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INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Upcoming News/Events

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- Thousands of liters of sewage have tainted Yelahanka's Puttenahalli lake, undoing a decade of conservation efforts. The contamination resulted from an incomplete storm water drain, violating wildlife protection regulations.
- ISRO Chairman S. Somanath urged Indian industry to increase investments in the space sector during his keynote address at the US-India Space Cooperation Conference on May 24. Highlighting the lack of significant strides by major industries in space, he cited ISRO's commercial arm, NewSpace India Ltd, which is inviting partners to manufacture the Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM3).

Gujarat

- Sustained very high temperatures claimed the lives of two middle-aged men in Ahmedabad on Friday, with Civil Hospital authorities confirming both deaths due to heatstroke. These are the first officially recorded fatalities attributed to the heat, though other casualties reported across the state remain unconfirmed as heat-related by authorities.
- In response to the ongoing heatwave, the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) relocated 270 people from the streets to shelter homes on Friday, providing relief during peak afternoon hours. Additionally, SMC health teams distributed water, buttermilk, lemonade, ORS, and water at 160 bus stops to over 3,000 people, advising precautions against extreme heat.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao announced a surge in demand for green manure seeds due to recent rains, with farmers purchasing over 20,158 quintals from the available 62,794 quintals. In a review meeting, he noted that the government has provided 50,942 quintals of jeeluga (sesbania), 11,616 quintals of jute, and 236 quintals of pillipesara (phaseolus trilobus) seeds for the upcoming Kharif season.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- The IMD has assured that Mumbai faces no cyclone threat, urging residents not to panic. Dry weather is anticipated for the city, with light rain forecasted in neighboring regions like Raigad. Although a cyclone might form in the Bay of Bengal post-monsoon onset in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, its trajectory is uncertain, with no expected impact on Mumbai or the west coast.
- The BMC is setting up dedicated areas for sorting dabbas and parking bicycles used by dabbawalas near multiple railway stations. These designated spaces, initially prepared at Andheri Station East and Churchgate, are in response to the Mumbai Dabbawala Association's request for such facilities near five stations: Andheri, Bandra, Lower Parel, Grant Road, and Churchgate.
- Mumbai's water stock hit a three-year low at 10 percent, according to BMC data on May 23, compared to 15.99 percent in 2023 and 20.63 percent in 2022. Despite this, officials have ruled out an immediate water cut, citing plans to sustain operations until July 31. A review of water reserves is slated for the first week of June.

Pune, Maharashtra

- The PMC issued a warning to Maha-Metro for unauthorized digging on Satara Road, imposing fines totaling Rs 1.5 lakh for the underground Pune Metro extension. Strict action follows concerns, emphasizing the need for proper permission and fees for road digging licenses by private organizations.
- The PMC's solid waste management department has raised fines to Rs. 5,000 for public garbage burning, aiming to deter offenders amid a significant surge in such incidents impacting Pune's environmental health. Revised penalties also target non-compliance with waste segregation, emphasizing the need for responsible citizenry and effective implementation to combat harmful practices.

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- Liquor sales in Bengaluru will be banned from June 1 to 6 due to legislative council elections and the Lok Sabha election counting. During this period, all wine shops, bars, and pubs will remain closed, though pubs and bars can serve non-alcoholic beverages and food.
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecasted light to moderate showers in Bengaluru over the next five days due to cyclonic circulation in the Arabian Sea and Cyclone Remal's movement in the Bay of Bengal. The city is expected to have partly cloudy skies with temperatures ranging from 23 to 32 degrees Celsius, along with occasional rain and thundershowers.

Gujarat

GSFC University and Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya signed an MoU on Friday to promote scientific, cultural, and technical cooperation. The partnership aims to foster Vadodara's development by leveraging academic, industrial, and governmental synergies, utilizing digital technologies to preserve local heritage, and enhancing education and skill development programs.

Hyderabad, Telangana

With new driving license rules set to take effect on June 1 and the Union government's plans to phase out old government vehicles, the Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC) buses are expected to draw significant attention. As of March 2024, TGSRTC operates a fleet of 9,094 buses, including 6,368 corporation-owned and 2,726 hired buses. The upcoming ₹430 crore Cherlapalli terminal station will feature four new high-level platforms, with extensions to the existing five platforms to accommodate full-length trains. Additionally, two new foot-over bridges, one 12 meters wide and another six meters wide, are being constructed to facilitate seamless inter-platform movement. A modern station building with an architectural facade is also under development.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

In response to the Ghatkopar tragedy that claimed seventeen lives, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has ordered the removal of all illegal hoardings. To achieve a "zero casualty mission" during the monsoon season, he stressed the importance of preventive measures, deep sewage cleaning to prevent waterlogging, and coordinated efforts among authorities. With just 10% water reserves left in lakes supplying drinking water, the BMC plans to enforce a 5% water cut starting May 30 and increase it to 10% from June 5 in the Mumbai Metropolitan City. This measure aims to conserve the remaining water stock as only 9.69% of the total water is currently available.

Pune, Maharashtra

Starting June 1, Pune commuters can lodge complaints against auto rickshaw drivers directly to the Pune Regional Transport Office (RTO) via a dedicated WhatsApp helpline number. This initiative aims to address daily issues like refusal to ply and misconduct faced by passengers. Last year, the Pune RTO took disciplinary action against 1,613 auto rickshaw drivers for various violations discovered during enforcement operations. Pune is making strides in its metro transportation system as three coaches of the Pune Metropolitan Region Development Authority's (PMRDA's) metro line 3 are slated to arrive in the city by the end of this month. These coaches, crucial for the metro line connecting Hinjewadi to Shivajinagar, will undergo extensive testing and trials in the following month to prepare for public deployment.

GLOBAL UPDATE

Highlights of this week

China

- China concluded a two-day military exercise near Taiwan, featuring bomber attacks and ship boarding simulations, prompting Taiwan to denounce it as a "blatant provocation." The drills included a surge of Chinese warplanes and warships, escalating tensions in the region.
- China recently conducted mock missile strikes as part of military exercises aimed at testing its ability to "seize power" and as a form of punitive action against Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te, whom Beijing views as a "separatist." Despite Taiwan mobilizing its forces in response, daily life on the island remains largely unaffected.

Europe

- According to four Russian sources, President Vladimir Putin is willing to stop the conflict in Ukraine through a negotiated ceasefire that acknowledges the existing battlefield boundaries. However, he is also prepared to continue fighting if there is no response from Kyiv and the West.

Middle East

- As of 25 May, Reports from Palestinian medics indicate that Israeli forces carried out new attacks in the Gaza Strip, resulting in the deaths of over 30 individuals. This occurred despite a recent order from judges at the top United Nations court directing Israel to cease its offensive in the southern Gazan city of Rafah.
- The White House announced President Biden's support for Egypt's decision to allow UN humanitarian aid through Kerem Shalom into Gaza temporarily. Biden also backed efforts to reopen the Rafah crossing, with a senior US team set for talks in Cairo next week.
- Israeli military intensified airstrikes on Gaza's Rafah city despite the UN's court order to cease its offensive. The conflict also saw heightened clashes in Jabalia, with Israel retrieving the bodies of three hostages from prior Hamas-led attacks.

Pakistan

- On Friday 24 May, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) team left Islamabad without finalizing a staff-level agreement for a new bailout program with Pakistan. The IMF stated that it would assess Pakistan's implementation of the stringent conditions before considering signing a deal, despite assurances from Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his team regarding compliance with the conditions.
- On Saturday 18 May, Pakistan's foreign ministry summoned and issued a note of protest to Kyrgyzstan's top diplomat in response to recent attacks on Pakistani students in Bishkek. Kyrgyz police deployed forces to control the violence, where hundreds of Kyrgyz men targeted buildings with foreign students, including Pakistanis.

United Kingdom

- Sunak's Conservatives are trailing behind Labour in polls as he calls for an early election, a gamble given his party's current standing. Despite economic optimism, Sunak faces a tough battle against Labour, with attack lines already drawn for the upcoming election.
- Over 10,000 asylum seekers have arrived in Britain via small boats this year, according to updated government data on Saturday 25 May. This issue presents a significant challenge for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak ahead of the July 4 national election.
- Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces a surge of Conservative MPs resigning, surpassing levels before the 1997 election defeat. The resignations highlight challenges like inflation and political issues ahead of the July 4 election, with veteran Michael Gove also stepping down.

United States

- Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared that the United States will impose visa restrictions on Georgia and initiate a review of bilateral cooperation due to a "foreign agent" bill passed by the Georgian parliament. The law, criticized for hindering freedoms and media independence, has led to significant protests in Georgia, although the ruling party argues it's necessary for ensuring transparency in NGO funding and safeguarding sovereignty.
- The U.S. TSA reported a record-high of 2.95 million screened airline passengers on Friday 25 May, coinciding with the Memorial Day weekend and the start of the summer travel season. This surge in travel follows a forecast of record summer travel, with airlines anticipating a 6.3% increase in passengers compared to last year.
- Louisiana's Governor signed a bill classifying abortion-inducing medications as controlled substances, amid broader Republican-led efforts to restrict abortion. This move contrasts with ongoing FDA initiatives to expand abortion pill access, currently under legal review in the Supreme Court.

Upcoming News/Events

China

- South Korea is preparing to host the first trilateral summit with China and Japan in four years, but diplomats and officials believe that deep-rooted tensions may hinder substantial progress in diplomatic relations. Despite this, the summit is seen as an opportunity to maintain some level of high-level diplomacy, even if it only includes basic gestures like handshakes, according to officials and members of the diplomatic community in Seoul and Tokyo.
- China National Offshore Oil Corp (CNOOC) has signed oil exploration deals with Mozambique's energy entities for five offshore blocks, covering around 29,000 sq km. The contracts involve CNOOC subsidiaries operating for four years, alongside ENH's non-operating interests, including previous LNG agreements.

Europe

- Putin is reportedly willing to pause the conflict at the front but aims to seize more territory to push Kyiv to negotiations, avoiding further mobilization and showing no intent for NATO territory; Russia is also wary of nuclear escalation.
- Finance chiefs from the G7 are considering utilizing future income from frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine, as mentioned in a draft statement seen by Reuters. The G7, along with its allies, froze around \$300 billion of Russian assets following Moscow's invasion in 2022, and discussions have been ongoing on how to leverage these immobilized assets for Ukraine's benefit, including the possibility of a significant loan of up to \$50 billion in the near term.

Middle East

- Mediated negotiations to free Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza are set to restart next week. The decision follows high-level meetings involving Israeli and Qatari officials, with the United States playing an active role. Previous efforts under a ceasefire framework have not succeeded due to differences in demands between the two sides.
- Italy has promised to contribute 35 million euros to UNRWA, with 5 million euros allocated to UNRWA projects and the rest for the "Food for Gaza" initiative. This announcement came during talks between Italian officials and Palestinian leaders in Rome, focusing on supporting Gaza's humanitarian needs and efforts for a lasting ceasefire.

Pakistan

- Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is set to visit China early next month for the launch of the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), aiming to bolster sectors like agriculture, rail infrastructure, and IT in collaboration with Chinese partners. This move comes amidst ongoing concerns from India regarding the CPEC's route through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

United Kingdom

- Executives in London's financial sector are optimistic about the upcoming election, hoping for improved government attention and stability after years of challenges. Despite potential political shifts, including a possible Labour Party victory, the sector sees the election as a chance for positive change amid past turbulence like Brexit and strained relations with previous leaders.
- British PM Rishi Sunak's plan to ban smoking for those under 15 won't pass before the upcoming election due to time constraints. Sunak's anti-smoking measure, a flagship policy, faces shelving as Parliament won't address it in the "wash-up" period before the election.

United States

- Boeing will proceed with its first crewed space mission in June despite a minor gas leak in its Starliner spacecraft, which has faced technical challenges since 2010. This contrasts with SpaceX's progress with its Crew Dragon capsule, as the Starliner aims to transport astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS) after a delayed launch due to a faulty valve.
- US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin is planning to visit Cambodia, a close ally of China in Southeast Asia, following discussions with his Chinese counterpart at a security conference in Singapore. Austin's trip, as announced by the US Defence Department, will also include visits to Singapore and France next week.
- On Thursday 23 May, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced new visa restrictions and a review of relations with Georgia due to its adoption of a "foreign influence" law resembling Russia's, which sparked widespread protests. The restrictions target individuals involved in undermining democracy in Georgia and their family members.

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