



Punjab, Haryana need to look beyond MSP crops

The rice and wheat focus in Punjab

1. High productivity, assured MSP which is often above open market price, free power, and fertilizer subsidy underlie the higher income per unit area from wheat and paddy cultivation (compared to cereals, pulses, oilseeds).
2. It is no surprise then that the area share of rice and wheat in the total cropped area rose to 84% and 60% in Punjab and Haryana respectively in recent years.
3. Land-labour ratio is also very favourable in Punjab when compared to other States; on an average, a farmer owns and cultivates 2.14 hectares net sown area as against 1.42 hectares in Haryana and 1.17 hectares at the national level.
4. An estimate of income (derived from National Accounts Statistics) shows that all agriculture activities are taken together to generate an annual net income of ₹5.31 lakh per cultivator in Punjab; it is ₹3.44 lakh in Haryana while the all-India average is ₹1.7 lakh (reference year, 2017-18).

Negative consequences started

Ecological and environmental Distress

1. During the mid-1980s, some experts foresaw the serious consequences of the continuation of paddy cultivation in the region and suggested diversification away from the rice-wheat system in the mid-1980s.
2. The adverse effect of the rice-wheat duo on natural resources, the ecology, the environment, and fiscal resources was high. To enumerate a few groundwater depletion, loss of agri-biodiversity, increasing soil salinity, soil degradation, water pollution due to fertilizer load and air pollution due to stubble burning.
3. In the last decade, the water table has shown a decline in 84% observation wells in Punjab and 75% in Haryana.

Household-level distress

1. The loss of growth momentum in the income from agriculture not keeping in pace with an increase in households' expenditure.
2. The prospects of further growth in agricultural income from rice and wheat are very dim because of low productivity and competition from the emerging states like MP and Jharkhand.



Market and Fiscal Challenge

1. There is pressure to seek an increase in MSP to increase income. However, demand and supply do not favour an increase in MSP in real terms.
2. In India, the per capita intake of rice and wheat is declining and consumers' preference is shifting towards beverage and spices.
3. The country does not find an easy way to dispose of such large stocks and they are creating stress on the fiscal resources of the government.
4. Assured procurement for more than 50 years has affected the entrepreneurial skills of farmers to sell their produce in a competitive market where prices are determined by demand and supply and competition.

Youth and Jobs

1. Another rather more serious challenge for the two States is to provide attractive employment to rural youths who find agriculture unattractive and look for better paying salaried jobs in non-farm occupations. However, government jobs are few.
2. Thus, the option left is to create jobs in the private industry which has witnessed a flight from the State during the rise of militancy which hurt the State economy, employment and the revenues of the State. This setback has pushed the rank of the State in per capita income from number one in the 1970s and the early 1980s to number 13 among the major states of the country.

Way Forward

1. For further progress and to meet the aspirations of rural youth to get satisfactory employment, the State needs large-scale private investments in modern industry, services, and commerce besides agriculture.
2. The solution to the ecological, environmental and economic challenges facing agriculture in the traditional Green Revolution States is not in legalising MSP but to shift from MSP crops to high-value crops and in the promotion of non-farm activities.
3. Thus, to enable Punjab and Haryana farmers to move toward high-paying horticulture crops requires institutional arrangements on price assurance such as contract farming.



4. Farmers' groups and farmer producer organisations can play a significant role in the direct marketing of their produce.
5. Both Punjab and Haryana need to promote economic activities with strong links with agriculture tailored to State specificities.
6. Some options for this are the promotion of food processing in formal and informal sectors; a big push to post-harvest value addition and modern value chains; a network of agro- and agri-input industries; high-tech agriculture; and a direct link of production and producers to consumers and consumers without involving intermediaries.

Conclusion:

The traditional Green Revolution States of Punjab and Haryana would need to shed "business as usual" approach and embrace an innovative development strategy in agriculture and non-agriculture to secure and improve the future of farming and rural youth.

From a digital India to a digital Bharat

Opening statement

The PM-WANI fits within the framework of an evolving decentralised concept to bridge the e-divide. Essentially, this would mean the ability to connect to a Wi-Fi broadband connection almost anywhere. This can help to bridge the increasing digital divide in India.

PM WANI

The Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM WANI) provides for public Wi-Fi Networks by Public Data Offices (PDOs) to accelerate the proliferation of broadband Internet services through the Public Wi-Fi network in the country.

Potential and Deficit

1. Recently, the NITI Aayog said that India can create \$1 trillion of economic value using digital technology by 2025.
2. However, as per the latest Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) data, about 54% of India's population has access to the Internet.

16.12.2020

Wednesday



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3. The 75th round of the National Statistical Organisation survey shows that only 20% of the population has the ability to use the Internet.
4. The India Internet 2019 report shows that rural India has half the Internet penetration as urban, and twice as many users who access the Internet less than once a week.

Advantage PM WANI

Last-mile delivery

1. The focus is on last-mile delivery is much needed
2. This will also help to reduce the pressure on the mobile Internet in India.
3. As per the India Internet report, it shows that 99% of all users in India access the Internet on mobile, and about 88% are connected on the 4G network. This leads to a situation where everyone is connected to a limited network, which is getting overloaded and resulting in bad speed and quality of Internet access.

The Ecosystem

1. The PDO can be anyone, and it is clear that along with Internet infrastructure, the government also sees this as a way to generate revenue for individuals and small shopkeepers.
2. It is important to note that PDOs will not require registration of any kind, thus easing the regulatory burden on them.
3. Next, is the PDOA, who is basically the aggregator who will buy bandwidth from the Internet service provider (ISPs) and telecom companies and sell it to PDOs.
4. Finally, you have the app provider, who will create an app through which users can access and discover the Wi-Fi access points.
5. So through PDO, PDOA and app providers a lot of entrepreneurial activity, employment will be created, giving additional income sources to millions.

Two pillars of public Wi-Fi

1. The first is interoperability, where the user will be required to log in only once and stay connected across access points.

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2. The second is multiple payment options, allowing the user to pay both online and offline. The report also talks about how products should start from low denominations, starting with ₹2.

Aiding rural connectivity

1. The PM-WANI has the potential to change the fortunes of Bharat Net as well. Bharat Net envisions broadband connectivity in all villages in India.
2. The project has missed multiple deadlines, and even where the infrastructure has been created, usage data is not enough to incentivise ISPs to use Bharat Net infra to provide services. One of the reasons for the lack of demand is the deficit in digital literacy in India.
3. The other reason is simply the lack of last-mile availability of the Internet.

Security, privacy issues

1. There are some concerns, mainly with respect to security and privacy. A large-scale study conducted at public Wi-Fi spots in 15 airports across the United States, Germany, Australia, and India discovered that two-thirds of users leak private information whilst accessing the Internet.
2. Further, the TRAI report recommends that 'community interest' data be stored locally, raising questions about data protection in a scenario where the country currently does not have a data protection law in place.
3. These are, however, problems of regulation, state capacity and awareness and do not directly affect the framework for this scheme.

Conclusion:

With the PM-WANI, the state is expanding the reach of digital transformation to those who have been excluded till now. It is a game-changer because it has the potential to move Digital India to Digital Bharat.

Mains:

1. Bharat Net failures and the possibility of resurrection through PM WANI.



Vaccine drive

CruX: Assurances of safety, efficacy and long-term follow-up are essential

Vaccination program:

1. With a definitive cure not yet available for COVID-19, vaccines present the world with the best strategy to slow the virus down in its tracks along with a measure of vested herd immunity.
2. India has announced its plan and proposed line-up for COVID-19 vaccination, the government has denied COVID vaccination for all in the country.
3. As per the government's strategy, the vaccination is to be given first to health-care workers and then to people over the age of 50, with those over 60 given priority, based on the situation. This will amount to about 30 crore people.
4. The voters' list for the Lok Sabha and Assembly election polls has been set as the verifying document for the process.
5. A new digital platform, Co-WIN, will be used for COVID-19 vaccination delivery, and about 1.54 lakh Auxiliary Nurse Midwives working on Universal Immunisation Programmes will be roped in as vaccinators. Cold chain systems are to be strengthened across the country to deliver multiple doses.

Concerns:

1. As governments beef up the vaccination drive, they need to clear the fog on vaccine safety and efficacy among the people.
2. Vaccine hesitancy is a reality and the only way to counter that is to be open and honest about adverse effects and post-vaccination sequelae if any, and make available relevant information in the public realm.
3. In addition, in this case, long-term follow up of all who receive the vaccine is absolutely essential. For, therein lies the assurance that everyone in the global line list is waiting for.

Mild moderation

Retail inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is estimated to have moderated in November to a provisional 6.93%, from the previous month's 7.61%, official data released on Monday showed.



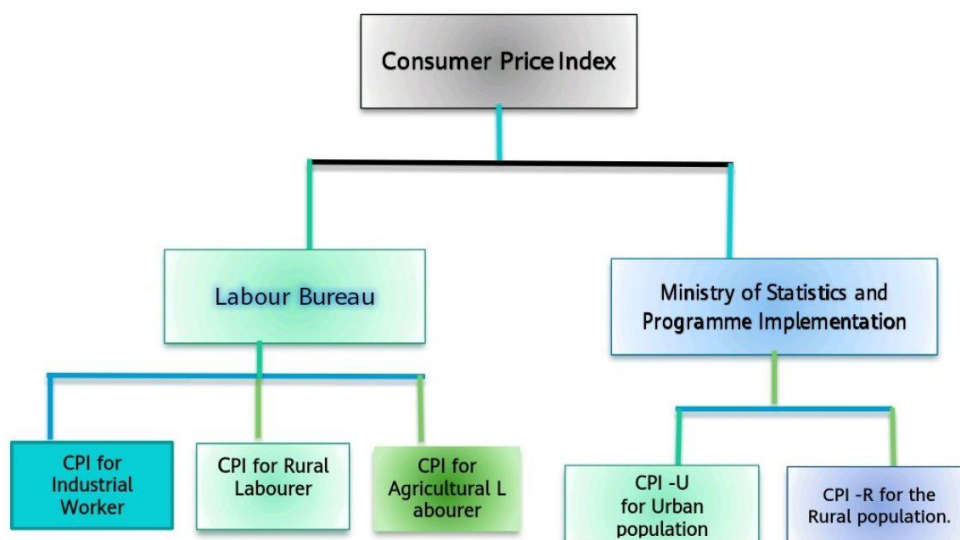
Food and beverages:

1. On the face of it, the moderation in price gains ought to be welcome news. A closer look shows easing in the headline level of inflation has been helped largely by the food and beverages basket, which with a weight of almost 46 is the single biggest index constituent and driver of retail inflation.
2. Of the basket of 12 items in food and beverages, inflation still remained in the double digits in the case of six, excluding vegetables.
3. Key protein sources including pulses, eggs and meat and fish continued to register worryingly high levels of inflation that surely cannot bode well for the wider population's nutritional well-being.

Inflation and economic recovery

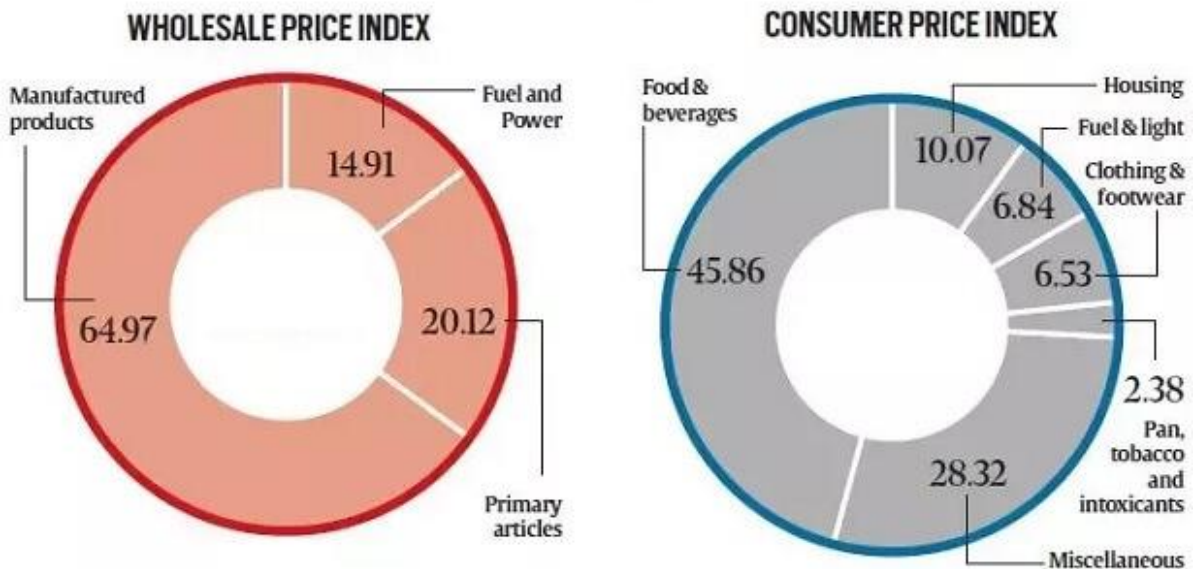
1. Disconcertingly, inflation in the key transport and communication category that includes petrol and diesel is still high. High transportation costs may drive food inflation in the coming months.
2. With more households expecting general prices to rise over the 'next three months' and 'one year ahead' horizons policymakers must guard against easing vigilance on prices while considering growth-supportive measures.
3. Price stability must remain the monetary authority's primary target: unchecked inflation poses manifold risks to the nascent economic recovery.

Learn Through Graphics: CPI calculating agencies





CPI and WPI Basket break up



Law and disorder

CruX: As a result of the unrelenting focus on the highest court, the other inadequacies of the justice delivery system don't get as much public attention. A few important ones are dealt with below.

Reason for poor access to justice:

1. Low Spending on the judiciary: The average national spending on the judiciary in this period was 0.08% of the gross domestic product (GDP), said the report which was published by Tata Trusts,
2. The poor performance of the free legal aid regime
3. Poor judge-population ratio: The judge-population ratio provides one of the most important yardsticks to measure the health of the legal system. The U.S. has about 100 judges per million population. Canada has about 75 and the U.K. has about 50. India, on the other hand, has only 19 judges per million population.
4. Of these, at any given point, at least one-fourth is always vacant. Vacancies are much higher in the lower courts, the point of contact for the common man.
5. Government largest litigant crowding out others like tax-related litigation.

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6. Lack of a national policy and road map for clearing backlogs and making access to justice real.
7. Poor legal education in India

Mains:

1. Though a significant proportion of the population falls under a free legal aid regime in reality free legal aid regime is a dead letter. Explain. Suggest reform to make free legal aid effective in India.

Additional resources:

India has one of the most comprehensive legal aid programmes in the world, the Legal Services Authority Act of 1987. Under this law, all women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and children are entitled to free legal aid meaning a significant proportion of the population falls under a free legal aid regime. However, there has been little effort on the part of successive governments to provide a task force of carefully selected, well-trained and reasonably paid advocates to provide these services. In comparison, the system of legal aid in the U.K. identifies and funds several independent solicitor offices to provide such services. If support is withdrawn, many solicitor offices that provide these invaluable services would collapse and with that, the rule of law. India is yet to put in place anything similar to this. Next issue is awareness in public.

Supreme court case

In the All India Judges Association v. Union of India (2001), the Supreme Court had directed the Government of India to increase the judge-population ratio to at least 50 per million population within five years from the date of the judgment. This has not been implemented.

Access to justice is part of Right to Life (article 21)

The Apex court pointed out four important components of access to justice.

1. Alternate adjudicatory mechanisms.
2. conveniently accessible in terms of distance
3. must be speedy and affordable