



● POLITY

● ECONOMICS


● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

## Opposition slams Centre for 'not responding' to U.S. tariffs

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Opposition members in the Rajya Sabha expressed concern over the global "tariff war" triggered by U.S. President Donald Trump's recent announcements. During a discussion on the Appropriation and Finance Bills, senior Congress leader P. Chidambaram urged the government to clarify its response to Trump's plan to impose reciprocal tariffs from April 2. He criticized the Centre for not discussing the issue in Parliament or consulting the Opposition, stating that there has been no clear policy statement on the matter.



**What is the gov't response? What is India's response?**  
There has been no statement of policy, no discussion in Parliament, no consultation with Opposition parties. The gov't. is holding its cards close to its chest, if it has any cards at all

**P. CHIDAMBARAM, Congress**



**We have been doing this from 2023. Steadily, every year, new items are being brought in keeping in mind Atmanirbhar Bharat for the requirements of developed India... This is an ongoing process. It has nothing to do with today's global situations**

**NIRMALA SITHARAMAN, Union Finance Minister**



**Until the tariff is not implemented, what speech or what mention can anyone make on it. We will be able to talk about it only after it is implemented after April 2**

**R.P.N. SINGH, BJP**

### 'Trump effect'

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addressed concerns over the global "tariff war," stating that recent reductions in basic customs duties and tariffs were not a response to U.S. President Trump's announcements but part of ongoing reforms since 2023. She explained that lowering or removing customs duties supports small and medium industries by reducing input costs, boosting exports, and promoting domestic manufacturing. The Finance Bill also eliminates seven customs tariff rates, making Indian exports more competitive. Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram attributed the cuts to the "Trump effect" but welcomed the shift away from protectionism. Both the Appropriation and Finance Bills were later passed by the Rajya Sabha.


## Trump imposes 25% tariff on imported cars; affected allies threaten retaliation

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### Driving imports away

The table shows the shares of expenditure on imports of eight types of cars and trucks imported into the United States in 2022

Type	Quantity Share
Small cars	34.6%
Mid and large cars	10.2%
Luxury cars	42.5%
Small CUVs	46.8%
Mid and large CUVs	24.2%
SUVs	13.9%
Vans	10.6%
Pickups	0%



U.S. President Donald Trump announced a 25% tariff on imported vehicles, escalating a global trade war and drawing criticism from U.S. allies. The tariffs, effective April 3, follow previous duties on steel, aluminium, and goods from Mexico, Canada, and China. In 2024, the U.S. imported \$474 billion in automotive products, with major suppliers including Mexico, Japan, South Korea, Canada, and Germany.

### 'Bad for businesses'

World leaders criticized U.S. President Donald Trump's 25% tariff on imported vehicles, with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen calling it harmful to businesses and consumers. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney condemned it as a "direct attack" on Canadian workers and hinted at retaliation, while Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba stated that all options were being considered. Trump views tariffs as a way to boost

revenue and revive U.S. industry, but trade experts warn they may initially raise prices and hurt global auto demand. Defending his stance, Trump argued that other countries have long exploited the U.S. economy.

## Putin to visit India this year: Russian Foreign Minister

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit India this year, as announced by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, with preparations underway. Lavrov praised India's balanced stance on the Ukraine crisis and highlighted the strong historical ties between the two nations. He noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first bilateral visit after re-election was to Russia, and now it is Russia's turn. This will be Putin's first visit to India since the Ukraine crisis began in 2022. Modi last visited Russia in July 2024 for the India-Russia summit and later met Putin at the BRICS summit in Kazan.

#### 'Balanced approach'

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov praised India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for maintaining a balanced stance on the Ukraine crisis, advocating for a solution through dialogue. Speaking at an event on Russia-India relations, Lavrov stated that Russia shares this approach and has been open to negotiations to end the conflict since its inception.

## Tri-service exercise held in Arunachal takes integrated approach to surveillance

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

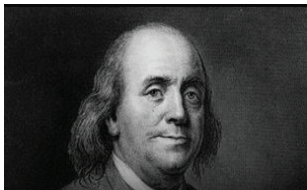


The Indian Army conducted the tri-service integrated multi-domain warfare exercise 'Prachand Prahaar' in Arunachal Pradesh from March 25 to 27. Organized under the Eastern Command, the exercise aimed to validate a fully integrated approach to surveillance, command, control, and precision strikes across the Army, Navy, and Air Force. It featured advanced platforms like maritime reconnaissance aircraft, UAVs, armed helicopters, loitering munitions, and space-based assets. Simulated targets were swiftly neutralized using coordinated strikes involving fighter jets, artillery, drones, and long-range rocket systems in an electronically contested environment. The exercise builds on the momentum of 'Poorvi Prahar' and highlights jointness, technological superiority, and multi-domain operational readiness.

## Union government to help States procure pulses at MSP: Agriculture Minister

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced that the procurement of tur dal (pigeon pea) in major producing states has gained momentum. To boost domestic pulse production and reduce import dependence, the government has approved the procurement of tur, urad, and masoor under the Price Support Scheme at 100% of state production for 2024-25, extending this commitment until 2028-29. Procurement is ongoing in several states, including Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Telangana, with 2.46 lakh metric tonnes of tur purchased, benefiting over 1.71 lakh farmers. The PM-Asha Yojana has also been extended until 2025-26 to ensure continued MSP-based procurement of pulses and oilseeds.



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

—Benjamin Franklin

## Centre tells States to be prepared to tackle heat-related ailments

### DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The Union government has directed states to review health facility preparedness for managing heatstroke and heat-related illnesses as temperatures rise. Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava emphasized ensuring uninterrupted power for cooling appliances, installing solar panels, and implementing heat-reducing measures. States must ensure adequate supplies of medicines, IV fluids, ice packs, and emergency cooling equipment. Rainwater harvesting and recycling should be explored for water self-sufficiency. Public health guidelines on heat-related issues are available on the National Centre for Disease Control website, and states are urged to disseminate them. From March 1, heatstroke cases are being tracked through the Integrated Health Information Platform.

## The judiciary's 'between a rock and hard place' moment

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Justice Yashwant Varma case involves an accidental fire at his official bungalow in New Delhi, where firemen reportedly found burnt sacks of ₹500 currency notes. A video of the incident was recorded, and the Delhi police chief informed the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, who then alerted the Chief Justice of India (CJI). The Collegium decided to repatriate Justice Varma to the Allahabad High Court and sought his response, where he denied storing money and suggested a possible conspiracy.

Amid public uproar, the CJI initiated an in-house inquiry by a three-judge committee and sought call records of Justice Varma and his staff. The CJI also released details of the incident, including the video, demonstrating transparency. Justice Varma was relieved of judicial work pending the inquiry. While his explanation seems questionable, the inquiry committee's report is expected to clarify the situation.

### A triggering of the government

The controversy surrounding Justice Yashwant Varma has given the government an opportunity to push for regaining control over judicial appointments. In this context, the Vice-President has invited political leaders to discuss reviving the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, which was previously struck down by the Supreme Court for violating the Constitution's basic structure. The NJAC proposed an appointment body including the CJI, two senior judges, the Law Minister, and two eminent persons, with its secretariat under the Law Ministry. The Supreme Court had ruled that this setup risked government interference and undermined judicial independence, leading to its invalidation despite being passed via a constitutional amendment.

### Government's game plan

The Modi government has allegedly interfered with judicial appointments by delaying or withholding the notification of judges recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium, particularly those deemed independent or inconvenient. While the law states that the government must notify a judge's appointment if the Collegium reiterates its recommendation, the government has selectively approved judges favorable to its ideology. In response, the Collegium has sometimes compromised by approving government-preferred judges to ensure the appointment of others. This has weakened judicial independence. Now, leveraging the Justice Yashwant Varma case, the government is attempting to gain even more control over appointments, threatening the judiciary's autonomy further. While the Collegium system has flaws, including a lack of transparency and nepotism, increasing government influence is not the solution. Instead, reforms should focus on refining the existing process without compromising judicial independence.

### Appointment of judges, issue of corruption

The current judicial appointment process lacks a proper selection method, as it fails to evaluate a sufficient pool of candidates based on clear criteria. A better solution would be a full-time judicial appointments commission, comprising retired judges and independent public figures, with its own secretariat to ensure a transparent selection process. Additionally, the Justice Varma case highlights corruption within the judiciary, which the existing impeachment process has failed to address due to its politicization. To tackle judicial misconduct, a high-powered judicial complaints commission, independent of both the government and judiciary, should be established. This commission would investigate complaints, conduct trials if necessary, and make binding decisions, subject to judicial review only in exceptional cases. Removing Parliament from the process would enhance accountability and reduce political interference in judicial oversight.

## Back door censor

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Social media platform X has challenged the Union government's SAHYOG portal in the Delhi High Court, arguing that it cannot be compelled to join. The portal aims to coordinate law enforcement agencies, social media platforms, and telecom providers for faster takedowns of unlawful content. It follows an October 2023 memorandum by the IT Ministry authorizing content blocking under Section 79 of the IT Act. The Ministry of Home Affairs disclosed SAHYOG's creation in the \*Shabana vs Govt of NCT of Delhi\* case, where the court stressed the need for real-time coordination. While Section 79 grants intermediaries safe harbour protection, they must comply with takedown requests under Section 79(3)(b) to retain this protection.

X argues that the SAHYOG portal bypasses the safeguards of Section 69A of the IT Act by relying on Section 79(3)(b) for content takedowns. Unlike Section 69A, which permits blocking only on specific grounds with procedural safeguards, SAHYOG could enable unchecked censorship by granting multiple government agencies blocking powers without independent oversight or appeal mechanisms. This raises concerns about the portal's legality and its potential violation of the Supreme Court's \*Shreya Singhal vs Union of India\* judgment. As the Delhi and Karnataka High Courts hear the challenges, the MHA must disclose SAHYOG's details to ensure compliance with legal frameworks.

## The flawed push for a third language

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Evidence-based policymaking relies on data, research, and statistical analysis — not ideology, untested assumptions or political convenience. It ensures that policies address real needs, maximise effectiveness, and avoid unnecessary burdens. By this standard, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's push for a third language in schools fails to meet the mark.

#### What do surveys say?

India's school system struggles with teaching core subjects effectively, as shown by poor rankings in the PISA test and domestic surveys like NAS and ASER. Many students face difficulties in their mother tongue and English, raising concerns about adding a third language. Despite this, there is no credible data assessing third-language proficiency, leaving the policy unexamined. Instead of burdening students with an additional language, resources should focus on strengthening math, science, and emerging fields like AI, as seen in countries like China, Estonia, and the U.K., which are integrating AI into education.

#### What does research say?

NEP 2020's trilingual policy oversimplifies language learning by ignoring global best practices and cognitive research. The Cambridge Handbook of Third Language Acquisition highlights that learning a third language (L3) increases cognitive load, especially if students struggle with their first (L1) and second (L2) languages. This can lead to mental fatigue, reduced learning efficiency, and L2 attrition. Cross-linguistic interference can also cause grammatical and pronunciation errors. Additionally, language similarity impacts learning ease—Indo-Aryan language speakers find Hindi easier to learn as L3, while Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Sino-Tibetan speakers face greater challenges. NEP 2020's rigid approach fails to consider these complexities.

#### Implementation challenges

While students can learn multiple languages privately, funding more than two languages in public schools is not cost-effective. Teaching a third language requires significant investments in teachers, training, textbooks, and technology, posing challenges for rural schools and budget-limited States. NEP 2020 claims language choice, but in reality, diverse preferences in a single school make it impractical to hire teachers for all requested languages. This indirectly pushes Hindi or Sanskrit in non-Hindi-speaking States due to cost and availability constraints. The policy overlooks these practical challenges, making its implementation unrealistic.

#### A policy stuck in the past

NEP 2020 briefly mentions technology for language learning but overlooks AI-powered translation tools that can reduce the need for multilingual education. While mother tongue and English should be taught traditionally, AI can enable independent learning of additional languages in a cost-effective and flexible manner. The policy also prioritizes languages as cultural pursuits rather than for career prospects, dedicating more focus to Sanskrit over English, despite the latter's global importance in education, science, and job markets. Meanwhile, countries like China, Russia, and Japan are actively strengthening English education, highlighting NEP 2020's outdated approach.

## Lessons from Singapore

Lee Kuan Yew resisted pressure to make Mandarin Singapore's sole national language, choosing English instead to maintain fairness and social cohesion among its diverse population. Singapore adopted a bilingual education system, with English as the first language and mother tongues (Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil) as the second. This policy balanced economic opportunities with cultural preservation, prevented ethnic tensions, and helped Singapore become a global economic hub. The success of its education system is reflected in its top PISA rankings, demonstrating its effectiveness in fostering both linguistic and academic excellence.

## Why Hindi won't work as a unifier

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The 2011 Census states that 43.63% of Indians speak Hindi, but G.N. Devy argues this figure is inflated by classifying 53 distinct languages as Hindi dialects, reducing true Hindi speakers to 25%. Additionally, 95% of Indians remain within their home States, using their native languages, making the push for Hindi as a national lingua franca misguided. The idea that a single language ensures national unity is a European concept, unsuitable for India's linguistic diversity. Historian John Key credits India's linguistic flexibility for its unity, unlike Pakistan, which imposed Urdu, leading to Bangladesh's creation. India's recognition of multiple languages and retention of English have preserved unity and federalism.

### Evidence over ideology

The NEP 2020's mandatory three-language policy prioritizes ideology over evidence, disregarding India's struggle with basic proficiency in two languages. Non-Hindi-speaking southern states, particularly Tamil Nadu, have economically outperformed the Hindi heartland due to their stronger embrace of English. Tamil Nadu's successful two-language policy since 1968 highlights the benefits of linguistic pragmatism. However, NEP 2020 ignores both internal successes and global best practices by enforcing a rigid trilingual mandate. Instead, India should adopt a practical two-language policy like Singapore, emphasizing English for global competitiveness and regional languages for cultural preservation, rather than promoting linguistic nationalism.

## 'U.S. tariff hike will dent JLR, auto parts makers' margins'

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The U.S. decision to impose a 25% tariff on imported cars and auto components will significantly impact Tata Motors' subsidiary, Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), which derives over 30% of its sales from the U.S. market but lacks a manufacturing

## Bumpy ride ahead

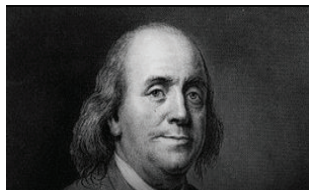
**Tata Motors will face the biggest hit as over 30% of Jaguar Land Rover sales volume comes from the U.S. market**



- Tata Motors shares on Thursday fell 5.56% to ₹668.60 on the BSE
- For India's auto components sector, U.S. is a key export market, contributing 27% to total exports in FY24
- India exported automobiles worth just \$37.11 million to the U.S. in 2023, UN's COMTRADE database shows

facility there. This could affect JLR's pricing and profitability, leading to a drop in Tata Motors' share price. The tariff will also impact Indian auto component manufacturers, as the U.S. accounts for 27% of their total exports. Companies like Sona Comstar and Samvardhana Motherson, which have significant revenue exposure to North America, may be particularly affected. Analysts estimate a 1.25–1.5% drop in operating margins for Indian auto parts exporters. The tariff threatens India's growing auto component exports, potentially disrupting the industry. Hence, a bilateral trade agreement stands out as the most practical strategy, offering a structured mechanism to secure market access while shielding India's domestic industry from adverse global competition.

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—Benjamin Franklin

## 'In Feb., bank loan growth slowed for eighth month in row'

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Loan growth at Indian banks moderated for the eighth straight month in February, central bank data showed on Thursday, due to a drop in personal- and credit-card loans following tighter rules by the Reserve Bank of India. The data showed that bank credit increased by 12% year-on-year last month, slower than the 16.6% rise a year earlier, excluding the impact of HDFC Bank's merger with parent HDFC. Including the merger impact, loans grew 11% in February, compared with 20.5% in the year-earlier period. The loan growth rate slowed to 12.5% in January, excluding the merger, and to 11.4% including the merger.

## 'U.S. tariff hike will dent JLR, auto parts makers' margins'

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Former U.S. President Donald Trump's economic policies focused on addressing the U.S. trade deficit, aiming to counter foreign countries that allegedly undercut U.S. producers by overvaluing the dollar. However, less attention is given to the U.S.'s massive capital surplus, driven by the country's large and liquid financial markets.

The Net International Investment Position (NIIP), which measures the difference between foreign holdings of U.S. assets and American investments abroad, reached a record \$26.2 trillion (88% of U.S. GDP) by the end of 2024. This surge has been fuelled by strong foreign demand for U.S. stocks, bonds, and real estate, along with the significant appreciation of these assets compared to those in other countries.

The high returns on U.S. investments have created a cycle of increasing capital inflows, strengthened by U.S. tech innovation and the global appeal of U.S. Treasuries. These capital inflows, rather than trade imbalances, have primarily driven the dollar's appreciation over the past decade. However, reversing these flows could destabilize U.S. asset prices, potentially harming American investors and the broader economy.

### \$30 trillion tsunami

Foreign investment in U.S. assets surged by nearly \$8 trillion in Q4 2024, bringing total overseas holdings to \$62.12 trillion—almost double the level from a decade ago. The growth was driven by equities, which rose by \$676 billion to \$18.4 trillion, rather than U.S. debt. Foreign investment is now heavily concentrated in equities (60%) rather than Treasuries (15%), a shift from 15 years ago. Upcoming tariff announcements may impact these trends, and if foreign investors pull back, Wall Street could face a turbulent year. If the U.S. Net International Investment Position (NIIP) has peaked, market volatility may increase.

## Green iron is a prize worth billions, winning is the trick

### ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Decarbonizing the steel industry is crucial for meeting climate goals, as it accounts for 7-9% of global carbon emissions, mainly from the iron ore-to-pig iron process reliant on coal. Technologies exist to reduce emissions significantly, but large-scale adoption requires massive capital investment, abundant cheap green energy, and coordinated government policies. Australia, a major iron ore and coal exporter, could boost its industry value by transitioning to green iron using hydrogen from renewables. While full conversion could yield up to \$252 billion annually, a 40% shift by 2050 is more realistic, generating around \$110 billion. However, large investments depend on policy and market certainty.

### Commitments needed

Decarbonizing steel production requires commitments from major steel-producing nations like China, Japan, and South Korea to purchase green iron and invest in electric arc furnaces, replacing coal-based methods. Steel makers must also help fund Australian green iron plants. Miners, traditionally focused on extraction, need partners for renewable energy and hydrogen production. The challenge is coordinating stakeholders to establish this new industry. Governments will likely play a key role, as low-emissions steel will be costlier, requiring either carbon taxes or subsidies to drive adoption. The transition is in its early stages and needs initial momentum to become viable.

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## European force on agenda as Macron hosts Ukraine meet

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

French President Emmanuel Macron proposed a European armed force that could be deployed in Ukraine alongside a future peace deal and could respond if Russia launched an attack. Speaking before a summit of 30 nations, Macron suggested the force could be stationed in key Ukrainian cities. Along with U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, he is leading efforts to form a coalition supporting the deployment to deter future Russian aggression. However, Macron did not specify what form a response to a Russian attack would take.

#### 'Hollow promises'

U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer dismissed Russian President Vladimir Putin's ceasefire promises as insincere, accusing him of not being serious about peace talks with Ukraine. Starmer criticized Russia for undermining the agreed naval ceasefire in the Black Sea while continuing attacks on Ukraine. He emphasized that the U.S. is leading efforts to convene ceasefire negotiations.

## Israel passes law enabling political control over judicial appointments

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Israel's parliament passed a law expanding elected officials' power to appoint judges, despite widespread protests against Prime Minister Netanyahu's judicial reforms. The move deepens tensions with the Supreme Court as Netanyahu's government seeks to dismiss key legal officials. Critics see the law as a threat to democracy, while the Opposition, which boycotted the vote, has filed a legal challenge. Justice Minister Yariv Levin argues the law restores balance between branches of government. The new judicial selection committee will still have nine members but with changes favouring government influence over appointments.

## New U.S. air strike campaign targeting Houthi rebels more intense than last

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The U.S. has intensified its airstrike campaign against Yemen's Houthi rebels, expanding from targeting launch sites to striking key personnel and urban areas. This shift, under President Trump, contrasts with the Biden administration's restrained approach as Arab allies sought peace. The escalation follows Houthi threats to attack Israeli vessels and ongoing missile strikes on Israel. Concerns have risen in Washington after Trump-era security officials shared strike plans in a group chat with a journalist. Experts warn that simply eliminating Houthi leaders may not be effective, as the group has historically rebounded and grown stronger.

#### Concerns grow

Concerns are rising over civilian casualties as the U.S. intensifies its airstrike campaign against Yemen's Houthi rebels. While the U.S. has not confirmed civilian deaths, activists fear noncombatants have been killed. The campaign, launched on March 15, involves cruise missiles and fighter jets targeting Houthi-controlled areas. Trump justified the strikes as necessary to protect global shipping, reinstating the Houthis' "foreign terrorist organization" designation. The Houthis claim 57 deaths so far, while ACLED recorded 56 strike events in a week—the highest since U.S. strikes began amid the Israel-Hamas war. Trump officials emphasize their approach is more forceful than Biden's.

#### 'Houthi leader killed'

The U.S. has intensified its airstrike campaign against Yemen's Houthis, with Trump officials claiming key leaders have been killed, though the Houthis deny any losses. Unlike Biden's administration, which targeted mobile launchers and infrastructure, Trump's approach focuses more on urban areas and allows Central Command to launch strikes without White House approval. This has led to increased attacks, though the U.S. has not publicly detailed its targets. The Houthis claim civilian areas, including a cancer clinic, have been hit. Meanwhile, additional U.S. military assets, including the USS Carl Vinson and B-2 bombers, are being deployed to the region.

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