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INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- On Friday afternoon (1 March 2024), a bomb blast at a cafe in Brookefield injured ten people. The man who took a food token at the cafe left behind a bag with an improvised explosive device (IED).
- The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) presented a budget of Rs 12,369 crore for the city, primarily focusing on the 'Brand Bengaluru' initiative. The budget includes an opening balance of Rs 12,371 crore, sourced from own resources and central/state government grants, with an estimated total expenditure of Rs 12,369 crore, resulting in a surplus of Rs 2.17 crore.

Gujarat

- On 1 March 2024, Union Minister of State for Defence, Ajay Bhatt, inaugurated the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) jetty at Vadinar in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka district. This move is aimed at enhancing infrastructure development in the strategically important North-West region of the Indian Coast Guard.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Rajkot, Gujarat, and virtually dedicated four more AIIMS facilities in Bathinda (Punjab), Raebareli (Uttar Pradesh), Kalyani (West Bengal), and Mangalagiri (Andhra Pradesh) to the nation.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated 'Sudarshan Setu,' the country's longest cable-stayed bridge spanning 2.32 km on the Arabian Sea. The bridge connects Beyt Dwarka island to mainland Okha in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka district.
- A significant fire erupted at scrap godowns in Valsad district, Gujarat, during the early hours of Tuesday. The blaze engulfed ten scrap godowns in Vapi.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- Telangana has decided to rejoin the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) to offer crop insurance to farmers, safeguarding their investments against crop loss in adverse weather conditions. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy made this announcement after a meeting with the PMFBY CEO and Joint Secretary for the Union Agriculture Ministry, Ritesh Chauhan, on Friday, 01 March 2024.
- Following a blast at Rameshwaram cafe in Bengaluru, the Hyderabad police have enhanced security measures in the city. This includes vehicle checks, increased patrolling at crowded spots, and inspections at railway and bus stations. Bomb detection squads, along with sniffer dogs, are conducting checks, and security at vital installations, including RGI Airport, has been reinforced by the CISF.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- The Bombay High Court is reviewing the legality of the recent law providing the Maratha community with a 10% independent quota in jobs and education. Enacted during a one-day session on February 20, the law establishes a socially and educationally backward class (SEBC) category, akin to previous laws from 2014 and 2018 that faced legal challenges.
- To avoid trenching, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has approved a policy that includes the provision of ducts for underground utilities during road repair activities. Civic chief I S Chahal gave his approval to this policy in the first week of February.

Pune, Maharashtra

- In Pune district and New Delhi, the police conducted raids leading to the seizure of 1100kg of the synthetic stimulant drug mephedrone, commonly known as 'meow meow.' The estimated value of the seized drug is over Rs 2,000 crore. Three individuals have been arrested, and two others have been detained in connection with the case, as per officials on Tuesday, 28 Feb 2024.
- The Pune District and Sessions court will make history by including transgender members on the judicial panel during the National Lok Adalat. Approximately 12 transgender activists are set to participate in the Lok Adalat scheduled for March 3.
- The "zero fatality corridor" initiative on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway has led to a remarkable 58.3% decrease in road crash fatalities since 2016, according to a recent report. This initiative has been widely praised for its unprecedented success in improving road safety on one of the country's deadliest expressways.

Upcoming News/Events

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- The Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) has announced a noteworthy reduction in power tariffs for consumers using over 100 units monthly, effective from April 1, 2024. This move is expected to lead to substantial monthly savings, estimated at Rs 250 to Rs 300 for an average household of three to four people.
- The Karnataka government has granted a two-week extension to the deadline for commercial establishments in Bengaluru to implement signage with 60% Kannada content. The initial deadline was scheduled to end on Thursday, 28 Feb 2024.

Gujarat

- The Union Cabinet approved the establishment of three semiconductor units in India under the 'Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystems in India.' Union Minister for Communications, Electronics, and Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, stated that construction for all three units will commence within the next 100 days.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- After an eight-year wait, the Defence Ministry has approved the construction of elevated corridors on defence lands in Hyderabad. These corridors are set to facilitate a seamless flow of traffic along the Hyderabad-Nagpur National Highway and the Hyderabad-Karimnagar Rajiv Highway, providing a significant enhancement to regional transportation infrastructure.
- Oil marketing companies have raised commercial LPG cylinder prices in metro cities, including Hyderabad, effective from March 1. This is the first hike in the current year and is attributed to ongoing fluctuations in fuel costs and market dynamics. Hyderabad now has the second-highest price for commercial LPG cylinders among all Indian metros.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has suggested relocating hawkers to underground plazas as a solution to ease congestion on footpaths and crowded roads. The proposal was presented in court by Kamdar on Friday, 1 March 2024.
- On Friday, 1 March 2024, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) announced that citizens will not experience a ten percent water cut at present. This decision comes as the state government has assured the supply of water to the metropolis from its designated quota.
- The Maharashtra legislature's week-long budget session concluded with the passage of the interim budget, setting the stage for the monsoon session in Mumbai from June 10 after the Lok Sabha polls. Finance Minister Ajit Pawar presented the interim budget during the session, which began on February 26.

Pune, Maharashtra

- A new expressway connecting Chhatrapati Sambhaj Nagar (Aurangabad) to Pune in Maharashtra has received official approval from the Union Ministry after nearly 22 months of discussions. Union Minister Nitin Gadkari confirmed that the project will proceed under the BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) framework.
- The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has declared a water cut on March 6, 2024, impacting various areas in the city. The decision is a result of urgent repair work on the main water line in front of ISKCON Mandir Kanha Hotel on Kondhwa Road, requiring prompt completion. Residents are advised to anticipate disruptions in water supply on Wednesday, March 6, 2024, during the repair work.

For more details-<https://www.timesnownews.com/pune/pune-to-face-water-cut-on-march-6-due-to-water-line-work-check-affected-areas-article>

- To address traffic congestion at Swargate Junction, a subway connecting the MSRTC bus terminus to the Metro station is nearing completion and expected to be accessible by April 2024. The initiative by Maha Metro aims to provide commuters with an alternative route and alleviate congestion on the roads.

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

- Taiwan is facing escalating pressure from China ahead of its presidential inauguration, with recent actions including the loss of a diplomatic ally, changes to air routes in the Taiwan Strait, and increased coast guard patrols around Taiwan-controlled Kinmen islands. The U.S. Representative, Mike Gallagher, described these moves as part of a consistent pattern of pressure on Taiwan during his recent visit to Taipei. China asserts territorial claims over Taiwan despite strong objections from the island.
- China's manufacturing activity contracted for the fifth consecutive month in February, with the official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) dropping to 49.1, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. The figure, below the 50-mark indicating contraction, highlights the need for Beijing to implement additional stimulus measures as the annual parliamentary meeting approaches.

Europe

- Several hundred protesters briefly entered a plant owned by the chemicals group Arkema near Lyon, southeastern France, to demonstrate against alleged pollution from the site. Eight people were arrested in connection with the protest, according to local authorities on 2 March 2024.
- A Russian drone struck an apartment building in the southern Ukrainian city of Odesa on Saturday 02 March 2024, resulting in at least seven casualties, including a three-year-old child and a woman with her infant.
- Houthi leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi has announced that Yemen's Houthi forces will unveil military "surprises" in their operations in the Red Sea, as revealed in a televised speech on Thursday, 29 Feb 2024.

Middle East

- A march by thousands of Israelis demanding the release of hostages held in Gaza reached Jerusalem on Saturday 02 March 2024, as negotiators prepared to resume ceasefire negotiations in Cairo that would include a swap deal with Hamas.
- Nicaragua has lodged a case at the International Court of Justice against Germany, alleging financial and military support for Israel and cessation of funding for the UN Palestinian Refugee Agency (UNRWA). The complaint seeks emergency measures to stop military aid to Israel and restore funding to UNRWA.

Pakistan

- As of 28 Feb 2024, Heavy rains lasting over 15 hours have caused severe flooding and chaos in Gwadar, a coastal town in Pakistan's Balochistan province. Entire neighborhoods are submerged, and the extensive rainfall, stemming from a weather system entering Balochistan on February 25, has led to power failures and brought life to a standstill.
- India has successfully halted the flow of the Ravi river into Pakistan through the completion of the Shahpur Kandi barrage. This newly-built structure enables India to harness the river's full potential, retaining 1150 cusecs of water that was previously directed towards Pakistan, providing increased benefits to local farmers.

United Kingdom

- A survey conducted by the British Chambers of Commerce revealed that a majority of British exporters and manufacturers have experienced disruption in the Red Sea due to attacks on shipping by Yemen's Houthi rebels. Of the respondents, 55% of exporters, 53% of manufacturers, and 37% of all businesses reported an impact from the disruptions caused by the attacks.
- In February, British manufacturers experienced a year of declining output, with factories witnessing the fastest rate of workforce reduction since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a survey. The S&P Global/CIPS UK Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose slightly to 47.5 from January's 47.0, but it has remained below the 50 threshold for growth since August 2022.

United States

- The United States military conducted its inaugural humanitarian aid airdrop into Gaza amid the ongoing conflict, delivering over 35,000 meals to address the escalating humanitarian crisis. The United Nations has reported that a quarter of the Gaza population is on the verge of famine. Palestinians shared videos on social media depicting the airdrop of aid boxes.
- On 1 March 2024, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis vetoed a bill that sought to ban individuals under the age of 16 from using social media platforms. The proposed legislation, passed by the state's Republican-controlled legislature, would have required social media platforms to terminate accounts of those under 16 and implement a third-party verification system to screen out underage users. DeSantis expects lawmakers to produce an alternative bill.
- The Smokehouse Creek Fire in Texas has become the largest wildfire in the state's history, consuming over 1 million acres, destroying homes, and prompting evacuations in the Panhandle region. The fire, doubling in size within a day, is currently 3% contained as firefighters utilize a brief respite in strong winds to establish barriers and address hot spots.

Upcoming News/Events**China**

- China's National People's Congress (NPC) annual meeting is set to unveil moderate stimulus plans for economic stabilization, focusing on short-term support amid challenges like a property crisis and deflation. Premier Li Qiang is expected to address immediate measures to revive the economy post-pandemic, while comprehensive strategies for structural issues might not be fully outlined.
- Beijing is chosen to host the 2027 World Athletics Championships, according to World Athletics. This decision follows the withdrawal of Rome's bid due to a lack of financial support from the Italian government. Beijing previously hosted the Championships in 2015.

Europe

- U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has revealed that the United States and its allies, including France, are actively exploring legal avenues to access around \$300 billion in frozen Russian sovereign assets. Talks during a G20 finance ministers meeting in Brazil failed to yield a deal to support Ukraine's war effort. Yellen stressed the importance of a robust legal justification for any action and has urged French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire to collaborate on developing options for presentation to G7 leaders at their June summit.
- Poland is considering the possibility of implementing a ban on agricultural products from Russia, according to the country's prime minister. This statement was made during a visit to Warsaw by the Latvian prime minister, whose country has already enacted such a ban. The move is prompted by ongoing farmer protests in Poland against EU environmental regulations and perceived unfair competition from Ukraine following the removal of import duties in 2022.

Middle East

- Gaza truce talks are scheduled to restart in Cairo on Sunday 03 March 2024, as confirmed by Egyptian security sources. However, an Israeli news outlet reports that Israel is withholding its delegation until it receives a comprehensive list of surviving Israeli hostages. U.S. President Joe Biden expresses optimism for a ceasefire before Ramadan begins on March 10. No immediate comments from Israel or Hamas, the Palestinian group, involved in negotiations through intermediaries like Egypt and Qatar.
- Saudi Arabia officially initiated its bid to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup, a venture anticipated to succeed as it remains the sole expression of interest. FIFA, having assigned the 2030 tournament to Morocco, Portugal, and Spain, confined the bidding for 2034 to the Asian and Oceania confederations. If successful, Saudi Arabia would be the second Gulf nation to host the World Cup after Qatar's hosting in 2022.

Pakistan

- The Pakistan government, under the interim administration, has granted approval for the construction of its segment of the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline. The Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCoE) sanctioned the initial phase of the 80-km section within Pakistan, a decision made shortly before the inauguration of the new government following the February 8 elections.
- Following allegations of electoral fraud in the recent national elections, Pakistan is preparing for the presidential election by March 9. The election will be conducted by the current senators after the establishment of all four provincial assemblies, with a potential date set for March 9 or 10. This comes as half of the senators retire after completing their six-year terms.

United Kingdom

- By 2027, pension schemes in the UK will be required to disclose their investments in UK assets, according to the finance ministry. The move aims to pressure the sector to generate improved returns for savers and contribute to the growth of companies. Finance Minister Jeremy Hunt's Mansion House Compact, introduced in July, had 10 defined contribution pension funds, including Aegon, Legal & General, and Aviva, pledging to invest a minimum of 5% (around £50 billion) in high-growth unlisted UK companies by 2030.
- The British government's controversial plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda might end up costing more than 600 million pounds to deport 300 refugees, Under the policy first announced in 2022, asylum seekers who arrive on England's southern coast in small, inflatable boats would be sent to Rwanda, but so far no one has been deported because of ongoing legal challenges.

United States

- NASA is terminating the On-orbit Servicing, Assembly, and Manufacturing 1 (OSAM-1) project, a \$2 billion initiative to test satellite servicing in space, citing increased costs, schedule delays, and a lack of committed partners due to changing industry preferences away from refueling unprepared spacecraft. Contractor Maxar's "poor" performance has been a significant factor in the project's cost growth and scheduling issues.
- A Texas federal judge has blocked the implementation of SB4, a new state law granting authorities extensive powers to deal with illegal border crossings, acknowledging the Biden administration's argument that it interferes with federal immigration enforcement and migrants' rights. The law, set to take effect on March 5, is now temporarily halted pending legal proceedings.

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