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INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- Mantri Square Mall in Malleswaram was sealed and its trade license was suspended by BBMP due to over Rs 50 crore in property tax arrears, following multiple previous sealings including one just before the Lok Sabha elections on March 16.
- In a noteworthy move to enhance Bengaluru's flood readiness, BBMP has secured a substantial Rs 1,500 crore agreement with the World Bank. This funding is dedicated to revitalizing the city's stormwater drainage, especially the vast network of Rajakaluves.

Gujarat

- Repolling under heightened security was conducted on May 11 at the Parthampura booth in Dahod, Gujarat, following the nullification of May 7 voting due to a man's live-streaming of the process.
- The Ahmedabad Detection of Crime Branch (DCB) disclosed on Friday 10 May, that they have traced the threatening email aimed at 36 schools in Ahmedabad during the Lok Sabha polls on May 7 back to a military establishment in Pakistan. The email, received on the eve of the third phase of the election, prompted immediate investigations by DCB, Cyber Crime, Special Operations Group, and Ahmedabad Police.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- A senior TSRTC officer mentioned that TSRTC MD VC Sajjanar has advised employees to refrain from wearing T-shirts and jeans to the office, even though there is no official mandate. The move aims to maintain a formal dress code and uphold the dignity of the organization, particularly for office-based personnel.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- A historic moment was marked in Mumbai as a metro train completed a pre-trial run, entering the city for the first time via the Colaba-Bandra-Seepz (Metro 3) route and reaching Dadar. Metro 3 serves South Mumbai, contrasting with other corridors focusing on suburban and metropolitan areas.
- The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has opted to retract the ₹2,400 crore tender for an elevated road above the Khar Subway following objections from residents of Khar and Santacruz.
- On Friday 10 May, the Bombay High Court invalidated a communication from the Airport Authority of India, denying maternity leave to an employee based on the number of children she had. The court emphasized the importance of employer empathy and support towards female employees during natural life events like motherhood.

Pune, Maharashtra

- Pune's traffic congestion relief efforts face a pause as the removal of speed breakers halts temporarily. The PMC road department started this action following traffic police concerns about excessive speed breakers causing gridlock and safety risks.
- MSEDCL introduced 'Urja,' an AI-powered chatbot on May 9, 2024, aiming to enhance customer service for over 3 crore electricity consumers in Maharashtra. The 'Urja' mobile app and website offer 24/7 access to various services like bill payments, new connections, and complaint status, streamlining customer interaction without the need for physical visits or long wait times.
- Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) initiates the Vishrantwadi flyover and grade separator project's first phase to address traffic woes. Following the tendering process, PMC swiftly commences soil testing under the contractor's supervision.

Upcoming News/Events

Bengaluru, Karnataka

- The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has fixed a target to dig 2,000 recharge pits in the city to ensure monsoon rains are utilised to improve groundwater, and to replenish dried up lakes and borewells.
- Bengaluru experienced heavy rainfall causing waterlogging in its tech hub, marking the lowest maximum temperature since March. The forecast predicts continued rain and thundershowers till 16th May, prompting residents to share updates on social media about the intense weather conditions and resulting disruptions like traffic jams and flooding.

Gujarat

- Vadodara Municipal Corporation will initiate pre-monsoon operations, focusing on cleaning three historic natural drains to ensure efficient rainwater drainage. This effort will be reviewed by the standing committee chairman and corporation officials. Every year before the monsoon, these drains - Haki, Masiya, and Rupared Kans - will undergo cleaning to remove natural obstacles, floating waste, vegetation, and debris, especially addressing any congestion in the Mangrove Kans meeting the Jambuwa River.
- Near Bhuj, Tapkeshwari, nestled amidst a range of hills, will be developed as a Geo Heritage Site due to its unique geological features. This move aims to attract visitors from across the country to explore Kutch district's diverse natural landscapes of sea, hills, and desert, along with its rich sculptural architecture and historical structures in the capital city.

Hyderabad, Telangana

- Inclement weather may disrupt polling activities in Telangana on May 13, as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a yellow alert for heavy rains, thunderstorms, lightning, and gusty winds in various districts such as Ranga Reddy, Medak, and Sangareddy.
- L&T president, director & CFO R Shankar Raman suggested that if Congress's Mahalakshmi scheme for women travelers remains successful, they may consider withdrawing from Hyderabad Metro after 2026.

Mumbai, Maharashtra

- Residents in Mumbai's eastern suburbs anticipate the soon-to-be-completed Wadala-Kasarvadavali Metro 4 project. During a local meeting, MLA Mihir Kotecha shared that the Metro line is set to open within 15 months.
- The Mumbai civic administration assures residents of ample water supply, stating that current reservoir levels will suffice until July's end, with additional measures in place for continued availability.

Pune, Maharashtra

- To ensure smooth transportation during the Lok Sabha General Elections 2024, Pune Mahanagar Parivahan Mahamandal Limited (PMPML) will deploy 818 buses across Pune city, Maval, and Shirur Lok Sabha constituencies. This action comes in response to a request from the District Collector and District Election Officer of Pune District for morning and afternoon shifts on May 13, 2024.
- A new automated system is in the works to tackle the issue of vehicles without valid Pollution Under Control (PUC) certificates. This system will impose fines automatically, even at petrol pumps, with penalties reaching ₹10,000 for offenders. Failure to renew this certificate may lead to registration blacklisting for vehicles.

GLOBAL UPDATE

Highlights of this week

China

- China's military stated that it closely monitored and repelled USS Halsey's entry into Paracel Islands' territorial waters in the South China Sea on May 10, according to the Southern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army.
- A 5.8 magnitude earthquake hit off Taiwan's east coast on Friday 10 May, according to the island's weather administration, but there are no immediate reports of damage.

Europe

- Around 50,000 demonstrators staged a peaceful march in Georgia's capital, protesting against a proposed "foreign agents" bill. The rally occurred amid ongoing opposition to the bill, with the government expressing intent to proceed despite dissent.
- In Warsaw, thousands of protesters, including farmers and Solidarity trade union members, rallied against EU environmental regulations perceived as detrimental to their livelihoods. The protest highlighted concerns over cheap food imports and constraints imposed by the EU's Green Deal.

Middle East

- On Friday 10 May, the Biden administration expressed concern that Israel may have breached international humanitarian law using U.S.-supplied weapons during its Gaza military operation, marking its most robust critique of Israel yet. However, the administration refrained from making a definitive judgment, citing the challenges of verifying specific instances amid the chaos of the conflict in Gaza.
- Egypt rejected coordinating with Israel on facilitating aid into Gaza through the Rafah crossing, citing Israel's actions as "unacceptable escalation."

Pakistan

- Pakistan's first lunar orbiter has transmitted its initial images of the sun and moon, marking a significant milestone in China's moon mission. The images were showcased during a ceremony at the China National Space Agency (CNSA), according to Maria Tariq, spokesperson for Pakistan's Suparco.
- A tragic incident occurred in Balochistan, Pakistan, as a double landmine explosion claimed one life and left 18 others injured. District police officer Asif Haleem reported that the first mine detonated as a truck was passing through a valley in the coal-rich Duki district of Baluchistan province.

United Kingdom

- Britain's FTSE 100 reached a record high for the fifth consecutive session, buoyed by the Bank of England's positive stance and stronger-than-expected economic growth in the first quarter. The blue-chip index ended 0.6% higher, breaching the 8,400 mark, while the mid-cap FTSE 250 also saw gains, hitting its highest level in over two years and marking a third straight week of positive performance. The British economy's 0.6% growth in Q1, the strongest in nearly three years, signaled a robust recovery from recession.
- A second lawmaker from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative Party switched sides to join the opposition Labour Party on Wednesday, citing broken promises and criticizing the government's state as "tired and chaotic". This defection comes amidst a challenging period for Sunak's Conservatives, who trail Labour by around 20 points in opinion polls ahead of an upcoming national election, following significant losses in recent local elections.

United States

- In recent weeks, protests at U.S. universities have led to mass arrests by police, sparking concerns about the effectiveness and impact of such heavy-handed tactics. Incidents like the arrests of hundreds at Columbia University, City College of New York, UCLA, and other campuses have raised questions about the approach's relevance and outcomes, prompting experts to advise against hasty conclusions about its efficacy.
- FERC is poised to release a final rule addressing the strain on U.S. electricity transmission due to rising demand and the integration of large amounts of clean energy. The rule aims to coordinate regional plans, align state and local regulations, and distribute costs for expanding transmission infrastructure, supporting President Biden's goal of a carbon-free power sector by 2035, which requires significant capacity increases according to a Department of Energy study.

Upcoming News/Events

China

- On Friday 10 May, the Philippines' national security adviser urged the expulsion of Chinese diplomats, citing an alleged leak of a phone conversation with a Filipino admiral. This move comes amid escalating tensions over the South China Sea, with accusations of disinformation and discord-sowing from China's embassy in Manila.
- South Korea's Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul is set to visit China next week at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. This marks Cho's first trip to Beijing since assuming his position and the first visit by a South Korean foreign minister in over six years. The discussions will cover bilateral relations, a trilateral meeting with Japan, Korean Peninsula issues, and economic exchange, including meetings with South Korean business leaders.

Europe

- Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced plans to bolster the eastern border in response to escalating illegal migration from Belarus, labeling it a "hybrid war." While specifics were not disclosed, Tusk emphasized an unwavering commitment to Poland's security during his visit to the border.
- The United States is readying a \$400 million military assistance package for Ukraine following the passage of a \$95 billion bill, including artillery, air defense munitions, anti-tank weapons, armored vehicles, and small arms. This aid will be delivered through Presidential Drawdown Authority, part of the larger bill authorizing \$60.8 billion in aid to Ukraine.

Middle East

- Israel urged more Palestinians in Gaza's Rafah to evacuate to an expanded humanitarian area in Al-Mawasi, hinting at a forthcoming ground attack. The military also called on residents in Jabalia to clear out, citing Hamas's attempt to reassert control.

Pakistan

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has cautioned about Pakistan's political instability and social tensions, which could jeopardize economic stabilization efforts in the financially strained nation. Despite intentions to maintain standby arrangement policies, political uncertainty remains a major concern, as highlighted in the IMF's recent staff report. Pakistan narrowly avoided a sovereign debt default last summer.
- Pakistan has extended the deadline for companies interested in purchasing Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) to May 18, as announced by Privatisation Minister Abdul Aleem Khan. This extension provides more time for potential buyers to submit their expressions of interest, originally due a day earlier.

United Kingdom

- On Friday 10 May, British opposition leader Keir Starmer vowed to crack down on gangs bringing asylum seekers to Britain by boats. He outlined plans for a Labour government to employ hundreds of enforcement officials and utilize counterterrorism measures to combat these gangs.
- British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will address university leaders in a meeting aimed at safeguarding Jewish students from harassment and antisemitic abuse amid pro-Palestinian protests on campuses. The issue has gained significance as similar protests in the United States have faced police intervention, and pro-Israeli counter-protesters have raised concerns about antisemitism. In Britain, solidarity camps at universities like Oxford and Cambridge have emerged, drawing criticism from local antisemitism advocacy groups.

United States

- The Biden administration announced a funding allocation of nearly \$200 million to combat avian flu in dairy cows, aiming to address concerns about the virus's spread and potential human infections. This initiative follows outbreaks in nine states and findings of H5N1 particles in a significant portion of retail milk samples, prompting the USDA to provide financial support to dairy farms for containment efforts and virus testing.
- A U.S. congressional committee is probing Georgia Institute of Technology's collaboration with China's Tianjin University, flagged for ties to the PLA. Georgia Tech's research, defended by a lead scientist, faced scrutiny due to funding links and technology sharing despite legal clearance.

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