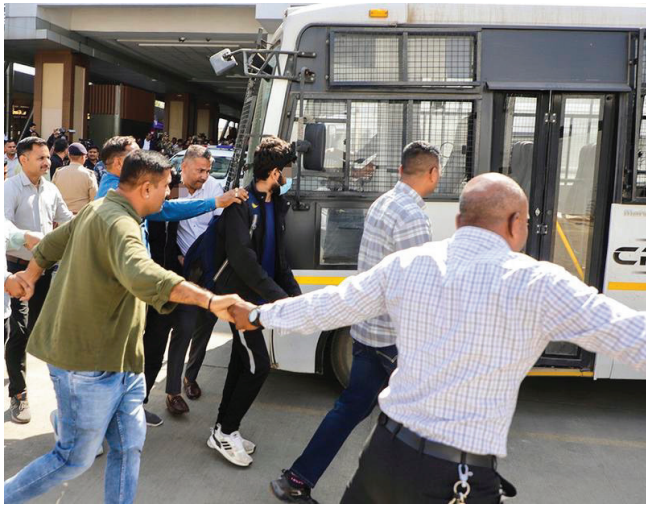




## Third U.S. aircraft touches down in Amritsar carrying more than 100 deportees

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



A U.S. aircraft carrying 112 undocumented Indian immigrants landed at Amritsar International Airport on Sunday night, following a similar deportation flight the previous week. The deportees, primarily from Punjab, Haryana, and Gujarat, reported being handcuffed and chained during the flight. The deportations are part of the U.S. government's crackdown on illegal immigration. Upon arrival, the deportees underwent immigration checks, and two individuals were arrested in connection with a 2023 murder case.

Many deportees had been misled by travel agents into using illegal migration routes through Mexico. The Punjab Police have launched an investigation into human trafficking, registering 10 cases against travel agents. Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann urged youth to avoid illegal migration, while opposition leaders criticized the Union government for the treatment of deportees.

## Kuki-Zo MLAs seek road map for peace, justice in Manipur

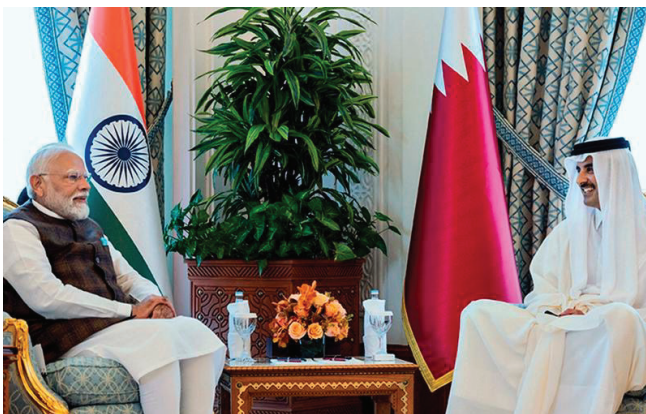
### INTERNAL SECURITY

Kuki-Zo legislators in Manipur, including seven from the BJP, are optimistic about the restoration of peace under President's Rule. They expressed hope for a political roadmap ensuring peace and justice for conflict-affected people. Having fled the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley after ethnic violence erupted in May 2023, the MLAs continue to stay away and advocate for a "separate administration" for their community.

Meanwhile, Manipur Police are investigating fraudulent calls made to MLAs to mislead them amid the political crisis. Security forces have intensified operations against extremists, leading to the arrest of over two dozen armed group members, including seven from the Kuki National Army, with weapons recovered in Churachandpur district.

## Ahead of Qatar Emir's visit to India, colleagues call for Navy

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Ahead of Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani's visit to India, seven former Indian Navy officers, who were imprisoned in Qatar for 18 months, have urged the repatriation of their last remaining colleague, Commander Purnendu Tiwary.

The eight officers were arrested in August 2022 while working for Dahra Global, a company supplying defense equipment to Qatar. In October 2023, they were sentenced to death, a decision India called "deeply shocking." Their sentences were later commuted, and seven returned to India in February 2024, just before PM Modi's Qatar visit.

The Emir's visit coincides with an upcoming Arab summit in Riyadh, where Qatar plays a key role in the Israel-Palestine crisis, and also highlights growing energy and trade ties between India and Qatar.

## Indian Ocean Region is witnessing a sharp churning, says Jaishankar

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain in Muscat to address tensions between India and Bangladesh over minority attacks and former PM Sheikh Hasina's stay in India. The meeting, held during the eighth Indian Ocean Conference (IOC), focused on bilateral relations and upcoming border security talks.

Jaishankar also met foreign ministers from Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Iran, and others, discussing regional cooperation, including the BIMSTEC summit in April. Addressing the IOC, he highlighted geopolitical tensions in West Asia and the Indo-Pacific, calling for a "coordinated flotilla" to ensure stability. He referenced U.S. President Trump's controversial Gaza plan, which Gulf nations, including Oman, oppose.

Jaishankar reaffirmed India's support for regional development, citing economic aid to Sri Lanka and humanitarian initiatives. Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Minister criticized U.S. sanctions, particularly those affecting the Chabahar port.

## U.K. will always be India's reliable partner: Minister

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The U.K.'s Minister of State for Defence, Vernon Coaker, reaffirmed Britain's commitment to strengthening defence ties with India, emphasizing the newly established Defence Partnership, India (DP-I) in London as a key step in bilateral collaboration. Speaking at Aero India in Bengaluru, he highlighted joint ventures, including Thales U.K. and Bharat Dynamics Limited's (BDL) agreement for Laser Beam Riding Man-portable Air Defence Systems (LBRMs) and Lightweight Multirole Missiles (LMMs). MBDA U.K. and BDL are also working on an Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) facility in Hyderabad for domestic use and exports.

Additionally, General Electric (GE) Vernova and BHEL will develop an electric propulsion system for India's next-generation Land Platform Docks (LPDs), with a test facility in Hyderabad and delivery by 2030. India and the U.K. signed a Statement of Intent to boost India's self-reliance in defence manufacturing.

Coaker noted that Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Keir Starmer agreed to refresh the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the G-20 summit in Brazil in 2024. He also announced that the U.K.'s carrier strike group will visit India during its deployment to the Indian Ocean this year.

## 'Announcement of U.S. trade pact gives relief to businesses'

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India and the U.S. have announced plans to negotiate a bilateral trade agreement (BTA), boosting business confidence and strengthening economic ties. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal stated that the agreement, expected by fall 2025, aims to double bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030.

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington, both nations emphasized leveraging their competitive strengths for mutual prosperity. The agreement is expected to ease trade norms, reduce tariffs, and promote investment.

Previously, a mini-trade deal was discussed during Donald Trump's presidency but was shelved by the Biden administration. Meanwhile, India is expanding global trade partnerships, signing agreements with Australia, the UAE, and the EFTA bloc.

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## Will U.S.'s F-35 stealth fighter jets fit into IAF's future plans?

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



At Aero India, both the Russian Su-57 and U.S. F-35 fifth-generation fighter aircraft were showcased. Shortly after, U.S. President Donald Trump announced increased military sales to India, including a potential deal for F-35 stealth fighters. This has sparked debate in India about its impact on indigenous fighter programs and military modernization. India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri clarified that no formal procurement process has begun. The F-35, a highly advanced stealth fighter, presents integration challenges due to India's diverse military systems sourced from multiple countries. Additionally, India prefers twin-seater jets, while the F-35 is a single-seater.

The U.S. has delivered over 990 F-35s, but the program has faced delays and cost overruns. Meanwhile, India is developing its own fighter jets, including the LCA Mk1A, LCA Mk2, and the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), expected by 2034-35. India is also pursuing the Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) program to acquire 114 foreign jets. If India proceeds with the F-35, it would mark its first U.S. fighter jet acquisition, bringing stringent U.S. regulations. How the F-35 fits into India's long-term defense plans remains uncertain.

## The panchayati raj movement is in distress

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution, which established the Panchayati raj system in 1992, significantly strengthened grassroots democracy. However, despite early successes, including increased women's representation and local elections, the momentum for deepening local governance has stalled due to systemic challenges and societal shifts. Key issues affecting Panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) include the lack of administrative decentralization, declining fiscal autonomy due to an increase in tied grants, the rise of direct cash transfers bypassing PRIs, and the growing focus on urban development as India urbanizes. These factors have reduced the role of panchayats in governance, limiting their ability to function beyond implementing centrally sponsored schemes.

To revitalize panchayats, a new vision is needed. PRIs could leverage technology for citizen engagement, support internal migration, enhance water conservation and renewable energy initiatives, and implement community-based disaster management. Strengthening local governance remains crucial, as a significant portion of India's population still resides in rural areas. A renewed commitment to decentralization and local decision-making is essential to sustain and enhance the role of panchayats in India's development.

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## Interpreting the recent Bangladesh-Pakistan thaw

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The legacy of the 1971 Liberation War has long shaped Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, but recent diplomatic engagements signal Dhaka's intent to diversify its foreign policy. Following Sheikh Hasina's ouster in 2024 after a student-led revolt, interim leader Muhammad Yunus has strengthened ties with Pakistan, meeting Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif while avoiding engagement with India. This shift, marked by military and diplomatic exchanges, including joint naval exercises and direct flights, raises concerns in New Delhi.

Despite these developments, historical grievances over the 1971 war and economic disparities limit the depth of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. Public opinion in Bangladesh remains a challenge, and practical hurdles such as geographical separation and economic misalignment make a substantial partnership unlikely. Meanwhile, India closely monitors this shift, especially as it coincides with its growing engagement with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

India remains Bangladesh's largest trading partner, making an overtly anti-India stance difficult for Dhaka. However, New Delhi must remain vigilant against potential alignments involving Bangladesh, China, and Pakistan. India should reinforce ties through economic cooperation, cultural engagement, and strategic red lines on security, military collaboration, and trade. Maintaining a favourable constituency in Bangladesh is crucial for long-term regional stability.

## Transactional turn

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington was brief but significant, marking India as one of the first nations to engage with U.S. President Donald Trump post-inauguration. Key developments included the launch of 'Mission 500' to boost bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030, discussions on a free trade agreement, increased Indian purchases of U.S. energy and defense equipment, and the introduction of COMPACT and TRUST frameworks for strategic and technological cooperation. A major highlight was Mr. Trump's approval of Tahawwur Rana's extradition to India.

While the visit strengthened India-U.S. ties, economic and trade discussions took a transactional turn, reminiscent of Mr. Trump's earlier presidency. Despite positive optics, challenges remain, including Trump's stance on tariffs and deportations. India must strategically navigate these engagements to protect its economic and strategic interests while reinforcing cooperation in defense, trade, and technology.

## How does a President's rule function?

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE



On February 13, the Indian government imposed President's Rule in Manipur after escalating violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, which has resulted in over 250 deaths and displaced 60,000 people. The conflict, stemming from the Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe status, led to political instability after Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's resignation. President's Rule was enacted under Article 356 of the Indian Constitution due to the State government's inability to function constitutionally.

President's Rule, or "constitutional emergency," transfers executive powers to the Centre and suspends the State legislature, although the judiciary remains unaffected. The move is a temporary measure to manage crises and maintain stability when a State's constitutional machinery fails. This differs from a national emergency, which has no time limit, and affects fundamental rights. President's Rule has been used 134 times since 1950, with Manipur having experienced it

11 times. The Supreme Court has clarified that the use of President's Rule must be based on constitutional failure, not political motives, and is subject to judicial review.

## Faltering pre-pack resolution plan: it's time to revamp modalities to fix gaps

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

The Pre-Pack Insolvency Resolution Process (PPIRP), introduced under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in April 2021, aims to offer a faster and less disruptive way to restructure stressed MSMEs. The process allows debtors and creditors to negotiate a resolution plan before initiating insolvency proceedings, which is then submitted to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for approval. The primary goals are preserving value, ensuring a time-bound resolution, and allowing for debtor-in-possession management.

However, the uptake of PPIRP has been slow, with only 13 applications so far, and challenges such as hesitancy from bankers, MSME promoters, and delays in NCLT approvals. Creditors also have concerns over the 66% voting requirement for approving plans and the potential misuse of the debtor-in-possession framework. Despite these issues, PPIRP offers benefits for MSMEs, including reduced costs, operational continuity, and protection against liquidation.

There is a debate about extending PPIRP to larger companies. Supporters argue that it could provide similar benefits to bigger firms by allowing them to negotiate with creditors before reaching a crisis point. However, significant modifications would be needed to adapt the process for larger corporations.

## Rubio leaves truce on shaky ground by calling for eradication of Hamas

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio endorsed Israel's goal of eradicating Hamas during his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem. Rubio emphasized that Hamas must be eliminated to achieve peace, as it poses a continued threat to Gaza's stability. His comments came ahead of the first phase of the ceasefire ending, with the second phase yet to be negotiated. Rubio also supported U.S. President Donald Trump's controversial proposal to transfer the Palestinian population out of Gaza and redevelop it under U.S. ownership, a plan welcomed by Netanyahu but likely to face resistance from Arab leaders. The U.S. also sent 2,000-pound MK-84 bombs to Israel, signalling further military support. Rubio suggested that Arab states should propose their own

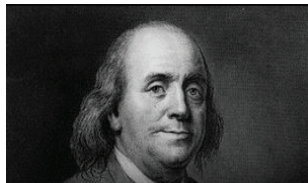
post-war plan and potentially send troops to combat Hamas.



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