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Our Head Office : 110/1A & 110/2B, Ansec House, Tank Road, Yerwada, Pune, Maharashtra - 411006

INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Andhra Pradesh

- Over 700 interstate cannabis smugglers have been absconding for years, prompting AP police to enhance inter-state coordination for their capture. The police are focusing on major figures in the ganja trade, with significant seizures and arrests made under the NDPS Act.

Delhi

- Under Stage 2 of the Graded Response Action Plan (Grap), the entry of interstate buses from NCR states is prohibited, except for electric vehicles and those running on CNG or BS-VI diesel. The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has updated guidelines to address air quality issues, including stricter measures such as hybrid classes for schools and revised parking fees.
- At least 30 Delhi schools received hoax bomb threats on Friday 13 December, causing panic among parents. Despite thorough searches by authorities, no suspicious items were found, and police suspect the same group is behind this and similar threats earlier in the week.

Goa

- The MoRTH has sanctioned Rs 747 crore for widening a 7.2 km stretch of NH 66, including a 4.5 km six-lane flyover to ease congestion. The project will enhance connectivity between Margao and Cuncolim, improving safety and reducing traffic issues.
- The Goa State Urban Development Agency (GSUDA) has faced setbacks in progressing the multi-level parking project in Margao, with no response to tenders. The Margao Municipal Council is now considering a hydraulically operated parking system to attract contractors and ease the approval process.

Gujarat

- Gujarat government introduces new rules for operating pleasure crafts and vessels under 10 meters, following the Harni boat tragedy. The rules mandate regular inspections, safety measures, and permit requirements for boat operations.
- Nature Club Surat (NCS) raises concerns about painting tree trunks, claiming it harms biodiversity and exposes insects to predators. The club urges the municipal commissioner to stop the practice, citing the negative impact on tree health and wildlife.

Haryana

- The Haryana government has suspended mobile internet services, bulk SMS, and dongle services in several villages until December 17 to prevent unrest during a potential farmers' protest. The measure aims to curb the spread of false information and maintain public order.
- Haryana installed 137,686 solar water pumps under PM-KUSUM, with Hisar leading and Panchkula lagging. Rewari topped rooftop solar adoption, while Palwal and Nuh saw the lowest participation.

Himachal Pradesh

- Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu announced the formation of a state-level advisory board for de-addiction and rehabilitation to coordinate efforts against substance abuse. The board aims to unify departmental actions and combat the drug menace affecting the state's youth.

Karnataka

- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in Karnataka address rural welfare gaps, with Wienerberger India building 19 eco-friendly homes in Yedyur for BPL families. Each house cost ₹6.38 lakh, using sustainable clay bricks for durability and comfort.

Upcoming News/Events

Andhra Pradesh

- Civil Aviation Minister K. Rammohan Naidu announced the construction of 50 new airports in India over the next five years. He also highlighted new air routes and infrastructure improvements, including a new terminal at Rajahmundry Airport.
- State Endowments Minister Anam Ramanarayana Reddy confirmed that the Somasila high-level canal project will be completed by March 2026. During a visit to the Ponguru reservoir, he emphasized that the project resumed after an 11-year gap, bringing renewed hope to local farmers.

Delhi

- The PWD will begin ₹42 lakh worth of beautification and repair work on multiple Delhi flyovers, including painting, micro-repairs, and planter maintenance. Major repairs on older flyovers like Shadipur and Zakhira will start in February 2025 due to winter weather.
- Delhi's PWD has requested the Union government to resume work on the stalled Pragati Maidan underpass, which was delayed due to the 2023 floods. The PWD has sought design changes to overcome challenges caused by waterlogging and to progress with construction of the underpass.

Goa

- The football stadium and parade ground project at Campal, Panaji, remains unfinished, with completion delayed by over a year. Despite 98% of the work being completed, the remaining 2% is expected to be finished by March 2025, with a total cost of Rs 30 crore under the smart city initiative.
- The Goa government has urged the Union government not to impose an export duty on low-grade iron ore (below 58% Fe), citing concerns over its impact on state revenue. Chief Minister Sawant emphasized that such a move would be detrimental to Goa's economy, especially after previous reductions in export duties.

Gujarat

- Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel set a target to handle 2,000 MMTPA of cargo by 2047, emphasizing infrastructure and port development. He highlighted the state's rich maritime heritage and the National Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal.

Haryana

- Haryana Tourism signed an MoU with DMRC to boost the 38th Surajkund International Crafts Mela, enabling metro-based ticket sales, promotions, and seamless visitor management. DMRC will also manage parking and enhance Mela visibility via metro station announcements and displays.
- Haryana Police launched a cashless treatment scheme for road accident victims, covering up to ₹1.5 lakh per person during the golden hour for seven days post-accident. ADGP Hardeep Doon directed officers to ensure compliance.

Himachal Pradesh

- BJP MP Anurag Thakur and Himachal MPs urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for swift approval of a ₹900 crore Disaster Risk Reduction loan agreement. The agreement with AFD was negotiated in September 2024 after prior deliberations.

Karnataka

- Belagavi district's trifurcation proposal into Belagavi, Chikkodi, and Gokak is set for discussion during Karnataka's winter legislative session. CM Siddaramaiah has expressed support, promising consultations with district MLAs.
- Legacy waste clearing at Vidyanayapuram's Sewage Farm has progressed, with a Surat-based firm clearing 1.5 lakh tonnes since March. The ₹75 crore project aims to remove waste from 22 acres within 12 months.

INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Madhya Pradesh

- Madhya Pradesh's Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary has been declared a tiger reserve, with the Ministry of Environment's approval. The designation will boost ecotourism, generate employment, and improve conservation efforts, supported by NTCA funding.

Mumbai

- The BMC's weekend clean-up drive cleared 427 tons of waste, including construction debris, silt, and garden waste, with 2,246 personnel and 215 machines involved. The drive also tackled 2,603 dusty barricades at infrastructure sites.
- In response to the Kurla bus accident, Navi Mumbai Municipal Transport (NMMT) and traffic police organized a workshop at Ghansoli depot, training over 100 drivers on safety protocols. The initiative aims to enhance driver awareness and ensure adherence to traffic regulations.

Pune

- The NH7 Weekender music festival, scheduled for December 14-15 in Pimpri Chinchwad, was cancelled after the police denied permission, citing concerns over law and order and traffic congestion.
- Pune Municipal Corporation has issued stop-work orders to 91 construction sites for failing to implement dust control measures, as part of efforts to address air pollution. The city's air quality remains in the "moderate" category, with construction dust contributing significantly to pollution.

Punjab

- The Punjab and Haryana High Court directed the Punjab government to ensure videography of the municipal election nomination process. The scrutiny of nominations was on December 13, with the withdrawal deadline on December 14.
- The Punjab State Information Commission condemned an appellant's attempt at "bench hunting," refusing to transfer the case. The commission emphasized that such actions undermine judicial integrity and impartiality.

Rajasthan

- The Rajasthan Cabinet approved the "Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2024," targeting conversion through inducement or deceit. Once passed, it will impose severe penalties and allow courts to declare marriages with conversion intent as invalid.
- Rajasthan continued to experience a cold wave for the fourth day, with temperatures dropping significantly. Fatehpur recorded the coldest temperature at -0.1°C, while Mount Abu saw a minimum of 1.4°C.

Tamil Nadu

- On International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Minister M P Saminathan distributed welfare measures worth 9.34 lakh to 78 beneficiaries in Udthagamandalam. He also highlighted a 1,372 crore allocation for disabled persons this fiscal year and inspected desilting work at Ooty Lake.

Telangana

- The Telangana Cyber Security Bureau refunded 33.27 crore to 4,893 cyber fraud victims during a Mega National Lok Adalat. In 2024, the Bureau has refunded 155.22 crore to 17,210 victims, highlighting improved coordination and commitment to justice.

Uttar Pradesh

- The state government has exceeded its jowar procurement target, acquiring 28,631 metric tons and supporting millet farmers with Rs 200 crore through DBT. Over 23 lakh metric tons of paddy have also been procured, with purchase centers set up to ensure fair prices.
- The Uttar Pradesh Vigilance Establishment conducted searches at the properties of suspended officer Ravindra Singh Yadav in a disproportionate assets case. The searches uncovered Rs 62.44 lakh in jewelry, Rs 2.47 lakh in cash, and electronic devices worth Rs 37 lakh, among other assets.
- Protests erupted on Mathura-Vrindavan Road after over three dozen cow carcasses were found in a forested area near PMV Polytechnic College. The roadblock caused significant traffic disruptions, leading to the use of mild force by police to disperse protesters. Authorities are investigating the incident and will take action against those responsible.

Upcoming News/Events

Madhya Pradesh

- The Regional Development and Investment Plan for Indore may expand to include Nagda (Ujjain) and Badnawar (Dhar) for integrated growth. Covering 6,631 sq. km across four districts, the plan focuses on economic growth, infrastructure, and improved living standards.

Mumbai

- The Mumbai Port Trust, in collaboration with The Heritage Project, is offering guided tours of Mumbai's port from Saturday to Friday. The initiative will take around 1,500 people on a tour of the port, showcasing key areas like the dry docks, where ships are built and repaired.
- Maharashtra's cabinet expansion has been delayed due to portfolio disputes among the BJP, Shiv Sena, and NCP. Despite Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis' push for an expansion before the winter session, the three parties have yet to finalize the allocation.

Pune

- IG Sunil Phulari's proposal to shift the Kolhapur Special IGP office to Pune has sparked political debate, with Congress leaders opposing the move. The shift is proposed for logistical convenience, as all other offices in the division are in Pune.
- The Pune Book Festival, organized by the National Book Trust, will be held at Ferguson College Ground from December 14 to 22, featuring 600 book stalls, cultural events, and workshops. A highlight of the event is the Lit Festival from December 20-22, with over 25 sessions by 60+ authors and thinkers.

Punjab

- Trident Group has announced an additional Rs 3,000 crore investment in Madhya Pradesh's textiles sector, expanding employment opportunities from 12,000 to 15,000. The move comes after Punjab saw a 30% drop in textile exports over the past three years.
- Patiala's electoral officer has directed special monitoring at sensitive polling booths for the December 21 municipal elections. Nominations for Ludhiana and other elections are underway, with a total of 26 candidates in Ludhiana.

Rajasthan

- Union Minister CR Patil announced a Rs 40,000 crore project to link 11 rivers in Rajasthan, aimed at addressing water shortages. The project will support drinking water, irrigation, and industrial water needs in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.
- CM Bhajan Lal Sharma proposed bifurcating the Jaipur collectorate into Jaipur and Jaipur Rural to ease administrative duties and reduce congestion. The collectorate office may be moved to vacant land off Tonk Road behind the police headquarters.

Tamil Nadu

- Industries Minister T R B Rajaa announced that the Tamil Nadu government had signed an agreement with Google to train two million youths in AI. He also highlighted the successful conversion of 70% of agreements from the investor conference into actual investments.

Telangana

- The Telangana government is set to unveil a new energy policy in January 2025 and break ground for the 200-acre AI City project in the first quarter. The project, expected to complete in 15-18 months, will host R&D facilities, innovation centers, and data centers, with support from major companies like Yotta, Amazon AWS, and Microsoft.

Uttar Pradesh

- Ahead of Maha Kumbh, Mela police launched a special drive to make Sangam Nose beggar-free and rehabilitate beggars with NGO support. The drive aims to regulate the flow of devotees during the 45-day Maha Kumbh starting on Jan 13, 2025.
- Chief Minister announced that 40 crore devotees are expected at the 45-day Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, with preparations for 100 crore people. The event will feature advanced facilities, AI-based guidance, eco-friendly practices, and a focus on sustainable development.
- Operation Dronagiri, aimed at transforming agriculture and transport through geospatial data, concluded its kick-off meeting with key stakeholders. The Geospatial Data-sharing Interface (GDI) now hosts over 300 datasets, including high-resolution drone imagery from IdeaForge.

GLOBAL UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Africa

- The planned meeting between the presidents of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, intended to address the M23 rebel conflict, has been canceled, disappointing hopes for a resolution. The talks, held in Angola, aimed to ease tensions and prevent further instability in eastern Congo, but a deal is now uncertain.
- Suspected jihadists killed 39 civilians, including women and children, in attacks on Kokorou and Libiri in western Niger's borderlands. The assault highlights the ongoing insurgent threat in the Sahel region, which has intensified since 2012.

America

- Cuba is facing a severe fuel shortage, with many gas stations closed and long lines forming as motorists wait for fuel deliveries. This crisis follows recent nationwide blackouts, and the government has not provided an explanation for the fuel shortfall.
- Venezuelan authorities released 103 people arrested during post-election protests following the contested July 2023 presidential vote. Protests erupted after Maduro's victory claim, and opposition evidence suggested a landslide win for Edmundo Gonzalez.

China

- China and the U.S. renewed the Science and Technology Agreement for five years, continuing scientific collaboration. Concerns over intellectual property theft and China's tech advancements persist.

Europe

- Russia and China held discussions in Beijing on missile defense and strategic stability, focusing on global and regional security, including intermediate- and shorter-range missiles.
- Ukraine is ready to supply food to Syria after Russia suspended wheat exports due to uncertainty over the new Syrian government. Ukraine, a major grain producer, has revived exports via southern ports after Russia's 2022 invasion.

Middle East

- Israeli airstrikes across Gaza killed at least 28 Palestinians, including a journalist and rescue workers. The strikes targeted areas in northern and central Gaza, with a significant hit on the civil emergency center in Nuseirat, where a journalist and emergency personnel lost their lives.
- Diplomats from the U.S., Turkey, EU, and Arab nations agreed Syria's new government must respect minority rights and avoid supporting terrorism. The statement reaffirmed Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty amid Israel's extended presence.

Pakistan

- The World Bank has withdrawn a \$500 million budget support loan to Pakistan due to unmet conditions, including revising the purchase power agreement under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The bank also stated no new budget support loans will be granted for the current fiscal year, highlighting Pakistan's \$2.5 billion external financing gap.
- Pakistan's Supreme Court has allowed military courts to announce verdicts for 85 civilians tried for involvement in the May 9, 2023 riots, while ensuring the decisions are subject to the court's final ruling on military trials for PTI protesters. Human rights groups have raised concerns over the fairness of military trials compared to civilian courts.

United Kingdom

- Britain officially joins CPTPP, its largest post-Brexit trade deal, enabling lower tariffs with eight nations from Sunday. The pact includes new trade deals with Malaysia and Brunei and deeper provisions for existing agreements.
- Britain has launched a plan to streamline the approval process for clean energy projects, aiming to meet climate targets and create jobs. The new initiative will simplify planning for large onshore wind projects and address grid connection delays.

United States

- The U.S. and China renewed their science cooperation agreement with added national security guardrails, despite Republican objections over China's military use of the collaboration. The deal includes researcher safety, data reciprocity, and dispute resolution.
- The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to add 66 new judges to federal courts, addressing understaffing and rising caseloads. Despite bipartisan support, President Biden has threatened to veto the legislation.

Upcoming News/Events

Africa

- Ghana's President-elect John Dramani Mahama plans to review the \$3 billion IMF rescue package, focusing on state spending and the energy sector. While he will not abandon the deal, Mahama aims to adjust it to address inflation, currency depreciation, and the cost-of-living crisis.
- Somalia and Ethiopia have agreed to collaborate on resolving a dispute over Ethiopia's plan to build a port in Somaliland. The leaders discussed arrangements to provide Ethiopia with reliable sea access, while Somalia opposed Somaliland's recognition and rejected the port deal.

America

- Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland stated that Canada will respond robustly if the incoming U.S. administration imposes tariffs on Canadian imports. Ottawa and the provinces are prepared to take action against such measures.
- Canada's federal government has proposed offering up to \$15 billion in incentives to encourage domestic pension funds to invest in AI data centers powered by green energy. The initiative is part of potential measures under consideration for the upcoming fall economic statement.

China

- As Donald Trump intensifies his tariff threats, China is preemptively imposing its own restrictions to push the U.S. into negotiations, aiming to avoid a full-scale trade war, analysts suggest.
- China's President Xi Jinping will visit Macau from Dec. 18-20 for the inauguration of the new government, following the election of former judge Sam Hou Fai as leader.

Europe

- Francois Bayrou, France's new prime minister, faces challenges in passing the 2025 budget with a fractured parliament. He must first form a government amid cross-party support for emergency legislation.
- Germany's Social Democrats plan a "Made in Germany" premium, offering a 10% tax refund on equipment investments to boost the economy. They also propose a 100-billion-euro Germany Fund to support infrastructure and energy projects, along with incentives for electric car purchases.

Middle East

- Israel will close its Dublin embassy, citing Ireland's "extreme anti-Israel policies," including recognition of a Palestinian state and support for legal action against Israel. Israel recalled its ambassador following Ireland's decision in May and its backing of South Africa's genocide case at the ICJ.
- Turkey's Defense Minister Yasar Guler expressed support for Syria's new administration, offering military training if requested. Turkey reopened its embassy in Damascus after the Syrian rebels toppled President Assad, signaling a shift in relations.

Pakistan

- Engro Corp, in partnership with Veon, plans to expand telecom tower-sharing coverage in Pakistan and explore new infrastructure use cases. The partnership aims to extend services across Pakistan and potentially to international markets.
- A Chinese business delegation has expressed interest in investing \$1 billion to establish Pakistan's first fully integrated pharmaceutical and medical ecosystem in Karachi's Dhabeji Economic Zone. This investment reflects the growing economic ties between Pakistan and China.

United Kingdom

- Britain announced a £50 million aid package for vulnerable Syrians, including £30 million for immediate support and £20 million for neighboring countries. The aid will assist with food, healthcare, infrastructure, and refugee assistance through U.N. channels.
- Britain, Italy, and Japan have agreed to create a joint company to develop an advanced stealth jet, the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP). This project aims to replace the Eurofighter and Japan's F-2 fighter jets by 2040, with each country holding a one-third stake in the new company.

United States

- U.S. President-elect Donald Trump invited Chinese President Xi Jinping and other foreign leaders to his inauguration, but experts believe Xi is unlikely to attend, given historical precedents.
- The City of London has approved a 73-floor skyscraper, 1 Undershaft, matching the Shard's height at 309.6 meters. The tower, revising a 2016 plan, aims to address post-pandemic office demand but faces criticism for its impact on the surrounding area.

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