



## No negotiation over annexed Ukrainian territory: Kremlin

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Kremlin has firmly rejected any negotiation over the status of five Ukrainian regions it claims to have annexed, calling them an inseparable part of Russia. This includes Crimea, which was annexed in 2014, and four other regions—Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson—annexed in 2022. While Russia controls most of Donetsk and Luhansk, it only controls parts of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. Ukraine has gained territory in Russia's Kursk region, and President Zelensky has suggested the possibility of exchanging territories, but Russia has ruled this out..

## A process where free and fair elections will be a casualty

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023, was enacted by Parliament to regulate the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (EC), as mandated by Article 324(5) of the Constitution. This law was introduced following a Supreme Court order in March 2023, which directed that the CEC and ECs be appointed based on recommendations from a high-powered committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India. Prior to this, the President appointed the CEC and ECs on the Prime Minister's recommendation, a practice deemed unsatisfactory by the Court due to concerns over the impartiality of the Election Commission.

### Challenging the new law

The new law regulating the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) has been challenged in court for deviating from a Supreme Court order. While the Court directed a selection panel to include the Chief Justice of India (CJI), the government replaced the CJI with a cabinet minister nominated by the Prime Minister. The law also establishes a search committee led by the Law Minister and senior bureaucrats to propose candidates. Despite a dissenting note from the Leader of Opposition (LoP), the selection committee proceeded with appointing the senior most EC as CEC. The appointments have been officially notified, but the law is now under judicial review for potential constitutional issues regarding the appointment process.

### Infirmities in the selection process

The Constitution of India assigns the responsibility for conducting elections and maintaining the electoral process to the Election Commission of India (ECI) under Article 324. The ECI is entrusted with ensuring free and fair elections, which is considered a critical constitutional function. Given the scale of India's elections, the Commission must be led by individuals of impeccable integrity and impartiality, selected through a constitutionally sound process that inspires public confidence. The new law, which governs the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs), has been criticized for its selection committee composition. The committee is chaired by the Prime Minister and includes the Leader of Opposition (LoP) and a cabinet minister nominated by the Prime Minister. The law mandates that the President appoint the CEC and ECs based on the committee's recommendations, giving the committee the final say. However, this structure creates a bias, as the government-appointed cabinet minister ensures the government's preferences dominate, making objective assessment and selection difficult. Furthermore, the nomination of the cabinet minister by the chairperson (the Prime Minister) undermines the independence of the committee. This setup raises concerns about the impartiality and objectivity of the selection process.

### It defeats fairness and objectivity

The law is constitutionally unsustainable as the composition of the selection committee is arbitrary and lacks a rational basis. By ensuring a majority for the government-supported candidate, it prevents a fair assessment of other candidates, potentially violating Article 14. Since the selection of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) is crucial for free and fair elections, a biased selection process could compromise the electoral process, which is part of the Constitution's basic structure.

# Trump 2.0 and the new matrix of U.S.-India defence ties

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.S. on February 13, 2025, strengthened bilateral defense ties. Key agreements include India's likely purchase and co-production of the 'Javelin' Anti-Tank Guided Missile and 'Stryker' Infantry Combat Vehicles. This will enhance interoperability, boost domestic manufacturing, and integrate India into the supply chain for these systems.

### A spectrum

India will purchase six more P-8I maritime patrol aircraft to strengthen the Indian Navy's Maritime Domain Awareness. A new 10-year U.S.-India defense partnership framework will be signed. Collaboration in Unmanned Aerial Systems and autonomous systems, including projects by Anduril Industries-Mahindra Group and L3Harris-BEL, received a boost through the newly announced Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA). Further cooperation is expected in undersea systems, fifth-generation fighter aircraft, space, air defense, and anti-tank missiles. Both countries will also review arms transfer regulations and work towards a Reciprocal Defence Procurement (RDP) agreement to enhance synergy in defense trade, maintenance, and acquisition. These steps strengthen U.S.-India defense ties.

### The hurdles

Challenges remain in U.S.-India defense ties. The joint statement lacked mention of the urgent delivery of GE's F-404 engines for the Tejas-Mark 1A or the 80% Transfer of Technology for the F-414 engine for the Mark-II variant. While President Trump suggested India could purchase F-35 fighters, integrating them would be difficult due to the Indian Air Force's (IAF) capability gaps and delays in inducting Tejas jets to replace retired MiG-21 squadrons. The omission of GE engine supply concerns is critical as IAF squadrons may drop below 30. Efforts to revive the Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) project for 114 jets continue. The earlier selection of Dassault's Rafale faced setbacks due to ToT issues and cost disagreements, leading India to procure only 36 Rafale jets via a government-to-government deal.

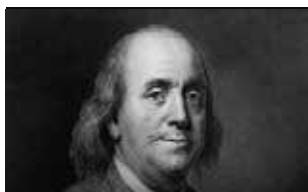
### What a deal with the U.S. would entail

The Trump administration's offer of the F-35 to India is not new, as a similar proposal was made during the Obama era. However, it lacks co-production or Transfer of Technology (ToT), with each jet costing \$80 million. In contrast, India's Rafale purchase at \$244 million per jet included advanced weaponry like the Scalp and Meteor missiles. Integrating the F-35 into the Indian Air Force (IAF) would be challenging due to its diverse fleet, high infrastructure and maintenance costs, and potential U.S. restrictions on its use. While U.S.-India defense ties have gained momentum, key challenges remain. The Modi-Trump engagement has set a foundation for advancing critical agreements.

## Counting matters

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has initiated a national debate on delimitation by calling for an all-party meeting on March 5. Delimitation has been frozen since 1973 based on the 1971 Census to maintain parity in population growth across States. The 84th Constitutional Amendment set the next exercise for after the first Census post-2026, likely after the 2031 Census. However, concerns arise over whether the Union government is delaying the Census to conduct delimitation earlier. Tamil Nadu fears a reduction in its parliamentary representation if seats are reallocated solely based on population growth, as seen in the disparity between Tamil Nadu and Bihar's electorate growth. Similar concerns exist for States like Kerala and Karnataka. While Home Minister Amit Shah assured Southern States would receive their "rightful share," there is no clarity on maintaining proportional representation. The increase in India's population justifies more seats, particularly in populous northern States, but federal balance must be preserved. To address concerns, the government must expedite the delayed Census to ensure transparency in the delimitation process.



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

*—Benjamin Franklin*

## Art of the deal

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

President Donald Trump has invited Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Washington to sign a deal granting the U.S. access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals in exchange for U.S. support in ending the war with Russia. While Trump presents the deal as beneficial for U.S. taxpayers, he has shifted security responsibilities to Europe and has not provided Ukraine with security guarantees, despite Zelenskyy's insistence that they are necessary for a ceasefire. The agreement includes a "Reconstruction Investment Fund," with Ukraine contributing 50% of revenues from its natural resources, though governance details remain unclear. While a ceasefire and peace deal with Russia are desirable outcomes, critics argue the deal prioritizes U.S. resource extraction over Ukraine's broader security needs. The exclusion of the EU and discussions with Russia about U.S. involvement in mining rare earth minerals raise concerns that the plan may serve a neo-colonial agenda rather than genuine peace efforts.

## The SEC and Hague Service Convention

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) informed a New York court on February 18 that it has sought assistance from the Indian government under the Hague Service Convention — formally known as the Convention on the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters, 1965 — to serve summons on billionaire Gautam Adani and his nephew Sagar Adani in a securities and wire fraud case.

### What did the SEC say?

The U.S. SEC informed the court that it had requested India's Ministry of Law and Justice to serve summons on the defendants under Article 5(a) of the Convention and is also exploring alternative service methods under Rule 4(f) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Meanwhile, the Trump administration paused enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) for 180 days starting February 10, requiring a review of ongoing investigations. However, the SEC's latest filing indicates that the pause does not apply retroactively, meaning its investigation into the Adanis is expected to continue unless the law is amended.

### How does the Hague Service Convention operate?

The rise in cross-border litigation led to the adoption of the Hague Service Convention in 1965 to ensure effective service of judicial and extrajudicial documents in foreign jurisdictions. Building on earlier Hague Conventions, this treaty guarantees timely notice to defendants and facilitates proof of service. Eighty-four countries, including India and the U.S., are signatories, and its procedures apply only when both the sending and receiving states are parties. Each member state designates a central authority to handle requests, but multiple service methods are available, including postal service, diplomatic channels, judicial communication, and direct government contact.

### How is service effectuated on defendants in India?

India acceded to the Hague Service Convention on November 23, 2006, with reservations, explicitly rejecting all alternative service methods under Article 10. Judicial documents can only be served through India's designated central authority, the Ministry of Law and Justice. Diplomatic or consular service is prohibited unless the recipient is a national of the requesting country. Service requests must be in English or include an English translation. The Ministry can reject requests under Article 13 if they threaten sovereignty or security but cannot deny them based on exclusive jurisdiction claims or non-recognition of a right of action under domestic law. If no objections are raised, service proceeds as a summons under Section 29(c) of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, with an acknowledgment issued upon completion. The process typically takes six to eight months.

### Can a default verdict be rendered?

Under the Hague Service Convention, a default judgment may be issued if a foreign government refuses to cooperate in serving summons. Article 15 sets conditions for this: (a) the document must be transmitted via a Convention-approved method, (b) at least six months must pass, and (c) no certificate of service is received despite efforts to obtain it. India allows its courts to issue default judgments even without a service certificate if these conditions are met. In *\*Duong v. DDG BIM Services LLC (2023)\**, a U.S. court acknowledged Article 15 as a "safety valve," enabling default judgments if India's central authority fails to comply.

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## What do Germany's election results mean?

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Germany's federal elections on February 23 saw a record 82.5% voter turnout. The conservative CDU/CSU won the most votes, followed by the far-right AfD, with the SPD and Greens in third and fourth places. The key takeaway is AfD's rise rather than CDU's victory. To form a coalition, CDU needs 316 seats, making negotiations with AfD and SPD crucial for Germany's political future.

#### What are the major electoral issues?

Germany's 2025 electoral reform changed seat distribution by eliminating "overhang seats" and requiring candidates to win both district and party votes to secure a seat. Immigration was a key issue, with CDU, FDP, AfD, and BSW advocating stricter policies, while SPD and Greens took a moderate stance. Economic revival debates focused on the debt brake law, with CDU and FDP supporting fiscal limits and SPD and Greens pushing for relaxation. Foreign policy centered on Ukraine and NATO, with most parties backing military aid, except AfD and BSW, who favored closer ties with Russia.

#### What explains the rise of AfD?

The far-right AfD's rise is driven by the migrant crisis, public dissatisfaction with mainstream parties, and economic concerns, particularly in East Germany. AfD capitalized on security fears, promoted strict immigration policies, and effectively targeted young voters through social media. The broader right-wing shift in Europe, especially in France, Italy, and Hungary, also contributed to its growing influence.

#### Will CDU be able to form a stable government?

Germany's election system promotes coalition governments, and with CDU-CSU falling 108 seats short of a majority, they must seek allies. A CDU-SPD coalition faces ideological differences on taxes, welfare, and immigration, while AfD remains isolated as mainstream parties refuse to work with it. CDU leader Merz views this government as a last chance to curb AfD's rise, while AfD's leader sees change as inevitable. Despite challenges, Germany's structured political system facilitates negotiations to prevent deadlock.

## EU team begins crucial visit; activist points to rights issues

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen led an EU delegation to India, emphasizing the need for "trusted friends" in an era of global conflicts. She met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and planned discussions with PM Narendra Modi to strengthen the strategic partnership. The visit occurs amid U.S.-Russia peace talks on Ukraine and EU involvement in Bangladesh's democratic stability.

Human rights concerns were raised by EU activist Claudio Francavilla, urging von der Leyen to address India's alleged crackdown on dissent and minorities. This revived EU's past criticism of the ethnic conflict in Manipur, which India strongly rejected as interference in its internal affairs. India is prepared to maintain its stance if the issue is raised again. Discussions may also cover the rights of minorities in Bangladesh.

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## Law trying to protect children born of live-in relationships: Uttarakhand govt.

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Uttarakhand High Court observed that live-in relationships are increasing and that the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) aims to protect the rights of women and children born from such relationships. A Bench of Justices Manoj Kumar Tiwari and Ashish Naithani made this remark while hearing petitions challenging provisions of the UCC, which was implemented on January 26, 2025.

One petition was filed by social activists Uma Bhatt, Kamla Pant, and Munish Kumar, while another was submitted by a couple in a live-in relationship. The UCC mandates registration of live-in relationships, and the court advised couples to seek legal recourse if punitive action is taken against them for non-registration.

#### 'State surveillance'

During the hearing on the Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code (UCC), advocate Vrinda Grover argued that the Act and its Rules enable excessive state surveillance and policing of personal choices, violating the right to privacy. She criticized the UCC for creating a rigid system of inquiry, authorization, and penalization regarding partner choices, which could lead to harassment, violence, and vigilantism against couples in live-in relationships.

Justice Manoj Kumar Tiwari questioned whether the mere requirement of relationship registration could be deemed unconstitutional, stating that the law seeks to adapt to changing societal norms and protect women's and children's rights. Ms. Grover countered that the UCC could be misused by those opposing live-in relationships and objected to the mandatory submission of confidential documents like Aadhaar.

The court asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta whether public suggestions were considered before implementing the UCC. Mr. Mehta defended the law, asserting that it does not violate privacy but serves as a regulatory measure to safeguard women's rights and was formulated through extensive consultations with stakeholders.

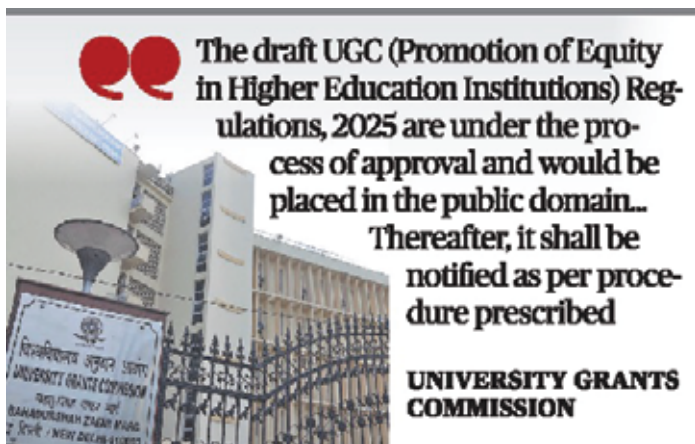
## India, China to end Ladakh conflict in 'effective manner'

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Chinese Defence Ministry stated that India and China are implementing resolutions to end the eastern Ladakh standoff in a "comprehensive and effective manner." Spokesperson Sr. Col. Wu Qian emphasized China's willingness to collaborate with India to maintain peace along the border. The two countries completed the disengagement process last year after agreeing on a military pact for troop withdrawal from the final friction points, Depsang and Demchok.

## UGC to release norms to end caste bias in colleges, varsities

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE



The University Grants Commission (UGC) informed the Supreme Court that new regulations to prevent caste discrimination in higher education institutions have been drafted and will soon be open for public comments. This follows a Supreme Court order in January on a petition filed by the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, who died by suicide after facing caste bias. The UGC's expert panel reviewed existing regulations and formulated the \*University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2025\*, which are awaiting approval. The court had earlier directed the UGC to compile data on caste discrimination complaints under its 2012 regulations.

#### Six weeks' time

A Supreme Court Bench had directed the UGC to collect data on the implementation of the 2012 Regulations concerning caste discrimination in higher education institutions. In response, the UGC reported receiving 3,522 responses, confirming the establishment of 3,067 Equal Opportunity Cells and 3,273 SC/ST Cells. A total of 1,503 caste discrimination

complaints were registered, with 1,426 resolved. Additionally, 1,314 complaints were received under the 2012 Regulations, of which 1,276 were resolved. The UGC stated that it is actively working to curb discrimination through monitoring and helplines. However, concerns remain about whether all institutions are effectively implementing these regulations.

## EPFO panel to discuss new interest rate, higher pension at meet today

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will meet to discuss key issues, including the interest rate for PF deposits in 2025-26, the implementation of the Supreme Court's order on higher PF pensions, and proposed changes to the Employees Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme (EDLI). Workers' representatives are demanding an increase in the current 8.25% interest rate due to inflation. Regarding higher pensions, EPFO is implementing a pro-rata calculation, which has raised concerns among workers. The Labour Ministry has supported this approach, and 70% of applications for higher pensions have been processed, with completion expected by March 31, 2025. The EDLI scheme may be revised to provide at least ₹50,000 to a worker's family in case of death within a month of joining, with increased compensation for deaths within six months.

## India's Olive Ridley turtle numbers improve, but climate skews sex ratio

### ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT



A 16-year study on turtle populations in India, conducted by the Dakshin Foundation in collaboration with IISc Bengaluru and State Forest departments, indicates a stable or growing Olive Ridley turtle population. However, climate change-induced rising sand temperatures are leading to a disproportionate number of female hatchlings, raising concerns about long-term population viability. The study also covers other sea turtle species, including leatherback turtles in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Green Turtles in Lakshadweep. Long-term monitoring is essential as sea turtles are slow-maturing and highly migratory. The mass nesting phenomenon,

known as arribada, remains a key event, with Odisha's Gahirmatha and Rushikulya being major nesting sites. Recently, Rushikulya saw 400,000–500,000 turtles nesting in a few days. While the absence of arribadas in some years is puzzling, offshore monitoring suggests a large turtle population, necessitating continued vigilance against threats to coastal and oceanic habitats.



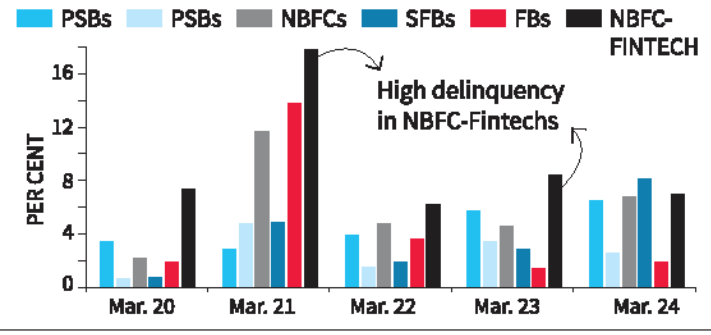
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# 'Banks will take cautionary stance on lending to NBFCs'

## ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT



Banks are expected to remain cautious while lending to NBFCs due to concerns over the sector's performance, according to Pankaj Naik of India Ratings and Research. Both secured and unsecured loans in NBFCs are showing stress, with asset quality pressures anticipated in FY26. Banks will focus on top-tier NBFCs with higher ratings if they increase exposure. Loan pricing for NBFCs is unlikely to decrease soon, despite stabilizing risk rates. Additionally, stress in the microfinance sector, rising delinquencies, and moderated consumer incomes are further contributing to banks' risk aversion, as noted by Nomura.

# Trump to slap EU with 25% tariffs, bloc vows to 'vigorously'

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



The European Union strongly rejected U.S. President Donald Trump's claim that the bloc was created to harm the U.S. and vowed to fight any proposed 25% tariff on EU products. Trump's comments further strained trans-Atlantic ties, already under pressure from his warnings about withdrawing U.S. security guarantees for Europe. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk countered that the EU was formed for peace, trade, and transatlantic friendship. The EU warned it would impose retaliatory tariffs on U.S. products like bourbon, jeans, and motorcycles if such measures were enacted, asserting its commitment to free and fair trade.



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