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INDIA UPDATE

General- IMD Issues Heat Wave Warning for Several States; Rain and Thunderstorms Expected in Northern and Northeastern Regions.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a heat wave warning for Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, Odisha, and Jharkhand. Meanwhile, rainfall and thunderstorms are forecasted for Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Rajasthan, Ladakh, Jammu Kashmir, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, and Sub-Himalayan areas.

Highlights of this week

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- The Karnataka State Disaster Management Authority has issued guidelines in preparation for an anticipated heatwave following an India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast. The state government circular, released on Wednesday, highlighted the IMD's prediction of above-normal temperatures across the country. It advised individuals to stay indoors during peak heat hours, particularly from noon to 3 pm and recommended staying hydrated, wearing light and cotton clothing, using sunglasses, hats, or umbrellas, and avoiding dehydrating beverages like alcohol, tea, and coffee.
- Continuing a pattern, Vokkaliga candidates significantly dominate the Congress and BJP-JD(S) alliance's lists for the 14 Lok Sabha constituencies that will be contested on April 26 in Karnataka. Out of these, three seats are reserved, leaving 11 general seats where Vokkaliga candidates from both Congress and the NDA alliance will compete, with four of these seats witnessing direct contests between them. Overall, Vokkaligas are featured in 10 out of the 11 general constituencies up for election.

Gujarat

- Election officials in Gujarat have reported the removal of approximately 2.20 lakh unauthorized posters and banners used for political campaigns on government and private properties ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. They also stated that materials worth Rs 42.62 crore were seized, including Rs 11.44 crore in cash, Rs 18.48 crore in gold and silver, and 52.26 kg of hash valued at Rs 14 lakh, suspected to be used for voter inducement. Gujarat, with 26 Lok Sabha seats, is scheduled to vote in a single phase on May 7.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- In response to a heatwave alert from the India Meteorological Department Hyderabad (IMD-H), Dr. B. Ravinder Nayak, Director of Public Health & Family Welfare, has released an advisory detailing Dos and Don'ts for citizens. The advisory emphasizes immediate medical attention for symptoms such as anxiety, dizziness, fainting, altered mental state, hot, red, dry skin, muscle weakness, nausea, rapid heartbeat, and shallow breathing, highlighting the risks associated with heat-related illnesses.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- Following the Election Commission of India's (ECI) enforcement of the code of conduct, detailed guidelines on budgetary spending have been issued nationwide, covering various expenses down to tea and chair rentals, monitored by district collectors. The ECI has directed universities to prevent political participation in voter awareness programs, with the University of Mumbai complying. District collectors have outlined expenditure limits for campaign materials, with each Lok Sabha candidate restricted to ₹95 lakh. Additionally, the ECI has prohibited the use of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's picture on electricity bills after MSEDCL defied the code of conduct.
- In the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra, the second phase will cover five constituencies in Vidarbha and three in central Maharashtra, with polling scheduled for April 26. These constituencies, including Buldhana, Akola, Amaravati, Wardha, Yavatmal-Washim, Nanded, Hingoli, and Parbhani, present a varied scenario for both the ruling alliance and the opposition Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi. A total of 352 candidates filed 477 nominations on the last day of filing nominations, and officials anticipate a reduction in candidates by half on April 8, the last day for withdrawal of nominations, as per the state branch of the Election Commission.

Pune, Maharashtra

- Instead of paying for water tanker services, residents are encouraged to report instances of extortion to the civic body via its toll-free number or mobile app. The report should include the tanker's registration number, names of involved individuals, the complainant's contact details, and address, along with supporting photos or evidence. Due to water scarcity in certain areas, the PMC is providing free water tankers, but some drivers exploit this by demanding payments unlawfully. To facilitate complaints, the PMC offers multiple channels such as a toll-free number (18001030222), WhatsApp hotline (8888251001), and the PMC CARE App, ensuring swift and efficient resolution of grievances.

Upcoming News/Events

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- As summer approaches, the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) declared a 10 percent reduction in water supply starting April 10 for consumers using between 40 lakh and 2 crore liters per day. This measure is likely to affect numerous high-rise apartments, large gated communities, and other sizable establishments. Additionally, BWSSB had previously announced a 20 percent cut for 38 bulk users consuming over two crore liters daily, resulting in a saving of approximately 10 million liters per day (MLD) of water.
- Bengaluru's commuters traveling from K R Puram to Hebbal flyover face prolonged traffic delays for four months due to BDA's new flyover lanes project. The plan aims to separate airport-bound traffic, alleviating congestion at Hebbal junction, a crucial link to IT areas. Dismantling two spans for construction may lead to narrowed roads and traffic disruptions, starting in two days per BDA officials.

Gujarat

Ten indigenous plant species from the state, categorized as rare, endangered, nearly threatened, or critically endangered, are set to be conserved at the botanical garden in Vallabh Vidyanagar, Anand district, known as an education hub. Sardar Patel University (SPU) has secured funding from the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) to preserve these species and later reintroduce them into their natural habitats after propagation.

Hyderabad, Telangana

South Central Railway is operating special trains to manage the summer passenger rush, including routes like Kacheguda-Tirupati, Secunderabad-Narsapur, and their return journeys on specific days. These special services will halt at designated stations along their routes, facilitating convenient travel during the busy summer season.

For more information on this news- <https://telanganatoday.com/scr-running-special-trains-between-various-destination-to-clear-summer-holidays-rush>

Mumbai, Maharashtra

In preparation for the Lok Sabha elections and upcoming summer holidays, the State Blood Transfusion Council (SBTC) Maharashtra has urged blood banks to ensure an adequate blood supply. The SBTC's letter dated April 4 encourages blood banks to host blood donation camps, especially since schools and colleges are closed, impacting the usual blood donor pool. Mahendra Kendre from SBTC emphasized the importance of college students as blood donors and the need for proactive measures to address potential shortages during April and May.

As Uran faces a two-day water cut and anticipates a three-day shortage due to the depleting Ransai dam, Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) is considering extending the water cut by another day to ensure supply until June. Despite substantial rainfall last year, the dam's current level is only sufficient until May 15, worsening water scarcity for Uran residents this summer due to an inadequate subsequent monsoon following the dam's overflow in July.

Pune, Maharashtra

- In preparation for the Lok Sabha elections, Pune city police have imposed prohibitory orders within a 200-meter radius of Council Hall and the District Collector Office, effective from April 12 to 29. These measures will be in place during the nomination filing, scrutiny, and withdrawal processes. The orders apply to areas under Pune, Shirur, and Baramati Lok Sabha constituencies, with Council Hall designated for Baramati and the District Collector Office for Pune and Shirur nominations.
- Pune faces a looming water crisis due to diminishing dam levels, exacerbated by civic projects, leading to a surge in water tanker trips to four lakh. Despite tax payments, residents must buy water as PMC struggles to meet demand, extracting 1,680-1,700 million liters daily, against a recommended 1,400 million liters, worsened by inadequate infrastructure after merging 34 villages into PMC.

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

- U.S. military officials held meetings with their Chinese counterparts in Hawaii this week to discuss safe operations between the two countries, with a focus on the South China Sea. President Joe Biden addressed tensions in a call with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday 2 April 2024, agreeing to resume direct military talks initiated during their November meeting. Both sides reviewed safety-related events, aiming to sustain operational safety and professionalism in maritime and aviation activities, according to a statement from the U.S. military. China's defense ministry also reported candid and constructive exchanges during the meetings on maritime and air security between China and the U.S.

Europe

- Regional officials reported that a Russian strike on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, resulted in six civilian deaths and 10 injuries early Saturday 6 April 2024. Ukraine's national police attributed the attack to drones and shared images of fires in the city streets and near buildings. Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov confirmed the casualties, stating the strike occurred in the Shevchenkivskiy district.
- On Thursday 5 April, NATO alliance members unanimously decided to search through their arsenals for additional air defense systems to shield Ukraine from potential Russian ballistic missile attacks. The decision came during NATO's 75th-anniversary meeting, which was notably overshadowed by the ongoing conflict on the alliance's borders. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressed the alliance's understanding of the urgency, following Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba's appeal for new air defense systems, particularly U.S.-made Patriot missiles.
- Russian officials stated on Saturday 06 April, that approximately 2,000 residents from Orsk were evacuated from their homes due to rising waters in the Ural River, leading to flooding in nearby villages and the bursting of a dam.

Middle East

- Turkish authorities have arrested 48 individuals believed to be linked to Islamic State following a shooting at an Istanbul church in January, where one Turkish citizen was killed by two gunmen affiliated with the group at the Italian Santa Maria Catholic Church.
- 48 individuals tied to Islamic State were arrested after a shooting at an Istanbul church in January, resulting in the death of a Turkish citizen. Japan is concerned about China's military growth near Taiwan, and North Korea's nuclear capabilities, and is planning to revamp its military structure by 2025.

Pakistan

- Hundreds of landowners and farmers staged a protest on Friday (5 April), blocking the Quetta-Karachi National Highway in Khuzdar. They were protesting against extended power load shedding, which they claimed was damaging crops in the region and nearby areas. The highway blockade led to significant traffic disruption, affecting travel between Sindh and Balochistan.
- On Monday 1 April 2024, The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) reported ten fatalities and twelve injuries due to rain-related incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over the last two days, as per The Nation. Among the deceased were eight children and two women, with the injured including nine children, two women, and a man.

United Kingdom

- Senior doctors in England have approved an improved government offer on pay and conditions, relieving some strain on the NHS following extensive strike actions. The British Medical Association (BMA) reported that approximately 83% of senior doctors, known as consultants, supported the offer, marking a 62% turnout. However, a separate dispute with junior doctors, who recently held five-day strikes in February, remains unresolved. The ongoing strikes have exacerbated the pressure on the NHS, leading to thousands of canceled appointments and procedures amid a backlog of over seven million patients waiting for hospital treatment.

United States

- A 4.8-magnitude earthquake hit close to New York City on Friday morning (05 April), causing buildings along the East Coast to tremble and surprising residents in a region not accustomed to significant seismic events. The quake's epicenter was in Tewksbury, central New Jersey, approximately 40 miles west of NYC, occurring around 10:20 a.m. ET at a depth of 4.7 kilometers according to the USGS.
- On Friday, the U.S. CDC issued a health alert regarding a case of avian influenza in a Texas farm worker who had contact with infected dairy cows. This marks the second case of the H5N1 bird flu strain in the U.S. following a 2022 incident in Colorado, highlighting the virus's spread to new mammals like dairy cattle. The CDC advises preventive measures like PPE use, testing, antiviral treatment, and monitoring of individuals exposed to infected animals.

Upcoming News/Events**China**

- U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng are set to launch economic exchanges aimed at achieving balanced growth and cooperating on anti-money laundering efforts. The discussions, scheduled in Guangzhou, will address U.S. concerns about China's manufacturing capacity, with Yellen planning to advocate for fairness for American workers and firms during the talks.
- On April 7, the defense forces of the U.S., Japan, Australia, and the Philippines are planning to conduct a "maritime cooperative activity" in the South China Sea to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific region. This one-day exercise, featuring communication activities and officer of the watch maneuvers, will take place in Manila's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and include warships such as the USS Mobile, HMAS Warramunga, JS Akebono, and two Philippine vessels. The activity aims to enhance interoperability among the participating countries' naval forces.

Europe

- Russia highlighted on Friday 06 April, that strategic security issues, particularly space-based weapons, are a key potential area for dialogue with the United States. This comes as the U.S. plans to present a resolution at the United Nations Security Council next week, aiming to ban the deployment of nuclear weapons in space. The move follows recent U.S. intelligence suggesting Russian efforts to develop space-based weapons, an assertion Moscow has refuted. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov emphasized that strategic security, including space-related matters, is a crucial topic for dialogue between the U.S. and Russia.
- The Finnish government will extend the closure of land borders with Russia indefinitely and add more ports to the travel prohibition list from the east. This decision follows accusations of Russia using migration as a weapon against Finland, with no significant changes prompting the continuation of border closures beyond the previously planned April 14 deadline.

Middle East

- President Biden warned Israel that future support for its Gaza offensive could hinge on protecting aid workers and civilians, a shift in U.S. policy amidst growing calls from Democrats. This marks a potential change in aid conditions, emphasizing the need for specific measures to address civilian harm and ensure aid worker safety, as discussed in the 30-minute call between Biden and Netanyahu.
- A Hamas delegation, led by deputy chief Khalil Al-Hayya, will participate in Gaza ceasefire discussions in Cairo on April 7, following an invitation from Egyptian mediators. The talks, expected to include U.S. CIA Director Bill Burns, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and an Israeli delegation, aim to address the ongoing conflict.

Pakistan

- Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is scheduled to visit Riyadh for a two-day trip starting, during which he will meet with the Saudi crown prince. This visit marks Sharif's first foreign trip since forming a coalition government in February. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a longstanding alliance, with Pakistan frequently seeking financial assistance from Riyadh during economic challenges, particularly since securing an IMF bailout last summer.

United Kingdom

- Britain's economy appears poised to exit recession based on the upcoming release of official first-quarter growth data, as indicated by a recent business survey despite a slight slowdown in services activity last month. The S&P Global Composite Purchasing Managers' Index for Britain dipped to 52.8 in March from February's 53.0 but remained above the growth threshold of 50 for the fifth consecutive month. The survey also revealed that British businesses outperformed counterparts in France and Germany but trailed behind expansions seen in Italy and Spain.
- British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak unveiled a £35 million (\$44.35 million) initiative on Friday (5 April) to fund the construction of 16 all-weather domes in cities hosting T20 World Cup matches in 2026 and 2030. These domes will support year-round cricket participation at the grassroots level, with England and Wales hosting the 2026 Women's T20 World Cup and England, Scotland, and Ireland hosting the 2030 men's edition.

United States

- The United States is on high alert, anticipating a potential attack by Iran on Israeli or American assets in response to Israel's strike on the Iranian embassy in Syria. The strike, which killed an Iranian military commander, has escalated tensions in the region, with Iran's Quds Force losing several advisers.
- On Thursday 5 April, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg called upon major airlines to enhance travel benefits for active-duty military members and their families. The Department of Transportation (USDOT) intends to publish comparative data on airlines' travel benefits for service members starting in May, emphasizing commitments to full refunds for canceled trips due to military directives and allowances for free baggage. Currently, most carriers offer additional free bags and perks like priority boarding or discounted fares to approximately 1.3 million active-duty military personnel and 800,000 reservists.

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