



US & CANADA

Newsletter

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
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US POLITICS

Avengers Assemble! Trump nominates controversial candidates to top positions

With the inauguration still a month away, President-elect Trump has been filling his time making periodic announcements of members of his cabinet and other key staff appointments. Expectedly, almost all of them have been [controversial](#) and elicited negative reactions even from his own party. He nominated Pete Hegseth, a Fox News host with no previous experience in government to helm the Pentagon.

Another controversial appointment was Tulsi Gabbard, to oversee the vast US intelligence apparatus as the Director of National Intelligence. She was till recently a Democrat member of the House of Representatives from Hawaii until she shifted to the Trump camp. Concerns over her suitability to the position stem from her lack of intelligence experience, and her foreign policy stances, particularly with regard to Russia.

Kash Patel's [nomination](#) as FBI director also sparked significant controversy due to his past statements on the FBI, and perceived intentions regarding its role and function. His plans have included closing the FBI's headquarters and redistributing its staff across the country. There are also concerns whether the FBI would remain impartial given his track record of supporting Trump unconditionally and pushing narratives that align with Trump's political interests.

Perhaps the most controversial of the appointments was that of Matt Gaetz, the controversial Congressman who was already under investigation by Congress for allegations of sexual misconduct and drug use when he was nominated by as the US Attorney General. Gaetz denied the allegations but following enormous pressure and public opprobrium, he decided to [withdraw](#) his nomination, stating that the confirmation process was becoming an unfair distraction for the incoming administration.

Other [appointments](#) to his Cabinet have included hedge fund CEO Scott Bessent as Treasury Secretary, Doug Burgum, the governor of North Dakota, as Secretary of the Interior, Chris Wright, CEO of Liberty Energy, as Secretary of the Department of Energy Sean Duffy, a former U.S. Congressman and Fox Business host, as the Secretary of Transportation, Howard Lutnick, a billionaire and head of a financial services firm, as Commerce Secretary, and Kristi Noem, governor of South Dakota as Secretary of Homeland Security. Robert F. Kennedy, anti-vaxxer and scion of the Kennedy family, who first ran for President independently, and then switched his support to Trump, was appointed to lead the Department of Health and Human Services.

Trump begins his tenure with a governing [trifecta](#), with the Republican controlling both the Senate and the House, albeit, both with narrow margins. This will make it easier to get his nominees for administration posts to be approved.

Trump has also been holding forth on various policies he proposes to implement from the time he takes office. He has announced plans to initiate the largest [deportation](#) of illegal immigrants in American history, potentially up to a million people a year. The controversial travel bans from his first terms are also likely to come back in one form or another.

Internationally, both friends and foes are facing up to the uncertainties of a Trump Administration, with a mix of varying degrees of enthusiasm, caution, and strategic repositioning. He has announced potential [tariffs](#) on China, Mexico and Canada as part of his "America First" economic strategy which aims at reducing the U.S. trade deficit and bringing manufacturing jobs back to the United States.

In terms of military alliances, Trump has previously shown a tendency toward transactional relationships with U.S. allies and pressed NATO allies to increase defence spending. He has suggested pulling back on U.S. aid to [Ukraine](#). Whilst these are the policy areas that will be most immediately impacted, going by his pronouncements and administrative appointments, the second Trump Administration promises to be even more tumultuous than the first one. If "Make America Great Again" was first used by Trump's role model, President Ronald Reagan during his presidential campaign, then another favourite tagline of President Reagan, "you ain't seen nothing yet" might well become the hallmark of this Administration.

INDIA-US RELATIONS

- The 15th edition of the India-US joint Special Forces [Exercise](#), VAJRA PRAHAR, was held from November 2nd to 22nd, 2024, at the Orchard Combat Training Centre in Idaho, USA. 45 personnel each participated from both countries, with the Indian Army represented by Special Forces units and the US Army by Green Berets. The exercise focused on joint planning, tactical drills, and the use of unmanned aerial systems, among other aspects.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi [met](#) with US President Joe Biden on the sidelines of the G-20 summit that took place in Brazil from November 16-21.

DIASPORA NEWS

- A number of Indian Americans have been tapped for roles in the Incoming Trump Administration. While Vivek Ramaswamy along with Elon Musk will [lead](#) the new Department of Government Efficiency, Dr. Jay [Bhattacharya](#), a Stanford physician and economist, has been appointed as the new head of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Controversial Trump loyalist Kash Patel has been [nominated](#) as the next head of the FBI.

- Six Indian-Americans are [now](#) in the U.S. House of Representatives, marking the highest representation for the community in the House to date. The so-called 'Samosa Caucus,' welcomed a new face, Suhas Subramanyam, who was elected from Virginia. Shri Thanedar and Raja Krishnamoorthi were re-elected from Michigan and Illinois respectively. The

other representatives include Ami Bera, Ro Khanna, and Pramila Jayapal.

- Sanjay Kaushik, a 57-year-old Indian national and Managing Partner of Arezo Aviation, was [arrested](#) in Miami for allegedly procuring aerospace components for Russian entities in violation of US export control laws. Kaushik, who is currently detained in Oregon, faces up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to USD 1 million per count if convicted. Federal prosecutors claim that Kaushik, along with his Austria-based associate Markus Kaltenecker, unlawfully obtained aviation goods and technology from the US for Russian clients, including sanctioned entities. The indictment alleges that Kaushik and his associates provided falsified end-user documentation to US suppliers and continued to supply aviation goods to Russian entities despite warnings from US authorities.

- The number of Indians seeking [asylum](#) in the US has surged by 855% from 2021 to 2023, with applications rising from 4,330 to 41,330, according to a report. In 2023, 5,340 Indians were granted asylum. According to the report, nearly half of the applicants are from Gujarat.

CANADA POLITICS

Trudeau finds himself on a sticky wicket

Canada's opposition leader, Pierre Poilievre, has [called](#) for Justin Trudeau's resignation for stating that his government would abide by an international arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu. Israeli ambassador Iddo Moed also attacked Trudeau's promise to abide by the warrants. Trudeau stated that Canada would follow the International Criminal Court's rulings, even if it meant arresting Netanyahu on Canadian soil.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau responded diplomatically to Donald Trump's [threat](#) of a 25% tariff on Canadian goods. The Canadian government vowed to maintain open communication with Trumps, even as regional premiers and Canadian industry stakeholders expressed alarm at the potential economic fallout. Trudeau engaged in phone calls with Trump and provincial leaders, highlighting the critical nature of the U.S.-Canada trading relationship.

Canada's chief electoral officer is proposing changes to nomination rules to curb "longest ballot" protests that have hampered vote counting in two recent by elections. Stéphane Perrault, the chief electoral officer, believes that voters who sign nomination papers are not supporting the nomination of one particular candidate but the idea of having as many candidates as possible. The committee is studying Bill C-65, which would lower the number of signatures a candidate needs to collect to run. Perrault argues that penalties should be imposed on individuals who sign multiple nomination papers to get as many candidates on the ballot as possible.

INDIA-CANADA RELATIONS

- In an abrupt [move](#) severely inconveniencing travellers, Canada announced tightened airport security

checks for passengers traveling to India citing the measure as having been undertaken due to “an abundance of caution”. The new measures, implemented by Transport Canada, include additional *physical screening*, *carry-on bags scanning*, and *hand swabs*. Passengers were advised to arrive at the airport at least four hours before departure to accommodate longer security wait times. The Canadian government also issued a travel advisory cautioning its citizens about the Zika virus and potential terrorist attacks in India.

- The Canadian government has [denied](#) a report, published by Canada's 'Globe and Mail' newspaper, and quoting unnamed government officials, linking Indian senior government officials to criminal activities in Canada, calling it "speculative and inaccurate." India has dismissed the report as a smear campaign, further straining diplomatic relations between the two countries.

DIASPORA NEWS

- The Indian Consulate in Toronto [cancelled](#) several consular camps in Canada due to security concerns over Khalistani extremism. The decision comes after Canadian security agencies failed to provide adequate security against heightened threats to members of the Indian diaspora. The cancellation comes after attacks on two planned camps in [Brampton](#) and Surrey.