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INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- As of 16 Feb 2024, The State government provides a significant boost to businesses by extending operational hours for shops and establishments in Bengaluru and 10 other corporations as per the Budget. Presently, bars and restaurants in Bengaluru operate until 1 a.m., with the extension awaiting clarification on eligible establishments and corporations.

Gujarat

- Gujarat has significantly elevated its oxygen-supported bed capacity, ranking among nine states that increased the number of such beds by 10 times in four years since the onset of the Covid pandemic. Starting with 4,061 beds in April 2020, Gujarat now boasts 40,708 oxygen beds, as reported by the Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare in the Lok Sabha.
- As of 12 Feb 2024, The Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation (GSRTC) has successfully implemented an integrated vehicle tracking and passenger information system in its buses. Covering 5,000 buses in two phases and an additional 3,000 in the third phase, the system includes passenger information installations at 100 bus stations across the state.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- For attendees of the Samakka–Saralamma tribal fair in Medaram from February 21 to 24, TSRTC has established a 55-acre base camp with a temporary bus stand. Plan accordingly with 6000 special buses running from February 18 to 25, and expect queues with 50 lines covering 7 kms.
- On 17 Feb 2024, City Police Commissioner, K Sreenivasa Reddy, launched 108 traffic bikes to patrol and clear traffic obstructions during peak hours in the city, emphasizing the priority to maintain a free flow of traffic for seamless commuting. The initiative aims to ensure people reach their destinations without encountering traffic blocks on city roads.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- Mumbai Police Traffic Division identifies 26 high-risk spots prone to accidents across the city, sparking concern about the toll on lives and injuries. Transport experts collaborate with authorities to understand causes and propose solutions, with Sion Parel highway, opposite Jakat Naka Chowki in Mankhurd, registering the highest accidents over the past four years.
- A 42-year-old graphic designer, Mohammad Zoheb Khan, from Sambhaji Nagar, Maharashtra, has been taken into NIA custody for alleged involvement in an ISIS recruitment module. The NIA claims Khan was in contact with foreign handlers and was planning to join ISIS. Raids at multiple locations in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar led to his arrest, revealing electronic gadgets and incriminating documents related to the ISIS Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar module case.

Pune, Maharashtra

- On 16 Feb 2024, Pune's Bund Garden police registered a complaint against Praveen Pandit Yeshi for a bomb threat made to the police control room, targeting Shivajinagar, Pimpri Chinchwad, Pune Railway Station, and Mumbai's Bandra and Gateway of India. Despite thorough inspections and security measures, no suspicious items or individuals were found; the police are tracing the suspect's phone number.
- As of 17 Feb 2024, The National Green Tribunal (Western Zone) instructs the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to transfer Rs 23.40 crore to the state forest department for tree plantation in Pune, Ahmednagar (Sangamner), and Nashik districts. The directive follows a petition by activist Ganesh Suresh Borhade, addressing the NHAI's alleged failure to replant trees after their removal along Pune-Nashik National Highway (NH 50).

Upcoming News/Events

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- The 2024-25 Budget, presented by Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on 16 Feb 2024, aims to boost BBMP revenue and tackle Bengaluru's traffic congestion with major projects, without specific allocations. The proposal includes preparing a feasibility report for extending the Bengaluru Metro rail from BIEC to Tumkur and Kempegowda International Airport to Devanahalli, with works planned under a Public-Private Partnership model for a total distance of 63 km.

Gujarat

- Tirth Chess Club, under the Gujarat State Chess Association, is set to organize the Gujarat State Selection for Rapid Chess Championship-2024 and Blitz Chess Championship-2024 in Ahmedabad on April 20-21. With participation from over 100 players statewide, the top two players in both rapid and blitz categories will qualify for the national tournament in Nashik.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled for a day-long visit to Gujarat on February 22, followed by additional visits on February 24 and 25. Security arrangements and traffic restrictions may be implemented during these visits.
- The Gujarat Metro Rail Corporation (GMRC) Ltd has declared that the trial run for the 20-km Phase II stretch from Motera to Gandhinagar will commence in March. The trial run will cover the distance between Motera and Sector-I in Gandhinagar via GIFT City.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- For attendees of the Samakka–Saralamma tribal fair in Medaram from February 21 to 24, TSRTC has established a 55-acre base camp with a temporary bus stand. Plan accordingly with 6000 special buses running from February 18 to 25, and expect queues with 50 lines covering 7 kms.
- The inauguration of a state-of-the-art fire command center and Fire Department headquarters is scheduled for Sunday, 18 Feb 2024. The facility, completed within a record time since its initiation in 2022 with a budget of Rs. 17 crores, includes parking, utilities, and specific departments on designated floors.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- BMC prioritizes road concreting over critical water projects as Mumbai faces a water stock crisis below 50%. Despite proposing a desalination plant at Manori for increased supply, the corporation delays tenders and lacks budget allocation for vital water stock initiatives in 2024-25.
- The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) aims to address cleanliness challenges in Mumbai's slums, constituting 48% of the population, by appointing a single agency for a Rs 1,500-crore plan. The agency will manage all aspects of solid waste management, including garbage collection, waste segregation, and sanitation tasks in over 15 lakh households within the city's slum areas.

Pune, Maharashtra

- As of 17 Feb 2024, Ongoing traffic diversions at Sadhu Vaswani rail overbridge and Koregaon Park lead to congestion on Mangaldas Road and near Wadia College. Expect delays and follow trial diversions as Pune Municipal Corporation plans to construct a new bridge.
- Central Railway, Pune Division announces a Mega Block on the Pune-Lonavala section on 18.02.2024, leading to temporary suspension of Suburban Services for crucial engineering and maintenance work.

For detailed understanding of suspension and timings go through the link-

<https://punemirror.com/pune/others/mega-block-scheduled-on-pune-lonavala-section-of-pune-division-on-feb-18/cid1708096746.htm>

GLOBAL UPDATE**Highlights of this week****China**

- With the lifting of COVID-19 border restrictions, Singapore is hosting Asia's largest air show, reflecting a rebound in regional travel. However, challenges persist for China, the world's second-largest aviation market, as it grapples with industry-wide supply shortages and macroeconomic headwinds. The event, featuring defensive systems and cautious arms buyers, takes place against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical tensions, putting a spotlight on weaponry.

Europe

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy signed a long-term security pact with France on Friday 16 Feb, 2024, following a similar agreement and aid from Germany. The signing occurred amid news of the death of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, adding a somber note to Zelenskiy's diplomatic tour.
- Ukrainian forces have announced the withdrawal from Avdiivka, a crucial town that has been a fiercely contested battleground on the eastern front. The move follows an escalation of Moscow's attacks, involving airstrikes, artillery, and ground assaults. Avdiivka's fall marks a significant gain for Russia, signaling a shift in the war's dynamics, while Ukraine grapples with renewed pressure, compounded by shortages in ammunition and manpower.
- Alexey Navalny, a prominent Russian opposition figure, has died in custody at 47, raising concerns about his well-being. Western leaders, including US President Joe Biden, hold Russian President Vladimir Putin accountable, emphasizing the need for a thorough investigation into Navalny's sudden death.

Middle East

- As of 16 Feb 2024, Israeli forces conducted arrests at Gaza's largest operating hospital, Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, during airstrikes in the enclave. Health officials and the military confirmed the raid, with the Gaza Health Ministry denouncing the detention of medical staff in the hospital, accusing Israel of turning it into a military base as part of their ongoing conflict with Hamas.

Pakistan

- On February 12, 2024, thousands of protesters in Pakistan staged a daylong strike, blocking highways in protest against the results of the recent general election held on February 8. Tensions were heightened due to allegations of vote rigging and tampering, leading to uncertainty about the formation of the next government.

United Kingdom

- British Foreign Minister David Cameron discussed pressing China to use its influence on Iran regarding Houthi militants at the Munich Security Conference. He also addressed human rights issues in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, raised concerns about sanctioned British parliamentarians, and called for the release of media tycoon Jimmy Lai during the meeting with his Chinese counterpart.

United States

- As of 17 Feb 2024, A winter storm hit Denver, bringing half a foot of snow by midnight, causing hazardous driving conditions with freezing drizzle and black ice, especially in south Denver, Castle Rock, and Parker.
- A moon lander, "Odysseus," developed by Houston-based aerospace company Intuitive Machines, was launched from Florida early Thursday, 15 Feb 2024. It embarks on a mission to achieve the first U.S. lunar touchdown in over half a century and marks the first by a privately owned spacecraft. The Nova-C lander, carried by Elon Musk's SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, lifted off from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral.

Upcoming News/Events**China**

- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warns the West against a historical mistake if it pursues decoupling from China for risk reduction, amid calls from the U.S. and EU to decrease dependence. Wang's remarks come as the EU considers "de-risking" to reduce economic reliance on China due to concerns about its ties with Russia.

Europe

- German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius suggested that Germany might need to exceed spending 2% of its GDP on defense to effectively deter Russia in the coming years. While Germany achieved the 2% NATO target for the first time since the Cold War, Pistorius acknowledged the possibility of needing more in the future, given the evolving geopolitical landscape. This statement follows German Finance Minister Christian Lindner's acknowledgment that maintaining a 2% defense spending level could pose a challenge.

Middle East

- Egypt is reportedly preparing a designated area at the Gaza border to accommodate Palestinians in case of a potential exodus due to an Israeli offensive in Rafah, according to four sources. However, Egypt denies making such preparations, emphasizing its concern over the displacement of Palestinians into Sinai, which it deems unacceptable. The move echoes warnings from Arab states, including Jordan, about the impact of Israel's Gaza offensive.

Pakistan

- The coordination committee meeting between the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to finalize government formation at the center is rescheduled, following a postponement on Friday 16 Feb 2024. The delay occurred as the PML-N's committee needed to consult with the party's senior leadership on the matter.
- In anticipation of nationwide protests by Imran Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), against alleged election rigging, authorities in the capital will impose prohibitory orders. The PTI, dissatisfied with the election outcome, plans peaceful protests, commencing with a march in Wana, South Waziristan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

United Kingdom

- In anticipation of the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in prison, Britain, led by Foreign Minister David Cameron, plans to take action and urges other countries to follow suit, emphasizing the need for consequences in cases of severe human rights violations. Navalny's demise has triggered outrage among Western leaders, with the Kremlin deeming the expected reaction unacceptable.
- Britain's economy entered a recession in the latter half of 2023, posing a challenge for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak as he aims to fulfill growth promises ahead of the expected election this year. The contraction of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 0.3% in the fourth quarter, exceeding economists' estimates, raises concerns about future economic impacts.

United States

- The Republican chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, Michael McCaul, expressed support for funding U.S.-allied Pacific Island nations to counter China's influence. He intends to advocate for their inclusion in any supplemental security aid bill, considering it a crucial strategy to counter China's influence over the island nations.

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