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INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Andhra Pradesh

- Andhra Pradesh is considering replicating Karnataka's successful Shakti Scheme, offering free bus travel for women. A delegation, including key ministers, visited Karnataka's KSRTC headquarters to study the scheme's impact and potential benefits for women, students, and laborers.
- Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu emphasized Visakhapatnam's potential as the maritime gateway of Andhra Pradesh, urging support from the Eastern Naval Command to realize goals like becoming a drone technology hub.

Delhi

- Delhi's Kashmere Gate now features a prepaid auto stand to ease traffic congestion, inaugurated by LG VK Saxena. The opening of Kranti Udyan, a 10-acre park, is part of broader efforts to enhance recreational spaces and infrastructure.
- Dense fog in Delhi for the second consecutive morning led to zero visibility, causing 81 train delays and 15 flight diversions. The fog, accompanied by calm winds, persisted, impacting operations at Indira Gandhi International Airport.

Goa

- The Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority fined Rs 77.9 lakh for constructing a building within 50m of the CRZ area in Arambol. The structure, located in a no-development zone, was found to cause environmental damage.
- South Goa has published a sand mining survey report, identifying five feasible mining zones along the Zuari River. Public feedback is invited before finalizing the regions, based on detailed environmental assessments.

Gujarat

- The Khel Mahakumbh 3.0 was inaugurated with a record 71.30 lakh registrations across 39 sports disciplines. CM Bhupendra Patel highlighted the government's commitment to promoting sports culture and building world-class infrastructure in Gujarat.
- The Gujarat government promoted 40 IAS officers, effective from Jan 1, with promotions mostly in situ. Notable promotions include Vatsala Vasudeva and D Thara to the rank of additional chief secretary.

Haryana

- Haryana's sex ratio at birth in 2024 dropped to 910 girls per 1,000 boys, marking its lowest in eight years. This decline highlights ongoing social biases and challenges in addressing female foeticide despite government initiatives.
- Haryana police have enforced Section 163 of BNS around the Khanauri Border to prevent large gatherings for a farmer-led Mahapanchayat. A heavy security presence of 21 police and paramilitary companies has been deployed to maintain law and order.

Himachal Pradesh

- Baddi ranks as the fourth most polluted city in India, with an AQI of 366, surpassing cities like Delhi and Noida. The ongoing 4-laning of Baddi-Nalagarh highway contributes to dust pollution, worsening air quality and posing health risks.
- Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu inaugurated and laid the foundation for four development projects worth Rs 40.84 crore in Jubbal-Kotkhai. These include an HPMC CA store, a Mini-Secretariat building, and a Trauma Centre for Kotkhai.

Karnataka

- The Karnataka government has announced a 15% bus fare hike across state-owned transport corporations, including BMTC and KSRTC. The revised fares range from Rs 3 to Rs 115, with variations based on distance, and the changes apply to all bus categories, including luxury fleets.
- In 2024, 23,380 farmers in the Belagavi district applied online for MGNREGA jobs, reflecting a rise in interest in individual agricultural work. The zilla panchayat's awareness drive and promotion of digital platforms contributed to the increased online applications.

Upcoming News/Events

Andhra Pradesh

- Vijayawada's Regional Passport Office has introduced new initiatives to improve passport services, including extra appointments every Wednesday to meet public demand. Last year, over 3.2 lakh passports were issued, with the office recognized for its exceptional service in 2023-24.
- The 'Dokka Sitamma Mid-Day Meal' scheme, launched in Kurnool, will benefit 1.48 lakh students in Andhra Pradesh's government junior colleges. Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand inaugurated the scheme at B Camp and shared a meal with students.

Delhi

- Aiming to create a "Delhi Bird Atlas," 37 birding teams are surveying 10% of Delhi's area to map species and their habitats, with the atlas expected by December 2025. The initiative, led by experienced birders, involves volunteers and the Delhi Bird Foundation.
- The PWD will revamp a 4-km stretch of the Ring Road from Punjabi Bagh to Prembari Pul, with recarpeting and repairs set to be completed in four months at a cost of ₹16.77 crore. Work will be carried out in phases to minimize disruptions.

Goa

- Goa's Chief Minister Pramod Sawant announced a Rs 28,000 crore demand for development projects before the 16th Finance Commission. Various departments, including tourism, health, and public works, have submitted proposals with specific fund allocations.
- Goa's police stations will feature QR codes for public feedback on police conduct, improving transparency and accountability. Chief Minister Sawant also launched the Bhashini Mobile App for better communication with locals and tourists.

Gujarat

- The Gujarat health department launched a WhatsApp number for PM-JAY complaints after two patients died due to botched surgeries. The service allows beneficiaries to upload documents or raise queries, aiming to restore trust in the scheme.
- The Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board has initiated action after concerns about dummy schools were raised. A circular was issued to district education officers to identify such institutions, but previous efforts in 2023 yielded no results.

Haryana

- Haryana has declared a winter break for all private and government schools from January 1 to January 15, 2025. Schools will reopen on January 16, 2025, with board exam students attending for practicals as per the schedule.
- Haryana's DTCP has revised EDC and IDC payment norms to boost stalled projects and recover dues. Developers or new entities can now pay outstanding charges upfront for migration or change of developer before final approval.

Himachal Pradesh

- HPSEBL will withdraw the subsidy providing free electricity up to 125 units for domestic consumers, effective from January 1, 2025. This includes Group A and B employees, pensioners, and military personnel, both state and central government employees.
- Water supply in Shimla will be disrupted for two days (5th & 6th Jan) due to the shutdown of the 66 kV Jutogh-Gumma-Sanj-Hulli transmission line for maintenance work.

Karnataka

- Karnataka's social welfare department has introduced a pilot project requiring wardens to post daily updates on meals served at schools and hostels via social media. The initiative aims for greater transparency and accountability in meal quality.
- Karnataka's caste census report, submitted by the State Commission for Backward Classes, could be discussed in the next cabinet meeting. Vokkaligas and Lingayats have expressed concerns about the survey.

INDIA UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Madhya Pradesh

- Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav emphasized the state's development, focusing on key sectors like youth, farmers, and women. He inaugurated 198 projects and highlighted irrigation schemes benefiting several regions.
- Protests over Union Carbide waste disposal in Pithampur forced at least 80 industries to shut, causing significant production losses. Locals clashed with police, voicing concerns over the incineration of 337 metric tonnes of waste.

Mumbai

- Construction at 78 sites in Borivali East and Byculla may resume within 24 hours as air quality improves, while Navy Nagar and Shivaji Nagar remain under observation. The suspension was imposed under GRAP-4 due to poor AQI.
- Maharashtra attracted ₹1.13 lakh crore FDI in the first half of FY 2024-25, accounting for 31.48% of India's total FDI and continuing its 5-year top position, says CM Devendra Fadnavis.

Pune

- The Pune RTO issued 2,90,321 driving licenses in 2024, up from 2,77,904 in 2023, with permanent licenses rising to 1,39,851 from 1,32,944. International licenses also increased slightly from 5,110 in 2023 to 5,184 in 2024.
- The PCMC Farmers' Street, launched at Linear Garden, Pimple Saudagar, offers fresh organic produce and cultural activities. The event, celebrating sustainability and community, runs from January 4-5 with free entry.

Punjab

- Dense fog reduced visibility to zero in parts of Punjab and Haryana on Saturday 4 January, affecting Amritsar, Ludhiana, Patiala, and other areas. Cold weather conditions persisted, with Narnaul recording the lowest temperature at 4.4°C.

Rajasthan

- Conservationists are pleased with the Centre's decision to ban Nimesulide formulations, following research linking the drug to vulture deaths. The ban will protect raptors at major sites like Jorbeer and Keru, which host the highest raptor population in Asia.
- RIICO board approved a direct land allotment scheme for projects linked to MoUs signed at the Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit. Entrepreneurs can apply online for land allotments, selecting up to three plots at reserved rates in identified industrial areas.

Tamil Nadu

- Tamil Nadu has achieved a 100% transition rate from primary to upper primary, with girls' rate also reaching 100%. Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi criticized the Union government for withholding SSA funds to force the three-language formula on the state.
- The Tamil Nadu government has announced a Pongal bonus for C and D group employees, teachers, and pensioners. C and D group employees will receive up to Rs 3,000, while pensioners and others will receive a Rs 500 gift, costing the state Rs 163.81 crore.

Telangana

- The Telangana government's decision to make all orders available in Telugu has been praised for promoting the language, though doubts about its implementation persist. Previous guidelines issued for the language's use in official communications had little impact, raising concerns over the current order's effectiveness.

Uttar Pradesh

- Uttar Pradesh has set up 1,240 shelters and distributed over 3 lakh blankets to protect people from the cold. The government is ensuring safety, especially for women, and enhancing public awareness through digital displays.
- Three new roads totaling about 8.3 km will be built under the Chief Minister Green Road Infrastructure Development Scheme (CM Grid Scheme) in Kanpur. The proposal, including a 3.2 km road from Ghantaghar to Noronha Crossing, has been sent for state approval with an estimated cost of Rs 54.40 crore.

Upcoming News/Events

Madhya Pradesh

- Indore's metro rail services may begin this month or in February, pending safety approval. The initial 5.90 km route will operate with three-coach trains, expanding as demand increases.
- The MP gov't awaits central approval for its first loan of 2025, a routine procedure for all states. The loan amount will be determined based on the state's financial health and debt burden.

Mumbai

- Central Railway plans to install Speed-Sensing Devices on the Kasara-Igatpuri and Karjat-Lonavala ghat sections to improve train punctuality and safety, reducing 20-25 minute delays caused by halts on steep gradients. The proposal awaits Railway Board approval.
- Mumbai's metro network expansion will double its pace, increasing from 22-25 km to 50 km annually, announced CM Devendra Fadnavis after reviewing MMRDA projects. Metro-3's second phase (BKC-Worli) will open in three months, with full operations to Colaba by May 2025.

Pune

- Maharashtra's health department has mandated inspections of all registered hospitals to ensure compliance with tariffs, waste management, and fire NOCs. District teams will conduct checks under directives issued by public health authorities.
- The Pune Municipal Corporation has requested 15 state government plots for developmental projects like roads, water tanks, and river beautification. Land for water infrastructure will be free, while others require payment at market rates.

Punjab

- Punjab has written to Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, seeking intervention to resolve the farmers' protest at the Punjab-Haryana border. The letter also addresses the hunger strike of Jagjit Singh Dallewal, emphasizing the Supreme Court's recent order.

Rajasthan

- The Bhajan Lal Sharma-led cabinet in Rajasthan decided to scrap 9 of the 17 districts created by the previous Ashok Gehlot government, merging them back into original divisions. Budgets will be allocated for infrastructure in the eight retained districts, and changes will be implemented within a month.

Tamil Nadu

- Tamil Nadu government has announced a five-day holiday from January 14 to 19, 2025, for schools, colleges, and government offices to celebrate Pongal. January 17 has been added as an additional holiday due to requests from various sections of the state.
- Tamil Nadu may soon surpass Andhra Pradesh to claim the position of having the second-longest coastline in India. This change is due to new measurement methods for coastal accretion and erosion, with Gujarat still holding the longest coastline.

Telangana

- Telangana and Andhra Pradesh plan to apply for GI tags for a range of products in 2025. Telangana's list includes Hyderabad pearls and Armur turmeric, while AP targets items like Madhavamala wood carvings and Polavaram sarees.
- Telangana's clean energy goals, including green hydrogen and renewable energy, depend on a stable supply of critical minerals, said Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka. He emphasized the role of collaborations like the Australia-India Critical Minerals Research Hub in achieving these objectives.

Uttar Pradesh

- Uttar Pradesh's Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyam Vikas Abhiyan initiative aims to economically empower youth with interest-free loans to foster entrepreneurship. CM Yogi Adityanath will distribute loan documents to 25,000 beneficiaries on UP Diwas, with plans to create one lakh jobs annually.
- The Kanpur-Lucknow Expressway, opening this year, will cut travel time between the cities from 3 hours to 35-45 minutes. Spanning 63 km, it connects Lucknow's Shaheed Path to Nawabganj in Kanpur, enhancing regional connectivity.

GLOBAL UPDATE

Highlights of this week

Africa

- Ghana's parliament narrowly passed a provisional budget of 68.1 billion cedis (\$4.65 billion), averting a government shutdown. Incoming President John Dramani Mahama, who won the December election, will assume office next week.
- Ethiopia's defense minister visited Somalia to strengthen bilateral ties and discuss the AU peacekeeping mission, marking the first such visit since tensions over Ethiopia's naval base plan in Somaliland.

America

- A second group of 75 Guatemalan soldiers arrived in Haiti on Saturday, January 4, raising the total to 150 troops supporting a UN-backed mission to restore order amid gang violence. The reinforcements are from Guatemala's military police unit.
- Peru declared a 90-day environmental emergency on its northern coast after a crude oil spill by Petroperu impacted 10,000 sq. meters of seawater, seven beaches, and local wildlife. The move aims to ensure recovery and mitigate contamination.

China

- China establishes its first national sports arbitration center in Beijing to resolve sports disputes and safeguard athletes' rights. The center aims to professionalize sports governance following recent corruption cases.
- India expresses concerns to China about a hydropower dam project on the Yarlung Zangbo river in Tibet, fearing impact on downstream regions. India urges China to ensure no harm to downstream states of the Brahmaputra.

Europe

- Poland assumed the EU presidency amid tensions with Hungary and a challenging global context, including the return of Donald Trump to the White House and escalating security concerns. Poland aims to strengthen European policy, particularly on security, as it navigates these complex issues.

Middle East

- Hamas has approved a list of 34 hostages for potential exchange with Israel. The deal depends on an agreement for an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a permanent ceasefire. The announcement came from a Hamas official under condition of anonymity.
- Syria has imposed temporary restrictions on Lebanese crossing the border, limiting entry for those without residency or family ties in Syria. The move is linked to a dispute over the treatment of Syrians by Lebanese authorities. Five Lebanese soldiers were also wounded in clashes during the tensions.

Pakistan

- UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan discussed enhancing collaboration with Pakistan in mining, minerals, and agriculture sectors during a visit to Rahimyar Khan. Both leaders emphasized economic, political, and cultural ties, highlighting shared interests in regional stability, climate change, and global cooperation.

United Kingdom

- Britain's plan to overhaul costly care for older and disabled adults will not be implemented until 2028 at the earliest. The Labour government has initiated a three-year independent review to propose changes, with a focus on creating a National Care Service.

United States

- Donald Trump has appointed Stanley Woodward, a lawyer who has defended several of his associates, to join his White House legal team. Woodward will serve as an assistant to the president and senior counselor, working with Chief of Staff Susie Wiles.
- The U.S. has announced nearly \$6 billion in additional aid to Ukraine, including \$2.5 billion in military assistance and \$3.4 billion in budget support. The move comes as President Biden seeks to strengthen Ukraine's position before the incoming Trump administration.

Upcoming News/Events

Africa

- A volcano in Ethiopia's Afar region near Awash Fentale shows signs of activity, prompting authorities to evacuate residents to temporary shelters. Officials are monitoring the situation closely as the region has experienced recent earthquakes and tremors.
- Nigeria will establish a National Credit Guarantee Company in May 2025 to boost credit access for businesses and individuals, President Bola Tinubu announced. The initiative aims to strengthen the financial system, support underserved groups, and drive economic growth.

America

- Venezuelan opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez plans to visit Uruguay, Panama, and Argentina as part of a regional tour ahead of Nicolas Maduro's January 10 inauguration. Gonzalez, living in Spain due to an arrest warrant, aims to rally support after claiming victory in the July election.
- Brazilian President Lula da Silva discussed advancing a Mercosur-UAE trade deal with Emirati leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, expressing optimism for a partnership within months. The two leaders spoke by phone for 30 minutes.

China

- China has announced 15 measures to boost its western provinces, focusing on enhancing logistical infrastructure like aviation hubs, bonded zones, and ports. Key cities include Chengdu, Chongqing, Kunming, Xi'an, and Urumqi.
- Chinese authorities urge safety assessments to identify operational hazards in aviation after the deadliest year since 2018. The Civil Aviation Administration of China has warned airlines and adjusted flight routes following fatal incidents.

Europe

- Farmers' convoys have restarted protests in Paris over concerns about unfair competition and excessive regulation, fueled by a new EU-Mercosur trade deal. They also plan to meet with Prime Minister Bayrou on Jan. 13 to express their grievances.
- Moldova faces a security crisis as its Transnistria region, reliant on Russian gas, experiences severe shortages, leading to factory closures, power blackouts, and heating restrictions. Prime Minister Dorin Recean criticized Russia's role in destabilizing the region, warning of the isolation faced by Moscow's allies.

Middle East

- Syria's new Islamist rulers have called for the U.S. to lift sanctions, citing their hindrance to Syria's recovery. The request came during a visit to Qatar, with Syria's Foreign Minister emphasizing that the sanctions now impact the Syrian people rather than just the Assad regime.

Pakistan

- The OIC's COMSTECH and the University of Lahore have launched a scholarship program for Bangladeshi students, aiming to strengthen ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan. The program offers tuition remission, airfare, an honorarium, and free lodging for applicants aged 22-45 globally.

United Kingdom

- British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has urged regulators to remove growth barriers to boost the economy. He requested pro-growth initiatives from over ten regulators, including financial, competition, and sectoral bodies, by mid-January.

United States

- The U.S. Commerce Department is considering new rules to restrict or ban Chinese drones over national security concerns, citing potential risks of remote manipulation by adversaries. Public comments are being sought until March 4 to finalize the rules, which could mirror vehicle restrictions.
- The U.S. plans an \$8 billion arms sale to Israel, including munitions for fighter jets, helicopters, and artillery. Some deliveries will come from U.S. stock, while most will take years. The sale is part of continued support for Israel amid the Gaza conflict.

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