology-led innovations or products,



The newly proposed Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar awards' structure is significant for many reasons. KRISTANTIN/ISTOCK/PODAR

In addition to discovery-based research. The RVP also includes a set of team awards (Vigyan Team), to acknowledge the increasingly collaborative, cross-disciplinary, translational and intersectional nature of scientific research.

Importantly, with the exception of the Vigyan Yuva-SSB award - for scientists up to the age of 45 years - the other RVP awards don't have an age limit, while explicitly committing to ensure equitable gender representation.

This is notable vis-à-vis long-term conversations calling for reforms of the ageism and gender bias pervading science in India.

The RVP awards will also be open to Persons of Indian Origin abroad, which is relevant given India's large and accomplished scientific, engineering, and technology diaspora, and the increasingly global footprint of modern science.

Finally, the new award system has eliminated cash prizes, and will instead include certificates and medals.

Intent and processes

As India revamps the way it recognises good science, it is an opportune time to reflect on the intent, the implementation, and the selection and evaluation processes. This is so that the new system represents both the aspirations of

these initiatives often do so in addition to their primary responsibilities, so these contributions must be included in the new award structure - preferably as separate categories or at least weighed upon at the time of selection.

Third: The age limit of 45 years for the Vigyan Yuva-SSB for young scientists is a serious challenge to the new system's own commitment to ensure gender parity. In their erstwhile version (with the same age limit), the SSB awards were notorious for their lack of gender representation, and the age limit - which works against women with relocation, childcare responsibilities, and career breaks - was a big reason why.

So, the Vigyan Yuva-SSB award's definition of a 'young scientist' must be reconsidered based on, say, the number of years since a candidate held an independent position or it must offer eligibility extensions based on personal considerations (as the EMBO Gold Medal does). Otherwise, it could erect its own systemic barriers to ensuring gender parity.

A potential blueprint

Fourth: When the RVP award process is implemented, the selection process must adhere to the predetermined timelines, provide a public list of shortlisted applicants, and include gender-balanced and diverse selection committees, international jury members, and a non-partisan jury member - a non-scientist, preferably - to make sure the selection is fair.

Fifth: The new award system must pledge to consciously seek to ensure, in addition to gender parity, the proper socioeconomic and demographic representation among awardees, and account for contributions made in the face of serious systemic social challenges and/or constraints and considerations related to the workplace.

Finally: While some have questioned the need for awards for scientists at all, we in India lack the data to make this decision. In any case, continuously evaluating the impact of the new award system on subsequent scientific work, the growth of topics and fields, the effects of role models on diversity and inclusivity in science in India, and scientific temper of the country at large will be useful.

With these aspects in place, this is an opportunity for the RVP awards to become a blueprint for an expansive, inclusive, and transparent award system that can be adopted by scientific ecosystems in other countries as well.

(Karishma Kaushik is the Executive Director of IndiaBioScience.)



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scientists and the nature of contemporary science practice in India and ensures that the challenges that beset the older crop of awards aren't carried forward.

First: to ensure that the RVP system recognises only truly "notable and inspiring contributions", the awards' descriptions must include a statement that the contributions are over and above the standard job description of a scientist/technologist, not merely incremental work or work integral to their appointment.

Second: since the awards are national recognitions for exemplary work, dedicated citations for teaching, mentoring, science communication, public engagement and outreach, and leadership and administration are conspicuous by absence. (Some of these awards were previously conferred by the science academies.) Scientists engaged in

The economy of a world without work

A future where artificial intelligence has eliminated the need for all forms of work is one where AI has become self-aware. If such a future is possible, how would economic relations be organised? Can the current capitalist system function in a world where we don't have to work?

ECONOMIC NOTES

Rahul Menon

At the recently concluded Bletchley Park summit on Artificial Intelligence (AI), in an interview with the U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, billionaire Elon Musk highlighted the disruptive potential of AI. Mr. Musk conceived of a future where AI would substitute for all human labour – both physical and cognitive – and hence individuals would face no pressing need for a job, but would only seek work for personal fulfilment.

While AI may substitute for certain jobs, it generates new jobs in turn, for instance AI programmers. A future where AI has eliminated the need for all forms of work is one where AI has become self-aware – where AI software can not only take on the task it was designed for, but can also design AI to undertake new tasks, and operate and maintain itself. Such a future may be theoretically possible, but practically improbable.

The need for work

A world without work may not be probable, but is it desirable? The history of economic thought reveals different ways in which a human's relation with work has been theorised. Here one looks at two thinkers with diametrically opposite views on the nature of work – John Maynard Keynes and Karl Marx. Keynes was a liberal thinker who extolled capitalism but wished to save it from its worst excesses. He believed that at its heart, work represented a form of drudgery, and a world in which the hours of work could be reduced was one that unequivocally increased welfare. Keynes theorised that technological change under capitalism would eventually lead to a reduction of working hours. Mr. Musk's comments can be seen as an extension of Keynes' thinking, where improvements in technological change, if taken to its theoretical extreme, could eliminate the

need for work altogether, representing an unambiguous positive outcome.

Karl Marx had a more nuanced analysis. For him, the essence of humanity lies in our ability to materially manipulate nature; work therefore provides meaning to human life. The problem arises within the economic system of capitalism, as the product of human labour is not the labourers' to enjoy, but is seen as the property of capital to dispose of in the market for profit. Capitalism, in this reading, causes humanity to lose touch with the one activity that provides self-fulfilment. In contrast to Keynes' view, the elimination of work does not imply an elimination of drudgery, but the elimination of the only activity that gives human life meaning. In Marx's view, the ideal state is not one where AI replaces human labour, but where individuals can utilise AI to enjoy

and elevate their work, without it being appropriated by someone else.

The impact of AI on the economy

One may disagree with Keynes' notion that decreasing working hours will always increase welfare, for the working world does provide valuable social networks for many. At the same time, one can critique Marx's view of humanity finding meaning through work, for it does not allow us to conceptualise any kind of future without work at the centre. Yet the views of the above thinkers reveal an important problem in the current discussions around AI – the neglect of the economic system. Assume a situation where AI has advanced to the point that it is capable of substituting all kinds of labour. Under our current system of capitalism, the only way an individual can access material resources such as food and shelter is

through income derived from work. In such a system, a world without work does not imply a world without drudgery, but one where individuals who cannot find work cannot access basic resources.

One can make the caveat – as Mr. Musk has – that work would be available for those who desire it for personal reasons. However, in a capitalist world, labour has no choice but to seek out work if they are to feed and clothe themselves. The world as sketched out by Mr. Musk cannot emerge under modern-day capitalism.

A world without work

Imagine an economy where a part of the surplus generated in the productive sphere – where AI is the only productive factor – is transferred to human individuals to meet their basic needs. There is nothing wrong, of course, with postulating such a world. But this is not a capitalist world. It is a world with very different institutional arrangements regulating production and distribution, one where a universal basic income is a major source of income and not wage labour. This throws up several important questions, such as what determines the amount individuals receive, what determines the division of the net product between those who own the machines and those who don't and what determines the division between future growth versus current consumption. More importantly, is our current society open to devising new institutional arrangements to bring such a future to fruition, given that the current system has led to the emergence of rising inequality and a powerful billionaire class?

A situation where AI reigns supreme may never come to pass, and one may dismiss this article as speculative fiction. Yet the world economy will face disruptions, and it is imperative for us to fully understand the nature of these challenges. The impact of technological innovations cannot be seen in isolation from prevailing economic institutions.

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THE GIST

▼ Billionaire Elon Musk highlighted the disruptive potential of AI, wherein he conceived of a future where AI would substitute all human labour.

▼ Under our current system of capitalism, the only way an individual can access material resources such as food and shelter is through income derived from work. In such a system, a world without work implies a world where individuals who cannot find work cannot access basic resources.

▼ Therefore, a world where AI is supreme would not be a capitalist world but a world with very different institutional arrangements regulating production and distribution.

