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Many of Trump's priorities work for India: Jaishankar

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, speaking at Chatham House in London, highlighted how the shifting geopolitical order aligns with India's interests, particularly under U.S. President Donald Trump's administration. He noted that Trump's approach to multi-polarity benefits India, especially in areas like energy, technology, and connectivity.

Jaishankar emphasized the importance of the Quad (India, U.S., Australia, Japan) and noted that all members contribute fairly, avoiding burden-sharing disputes seen in NATO. He also pointed to U.S. openness towards collaborative connectivity initiatives like the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC) and the Indian Ocean Strategic Venture.

On energy, India appreciates Trump's policies that keep prices stable. In technology, the Trump administration's focus on innovation presents opportunities for India. Regarding trade, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is in Washington to negotiate a deal.

Jaishankar dismissed claims that BRICS nations are united against the U.S. dollar, stating that India supports dollar stability while promoting rupee internationalization. He acknowledged regional challenges due to a lack of dollar availability but stressed that India seeks economic globalization, not to undermine the dollar.

Trump previously threatened high tariffs on BRICS nations over currency policies, but Jaishankar clarified that BRICS countries hold diverse views on the dollar. He reaffirmed India's commitment to global economic stability.

26/11 accused says he will be tortured if sent to India

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Tahawwur Rana, accused in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, has filed an emergency application with the U.S. Supreme Court to halt his extradition to India, claiming he risks torture due to being a Muslim of Pakistani origin.

Rana, a 64-year-old Canadian national of Pakistani descent, is currently detained in Los Angeles. He is linked to David Coleman Headley, a key conspirator in the attacks.

Last month, U.S. President Donald Trump approved his extradition to India after the Supreme Court rejected Rana's review petition in January. Now, Rana seeks a stay on his extradition, arguing it violates U.S. law and the UN Convention Against Torture, citing fears of mistreatment in India.

'Health issues'

Tahawwur Rana's emergency application to the U.S. Supreme Court argues that his extradition to India would be a "de facto death sentence" due to severe medical conditions.

Citing medical records from July 2024, Rana claims to suffer from multiple life-threatening ailments, including past heart attacks, Parkinson's disease with cognitive decline, suspected bladder cancer, stage 3 chronic kidney disease, chronic asthma, and repeated COVID-19 infections.

The application asserts that his Pakistani origin, Muslim identity, past military service in Pakistan, and alleged involvement in the 2008 Mumbai attacks heighten the risk of torture in Indian custody, which could be fatal.

First CDS visit to Australia boosts cooperation on 'shared priorities'

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan's visit to Australia has strengthened defence cooperation, focusing on maritime domain awareness, reciprocal information sharing, and joint deployments, according to the Australian Defence Ministry.

This marks the first visit by an Indian CDS to Australia, where Gen. Chauhan was hosted by Australian Defence Chief Admiral David Johnston. Discussions centered on enhancing long-term defence collaboration and regional security.

Australia considers India a top-tier security partner, with both nations committed to a stable Indo-Pacific. Their partnership includes joint exercises across maritime, land, and air domains through bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral frameworks. Adm. Johnston reaffirmed

Australia's commitment to deepening defence ties and regional stability.

India, T.N. must help protect livelihood of fisher folk in north Sri Lanka: Colombo

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Sri Lankan Minister Bimal Rathnayake has urged the Indian and Tamil Nadu governments to take decisive action against illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters to protect the livelihoods of northern Sri Lankan fishermen.

Speaking in Parliament, Rathnayake acknowledged India's past support during Sri Lanka's war, economic crisis, and floods but emphasized that real help would be enforcing fishing laws to prevent livelihood losses for northern fishermen, who rely solely on fisheries.

The issue gained renewed attention after ITAK legislator Thurairasa Ravikaran raised it in Parliament, pleading for Indian and Sri Lankan authorities to safeguard local fishermen. For over a decade, Sri Lankan fishermen have protested Tamil Nadu's use of bottom-trawling, which depletes fish stocks and threatens their survival.

In 2024, over 540 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy for illegal fishing, with more than 100 arrests in the first two months of 2025. Recently, former Northern Provincial Council Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran urged Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin to curb bottom-trawling.

Maharashtra to start media monitoring centre to identify 'misleading reports'

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Maharashtra government has approved a ₹10 crore media monitoring centre to track and analyze news across print, electronic, and digital platforms.

As per a government resolution issued on Wednesday, the centre will collect and evaluate news content, identifying both factual and misleading reports. It will provide factual analyses and issue real-time clarifications for inaccurate or negative coverage.

The initiative aims to ensure accurate and timely dissemination of government-related information and create a centralized system to monitor how its activities are reported and perceived by the public.

Operational aspects

The Maharashtra government's media monitoring centre will operate daily from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. under the Directorate General of Information and Public Relations (DGIPR). The project has received full administrative and financial approval.

A professional consultant, appointed through an e-tender process, will categorize government-related news into segments like positive, negative, departments, and individuals. For electronic media, hourly updates on news trends, mood, and tone will be provided.

The consultant's initial contract will last one year, with a possible extension to two years based on performance, but the total term will not exceed three years.

PM likely to visit Sri Lanka in April, launch solar power plant project

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Sri Lanka in early April, though no official confirmation has been made. Reports suggest he will hold bilateral meetings in Colombo and launch a joint solar power project in Sampur, Trincomalee.

Sources indicate Mr. Modi may transit through Colombo while attending the BIMSTEC summit in Thailand. His visit follows an invitation from Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who visited India in December 2024. Mr. Modi will be the first head of government to visit Sri Lanka after Dissanayake's election victory.

Key issues during discussions may include regional security, digital infrastructure, connectivity, energy projects, and the Palk Bay fisheries conflict. Mr. Modi previously visited Sri Lanka in 2015, 2017, and 2019.

Meanwhile, China's Pan Yue, director of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission, recently visited Sri Lanka for talks on ethnic reconciliation and bilateral cooperation in culture and education, though no official statements were issued.

Govt. launches AI Kosha, repository of data to build models and tools

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Union government has launched AI Kosha, a platform for non-personal datasets aimed at supporting artificial intelligence development. At launch, it contains 316 datasets, primarily for creating and validating language translation tools for Indian languages.

AI Kosha is part of the IndiaAI Mission, a ₹10,370 crore initiative with seven pillars. Last month, the government announced pooled GPU access for startups and academia under the Compute Capacity pillar.

Apart from translation, the platform includes datasets from Telangana's open data initiative, 2011 Census, satellite imagery, meteorological and pollution data, and health records.

More GPUs

IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced that the number of GPUs commissioned for shared access under the AI Kosha platform has increased from 10,000 to 14,000, with more to be added quarterly.

He also provided an update on India's effort to develop a home-grown foundational AI model, emphasizing growing interest from startups. The urgency has increased after China's DeepSeek successfully launched a similar model at a lower cost than U.S. firms like OpenAI and Google. Vaishnaw noted that the team is now focused on evaluating numerous applications for this initiative.

Government datasets

The Union government has previously attempted to aggregate public data to encourage its use by researchers, companies, and policymakers. The Open Governance Data platform (data.gov.in) currently hosts over 12,000 datasets from various government agencies. To facilitate this, Chief Data Officers have been appointed across Ministries and departments.

In 2018, a government committee explored the possibility of requiring private firms to share non-personal data (e.g., traffic data from ride-sharing apps) to assist start-ups and government policy. The Kris Gopalakrishnan-led committee submitted its report in 2020, but the proposal faced resistance from tech firms unwilling to share data. This discussion largely occurred before the rise of large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT.



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

—Benjamin Franklin

₹1 lakh crore fund to stimulate private sector research and development close to approval

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The government is finalizing a ₹1 lakh crore fund to boost private sector investment in core research and development (R&D). Unlike previous schemes, this initiative will provide low-interest, long-term loans to private companies for developing new products and intellectual property.

Universities and academic institutions cannot directly access these funds, but they may collaborate with private firms. Ajay Sood, Principal Scientific Adviser, described it as a "huge PLI (Production Linked Incentive) scheme for R&D."

Major weakness

India's R&D investment is less than 1% of GDP (0.65%), significantly lower than scientifically advanced countries (1.5%-3%). The private sector's contribution to R&D in India is 30%-36%, compared to 75% in the U.S. and 77% in China. To boost private sector R&D, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a ₹1 lakh crore fund in the 2024 interim Budget, with ₹20,000 crore allocated to the Department of Science and Technology (DST). The fund will be administered by the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF).

Key features of the scheme:

- Zero-interest, long-term loans for private companies developing commercial products.
- Not applicable for academic institutions or blue-sky research.
- Loan tenure of 5-7 years, evaluated by a professional body.
- Sector-agnostic (applicable to space, pharma, auto, energy, etc.) but excludes IT services.
- ANRF aims to build a ₹50,000 crore corpus, with ₹36,000 crore from non-government sources.

'₹29,208 cr. declared in foreign assets'

INTERNAL SECURITY

In assessment year 2024-25, 30,161 taxpayers declared ₹29,208 crore in foreign assets and ₹1,089.88 crore in additional income following a compliance and awareness campaign.

Key highlights:

- These taxpayers represent less than 1% of India's 10.4 crore taxpayers (2023-24).
- 6,734 individuals changed their residential status to 'non-resident'.
- The initiative is part of a 'Trust First' approach, promoting voluntary compliance instead of enforcement.
- 62% of approached taxpayers revised their ITRs to declare foreign assets.
- The number of voluntary declarations rose fourfold to 2,31,452 in 2024-25, compared to 2021-22.

Zelenskyy thanks Europe for supporting Kyiv after U.S. rift

INTERNAL SECURITY

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked EU leaders for their support as the bloc held crisis talks on addressing U.S. President Donald Trump's shift away from Kyiv and its allies.

Key points:

- The European summit follows a White House dispute that led the U.S. to cut military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine.
- French Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu pledged military intelligence support to Ukraine.
- European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen unveiled a plan to mobilise €800 billion to strengthen Europe's defence against Russia's threat.
- She called it a "watershed moment" for both Europe and Ukraine, emphasizing the need for self-protection and lasting peace.
- The EU's 27 nations are expected to approve expanded defence spending to boost security.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

Unblock Vikatan site once it temporarily removes cartoon: HC

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Madras High Court issued an interim order directing the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to restore public access to the Ananda Vikatan website, provided the publication temporarily removes a controversial cartoon depicting Prime Minister Narendra Modi shackled during a meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump.

Key points:

- Justice D. Bharatha Chakravarthy passed the order in response to a writ petition filed by Ananda Vikatan Productions and Ananda Vikatan Publishers, challenging the Ministry's February 25 decision to block the website.
- Senior counsel Vijay Narayan, representing the petitioners, argued that the cartoon did not violate any legal grounds for restricting public access.

Women in corporate leadership, the lived reality

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A ripple effect

The passage highlights the global significance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) hiring, particularly regarding women's participation in the corporate workforce. It emphasizes that:

- While DEI initiatives help increase women's entry into the workforce, they have not significantly improved leadership representation.
- In India, women constitute 35.9% of the workforce, but only 12.7% hold leadership roles as of 2024. Criticism of DEI as tokenism exists, but it can still provide women an entry point into leadership roles. Ultimately, career growth and normalization of women in leadership depend on their performance and merit.

The effect of legal mandates

The passage highlights the impact of legal mandates on increasing women's representation in corporate leadership in India. Key points include:

- Legal mandates such as the Companies Act, 2013, and SEBI's 2015 directive have driven gender diversity in corporate boards, increasing women directors in NSE 500 companies from 5% in 2011 to 18% in 2023.
- Women in leadership roles bring diverse perspectives, enhance decision-making, and improve corporate accountability, reducing risks.
- Their leadership style fosters stakeholder commitment, better governance, and strategic oversight while also boosting a company's reputation and ethical standing.
- Key benefits of women in leadership include stronger corporate governance, risk management, shareholder value, and environmental responsibility, contributing to economic parity and sustainable business growth.

What real change is

The true gender diversity in corporate leadership goes beyond token participation and requires real power and responsibility for women. Key points include:

- Women in leadership should hold key executive roles (C-Suite/KMPs), independent directorships, and chairperson positions rather than being appointed merely for optics.
- Equal remuneration with male counterparts is a crucial indicator of genuine gender inclusion.
- While progress has been made, companies and regulators must take further steps to ensure meaningful and impactful participation of women in corporate governance.
- Women's inclusion should be promoted for its intrinsic benefits rather than as a symbolic gesture to gain approval from stakeholders.

- Thought Arbitrage is conducting a 10-year study on women in corporate boards, analyzing 1,000 companies using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Beyond 'Beijing', unlocking a feminist future in India

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) is a comprehensive global framework for advancing women's rights. India's progress in gender equality reflects sustained policy efforts, grassroots movements, and the resilience of women and girls.

The 1995 Beijing Conference united leaders from 189 countries, including over 200 Indian women and the Indian government, to outline 12 critical areas of concern for women's equality.

These areas included poverty reduction, education, health, combating violence against women, economic empowerment, and decision-making influence.

Over the last three decades, India has made significant progress in many of these areas.

Visible evidence of change

India has made significant strides in women's empowerment across health, education, economic independence, and digital inclusion, aligned with the Beijing Platform for Action.

Key achievements include:

- Maternal health care initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana have increased institutional deliveries to 95% and reduced maternal mortality from 130 to 97 deaths per 1,00,000 births between 2014 and 2020.
- Over 56.5% of married women use modern contraceptives, enhancing reproductive health choices.
- The Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana has given millions of women free medical treatment access.
- Education programs like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and the National Education Policy 2020 have boosted girls' enrolments and promoted STEM fields.
- Economic empowerment through National Rural and Urban Livelihood Missions has connected 100 million women to financial networks and self-help groups, promoting entrepreneurship.
- Digital literacy initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan have trained over 35 million rural women, closing the digital gender divide.
- Gender-responsive budgeting has increased to 8.8% of the national budget (2025-26), with \$55.2 billion allocated to gender-specific programs, supported by UN Women.

The shadow of violence

India continues to address gender-based violence and promote women's leadership through various initiatives.

Key developments include:

- 770 One Stop Centres providing medical, legal, and psychological support to survivors.
- The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023 (effective July 2024) strengthens legal protections for women.
- Innovative responses like Odisha's blockchain-based system ensure confidential, swift support for survivors.
- Gender-responsive policing initiatives, such as the UN Population Fund-Rajasthan Police partnership, enhance survivor trust and justice access.
- Young women's leadership is growing, with projects like Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI) promoting women in STEM and the G20 TechEquity platform training thousands in emerging technologies.
- The Women's Reservation Bill (guaranteeing 33% legislative representation) builds on local governance successes, empowering 1.5 million women leaders, the largest cohort of women political leaders globally.

A guiding framework

The 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration highlights that gender equality is a global imperative, not just a women's issue.

India's progress in this area has been driven by strong government leadership and local and global partnerships. Moving forward, strengthening collaborations, investing in young women's leadership, and addressing systemic barriers will be crucial.

The Beijing Platform for Action continues to guide India's efforts toward gender equality, with a commitment to women-led development, financial inclusion, and social transformation. By doing so, India is setting a global benchmark for inclusive and sustainable growth.

Tyranny of numbers

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

At an all-party meeting chaired by Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin, a call was made to freeze the strength of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for 30 more years beyond 2026. While this may delay the issue, challenges in 2056 could be even more complex than those faced in 2002, when delimitation was last conducted.

Despite northern States reducing fertility rates, southern States still fear a decline in their seat share in the Lok Sabha. Additionally, there is significant electoral malapportionment within States. For example, Bangalore North has 3.2 million voters, while Udipi Chikmagalur has only 1.6 million.

A possible solution could be delimitation within States rather than nationwide, aligning with federal principles. However, this could still be unfair to large States with disproportionate population growth over the past 50 years.

The southern States fear an unfair loss of representation in the Lok Sabha if population strictly dictates seat allocation. The Constitution allows flexibility in apportionment, considering factors beyond just numbers. Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin warned that using the 2026 Census for delimitation could cause “indelible injustice” if Tamil Nadu’s seat share decreases.

The all-party meeting clarified that Tamil Nadu is not against delimitation, but progressive States should not be penalized. Given the contentious nature of delimitation, the Union government must build a consensus on the next Delimitation Commission’s terms. A transparent, inclusive process can help restore trust between the Centre and the non-BJP Opposition. Those pushing for early delimitation should also respect federalism and be flexible in addressing regional concerns.

Unsettling plans

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In his first joint address to Congress, President Donald Trump highlighted his administration’s aggressive trade policies, including tariffs on India, China, Canada, and Mexico. Amidst Democratic walkouts, he cited 100 executive orders and 400 actions as evidence of his decisive leadership, emphasizing lower energy costs and efforts to end the Ukraine conflict.

Trump reaffirmed the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris climate accords, WHO, and the U.N. Human Rights Council, while championing fossil fuel expansion with the slogan “drill, baby, drill”. He also criticized woke culture, particularly regarding transgender participation in women’s sports.

He praised Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) for uncovering billions in fraud, despite global concerns over funding cuts at USAID and lawsuits challenging DOGE’s access to confidential data.

Trump’s second-term policies reflect his conservative agenda, notably his push for smaller government. However, some policies may backfire. Tariffs, for instance, could increase consumer prices and drive inflation, despite warnings from economists, though MAGA supporters remain unfazed.

Similarly, pausing military aid to Ukraine may save resources but could weaken U.S. deterrence against Russian aggression in Europe. The 2024 election exposed deep partisan divisions on immigration, reproductive rights, and the economy, and Trump’s leadership does not indicate that this divide will be bridged in the next four years.

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