



US & CANADA

Newsletter

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US POLITICS

February Frenzy: DOGE chews up Federal bureaucracy

President Trump continued to make good on his “draining the swamp” promise he had made to his voter base. He issued more than 50 executive orders, reshaping both domestic and foreign policies.

Other key orders included regulatory freezes and hiring freezes within the Federal government. These actions were in tandem with those of the Department of Government Efficiency. Key actions included introducing a buyout program that allowed federal employees to resign by February 6, 2025, while retaining pay and benefits through September 30, 2025. Approximately 75,000 federal employees accepted this offer, constituting about 3.75% of the workforce.

An executive order on February 11, 2025, titled “[Department of Government Efficiency Workforce Optimization Initiative](#),” directed agencies to prepare plans for mass layoffs and consolidations by March 13, 2025. The initiative included the development of a software tool designed to automate the firing process, raising ethical concerns about the use of artificial intelligence in personnel decisions. Musk raised further controversy by having DOGE send out an email instructing federal employees to list their achievements in approximately five bullet points with failure to respond to be taken as a resignation. The DOGE [website](#) was launched showcasing its activities and the estimated [savings](#) so far. However, many of those claims were factchecked by various news [organisations](#) and found to be vastly inflated.

DOGE’s initiatives faced significant legal challenges and public pushback throughout February. Workforce layoffs and agency restructuring sparked lawsuits from labour unions and federal employees, leading to temporary restraining orders on several initiatives. There were many documented [missteps](#) by DOGE, including the [firing](#) of federal employees responsible for designing and maintaining the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal and key scientists leading the response to the ongoing bird flu [outbreak](#). Musk himself admitted that the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) mistakenly [cancelled](#) an Ebola prevention grant under USAID.

Pushback to these decisions has largely been in the form of legal [lawsuits](#) and challenges, with the opposition Democratic party yet to get its act together, with conflicting views on how to [respond](#). Democrat Strategist James Carville [argued](#) in the New York Times that Democrats should adopt a strategic retreat and instead of resisting, should allow Republicans to govern poorly and let public opinion turn against them.

Whilst January had seen a near-total freeze on foreign aid and the retrenchment of over a 1000 employees of US aid agency, USAID, the Trump administration went further in February, dismantling a substantial portion of USAID’s operations by [terminating](#) over 90% of USAID’s foreign aid contracts, amounting to approximately 5,800 out of 6,200 multi-year contracts, cutting a total of \$54 billion in USAID contract funding and eliminating nearly 10,000 contracts and awards, affecting [projects](#) related to health, food security, and humanitarian aid. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that he

had been appointed Acting Administrator of USAID by Trump and that the agency was being merged into the State Department. The total number of employees to be retained was 294, out of a total of more than 10,000. The State Department ordered the halting of virtually all projects, from those linked to the eradication of smallpox to HIV prevention.

INDIA-US RELATIONS

- Prime Minister Modi made an Official Working Visit to the U.S. on 13 February 2025 to meet with incumbent President Donald Trump. In the joint [statement](#) issued after the visit, the two leaders reaffirmed the strong India-U.S. strategic partnership and rolled out a results driven agenda for a mutually beneficial partnership.

- **Bilateral Trade Agreement:** During PM Modi's visit, both leaders agreed to work towards a bilateral trade agreement, referred to as "Mission 500," which aims to double bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030. This agreement is expected to address tariff reductions and improve market access for both countries.
- **Defence Cooperation:** They discussed plans to extend the ten-year framework for the U.S.-India Major Defence Partnership. A major highlight from the discussions was the announcement of the US-India COMPACT (Catalyzing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce & Technology for the 21st Century). This initiative aims to drive innovation and

collaboration across several key sectors. They also announced the forming of the Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA) under COMPACT to collaborate on maritime drone and counter-drone development and manufacture.

- **Strategic Partnerships:** The summit also discussed the importance of collaboration in critical and emerging technologies, with both nations committing to work together on supply chain resilience and innovation in defence sectors. The establishment of the INDUS Innovation initiative aims to foster defence innovation cooperation between the two countries.
- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation:** The leaders also discussed advancing civil nuclear cooperation, including plans to build U.S.-designed nuclear reactors in India. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to enhance energy security and technological collaboration in nuclear power generation.

The leaders emphasized deepening people-to-people ties, addressing immigration issues, and enhancing military and economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region for mutual security and prosperity

- President Trump [announced](#) plans to impose reciprocal tariffs on foreign goods, including those from India, starting in April 2025. This policy aims to equalize tariffs imposed by other countries on U.S. products, which has raised concerns in

India about potential impacts on its exports.

- The [partnership](#) between Anduril and Mahindra Group aims to enhance regional security through advanced autonomous maritime and AI-enabled counter-unmanned aerial systems. The effort is part of the new "U.S.-India COMPACT" initiative.

DIASPORA NEWS

- Kash Patel, a lawyer of Indian descent, and a former official in the Department of Defense and the National Security Council, has been [appointed](#) as the Ninth Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He was confirmed in the Senate by a narrow vote of 51-49 and sworn in 21 February during a ceremony attended by President Trump. Patel has pledged to overhaul the Federal Bureau of Investigation and increase transparency inside the agency, and to take strong actions against threats to American citizens and their way of life. Kash Patel's appointment is seen as a [significant](#) moment for Indian Americans, particularly those aligned with the Republican Party.

- The US deported a total of 332 illegal Indian immigrants in the month of February in multiple batches on military flights. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri [said](#) that the government had been notified of the deportation of 487 presumed Indian nationals in total. These deportations have drawn widespread attention and controversy regarding the treatment of deportees from political leaders and the public.

- The midair collision between an Army helicopter and a jetliner at

Washington's Ronald Reagan National Airport that killed 67 people, [included](#) two Indian-origin individuals. Vikesh Patel, a GE Aerospace engineer, and Asra Hussain Raza, a consultant, were on American Airlines flight 5342. The collision is the deadliest aviation disaster in the US since 2001. Raza, a 26-year-old Indian-immigrant, was a consultant working on a hospital turnaround project.

CANADA POLITICS

Post-Trudeau Dynamics bring Canada to a Political Crossroads

Trudeau's Liberal Party found itself in the unusual position of [leading](#) in the polls, partly attributed to a rejuvenated political base following the resignation of Trudeau and the impending race for the Liberal leadership. The frontrunner, [Mark Carney](#), is a former economist who has held significant roles including Governor of the Bank of Canada (2008-2013) and Governor of the Bank of England (2013-2020). He played a crucial role during the global financial crisis and Brexit. Carney has also been involved in climate action as the UN Special Envoy. In January 2025, he announced his candidacy for the Liberal Party of Canada leadership, aiming to become the first Canadian Prime Minister without prior elected office experience.

The opposition Conservatives have faced [challenges](#) adapting their strategies for a post-Trudeau political landscape. Party leader Pierre Poilievre's previous efforts had heavily focused on criticizing Trudeau's policies, but with Trudeau's resignation, these attacks have lost their sting.

Canadians have also [rallied](#) around the flag after U.S. President Donald Trump's rhetoric and threats, particularly concerning trade relationships. Trump's strong remarks about Canada and proposed tariffs have influenced political debate and highlighted economic concerns.

INDIA-CANADA RELATIONS

- New Delhi hosted the first [India Canada Dialogue](#) on February 17, 2025. Ananta Aspen Centre and Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada convened Track 2 conversation. About 25 Canadian and Indian academics, industry specialists, and former ambassadors participated in the debate. Participants discussed how to improve Indo-Pacific cooperation, create confidence in technology and digital public infrastructure, strengthen economic links, and put the bilateral relationship in the changing global order. Both states are rising, therefore their cooperation will shape regional and global events. The debate sought to discover common ground and provide policy recommendations to capitalize on possibilities, share knowledge, and build trust in India-Canada relations.

DIASPORA NEWS

- Canada implemented new [immigration](#) and visa policies that have raised concerns among Indian students and workers. These changes, effective from February 2025, have led to the cancellation of study permits for many Indian students, causing anxiety within the community. Reports suggest that approximately 7,000 student visas could be revoked, impacting a significant number of the 427,000 Indian students currently studying in Canada.

- The Enforcement Directorate [raided](#) the residence of 32-year-old Simran Preet Panesar, who is facing a Canada-wide warrant for his alleged role in a \$20 million gold heist. Panesar, a former Air Canada manager, is living in Mohali's Sector 79 and is being questioned by ED officials. The Enforcement Directorate registered an Enforcement Case Information Report under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) into the \$22.5 million heist from Toronto's Pearson International Airport in April 2023.