



US & CANADA

Newsletter

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US POLITICS

MAGA storm hits H1B

The month of December has been a tumultuous one in US politics as multiple controversies rocked both the incoming and outgoing Administrations. The tumult within the incoming administration is widely seen to foreshadow many of the conflicts that will likely rise during the course of the Trump presidency. The month saw a near government shutdown after Trump asked Republican Congressmen to [derail](#) a funding bill. Elon Musk also threw in his support, using the bully-pulpit of his social media outlet, X, previously known Twitter, to cajole Congressmen to reject the bill. His posts on X threatened Republican lawmakers with primary challenges. In the event, thirty-eight Republicans joined Democrats in passing the bill. The narrow House GOP majority means that party divisions can easily derail leadership initiatives, a dynamic likely to intensify in the next Congress with an even slimmer majority.

Elon Musk, derided by the Democrats as the [power](#) behind the throne, was at the centre of other controversies as well, facing backlash from MAGA Republicans after he pushed back on their criticism of the H1B visa program. The episode began when conservative activist and Trump confidante Laura Loomer [denounced](#) the appointment of Indian-American Sriram Krishnan as a senior policy advisor for artificial intelligence in the Trump administration highlighting his [views](#) calling for the removal of country caps on green cards. This led to a vigorous debate on social

media with the likes of Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy [vigorously](#) defending the program but quickly degenerated into a slugfest when Loomer doubled down further by making racist remarks against Indians. This led to a further [outpouring](#) of racist and xenophobic remarks against Indians on social media. A temporary truce seemed to have been reached when Trump finally weighed on the [side](#) of Musk, calling it a “great program.”

Throughout December, Trump made several controversial statements and proposals. In an interview to [CNN](#), he reiterated his mass deportation plan, talked about potential pardons for January 6 defendants, and raised the possibility of legal action against political opponents, including former Representative Liz Cheney. News network [ABC](#) agreed to pay \$15 million to settle a defamation suit brought by Trump against the network and anchor George Stephanopoulos. Trump [initiated](#) several lawsuits following that, seen as an attempt to muzzle the media.

In the meantime, President Biden went on a pardoning and [clemency](#) spree, starting by [pardoning](#) his son, Hunter who was due to be sentenced on his federal gun charge conviction as well as on federal tax evasion charges. This after repeatedly emphasising that he would let the justice system do its work and that he would not consider issuing a pardon for his son. He also [announced](#) the largest single-day grant of clemency in modern American history, commuting the sentences of almost 1,500 individuals and granting pardons to 39 individuals convicted of non-violent crimes.

US NEWS UPDATE

- US President-elect Donald Trump has [requested](#) the US Supreme Court to delay an upcoming TikTok ban while he works on a "political resolution". The court is due to hear arguments on a US law requiring TikTok's Chinese owner, ByteDance, to sell the company to an American firm or face a ban on 19 January. TikTok and ByteDance have *filed* multiple legal challenges against the law, arguing it threatens American free speech protections.

- China has strongly [opposed](#) US President Joe Biden's approval of \$571.3 million in defense assistance for Taiwan. The White House statement did not provide details of the military assistance package, which comes less than three months after one worth \$567 million was authorized. China's foreign ministry said the move gravely infringes on its sovereignty and security interests.

- SpaceX and Elon Musk are under [investigation](#) by three US military departments for failing to disclose meetings with foreign leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, since 2021. The reviews were initiated by the Defense Department's Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Air Force, and the Pentagon's Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security. SpaceX employees allege Musk and his company have not provided full itineraries of meetings with foreign leaders and possibly omitted mandatory disclosures about personal habits.

INDIA-US RELATIONS

- External Affairs Minister [S. Jaishankar](#) met National Security Advisor

Jake Sullivan in Washington D.C., and discussed the progress of India-US strategic partnership. Later, the EAM had a meeting with Consul Generals based in Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, Seattle, and New York. The meeting's main agenda was to deepen partnership, and focus on trade, technology, and investments.

- 39th US president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Jimmy Carter passed away at the age of 100. During his [presidency](#), Carter visited India in 1978, leading to a village in Haryana being renamed "Carterpuri" in his honour. His mother, Lillian Carter, had also worked in India as a Peace Corps volunteer, deepening his personal connection to the country.

DIASPORA NEWS

- The US [Mission](#) in India achieved a significant milestone by processing over a million non-immigrant visas for the second year in a row. This was accompanied by notable growth in Indian travel to the US, with visitor numbers increasing 26% from 2023, reaching over two million between January and November.

- A particularly noteworthy development was India becoming the leading source of international students in the US, with 331,000 students enrolled. The majority of these students (about 200,000) were pursuing graduate studies, with a strong focus on [STEM](#) fields.

- Indian-American Congressman Shri Thanedar, Democrat from Michigan, condemned Hinduphobia and racism in the United States [following](#) a wave of hateful rhetoric directed at him. The backlash came after Thanedar voiced his support for the H-1B visa program and advocated for increasing legal immigration to maintain

America's competitive edge in innovation. In response to the racist and xenophobic comments, Thanedar introduced a bipartisan resolution condemning Hinduphobia.

- Donald Trump's 2024 administration has a significant number of Indian- Americans. Key figures include [Kash Patel](#) (FBI Director), [Vivek Ramaswamy](#) (Department of Government Efficiency), [Harmeet Dhillon](#) (Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights), [Sriram Krishnan](#) (Senior White House policy advisor on AI) and [Jay Bhattacharya](#) (Director, National Institutes of Health). Vice President-elect JD Vance's wife, [Usha Vance](#), will enter Number One Observatory Circle as the first second lady of Indian origin.

CANADA POLITICS

Freeland's exit sets off Final Countdown

Canadian politics continued to be roiled by internal and external developments. Chrystia Freeland, Canada's Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister, [resigned](#) from the Cabinet on December 16th, 2024. Freeland had been seen as close to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and a potential successor for the leadership of the Liberal Party. Her resignation was partly catalysed by the impending threat of 25% tariffs imposed by the incoming Trump administration as well as her opposition to recent economic policy announcements by Trudeau with an eye on the forthcoming polls.

Trump, who has taken to trolling Trudeau did not let go of this opportunity, posting on TruthSocial "The Great State of Canada is stunned as the Finance Minister resigns, or

was fired, from her position by Governor Justin Trudeau. Her behavior was totally toxic, and not at all conducive to making deals which are good for the very unhappy citizens of Canada. She will not be missed!!!". Following Freeland's resignation, calls for Justin Trudeau to resign as Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader escalated from within his Liberal Party. A key political ally, the National Democratic Party, which had withdrawn support in September but refused to vote against the government in successive no-confidence votes, [announced](#) it would no longer do so with Party leader Jagmeet Singh [stating](#) "The NDP will vote to bring this government down, and give Canadians a chance to vote for a government who will work for them. No matter who is leading the Liberal Party, this government's time is up. We will put forward a clear motion of no-confidence in the next sitting of the House of Commons." With fast-dwindling options before him, Trudeau announced his resignation on 6 January 2025. According to public opinion [polls](#), if elections were to be held now, 45 per cent of voters say they would support the Conservatives, 21 per cent, the NDP and 16 per cent, the Liberals.

CANADA NEWS UPDATE

- Canada is [implementing](#) measures to combat fraud in the Express Entry program, aiming to reduce the incentive to illegally buy or sell labour market impact assessments (LMIAs) to improve candidates' chances of being selected for permanent residency in the country. Starting in spring 2025, Express Entry candidates will no longer receive additional points for having a job offer. The policy change will apply to all candidates in the Express Entry pool, including those with

job offers and new applicants. The announcement builds on legislative changes introduced in June 2022, which allowed the government to select immigrants with specific attributes aligned with Canada's economic priorities.

INDIA-CANADA RELATIONS

- In response to an unstarred [question](#) in the Rajya Sabha on India-Canada relations and its impact on students and visa issuance, the MEA noted that there has been no significant decline in the number of Indians traveling to Canada with 1.36 million visas issued in 2022, 1.82 million visas in 2023 and 1.17 million visas for the period Jan-Jul 2024. The number of Indian students at Canadian universities has also increased over the last three years from 2,16,360 in 2022 to 4,27,085 in 2023.
- India condemned the recent separate murders of Indian students in Canada, labelling them "[terrible tragedies](#)." Gurasis Singh, a 22-year-old Indian [student](#) in Ontario, Canada, was stabbed to death by his housemate, Crossley Hunter, during a physical altercation. Hunter has been charged with second-degree murder. Harshandeep [Singh](#), a 20-year-old Indian-origin security guard, was shot dead by a gang in Edmonton, Canada. Pritpal Singh, a 26-year-old Indian national, was shot dead in [Brampton](#), Canada in what police described as a targeted killing. Singh had moved to Canada five months ago and was living with his brother, Khushwantpal Singh. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal [stressed](#) the critical importance of safeguarding Indian nationals abroad

and called for a comprehensive investigation into these murders.

DIASPORA NEWS

- Indian [students](#) in Canada are in panic following series of emails from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) demanding them to resubmit all the important documents including visa, educational records, and study permits. Some students have been summoned for personal verification, which has caused a panic amongst the student community. This follows Canada's introduction of tougher [policies](#) for international students, which encompass stricter financial criteria.
- Indo-Canadian community groups have held [meetings](#) with Canadian law enforcement agencies to discuss concerns over two-tier policing and a rise in Hindu phobia. Police emphasize the importance of reporting hate crimes for investigations and official recording. Toronto Police acknowledged being aware of hate crimes against Hindus and asked the community to report incidents for investigation. The community welcomed Toronto Police's role in preventing disruption during a consular camp but remains concerned over the actions of Peel Regional Police (PRP) following the November 3 violent attack on the Hindu Sabha Mandir in Brampton. PRP is looking to establish an Interim Hindu Advisory Committee to address trust and relationship building concerns.