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INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- During a recent initiative, traffic police found 1,412 abandoned vehicles, with 918 owners traced. The identified vehicles comprise 521 two-wheelers, 706 autorickshaws, and others, totaling 1,412 in all.
- The notorious traffic jams to Kempe Gowda International Airport, a potential electoral issue in Bengaluru, contrast with a verbal duel between Shashi Tharoor and Rajeev Chandrasekhar in Thiruvananthapuram's Lok Sabha elections.
- The Bangalore Apartments' Federation (BAF) has entered into an MoU with the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) to supply treated water from residential complexes and gated communities for construction use. Under the agreement, water will be sold at Rs 8 per kilolitre, with Rs 2 allocated as a facilitation charge to BWSSB.

Gujarat

- Gujarat experienced scorching heat on Wednesday 17 April, as temperatures soared to 42.2 degrees Celsius, contributing to heat-related emergencies. Ahmedabad ranked seventh in hotspots, with Amreli recording the highest temperature at 44°C. The IMD's forecast suggests a maximum temperature of around 41°C.
- In the financial year 2023-24, the pharmaceutical sector in Gujarat saw steady growth, as evidenced by the Gujarat State Food and Drug Control Administration (FDCA) issuing 133 approvals for allopathic drug manufacturing plants. This development signifies a major achievement, with record investment commitments surpassing Rs 10,000 crore, as numerous companies intend to invest over Rs 500 crore each.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- Between March 2023 and now, the groundwater levels in Greater Hyderabad have drastically declined by two to seven meters, highlighting the city's acute water scarcity. In Abdullapurmet specifically, the groundwater level plummeted by nearly seven meters to 17.8 meters in March 2024, as per water board data.
- As summer begins and temperatures rise, residents and sports enthusiasts in the city are eager for a swim, but most of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation's (GHMC) municipal swimming pools remain closed. Out of the total 13 pools, including 10 main and three baby pools, expected to open by March 1, many are still inaccessible despite the scorching weather.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- As of 18 April, BMC had gathered Rs 2,214 crore in property tax, marking about 49% of its Rs 4,500 crore target for 2023-24. The civic body initiated property tax billing at the end of February without any increase, following criticism for previously uploading bills with hikes in December. This move came after citizens and public representatives expressed concerns and confusion over the earlier bills issued by BMC in December.
- Daytime temperatures in Mumbai increased to 35.8 degrees Celsius on Friday (19 April) from the previous day's 33.5 degrees. India Meteorological Department officials anticipate a further rise in temperatures in the coming days. The highest recorded day temperature this season was 38.8 degrees on March 21.

Pune, Maharashtra

- To improve disaster management readiness, Pune District Collector Dr. Suhas Diwase has instructed Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), the irrigation department, and Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) to swiftly eliminate encroachments from riverbeds and flood lines. This move aims to address the repeated flooding in Pune caused by unregulated construction and encroachments along nullahs and river banks.
- The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) is confronted with significant challenges due to declining water storage in the Khadakwasla project dams, crucial for the city's drinking water supply. With storage levels adequate for only 40 days, the decision on imposing a water cut is uncertain, influenced by the model code of conduct during the Lok Sabha elections and its potential impact on the voting process.

Upcoming News/Events

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- Residents of Royal Lakefront Residency in J P Nagar 8th Phase, an approved housing society by Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), have opted not to participate in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections due to severe water scarcity. The depletion of borewells has left them dependent solely on water tankers for their needs.
- Koramangala, known as Bengaluru's IT and trends hub, presents a different scene during elections as pubs receive informal orders to halt music until the Lok Sabha polls conclude.
- BWSSB chairman V Ram Prasath Manohar has instructed officials to investigate paying guest (PG) facilities citywide, aiming to identify any unauthorized water and sewage connections. This directive follows a phone-in program by BWSSB where concerns about illegal Cauvery water connections in Kadugodi,

Gujarat

- Ahmedabad Police has enforced prohibitory orders, banning the hoisting of black flags, displaying inflammatory banners or placards, and raising provocative slogans during campaign events leading up to the Lok Sabha elections. The order, effective from April 17 to May 7, covers all 26 seats of Gujarat during the third phase of polls.
- Anand, influences the design of the Anand Bullet Train Station, with its façade and interior reflecting the fluidity, shape, and color of milk droplets. The station will comprise three floors and modern amenities such as ticketing areas, waiting zones, a business-class lounge, nursery, restrooms, information booths, retail centers, and skylight provisions, enhancing its functionality and appeal.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a high heat alert for several parts of Telangana, including Hyderabad, for the next two days, with temperatures expected to range between 40 to 45 degrees Celsius statewide. Additionally, there's a thunderstorm alert in areas such as Bhadradi Kothagudem, Khammam, Nalgonda, and others due to elevated heat levels.
- GHMC aims to collect 1,200 crore in property taxes within 30 days through its early bird scheme, offering a 5% rebate for full payments made before April 30 in the new financial year 2024-25. As of April 5, GHMC has already collected 80 crore, with the rebate applicable only to current year taxes and not arrears from previous years.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- A massive 2,000-ton bow string girder is poised to embark on a football field-sized barge from Nhava Sheva port to the Worli end of the sea link. This significant girder will connect the southbound arm of the Coastal Road to the sea link, offering motorists an uninterrupted, signal-free 16km road from Bandra to Marine Drive. Measuring 136 meters, it will become India's largest bow string arch on open sea upon completion.
- VJTI Mumbai submitted a report to BMC suggesting the merger of Andheri's Gokhale bridge with the CD Barfiwala flyover due to their misalignment. The report confirms that both arms of the Barfiwala flyover are structurally sound, proposing the lifting of the last four sections and adjusting pedestals to align with the new height for the merge.

Pune, Maharashtra

- Singapore's advanced water treatment technology presents a potential solution for the water scarcity challenges faced by cities like Bengaluru and Pune in India. With rising demand and depleting underground water levels, Singapore's approach of valuing every drop due to water importation can be a model for efficient water management.
- Officials at the regional transport office announced on Wednesday (17 April) that they would not take action against Ola and Uber cabs operating in the city until mid-April. This decision follows the denial of aggregator licenses to the service providers, with a month given for the companies to appeal before the state transport appellate tribunal.

GLOBAL UPDATE

Highlights of this week

China

- Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen extended her congratulations to Nymphia Wind, a Taiwanese drag queen who made history by winning RuPaul's Drag Race, becoming the first individual from East Asia to achieve this prestigious title.
- As of 19 April, China imposed a tariff on imports of propionic acid from the United States, commonly used in various industries, citing material damage to its domestic propionic acid sector. This move comes amidst escalating trade tensions between China and Washington, with a 43.5% levy taking effect on Saturday, according to the Ministry of Commerce's statement.

Europe

- On Friday 19 April, Russian missiles struck the port of Pivdennyi in Ukraine's southern Odesa region, causing significant damage to grain storage facilities and the food supplies they held, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and other officials.
- German Finance Minister Christian Lindner expressed opposition to Brazil's proposal to tax the super-rich, signaling potential difficulties in garnering broad G20 support. Lindner stated that Germany already has sufficient income taxation measures and does not find the proposed tax suitable. Brazil, as the current G20 presidency, seeks to achieve international consensus on wealth taxation and is pushing for a joint declaration at the upcoming G20 finance ministers and central bankers meeting in July.
- Nord Stream's insurers have rejected claims for coverage related to gas pipeline damage caused by explosions in 2022, citing the damage as war-related. Nord Stream is pursuing legal action seeking over 400 million euros from its insurers in response to the ruptured pipelines designed for Russian gas transport to Germany.

Middle East

- The death toll from heavy rains in the United Arab Emirates climbed to four, with severe flooding impacting roads and causing disruptions at Dubai's international airport. Originating in Oman, where it claimed at least 20 lives, the storm brought the UAE its most significant rainfall in 75 years.
- On Friday 19 April, the European Union announced sanctions targeting four individuals and two organizations involved in violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank. Among the entities listed are Lehava, described as a radical right-wing Jewish supremacist group, and Hilltop Youth.

Pakistan

- Five Japanese nationals narrowly avoided harm when their van came under attack by a suicide bomber and gunman in a terrorist incident in Pakistan's port city. According to police, the assailants targeted the vehicle carrying Japanese employees of Pakistan Suzuki Motors.
- Pakistan's central bank announced on Saturday 20 April, that it has successfully repaid a \$1 billion Eurobond, which was scheduled to mature this month. This repayment comes as Pakistan prepares for a long-term bailout from the International Monetary Fund, showcasing its commitment to meeting financial obligations.
- On 13 April, Nine individuals from Punjab were tragically killed by unidentified gunmen after being abducted from a passenger bus in Noshki. In a separate incident, one person lost their life and four others were injured in another attack on a different vehicle.

United Kingdom

- British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's proposal to prohibit individuals aged 15 and below from purchasing cigarettes successfully cleared its initial parliamentary vote on Tuesday 16 April, despite facing opposition from several of his party members.
- British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced plans on Friday 19 April to strengthen regulations for long-term sick leave, aiming to address the growing trend of Britons leaving the workforce permanently. The decline in labor force participation among working-age Britons, attributed to long-term illness and increased student numbers, contrasts with the trend in other wealthy nations that have seen rising participation since 2020.

United States

- The Biden administration implemented restrictions on oil and gas drilling and mining in Alaska, aiming to preserve wildlife habitats and indigenous communities. These measures align with President Biden's climate change goals but have sparked criticism from state officials concerned about job losses and reliance on foreign resources.
- The U.S. House of Representatives made significant progress by advancing a \$95 billion legislative package on Friday 19 April, aimed at providing aid to Ukraine, Israel, and the Indo-Pacific. This bipartisan move, overcoming earlier Republican opposition, signals a broader consensus in addressing crucial international issues.

Upcoming News/Events

China

- The European Union is initiating an investigation into China's procurement of medical devices, aiming to safeguard local manufacturers. Additionally, the EU has launched inquiries into Chinese clean tech producers for potentially dumping subsidized goods and Chinese-owned companies benefiting unfairly from subsidies within the EU, all with the goal of preventing market distortion and unfair competition.
- The Dutch military intelligence agency MIVD revealed in its annual report that Chinese spies have been focusing on the Dutch semiconductor, aerospace, and maritime sectors with the aim of bolstering China's armed forces. This activity is part of an ongoing pattern of Chinese political espionage targeting the Netherlands and its allies.
- They G7 Countries have warned China to cease supporting Moscow's military industry if it sought positive relations with the West.

Europe

- President Volodymyr Zelenskiy urged NATO members to provide a minimum of seven Patriot or similar advanced air defense systems to Ukraine to counter Russian air strikes. He emphasized the need for increased military assistance for Kyiv and described the current level of foreign aid as "very limited." Zelenskiy also referenced Israel's support during Iran's recent massive air strike, implying that Ukraine should receive similar assistance.
- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pledged the European Union's support to Finland in protecting its eastern border against Russia's alleged use of migrants to create instability. Finland had closed its border with Russia last year due to an influx of asylum-seekers, accusing Moscow of manipulating migration, a claim denied by the Kremlin.

Middle East

- Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian warned that Iran would retaliate with immediate and maximum-level response if Israel takes actions against its interests, emphasizing a strong stance against any perceived adventurism.
- The G7 major powers, including the United States, Italy, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, and Britain, pledged to strengthen Ukraine's air defenses in response to escalating Russian attacks.

Pakistan

- Pakistan has formally approached the IMF for a new bailout package, aiming for a range of USD 6 to USD 8 billion, possibly including climate financing. The country is also looking to schedule an IMF review mission next month to finalize details for a three-year Extended Fund Facility (EFF).
- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has instructed Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs), District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs), and other relevant departments to stay vigilant as heavy rainfall and thunderstorms are expected to persist in parts of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), as well as across Pakistan, until April 29.

United Kingdom

- On Friday 19 April, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced plans to review and potentially tighten regulations regarding long-term sick leave. This move aims to address the growing number of Britons permanently exiting the workforce, contributing to a decline in labor force participation, which has reached its lowest levels since 2015. This trend contrasts with other major developed nations that have experienced increased participation rates since 2020.
- Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced plans to host British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in Poland to discuss enhancing air defenses amid heightened security concerns. This initiative includes potential collaboration with NATO to bolster sky security swiftly, particularly relevant given recent missile activity near Poland's borders.

United States

- The United States is set to withdraw its troops from Niger following an agreement reached between U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and Niger's leadership. Last year, there were slightly over 1,000 U.S. troops in Niger, primarily operating from two bases, including the drone base Air Base 201 near Agadez, which cost over \$100 million to build.
- The United States plans to release guidelines for carbon offsets soon, aiming to bolster market confidence and ensure credits accurately reflect emission reductions. This initiative builds upon the Energy Transition Accelerator program launched in 2022, which seeks to mobilize private finance for developing countries' clean energy transitions.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Agency for International Development announced a distribution of \$1 billion in U.S. commodities to countries facing severe hunger crises. Recipients such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, South Sudan, Sudan, and Haiti are among the most affected by hunger, as reported by the United Nations' World Food Programme.

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