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INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Andhra Pradesh

- The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has mandated Aadhar validation for devotees without valid darshan tickets who wish to purchase Tirupati Laddus, starting Thursday. This measure aims to eliminate middlemen and enhance transparency, ensuring that devotees are protected from exploitation.
- Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu held a teleconference with key officials to address the flood situation caused by heavy rains, urging them to remain alert and coordinate efforts between the Irrigation and Revenue departments. He also stressed the importance of managing waterlogging, preventing contamination, and using technology for effective crisis management.

Delhi

- Since January 2023, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has spent over ₹1 crore on logistics for 30 meetings, with an additional ₹34 lakh on damages and ₹10 lakh on refreshments. Despite this, the meetings have resulted in 51,000 man-hours of wasted time and no substantive discussion on civic issues, only chaos and disruptions.
- Delhi experienced its coolest August in over a decade, with nights being the coldest in 13 years and days the coolest in 11 years. This was due to consistent rain and cloudy weather throughout the month, according to IMD data.

Goa

- Bicholim city will start CCTV surveillance on Saturday 31 August, with 37 cameras installed across key locations, funded under the MPLAD scheme. The cameras aim to monitor traffic, crime, and antisocial activities, and will be inaugurated by prominent local leaders.
- In preparation for Ganesh Chaturthi, Mapusa Municipal Council will enhance market organization by accommodating 300-350 vendors on a first-come, first-served basis. The market will be barricaded, and vehicle movement will be restricted during the day, with vendors needing tokens from the MMC office to set up.

Gujarat

- In response to recent heavy rains and severe floods in Gujarat, the state government has initiated relief and cleanliness efforts. In the Narmada district, immediate patchwork is underway for damaged roads, carried out by the Narmada District Road and Building Department after an assessment by the District Collector.

Haryana

- The Haryana government has introduced a framework to utilize stubble left after paddy harvests to reduce farm fires, which contribute to severe pollution in Delhi-NCR and North India during winter. The agriculture department estimates that paddy will be cultivated on 38.8 lakh acres of farmland in the state this year.
- Haryana Tourism celebrated its 50th anniversary on September 1 with various activities, including trekking in Morni Hills and a two-day food fest in Faridabad. The events were organized in collaboration with the forest department.

Himachal Pradesh

- The Himachal Pradesh government signed an MoU with Dubai-based EFS Facilities Services Limited to provide overseas placements for youth, with plans to hire up to 1,000 candidates per year in sectors like hospitality and technical services. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu also handed appointment letters to five youth from Una and Hamirpur districts, who are set to work on the NEOM city project in Saudi Arabia this September.

Karnataka

- In less than five days, three elephants were found dead in the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve, all due to natural causes. Two tuskers were discovered in Bailuru and another tusker's carcass was found in Betalakatte, with both tusks recovered from the deceased elephants.
- The Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) is facing controversy over poor translation in a preliminary exam for 384 gazetted probationers. Aspirants complained of unclear and inaccurate questions due to faulty English-to-Kannada translation. KPSC is now inviting objections and will review the issues based on the feedback received.

Upcoming News/Events

Andhra Pradesh

- The Andhra Pradesh Legislature is set to go paperless under the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) project, which will digitize all legislative processes. The proposal has been approved by the Chairman of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly Speaker.
- State HR and IT Minister Nara Lokesh announced plans to transform Andhra Pradesh government schools into top model institutions by initiating inter-school competitions and science fairs. He also mentioned creating a special WhatsApp group to track school rankings and noted recent surprise inspections at various schools.

Delhi

- Delhi Home Minister Kailash Gahlot announced new prison reforms during his inspection of Tihar Jail, including a comprehensive mental health programme and an electric vehicle facility for visitors. The reforms also involve urgent renovations to toilets and continued support for vocational training initiatives within the jail.
- Delhi Minister Gopal Rai has requested Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav to convene a meeting to explore the feasibility of inducing artificial rain this winter to combat the high air pollution levels in Delhi. The suggestion follows a review meeting with experts, who recommended cloud seeding as a potential measure to address the seasonal air quality issues.

Goa

- Health Minister Vishwajeet Rane announced plans to upgrade South Goa District Hospital to a tertiary facility to improve local healthcare. He also reported 950 cases of illegal hill cutting and criticized perceptions of inefficiency in the Town and Country Planning department.

Gujarat

- A new weather system from the Bay of Bengal is approaching Gujarat, expected to bring heavy to very heavy rainfall starting September 1. The IMD forecasts heavy showers in Navsari and Valsad on Sunday, increasing to heavy to very heavy rain in Vadodara and Chhota Udepur on Monday Sept 2. On Tuesday Sept 3, heavy rain is anticipated in Anand, Panchmahal, Dahod, Bharuch, Bhavnagar, and Narmada, with heavy to very heavy rain continuing in Narmada and Bharuch on Wednesday Sept 4.

Haryana

- The Election Commission rescheduled Haryana's polling date to October 5 to respect the Bishnoi community's traditions, with the counting for Haryana and J&K now on October 8. The change followed requests from BJP, INLD, and the All India Bishnoi Mahasabha.
- The results for the Group C and D exams conducted by the Haryana Staff Selection Commission (HSSC) will be delayed until after the Assembly elections due to the model code of conduct. HSSC chairperson Himmat Singh advised candidates to disregard false information and confirmed that the CET exam is likely to be held between October and December this year.

Himachal Pradesh

- The Himachal Pradesh government has initiated steps to take over three power projects—Sunni, Luhri, and Dhaulasidh—previously allotted to Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (SJVNL) by the former BJP government, as announced by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu in the Himachal assembly on Friday 30 August.
- The Himachal Pradesh government plans to launch a phased, district-level campaign to curb drug abuse, involving panchayati raj representatives, BDC members, the education department, and the police. Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla announced this initiative during a meeting at Raj Bhavan.

Karnataka

- The Campco is engaging with the WHO to remove arecanut from the list of harmful substances, according to Campco President A Kishore Kumar Kodgi. A scientific report supporting this exclusion will be submitted to WHO next month.
- Applications are open for the Karnataka Sports Coach Award 2024-25, which honors coaches who have significantly contributed to sports development and athlete success over the past five years. The award includes a certificate, a trophy, and a cash prize of ₹10 lakh.

INDIA UPDATE**Highlights of this week****Madhya Pradesh**

- During the Shravan month, the Department of Post distributed around 3,000 bottles of Gangajal, valued at over Rs 90,000, in the Indore region. The period saw a significant increase in demand for packaged Gangajal, which began on July 22 and ended on August 19.
- Chief Minister Mohan Yadav announced a new scheme to boost tourism and investment in Madhya Pradesh at the 39th annual conference of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO). He highlighted Ujjain's Vedic clock and Bhopal's growing tourism appeal, while Union Culture and Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and other officials were also present.

Mumbai

- The Central Railway reported that 29,321 people have died in Mumbai's local train system since 2009 due to various incidents such as crossing tracks, falling from trains, and accidents involving electrical poles and platform gaps. This data, submitted to the Bombay High Court, highlights the need for a robust safety system to prevent such fatalities.
- The Bandra Terminus-Madgaon Express, the first Mumbai-Goa train on Western Railway, was inaugurated by Union Minister Piyush Goyal. This new service offers direct connectivity to the Konkan region for passengers in the western suburbs.

Pune

- Tamhini recorded 230 mm of rainfall, prompting the IMD to issue a red alert for Pune, Satara, and Raigad. Heavy rainfall and cloudy conditions were expected in Pune until August 30, with increased dam discharge causing floods and road closures in low-lying areas.
- In a significant ruling on August 16, a Pune commercial court ruled in favor of the city's local Burger King restaurant, dismissing a petition by the US-based Burger King Corporation. The court found that the Pune restaurant had been using the name since 1992-1993, predating the American corporation's trademark registration in India.

Punjab

- To ensure sufficient fertiliser supply for Punjab farmers in the upcoming Rabi season, Special Chief Secretary KAP Sinha met with Union Minister JP Nadda in New Delhi on Friday 30 August. This meeting followed Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's notification of a shortfall in the supply of diammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser in August compared to the allocation.

Rajasthan

- On Friday evening 30 August, many places in the state experienced mild to intense showers. Jaipur saw mild to moderate rainfall after a sunny day. Rain activity is expected to diminish temporarily but is forecasted to revive from September 2, with moderate to intense rainfall anticipated in Bikaner, Jaipur, Kota, and Ajmer divisions.

Tamil Nadu

- Southern Tamil Nadu saw the launch of two new Vande Bharat Express trains on Saturday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the Chennai Egmore-Nagercoil and Madurai-Bengaluru Cantt Vande Bharat Express trains via video conferencing, with Union Minister of State for Railways V. Somanna inaugurating the Madurai-Bengaluru service in person.

Telangana

- In Telangana, 1,864 government schools are at risk of closure this academic year due to zero student enrollment. While no official closure announcement has been made, teachers from these schools have been reassigned to other institutions. Primary schools are the most impacted.

Uttar Pradesh

- Around 32 lakh candidates appeared for Uttar Pradesh Police's recruitment exam, the largest in the state's history, held across 1,174 centers in 67 districts. The five-day test, ending Saturday, was for over 60,000 vacancies and was managed under tight security by the Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board (UPPRPB).
- Nearly 60% of stalled projects under Uttar Pradesh's three industrial authorities have sought relief through the government's rehabilitation package, leading to the registration of over 63,000 flats in the coming year. As of August 24, 93 out of 161 projects have utilized the package, with developers depositing Rs 953 crore, and the government expects to collect an additional Rs 2,250 crore over the next year.

Upcoming News/Events**Madhya Pradesh**

- The Madhya Pradesh High Court has issued a notice to the state government regarding the vacant posts of state information commissioners, requesting a reply within three weeks. The Madhya Pradesh State Information Commission has 10 sanctioned positions, all currently unfilled. The notice was issued by Justice Vishal Dhagat in response to a petition by Advocate Vishal Baghel of Jabalpur.

Mumbai

- Chief Minister Eknath Shinde inaugurated Mumbai's first double-decker flyover, integrating a metro viaduct with a road flyover for Metro Line 9. The project aims to improve traffic flow and connectivity between Dahisar and Mira Road.
- Mumbai is set to enhance its railway infrastructure with 12 new projects, including new rail lines between Parel and Kurla and an extension of the Harbour Line. The Panvel-Karjat line will connect Navi Mumbai to Raigad, aimed at reducing congestion and improving connectivity.

Pune

- The Airports Authority of India (AAI) announced plans to expand Pune International Airport's New Integrated Terminal Building (NITB) by adding 16 check-in counters, increasing the total to 50 by March 2025. This expansion aims to reduce check-in times, enhance security with new equipment, and convert the old terminal's arrival hall into an extended departure area.

Punjab

- To boost women's workforce participation, the Punjab government will launch job skill camps across all districts. Dr. Baljit Kaur, Minister of Social Security, Women, and Child Development, will inaugurate the first camp on September 10 in Muktsar. The camps, organized in collaboration with the Employment Generation, Skill Development, and Training Department, will mainly be held in educational institutions.
- Punjab Minister Anmol Gagan Mann inaugurated the Mohali-Chandigarh road widening project on Wednesday 28 August, which will extend from Abhipur village. The project aims to enhance connectivity to Himachal Pradesh and stimulate economic activities between the two states.

Rajasthan

- The Bhajan Lal Sharma government is preparing to set up a sub-ministerial committee to draft and implement the 'One State, One Election' (OSO) scheme in Rajasthan. The committee, expected to be announced in the first week of September, will handle constitutional amendments, election scheduling, budgeting, and administrative tasks related to the scheme.
- The Rajasthan Staff Selection Board has announced the CET 2024 for Senior Secondary Level posts, with applications open from September 2 to October 1, 2024. The test will cover various positions including Forester, Hostel Superintendent, Clerk Grade-II, and Constable, across multiple departments. Candidates can apply online at rsmssb.rajasthan.gov.in.

Tamil Nadu

- The government signed MoUs with six global technology firms for investments totaling ₹900 crore, potentially creating 4,100 jobs across the state. The agreements, announced at an Investors Conclave in San Francisco on Thursday, will fund the establishment of research and development (R&D) and delivery centers.

Telangana

- The Telangana government aims to complete the Devadula project by December 2025. Upon completion, it will create an additional 89,312 acres of irrigation land across seven districts. A review meeting will be held today at the Devadula pumping stations with key ministers to assess the project's progress.
- The Telangana government has assigned the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Assets Monitoring and Protection Agency (HYDRAA) the task of safeguarding water bodies, canals, parks, and government land parcels within the Outer Ring Road (ORR). Although guidelines for HYDRAA were issued last month, the agency previously lacked authority to protect public properties.

Uttar Pradesh

- Students in classes 3 to 5 from over 1.5 lakh government and aided schools will be assessed for foundational literacy and numeracy under the NIPUN Bharat Scheme. This scheme, which has already been implemented in UP, targets basic literacy from pre-primary to class 2.

GLOBAL UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Africa

- Gabon marked the first anniversary of the military coup that ended the Bongo dynasty's 56-year rule with celebrations in Libreville, led by interim president General Brice Oligui Nguema, as the public expressed support for ongoing reforms.
- Floods in eastern Sudan have devastated the region, compounding the suffering from ongoing conflict, as families like Ahmed Hadab's struggle to survive after losing their homes, food, and livestock. The floods have spread destruction beyond the areas affected by 500 days of fighting, further straining the nation's resources.

America

- The union representing workers at Canada's two main rail companies has filed court challenges against labor board rulings that forced over 9,000 Teamsters members back to work, arguing that the decisions undermine collective bargaining rights and set a dangerous precedent for future labor disputes.
- Power was partially restored in Venezuela after a blackout hit Caracas and much of the country. The government blamed the opposition for the outage, claiming sabotage, although no evidence was provided. President Nicolás Maduro has frequently accused political rivals of attacking the power grid, which the opposition denies.

China

- The Philippines and China have accused each other of deliberately ramming coast guard vessels near Sabina Shoal in the South China Sea, marking their fifth maritime clash in a month. Beijing claims most of the sea, which is crucial for global trade and resource-rich.

Europe

- Serbia has signed a €2.7 billion deal with France's Dassault Aviation to purchase 12 Rafale fighter jets, including a comprehensive logistics package. The acquisition, finalized during French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Belgrade, marks a significant shift from Serbia's traditional reliance on Russian military technology and reflects a move towards closer EU ties.

Middle East

- Qatar has facilitated negotiations between Germany and Afghanistan's Taliban to assist in the repatriation of Afghans based on their legal status, according to a Qatari foreign ministry.
- Israeli strikes killed at least 48 people in Gaza on Saturday 31 August, as clashes continue before the start of a polio vaccination campaign for 640,000 children. The UN campaign, relying on daily eight-hour pauses in fighting, faces significant challenges amid ongoing violence.

Pakistan

- The opening of a new Chinese-funded airport in Pakistan's Balochistan province has been delayed for a security review following deadly separatist attacks. The airport, part of the \$65 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, will be one of Pakistan's largest and is near a \$200 million deep-water port in Gwadar.
- Pakistan's military has launched operations in Balochistan following insurgent attacks that killed over 50 people. Five insurgents were killed in recent operations, with the Baloch Liberation Army claiming responsibility for the attacks targeting civil and military sites.

United Kingdom

- UK house prices fell in August for the first time since April, according to Nationwide Building Society. Despite this unexpected drop, the property market outlook is expected to improve.
- UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz agreed to work on a new treaty to enhance cooperation on defense, trade, and other areas, aiming to reset British-EU relations. The treaty is part of Starmer's broader strategy to strengthen ties with European allies and boost economic growth.
- UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer expressed alarm over the rise of far-right groups and populism in Europe, urging progressive parties to collaborate against these threats. He highlighted recent anti-immigrant riots in Britain and similar trends in other European countries, emphasizing the need for improved living conditions to counteract populism.

United States

- The U.S. is imposing visa restrictions on South Sudanese officials obstructing humanitarian aid by taxing shipments, amid a severe crisis exacerbated by ongoing conflict and natural disasters. The move follows concerns over delays in U.N. aid deliveries due to a tax dispute with South Sudanese authorities.
- Cows at three dairy farms in California have tested positive for bird flu, marking an expansion of the H5N1 outbreak to a 14th state. Federal officials report no human cases and emphasize that pasteurization makes milk safe. The virus's presence in cows has raised concerns but is considered low risk for the public.

Upcoming News/Events

Africa

- The WHO announced that mpox vaccines will arrive in the Democratic Republic of Congo within days, with 230,000 doses donated by the European Commission and Bavarian Nordic. Emergency licenses for the vaccines are expected within two weeks to expedite the vaccination process.
- South Africa's ban on breeding captive big game and using lions for commercial gain has left breeders concerned about their future, as the government implemented the ban in April without financial compensation. The country has the largest captive lion population globally, with over 8,000 lions in captivity, surpassing its wild lion population.

America

- Mexico's Congress will debate a controversial judicial reform next week that proposes electing judges by popular vote, raising concerns from Canada and the U.S. about potential impacts on investment and democracy. President López Obrador has paused relations with the U.S. and Canadian embassies in response to their criticisms.

China

- The Biden administration has delayed its final decision on steep U.S. tariff hikes on Chinese electric vehicles, batteries, semiconductors, and solar cells, promising an announcement in the coming days. The delay follows recent talks between U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Chinese officials, emphasizing the need to manage U.S.-China relations.

Europe

- The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is poised to achieve its first major electoral victory in an eastern German state, potentially becoming the first far-right party to win the most seats in a state parliament since World War II.
- French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer pledged to enhance cooperation on defense, security, migration, and energy following their meeting in Paris. Starmer's European trip also included talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to address issues from defense to trade, aiming to strengthen UK-EU relations and boost economic growth post-Brexit.

Middle East

- The UN will begin a polio vaccination campaign for 640,000 children in Gaza on Sunday, using daily eight-hour pauses in fighting between Israel and Hamas. The campaign aims to immunize 90% of children under 10, following the confirmation of a polio case in the region.
- Kamala Harris, in her first major interview since becoming the Democratic nominee for president, pledged a tougher stance on U.S. southern border migration and affirmed continued military support for Israel. She emphasized enforcement of border laws and adherence to President Biden's support for Israel, despite some Democratic calls to reconsider weapon supplies.

Pakistan

- Pakistan's government has confirmed it is upgrading its "web management system" amid public outcry over disruptions and slow internet speeds. The move, which includes implementing a nationwide firewall to block malicious content and protect government networks, has caused internet speeds to drop by 30-40%.
- Pakistan has confirmed its first case of mpox, with the strain yet to be identified. This follows Sweden's detection of a more dangerous Clade 1 variant, which has led the ECDC to raise its risk level to "moderate." France has also heightened its alert due to concerns over the virus.

United Kingdom

- British Prime Minister Keir Starmer proposed banning smoking in some outdoor areas, like pub gardens, to ease the burden on the NHS and reduce taxpayer costs. He emphasized the need to cut the 80,000 annual smoking-related deaths and tackle preventable diseases.
- UK energy regulator Ofgem announced a 10% increase in the price cap on household energy bills, raising it to £1,717 annually from October 1. The hike, attributed to severe weather and geopolitical tensions such as the Ukraine conflict, reflects ongoing instability in the global gas market.

United States

- The U.S. has requested trade dispute consultations with Canada over its new digital services tax, claiming it violates USMCA trade obligations. If unresolved after 75 days, the U.S. may seek a dispute settlement panel, potentially leading to retaliatory tariffs on Canadian imports. A Canadian official downplayed the move, viewing it as part of ongoing discussions between the two countries.
- The U.S. urged Honduras to reconsider its decision to withdraw from a long-standing extradition treaty, following President Xiomara Castro's claims of a plot against her government and concerns over U.S. interference. Castro argued that the treaty was being used to intimidate Honduras' armed forces, while the U.S. maintains that the treaty is mutually beneficial and remains in effect.

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