



● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

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● ECOLOGY

India, U.S. to double bilateral trade by 2030

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



India and the U.S. have agreed to negotiate the first phase of a trade agreement by autumn 2025, with India planning to increase energy purchases from the U.S. to address trade deficit concerns. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral meeting with President Donald Trump in Washington, Mr. Trump confirmed that the U.S. had approved the extradition of Tahawwur Rana, linked to the 2008 Mumbai attacks. He also offered to assist India with its border issues with China.

In defense, the U.S. is working towards providing India with F-35 stealth fighters and has agreed to supply six additional P-8I Maritime Patrol aircraft. Both nations will enhance cooperation under the U.S.-India COMPACT framework, focusing on military partnership, trade, and technology. They will also expand energy trade, including small modular nuclear reactors, and operationalize

the U.S.-India 123 Civil Nuclear Agreement.

Technology collaboration will be strengthened under the TRUST initiative, replacing the previous ICET framework, with a focus on semiconductor manufacturing and supply chain resilience. The two sides will also deepen multilateral engagements, reaffirming Quad cooperation and progressing initiatives under the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) and I2U2.

On immigration, both leaders agreed to streamline legal mobility for students and professionals while addressing illegal migration and human trafficking. Mr. Trump is expected to visit India later this year for the Quad Summit.

U.S. pushes for more defence deals, offers F-35 fighter jet

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The U.S. will significantly increase military sales to India, including offering the F-35 fighter jet, President Donald Trump announced during a joint press conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri clarified that formal procurement procedures had not yet begun.

Defense cooperation was a major focus of the joint statement, with new initiatives introduced, including U.S.-India TRUST, COMPACT, and the Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA). Both nations agreed to review their arms transfer regulations, including ITAR, to streamline defense trade, technology exchange, and maintenance. Negotiations for a Reciprocal Defence Procurement (RDP) agreement will begin this year to align procurement systems and facilitate mutual defense supplies.

The leaders committed to accelerating defense technology cooperation, with Mr. Modi acknowledging the U.S.'s key role in India's defense preparedness.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

CRPF to probe Manipur fratricide, urges personnel to contact helpline

INTERNAL SECURITY



Following a tragic incident in Manipur where a CRPF jawan killed two colleagues before taking his own life, CRPF Director General G.P. Singh emphasized the availability of a grievance helpline for personnel and families of martyrs, which is being further strengthened.

The incident occurred when jawan Sanjay Kumar, reportedly suffering from hypertension, opened fire after an argument with a senior over a duty delay, injuring eight others before dying by suicide. An inquiry has been ordered, with authorities investigating possible personal issues.

The Union Home Ministry reported that 55,555 CAPF personnel resigned or took voluntary retirement between 2020 and 2024, while 730 died by suicide. The government maintains that CAPF personnel generally work eight-hour shifts.

Local militant recruitment down in Kashmir; Pak. agents driving terror activities: police

INTERNAL SECURITY

The number of youth joining militant organizations in Jammu and Kashmir has significantly declined, with only one new recruit recorded in 2025 so far. For the first time in 15 years, local militant strength has fallen to single digits, with fewer than 10 active local militants.

Recruitment figures have steadily dropped, from 160 in 2020 to around 20 in 2024. The decline follows the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, which initially saw a spike in recruitment but later led to a downward trend. Security officials attribute the shift to cross-border influence, with Pakistani handlers now driving most terror activities.

The only recruit this year, from Kulgam, was confirmed based on intelligence. The last major rise in militancy was influenced by Burhan Wani (2013-2016) and Afzal Guru's hanging (2013). Officials note that 90% of militants recruited between 2019-2020 have been killed.

Panda to head 31-member select panel on I-T Bill

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

A Lok Sabha select committee was formed on Friday to examine the Income-Tax Bill, 2025, with BJP MP Baijayant Jay Panda appointed as chairman. The 31-member panel includes 17 MPs from the ruling NDA and 13 from the Opposition, along with one MP from Mizoram's Zoram People's Movement.

The committee must submit its report by the first day of the Monsoon session. The Budget Session ends on April 4, and the Monsoon session is expected in July.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Bill on Thursday and requested its referral to the committee. The Bill aims to simplify tax terminology, replacing terms like "assessment year" with "tax year", and removing complex provisos and explanations.



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Trump ruffles feathers with mediation offer to ease India-China tension

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



The Indian government rejected U.S. President Donald Trump's offer to mediate in India-China border tensions, reaffirming its bilateral approach to resolving disputes. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri emphasized that India handles such issues independently, following Mr. Modi's 24-hour U.S. visit.

During a joint press conference, Trump sidestepped a question on India's role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, instead suggesting China could help end the war. He also offered to assist in India-China border tensions, stating, "If I could be of help, I'd love to help." In response, Modi reiterated that India is on the side of peace.

Trump also discussed denuclearization talks with China and Russia, while dismissing the BRICS grouping, claiming "BRICS is dead" due to his tariff threats. He

mentioned plans for a trade corridor from India to Israel and Italy, though ongoing conflicts have stalled the initiative.

Meanwhile, China and Pakistan strongly criticized U.S. support for India, particularly the offer of F-35 fighter jets and Indo-Pacific initiatives. China warned against "bloc politics," while Pakistan expressed concerns over regional military imbalances.

Modi shared 'concerns' about Bangladesh with Trump: Foreign Secretary

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed concerns over the evolving situation in Bangladesh during his meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump, as confirmed by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri. India hopes for a constructive relationship with Bangladesh's interim government, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, which took charge after Sheikh Hasina's government fell on August 5, 2024.

At a joint media interaction, Trump denied U.S. "deep state" involvement in Hasina's removal, while Modi did not comment on the issue. Hasina had alleged U.S. pressure to surrender St. Martin's Island, though the Biden administration did not confirm these claims.

Misri stated that Modi shared India's concerns with Trump, emphasizing the need for a stable and cooperative relationship with Bangladesh. The interim government has not yet responded to these remarks.

The U.S. has advocated for fair elections in Bangladesh, with former Ambassador Peter Haas actively promoting transparency. Recently, U.S. Charge d'Affaires Tracey Ann Jacobson met Bangladeshi officials, including legal and military leaders, to discuss judicial reforms, counterterrorism, and development.

India may review Singapore's call for raising flight quota

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



India is now open to reviewing Singapore's request for a liberalised air service agreement (ASA), which could allow more flights and expanded airport access—a shift from its previous reluctance.

A Civil Aviation Ministry official stated that India may revise bilateral agreements, but Indian airlines must first fully utilise existing seat capacity. ASAs define flight frequencies, seat allocations, and permitted airports between two countries. Post-pandemic travel demand has led to requests from Singapore, UAE, Qatar, and Turkiye for more seat allocations, but India has resisted to protect Indian airlines from losing passengers to foreign carriers like Emirates and Qatar Airways, which route traffic through their hubs.

While Air India is expanding direct international routes, the government remains firm on not increasing quotas for West Asian carriers. However, Singapore Airlines and Scoot have fully utilised their seat allocations on Indian routes, while Indian

carriers are nearing their limits.

The current 2013 agreement allows 28,700 seats per week between seven major Indian airports, plus unlimited seating to 18 Indian destinations under ASEAN agreements. Singapore's President Tharman Shanmugaratnam highlighted high demand and full flights, supporting an expansion.

Singapore Airlines recently acquired a 25.1% stake in Air India, strengthening its Indian presence. The review of Singapore's request coincides with the expected April 2025 opening of Noida International Airport, which aims to attract top global markets.

Modi, Shah, and Rahul set to meet on Monday to choose next CEC

POIITY & GOVERNANCE

With Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar set to retire on February 18, a three-member selection committee, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will meet on February 17 to choose his successor. The committee includes Rahul Gandhi (Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha) and Home Minister Amit Shah.

This will be the first CEC appointment under the new Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023. Previously, the President appointed the CEC based on government recommendations.

The Supreme Court's March 2023 ruling had mandated a selection panel including the PM, the Leader of Opposition, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI) until Parliament enacted a law. However, the new law replaced the CJI with a Union Minister, strengthening the government's role in the appointment process.

A search committee, headed by Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, has prepared a five-person shortlist for the selection panel. If Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar is promoted to CEC, the panel may also appoint a new Election Commissioner.

The Supreme Court is set to hear pleas challenging the legality of the new law on February 19, a day after Rajiv Kumar's retirement.

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Wholesale inflation almost unchanged at 2.31% in Jan.

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT



India's wholesale price inflation slightly eased to 2.31% in January from 2.37% in December, as a slowdown in food inflation was nearly balanced by a rise in manufactured goods prices, according to government data.

Fuel and power prices remained in deflation, declining 2.8% year-on-year, though the fall was less than December's 3.8% drop. The Wholesale Food Index rose 7.5%, cooling from 8.9% in November and December. Manufactured products inflation increased from 2.14% in December to 2.51% in January. Month-on-month, wholesale prices declined by 0.45%, led by a 2.3% drop in food prices, though fuel, power,

and manufactured products saw minor price rises.

Key Food Price Changes

Vegetables: 8.35% costlier, with potatoes up 74.3%, onions 28.3%, and fruits 15.1%. Wheat prices: Up 9.75%; paddy and cereals rose 6.2% and 7.3%, respectively. Edible oils: Wholesale prices surged 33.1%.

Crackdown against extortion rings will be intensified: Manipur Police

INTERNAL SECURITY



With President's Rule imposed in Manipur, police have intensified their crackdown on extortion rings, now operating without political interference.

Since February 1, at least 60 individuals linked to underground outfits and armed groups have been arrested, with 250 arrests made in the past six months for extortion-related crimes. Extortion and abductions have increased since the ethnic violence began on May 3, 2023. On January 26, the Manipur government set up a dedicated Integrated Anti-Extortion Cell to tackle the growing threat.

Extortionists have been threatening individuals, including government officials, via calls, messages, or letters from unlawful groups. Police are also arresting

those who fraudulently activate SIM cards used by extortion gangs to make demands.

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Dealing with China's weaponisation of e-supply chains

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

China has restricted travel and equipment exports for engineers and technicians working at Foxconn's facilities in India, affecting Apple's manufacturing ambitions in the country. This move is seen as part of geopolitical competition, with China leveraging its dominance in advanced machinery and skilled labor to slow India's growth in global electronics production.

China's Strategic Motive

- **China Plus One Strategy:** As global corporations diversify beyond China, India, Vietnam, and Mexico are emerging as key alternatives.
- **Restricting Knowledge Transfer:** China aims to curb the skills transfer from its engineers to Indian workers.
- **Supply Chain Disruptions:** By limiting specialized equipment, China seeks to maintain its leverage in manufacturing negotiations.

India's Response & Economic Push

- **Apple-Foxconn Growth:** India has rapidly expanded Apple's supply chain, assembling \$14 billion worth of iPhones in FY 2024.
- **PLI Scheme:** The Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme has seen increased funding to boost electronics manufacturing, with Apple's suppliers receiving ₹6,600 crore.
- **Policy Reforms:** The 2025 Union Budget has removed import taxes on key mobile components and capital goods for lithium-ion battery production.

Challenges & Future Strategy

Short-Term Solutions:

- India needs Apple and Foxconn's intervention to negotiate with China.

Long-Term Goals:

- Strengthen domestic component manufacturing.
- Develop ancillary industries and skill training.
- Encourage private capital for indigenous manufacturers.
- India must future-proof its manufacturing sector by reducing dependence on China, fostering domestic innovation, and building a self-sustaining supply chain.

The Teesta dam and the long shadow of climate change

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

An expert committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change has recommended the rebuilding of the Teesta-3 dam in Sikkim, which was destroyed by a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in October 2023. The flood, triggered by a moraine collapse at South Lhonak Lake, released 50 billion litres of water, causing over 100 deaths and impacting 80,000 people.

Climate Change and Glacial Risks

Global warming and soot pollution are accelerating Himalayan glacier melt, leading to the formation and expansion of glacial lakes. Between 2011 and 2024, the number of glacial lakes in the region increased by 10.8%, and their surface area grew by 33.7%. The risk of future GLOFs remains high, with experts warning that the moraine at South Lhonak Lake is still unstable.

Concerns over rebuilding Teesta-3

The committee justified reconstruction based on the dam's previous commercial viability and the intact condition of power-generation equipment. However, environmental activists and experts have raised concerns, citing: Seismic and landslide risks.

- Historical legal challenges due to compliance and corruption issues.
- Unreliable climate models used for the new dam's design.

Proposed Safety Features in Teesta-3

- A stronger concrete-only structure.
- A spillway three times larger than before.

- An early-warning system for floods.

Designed based on a “worst-case scenario” modelled by the India Meteorological Department.

Expert Criticism & Alternative Perspectives

- Experts argue that rainfall alone cannot predict GLOFs, as the 2023 flood was likely caused by geological factors, not heavy rain.
- The current models fail to account for erosion, sediment transport, and landslide interactions, making flood predictions highly uncertain.
- Social security measures for affected residents need more focus, as disaster recovery cannot rely solely on infrastructure solutions.

The Bigger Picture: Risk vs. Commercial Viability

- The reconstruction should not be justified solely on economic grounds but should prioritize public safety and resilience.
- Risk assessment should include:
 - A clear ‘unacceptable risk’ threshold.
 - A response plan for future disasters.
- Hydropower pricing that accounts for safety measures, rather than externalizing risks to communities.
- As climate change multiplies risks, the long-term sustainability of rebuilding in disaster-prone areas remains questionable.

The decision to rebuild Teesta-3 should be reconsidered within a risk-minimization framework, rather than prioritizing commercial benefits. Experts emphasize that climate adaptation should involve relocation strategies, as engineering solutions alone cannot counteract climate change-driven risks.

Peace imperatives

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

With the BJP unable to appoint a successor to N. Biren Singh and the Assembly not convened for six months, President’s Rule has been imposed in Manipur, keeping the Assembly under suspended animation. Since mid-2023, the Union Home Ministry has controlled law and order, but ethnic violence since May 2023 persists.

Opportunities under President’s Rule

The Union government can now focus on easing tensions and addressing the displacement of over 60,000 people, many of whom suffer trauma and loss of livelihoods. It also provides an opportunity for dialogue between warring communities, involving legislators committed to peace.

Challenges: Militarisation & Insurgency

Civil society has been militarised, with armed groups looting weapons from police stations and branding themselves as “village volunteers.” Attempts to disarm them have failed, and insurgents from both the Indian and Myanmar conflicts have escalated violence. A coordinated effort by the government, armed forces, and civil society is needed to disarm these groups and address insurgency concerns.

Failures of the Biren Singh Government

The previous government failed to tackle violence due to perceived bias and stigmatization of the Kuki-Zo community, leading to distrust. The Home Ministry must now take urgent steps to restore peace and move away from this divisive legacy.

Way Forward

While elections should ideally be held soon, they must be preceded by efforts to restore law and order and eliminate threats from violent groups. The primary focus should be on stabilizing the situation, ensuring security, and fostering reconciliation before any electoral process resumes.

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Catching a break

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

India's consumer price inflation dropped to 4.3% in January, nearing the RBI's 4% target, thanks to a strong winter vegetable harvest that reduced food inflation to 6%, a five-month low. Urban inflation fell to 3.9%, while rural inflation moderated to 4.6%, offering some relief to households, especially the urban middle class. If inflation remains stable, it could boost consumer spending and economic growth.

Concerns amid Positive Trends

- The rupee's 4% depreciation against the U.S. dollar could increase imported inflation, particularly for fuel and edible oils, which make up 60% of India's consumption.
- Edible oil prices surged 15.6% in January, with wholesale prices up 33.1%, indicating further retail price hikes.
- Weather uncertainties during the summer and monsoon could reverse recent gains in food prices.

Policy Considerations

- The RBI may delay rate cuts if inflation risks rise.
- The government should consider reducing indirect taxes (fuel levies, import duties, GST) to ease price pressures on households, particularly the most vulnerable sections.



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