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INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has initiated efforts to draft new pet licensing laws, three years after its previous attempt was abandoned. The new bylaws aim to regulate pet ownership, pet shops, and breeding centers, as mandated by the BBMP Act 2020. A five-member committee comprising officials from BBMP, the state animal husbandry department, urban district administration, a veterinary college professor, and a pet vaccination center representative has been formed to draft the bylaws.
- Bengaluru experienced a record high temperature of 36.4 degrees Celsius in March, attributed to global warming and the El Nino effect. The Indian Meteorological Department issued a heatwave warning for north-interior Karnataka due to expected temperatures 2-3 degrees above normal.
- On Wednesday, Karnataka experienced temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius in Kalaburagi and Bagalkot districts, marking the onset of summer intensified by El Nino effects. IMD issued a heatwave alert for six districts in Kalyana Karnataka, with Bengaluru expected to see temperatures rise by up to 2°C in the coming days.

Gujarat

- The district administration issued a yellow alert in Rajkot as temperatures rose, leading to 44 heat stroke cases treated by 108 emergency services on Thursday 28 March and Friday 29 March. Calls included instances of fainting, vomiting, diarrhoea, and severe headaches.
- Gold prices in Ahmedabad surged to Rs 70,500 per 10g, following an international market rally with spot gold reaching \$2,233.48 per troy ounce. Factors such as US inflation data and geopolitical tensions contributed to this remarkable increase.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- On 29 March, Farmers protested near the Flood Flow Canal in Dumpeta, demanding water release for their standing crops. They staged a dharna and blocked Vemulawada-Korutla road, halting traffic until MLA Adi Srinivas intervened and instructed irrigation officials to release water, leading to the protest's end.
- Power consumption in Hyderabad has surged to 79.48 million units, marking a notable increase compared to the previous highest recorded last year. Southern Discom – TSSPDCL officials report a 22.7% rise in daily energy consumption, reaching an average of 70.96 MU per day, primarily due to the ongoing dry spell and summer season, disrupting the usual consumption pattern.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has issued notices to Metro railway contractors, including HCC - MMC, CEC – ITD, Doga Soma, and L & T (Larsen & Toubro), for pending property tax amounting to Rs 370 crore for their casting yard. With just three days left in the financial year, BMC is urging prompt settlement of dues as per the agreement terms obligating contractors to cover property tax expenses. Reminders were sent on March 19 to facilitate clearance of outstanding amounts.

Pune, Maharashtra

- On 29 March Pune faced a power outage due to an internet cable touching Mahapareshan's high-voltage line, leading to a transformer shutdown and load management. Over 300,000 customers in areas like Vadgaon, Dhairi, and Narhe were impacted by the disruption. Mahapareshan implemented load trimming to address the electricity shortage caused by the incident.
- The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) fined the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd (MSEDCL) Rs 10 lakh for digging up a newly paved road in Sadashiv Peth without adequate reason. MSEDCL's rush to use funds before the financial year end led to unnecessary disruption and wastage of public resources, despite claiming to have obtained permission from PMC for the excavation.
- Shirgaon police seized Rs 50 lakh cash from an SUV during a 'nakabandi' operation on the Mumbai-Pune expressway ahead of Lok Sabha elections, investigating the source as per the Model Code of Conduct. Maharashtra prepares for its 48 Lok Sabha seats' elections in five phases, part of a nationwide democratic process across 543 seats in seven phases with 97 crore eligible voters.

Upcoming News/Events

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- Several trains will be canceled due to line/power block between Devarapalli and Hindupur stations on April 3 and 10, including 06595 and 06596 MEMU Specials, 06517 and 06518 Express Specials. Additionally, train 06515 and 06516 MEMU Specials will be partially canceled between Gauribidanur and Sri Sathya Sai Prasanthi Nilayam. Train 22231 will be rescheduled by 320 minutes, and train 22232 by 60 minutes on the same days. Train 12976 Jaipur-Mysuru Express will be diverted via Guntakal, Ballari, Rayadurg, Arsikere, Hassan, and Mysuru on April 1 and 8.
- Motorists on the Bengaluru-Mysuru highway will face increased toll fees from April 1, with rates rising for cars, vans, jeeps, and commercial vehicles. The NHAI's annual revision will see one-way trips for cars costing Rs 170 and round trips at Rs 255 within 24 hours, while commercial vehicles will pay Rs 275 for a single journey and Rs 415 for a return journey.

Gujarat

- The Gujarat Energy Development Agency (GEDA) has received proposals for 10GW of renewable energy projects under the Renewable Energy Policy 2023, comprising 5GW each for solar and wind/wind-solar hybrid projects. Industry advocates propose reduced banking charges for open access to stimulate higher investment in renewable energy generation.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- With Hyderabad's temperatures surpassing 40 degrees Celsius, bus shelters provide little relief to commuters waiting in the scorching heat. Lack of adequate shelters at various stops is causing discomfort and inconvenience for the city's approximately 11 lakh daily bus riders. Many are left exposed to the sun for prolonged periods, highlighting the need for improved infrastructure to enhance commuter experience and comfort.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- The National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd. (NHSRCL) is implementing wind speed monitoring systems at 14 key locations along the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train corridor to enhance safety. Anemometers will provide real-time wind speed data up to 252 km/h, placed strategically at river bridges and gust-prone areas. Train speeds will be adjusted between 72 to 130 km/h based on wind conditions to prioritize passenger safety.
- As temperatures soar in Maharashtra, including Mumbai, concerns about heat waves' impact on public health are rising. Authorities are gearing up to address potential health risks associated with prolonged exposure to high temperatures, stressing the importance of proactive planning and preventive measures. Recommendations include taking frequent breaks, staying hydrated, and maintaining a cool environment with fans or air conditioning, especially for those working in hot environments.

Pune, Maharashtra

- MahaMetro, Pune's metro authority, adopts an innovative strategy by commercializing metro station names, generating significant annual revenue of 55 to 72 lakh rupees per station. This approach involves featuring well-known company and organization names at six metro stations, transforming them into lucrative advertising platforms. Future plans include extending this initiative to upcoming stations, further enhancing revenue streams for MahaMetro.
- Currently, Pune Metro operates from 6am to 10pm, but discussions are ongoing to extend the last service to 11pm, including the route to the airport until Ramwad. Additionally, PMPML plans to provide feeder bus services aligned with metro timings, following global practices where metros often adjust timings for airport travelers and weekend commuters.
- In April, the toll fees at the Khed-Shivapur toll plaza will witness substantial increments. Cars, jeeps, and light vehicles will see a five-rupee increase, totaling 120 rupees. Similarly, commercial light vehicles will also experience a five-rupee hike, bringing their toll fee to 190 rupees.

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

- On Friday 29 March, Chinese investigators arrived in Pakistan to participate in the investigation of the killing of five Chinese nationals in a suicide attack, as announced by Pakistan's interior ministry. This move aims to address the escalating assaults that pose a threat to Islamabad's efforts to modernize the economy, especially after three major attacks targeting Chinese interests within a week. The incident occurred during an ongoing joint investigation initiated in late 2022 following an attack on Chinese nationals and interests, showcasing the growing challenges faced by both countries.
- On 27 March 2024, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a meeting with American business leaders in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, aiming to regain confidence from foreign investors concerned about new regulations' impact. Beijing seeks to bolster the economy after a decline in foreign direct investment and uncertainties surrounding national security measures, while Xi emphasized China's resilience and ongoing development despite challenges.

Europe

- Officials confirmed that Ukraine's air force successfully intercepted and neutralized two Russian missiles targeting the southern port city of Odesa on 29 March Friday afternoon. However, despite the interception, debris from the missiles struck civilian infrastructure, resulting in injuries to five individuals.
- On Friday 22 March, assailants stormed a concert hall in Moscow, firing on the crowd and causing chaos, resulting in the tragic deaths of at least 40 people, with over 100 injured. The venue was also set on fire during the brazen attack, occurring shortly after President Vladimir Putin's recent electoral victory. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the assault, though independent verification of their statement is pending, leaving questions about the fate of the attackers as authorities investigate the incident as an act of terrorism.

Middle East

- Turkey announced on Saturday 23 March 2024, that it had "neutralized" 12 members of the PKK in northern Iraq's Metina region as part of a cross-border military operation. The term "neutralized" typically refers to killing in military context. Turkey, along with the US and EU, designates the PKK as a terrorist organization. Additionally, Turkey proposed setting up a joint operation center with Iraq to combat the PKK in northern Iraq.
- Israeli forces have reported that more than 170 gunmen were killed during their operation at Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza, which began on Monday. The military stated that the hospital complex was being used by Hamas and other Palestinian fighters as a base connected to a tunnel network.

Pakistan

- The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has expressed alarm over extended power cuts and internet shutdowns in Gilgit-Baltistan, emphasizing the urgency of bringing back a 13-year-old girl who was abducted. During a press conference, HRCP officials, including Munizae Jahangir, Israruddin Israr, Baba Jan, and Yasmin Kareem, underscored the need to address human rights abuses in the region.

United Kingdom

- The United Nations Human Rights Committee has called on Britain to halt the passage of a bill that could see refugees deported to Rwanda, citing concerns about compliance with international law. The committee urged the British government to withdraw or repeal the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill, which aims to relocate asylum seekers to Rwanda but has faced legal challenges and criticism for potential safety risks.
- The United States and Britain have imposed sanctions on a fundraising network linked to Hamas, following an attack on Israel. The measures target individuals and entities involved in financing Hamas, aimed at degrading its ability to fund terrorist activities.

United States

- On March 27, 2024, a cargo ship collided with Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, resulting in its collapse and the tragic loss of six construction workers. Authorities are currently investigating the incident, which occurred when the ship lost power, striking a bridge support at 8 knots, leading to the span breaking. As of now, four workers remain missing, adding to the gravity of the situation.
- The U.S. government swiftly allocated \$60 million in emergency funds to Maryland for the rebuilding of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore. Following Governor Wes Moore's request, the Federal Highway Administration approved the funding within hours, highlighting the urgent response after the tragic incident caused by a cargo freighter collision.
- A U.S. judge in Texas invalidated a climate rule by the Biden administration that mandated states to set declining targets for greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles on the national highway system. The ruling favored Texas and other states that argued against the rule's legal authority, with the Department of Transportation yet to comment on the decision. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg had previously promoted the rule as a way to track carbon pollution and empower states to establish their own climate targets.

Upcoming News/Events**China**

- On Friday 29 March, the United States announced its intention to enforce new visa restrictions on several Hong Kong officials due to the escalating crackdown on rights and freedoms in the territory, according to a Reuters report. Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized China's actions against Hong Kong's autonomy and democratic institutions, particularly citing the implementation of the Article 23 national security law. The Department of State did not disclose the names of the officials to be affected by these visa curbs.
- Taiwan's navy chief Tang Hua will visit the U.S. next week for a military event and discussions on enhancing naval cooperation amid rising threats from China. Despite unofficial ties, both nations aim to boost relations and reject Beijing's claims, with Tang attending key ceremonies and talks with U.S. naval officials.

Europe

- President Volodymyr Zelenskyy expressed concern in a recent interview that without promised U.S. military aid, Ukraine would face challenges such as lacking air defense systems, Patriot missiles, electronic warfare jammers, and artillery rounds. He warned that this could lead to a gradual retreat of Ukrainian forces if support is not received. Zelenskyy highlighted the importance of aid in maintaining Ukraine's defense capabilities amid ongoing conflicts and urged swift action from the U.S. House of Representatives to approve the aid package.
- On Friday 29 March, Russia called for a fresh approach to North Korea, criticizing the United States and its allies for escalating military tensions in Asia and attempting to suffocate the secretive state. Russia used its veto power to block the yearly extension of a panel of experts overseeing UN sanctions against North Korea for its nuclear and missile programs.

Middle East

- United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is set to visit Egypt's border with Gaza to renew calls for a ceasefire amid ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. His visit coincides with Israel's potential military operation threat in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, despite international appeals against such actions. The majority of Gaza's residents are seeking shelter around Rafah, and while conditions are worse in the northern part of the strip, civilians' situation has worsened across the territory due to the prolonged conflict.
- Lebanon plans to file an urgent complaint with the UN Security Council, accusing Israel of violating its sovereignty by disrupting navigation systems at Beirut's airport. Israel's actions are seen as endangering civil aviation safety, and Lebanon holds Israel accountable for any resulting accidents or disasters.

Pakistan

- Pakistan is expected to see a significant increase in petrol prices, possibly rising by nearly PKR 10 per litre in the next bi-weekly review, reaching around PKR 289.69 per litre from the current PKR 279.75 per litre due to a surge in global crude oil prices, as per industry officials.
- Chinese contractors have suspended construction on two major dam projects in Pakistan following a suicide bombing that killed five Chinese engineers and a Pakistani driver. China Gezhouba Group Company halted work on the Dasu dam, while Power China stopped work on the Diamer Bhasha dam, demanding improved security measures before resuming operations with around 1,250 Chinese workers involved.

United Kingdom

- Britain's government has decided to halt its efforts to narrow the wage gap using minimum wage increases, providing relief to employers after a nearly 10% hike this year. The minimum wage for workers aged 21 and over will reach £11.44 in April, aligning with the Conservative Party's commitment to set it at two-thirds of median earnings, aiming for a 2025 increase to £11.89 an hour based on expert advice.
- More than 600 UK Border Force officers stationed at Heathrow Airport will go on strike for four days starting April 11 due to disputes over working conditions, announced the PCS trade union. The officers, responsible for immigration controls and passport checks under the Home Office, voted for strike action in response to new rostering and shift pattern changes.

United States

- U.S. President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida are expected to announce tighter military cooperation next month, potentially including discussions on restructuring Washington's East Asia command with a new four-star commander overseeing forces in Japan, according to sources familiar with the plan.
- New York City is set to launch a pilot program testing gun-detecting technology in select subway stations, announced Mayor Eric Adams. The move follows recent subway shootings, with the NYPD planning to test portable scanning devices from Evolv at undisclosed stations after a 90-day notice period.

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