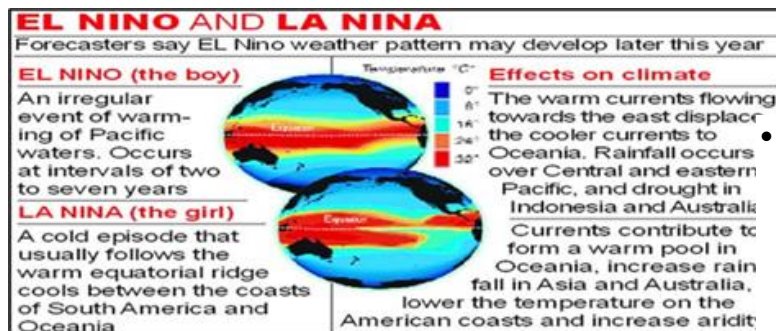


LIVING WITH EL-NINO: HOW FOOD INFLATION CAN BE MANAGED KEEPING EL NINO IN MIND

Context

- The prospect of El Nino hitting India sometime towards the later half of monsoon season has created a new uncertainty about kharif crops.
- Keeping El Nino in mind, **food inflation can be kept under control if India uses its trade policy wisely.**



CPI (Consumer Price Index) Data for March

Inflation has dropped to **5.66 percent (y-o-y)**, which is below the upper limit of **RBI's tolerance band of 4 percent +/- 2 percent.**

- The primary reason for this drop in inflation is **Food Inflation** [Vegetable inflation (-8.51%) and Oils and fats (-7.86%)] which is at **4.79 percent.**

The effect of low food inflation

- **The stress on onion and potato farmers** where prices dropped by more than 30 percent (year-on-year) and 20 percent respectively.
- **Mustard** prices have reached below Minimum Support Price.

For RBI:

- It has turned out to be timely in containing inflationary expectations which is the need of the hour.
- Recently, the Monetary Policy Committee stopped its rate hike **retaining the repo rate** - the interest rate (used by monetary authorities to control inflation) at which the central bank lends money to commercial banks - **at 6.5%.**

What needs to be done?

- The government can **lower import duties on wheat** and let traders **import** if they find it cheaper.
- The bottom line is that **there should be ample supplies in the country to avoid any distressed situation.**

Milk and Milk products

- Milk and milk products have the **highest weight** in CPI and so, contributes the most to CPI inflation.
- The inflation rate of Milk and Milk products is at 9.3 percent.

El Nino effect

- There is new uncertainty on Kharif crops **due to the possibility of El Nino** hitting India sometime towards **later half of the monsoon season.**
- Several crops from rice to maize to soyabean to groundnut, and pulses could be under stress.
- Since rice stocks in the country are more than three times the buffer stock norms so there is no need to panic.
- Edible oil prices are already collapsing due to cheaper global prices of palm and other oils. So, there is no need to worry on that account as well.
- But pulses, **especially tur and urad can cause concern.**

What should be done to minimise the El Nino effect?

- Imports of 2 to 3 mt of kharif pulses by NAFED or through private trade.
- The import duties are already low, and thus no further policy action needed.



CENTRAL GOVERNMENT HEALTH SCHEME (CGHS)

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently hiked **consultation charges and room rents** under the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS).

About Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS):

- It gives healthcare facilities to registered **employees and pensioners of the Central Government of India.**
 - The enrolled members are **provided reimbursement and cashless facilities under this scheme.**
 - Some of facilities offered under CGHS are: **OPD treatment and medication costs, indoor treatment and/or investigations at government or CGHS empanelled hospitals, maternity and child health services and family welfare, medical consultation and dispensing medicines for AYUSH.**
 - It covers health care under **different systems of medicine, such as Allopathy, Homeopathy, Ayurveda and Unani.**
 - CGHS beneficiaries **can undergo treatment at any empanelled private hospital of their choice.**
-

WHY IS THERE CONCERN ABOUT THE TIGER POPULATION IN THE WESTERN GHATS?

Why in News?

- To commemorate 50 years since **Project Tiger**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated an International Big Cat Alliance conference in Mysuru, Karnataka.

About Project Tiger:

- The Project Tiger was launched by the Government of India in **1973.**
- It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- **Objectives –**
 - To reduce factors that lead to the depletion of tiger habitats and to mitigate them by suitable management.
 - To ensure a viable tiger population for economic, scientific, cultural, aesthetic and ecological values.
- **Activities funded by Project Tiger include –**
 - Anti-poaching initiatives;

- Strengthening infrastructure within tiger reserves;
- Habitat improvement and water development;
- Addressing man-animal conflicts;
- Supporting States for staff development and capacity building in tiger reserves;
- **Project Tiger has been successful in increasing the population of the tigers.**
- National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) conducts **Tiger Census** across India, every four years.
- As per the last Tiger Census conducted in **2018-19**, tiger population in India has increased to **2967**.
- India now accounts for about **70% of the world's tiger population**.

Tiger Census Report for 2022:

- Though the survey and data gathering, for the latest cycle, was completed in 2022 some analysis is pending.
- Due to this, the NTCA has only publicised the lowest bound of animals present based on the number of unique tigers photographed via camera traps.
- This year, **3080** unique tigers were photographed.
- This year, the modelling estimates, or the number of tigers that haven't been captured on cameras, is reportedly incomplete and so the publicised figure – of **3,167** – is subject to revision.

What are the Causes of Local Decline?

- **India's tiger population annually grows at about 6% an annum** with high mortality rates among cubs.
- Apart from natural mortality, the other causes are –
 - Threats from invasive species,
 - Man-animal conflict,
 - Infrastructure development that impedes movement of the animal,
 - Disease,
 - Poaching and many reserves not having sufficient prey to sustain viable populations.

About National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA):

- National Tiger Conservation Authority is a **statutory body**, constituted under **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.
- It was established in 2005 following the recommendation of the Tiger Task Force.
- **Objectives –**
 - To provide statutory authority to **Project Tiger** so that compliance of its directives become legal.
 - To Foster accountability of Centre-State in management of Tiger Reserves.
 - To address livelihood interests of local people in areas surrounding Tiger Reserves.
- **Functions –**
 - To approve the tiger conservation plan prepared by the state government.
 - To ensure that the tiger reserves and areas linking one protected area/tiger reserve with another are not diverted for ecologically unsustainable uses.
 - To facilitate and support the tiger reserve management in the state for biodiversity conservation.
- **Chairman:** Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

NATIONAL HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY OF INDIA (NHAI)

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has come up with a set of guidelines to streamline foundation stone laying ceremonies and inauguration functions of national highway projects.



About National Highways Authority of India (NHAI):

- NHAI is India's premier **highway infrastructure creator** entrusted with developing, maintaining, and **managing National Highways**.
 - It is a statutory body under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways**.
- It was constituted under **National Highways Authority of India Act, 1998** and made operational in February 1995.
- **Composition:** It consists of a **full time Chairman**, and **not more than five full time Members** and **four part time Members** who are appointed by the Central Government.

- The part time Members are the Secretary (RT&H), Secretary (Expenditure), Secretary (Planning) and DG (RD) & SS.
 - NHAH has **technical, Finance, Administrative and Vigilance Wings** at its Headquarters.
-

G7 MINISTERS MEET

Recently, the G7 countries pledged to quit fossil fuels faster and urged other countries to follow suit, but failed to agree to any new deadlines on ending polluting power sources like coal.



About G7:

- It is an **intergovernmental organisation** of leading industrialised nations formed in 1975.
 - **Member countries:** Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United State.
 - It meets annually to discuss issues such as **global economic governance, international security, and energy policy**.
 - The host of the G7 summit, also known as the presidency, rotates annually among member countries.
 - It was formerly referred to as the **G-8 until Russia** was suspended from the group in 2014 after annexing Crimea.
 - As of 2022, G7 countries make up 10% of the world's population, 31% of the global GDP, and 21% of global carbon dioxide emissions.
-

SUDAN CRISIS

Why in news?

- Fierce fighting broke out between the Sudan's army and its paramilitary forces in Khartoum.

- Clashes erupted after weeks of heightened tensions between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo — also known as Hemedti — and the military, headed by Lt Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

What is the origin of the Sudan conflict?

- **Ouster of President Omar al-Bashir**

- The roots of the ongoing conflict go back to April 2019, when Sudan's long-serving authoritarian President Omar al-Bashir was overthrown.
- He was overthrown by military generals following a countrywide uprising against him.

- **Constitution of the Sovereignty Council - a power-sharing body**

- Despite Bashir's ouster, civilians continued their demonstrations, seeking democratic elections and the establishment of a civilian government.
- This led to the constitution the Sovereignty Council, a power-sharing body of military officers and civilians.
- This council would lead Sudan to elections at the end of 2023 and Abdalla Hamdok was appointed Prime Minister for the transitional period

- **Military overthrew Hamdok's government in October 2021**

- The new arrangement was short-lived as the military overthrew Hamdok's government in October 2021, and Burhan became de-facto leader of the country.
- Dagalo, Vice-President of the ruling council and Burhan's partner in the military seizure of power, became the second-in-command.
- Burhan announced that the military would hold power until elections are held in July 2023.

- **Tussle between Army and RSF**

- Soon after the 2021 coup, relations between the military and the RSF deteriorated.
- RSF was formed in 2013, and has been accused of human rights abuses, including the massacre of more than 120 protesters in June 2019.
- Burhan and Dagalo disagree over how the 10,000-strong RSF should be integrated into the army, and which authority should oversee that process.

- **Other fault lines**

- Civilians have called for the handover of lucrative military holdings in agriculture, trade, and other industries.
- These are crucial source of power for an army that has often outsourced military action to regional militias.
- Another point of contention is the pursuit of justice over allegations of war crimes by the military and its allies in the conflict in Darfur from 2003.
- The International Criminal Court (ICC) is seeking trials for Bashir and other Sudanese suspects.
- **Ferocious battle broke out**
- Later, the RSF was redeployed around the country, which the army saw as a provocation and threat.
- With both sides on edge, a ferocious battle broke out recently.

Impact of this crisis

• On Sudan

- The third largest country in Africa by size has seen repeated pro-democracy protests since the 2021 coup.
- But the battle between the army and RSF has likely made Sudan's transition to democracy more difficult.
- Some experts fear the tussle could transform into a wider conflict leading to the country's collapse.
- Sudan's economy is struggling, battered by hyperinflation and crippled by massive foreign debt.
- Billions of dollars given in international support and debt relief, were frozen after the ouster of the Hamdok government.

• On regional stability



- Sudan is in a volatile region, bordering the Red Sea, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa.
- The country's strategic location and agricultural wealth have attracted regional power plays.
- Hence, stability in Sudan is vital for regional peace and security.

- Several of Sudan's neighbours, including Ethiopia, Chad and South Sudan, have been affected by political upheavals and conflict.
 - Western powers fear the potential for a Russian base on the Red Sea, which Sudanese military leaders have expressed openness to.
 - **On India**
 - Over the years, India has developed close ties with Sudan and in recent years warmed up to the Government of South Sudan as well.
 - India's Election Commission had helped organise Sudan's first general elections in 1950s.
 - Indian engineers had played a major role in setting up the country's sugar industry and railways.
 - In the last decade, India's investments have been mainly in the energy sector.
 - In 2003, India's ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) had invested \$750 million to acquire 25 per cent equity held by the Talisman group in the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC).
 - Therefore, it is natural that conflict and instability in the region will have an adverse impact on India.
-

POLAR CROWN PROMINENCE (PCP)

Recently, an Argentina-based astronomer captured a structure that looked like a wall of plasma on the surface of the sun.



About Polar crown prominences (PCP):

- These are similar to **normal solar prominences**, which are loops of plasma, or ionized gas, that is ejected **from the solar surface** by magnetic fields.
- They occur **near the sun's magnetic poles** at latitudes between 60 and 70 degrees North and South,
- Due to the much **stronger magnetic fields** near the poles they collapse back towards the sun.
- This collapse back to the sun has earned them the nickname "**plasma waterfalls.**"

What is a solar prominence?

- It is a large, **bright feature extending outward** from the **Sun's surface**.



CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK



- These are anchored to the Sun's **surface in the photosphere**, and extend outwards into the Sun's hot outer atmosphere, called the corona.
 - It **forms over** timescales of **about a day**, and stable prominences may persist in the corona **for several months**, looping hundreds of thousands of miles into space.
 - The red-glowing looped **material is plasma**, a hot gas comprised of **electrically charged hydrogen and helium**.
 - This plasma flows along a tangled and twisted structure of magnetic fields generated by the sun's internal dynamo.
 - An erupting prominence occurs when such a structure **becomes unstable and bursts** outward, releasing the plasma.
-

