

CLAWS Newsletter



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by Yuvvraj Singh

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

1. Thousands of protesters took to the streets in cities across the U.S. under the banner of the “No Kings” movement, demonstrating against the administration’s policies and the prolonged government shutdown. ([Economic Times, October 17](#))

Thousands of protesters flooded the streets of major U.S. cities under the banner of the “No Kings” movement, voicing strong opposition to the administration’s policies and the prolonged government shutdown that has left federal institutions paralyzed. The demonstrations drew a diverse crowd of citizens, activists, and civil society groups, united in their demand for the restoration of democratic norms and an end to what they described as excessive concentration of power in the executive branch. Many participants carried signs and chanted slogans criticizing political leaders for prioritizing partisan interests over the welfare of ordinary Americans. The movement’s message centered on the idea that the United States must remain a republic governed by laws and institutions, not by the will of any single leader. The protests also underscored growing frustration over the shutdown’s economic toll—affecting government workers, small businesses, and essential public services—while highlighting a broader call for political accountability and renewal of democratic values.

2. The U.S. passport dropped out of the top 10 most powerful passports globally for the first time ([CNN, October 17](#))

The recently released 2025 edition of the Henley Passport Index reveals a shifting landscape in global travel freedom. Among the most formidable passports, Singapore leads with visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 193 destinations, followed by South Korea at 190, and Japan at 189. Meanwhile, European countries such as Germany, Italy, Switzerland and others cluster closely behind with access to around 188 destinations. Perhaps most striking is the fall of the United States passport: for the first time in the Index’s history the U.S. has slipped out of the top 10, now ranking 12th, tied with Malaysia with access to 180 destinations. Observers interpret this shift not just as travel-policy rather than prestige: the decline reflects deeper changes in global mobility, visa reciprocity and the international balance of soft power. These developments help highlight how much the “strength” of a passport is now shaped by openness, diplomacy and reciprocal access, rather than just national status.

3. The federal government shutdown escalated: The Congressional Budget Office projected that the impasse could cost the U.S. economy between \$7 billion and \$14 billion and reduce fourth-quarter GDP by up to 2%. [\(CBS News, October 29\)](#)

The prolonged U.S. government shutdown, now entering its sixth week, is inflicting heavy damage on the nation's economy, with losses estimated at up to \$15 billion per week. Hundreds of thousands of federal employees remain either furloughed or working without pay, drastically reducing household spending and slowing economic activity. The ripple effects are widespread—small businesses are struggling as loan programs are frozen, airlines and the tourism sector have lost billions due to travel disruptions, and essential services have been curtailed. Economists warn that the shutdown could shave 1 to 2 percentage points off quarterly economic growth, with lasting consequences even after the government reopens. While some economic activity may recover once operations resume, analysts believe a significant portion of the losses—potentially between \$7 billion and \$14 billion—will be permanent, reflecting the deeper economic strain caused by prolonged political gridlock.



IN THE WORLD

1. A high-level meeting took place at the White House between Volodymyr Zelensky and Donald Trump, with Ukraine pressing for U.S. delivery of long-range missiles and discussing future defence support. [\(ABC News, October 17\)](#)

When Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited the White House for a high-profile meeting with Donald Trump, the agenda centered squarely on the ongoing war in Ukraine and Moscow's aggression. Zelenskyy pressed for the procurement of U.S.-made Tomahawk cruise missiles and other military hardware to bolster Ukraine's defence. Trump, meanwhile, revealed that he and Vladimir Putin had spoken by phone and planned a future meeting—raising the possibility of a trilateral understanding involving Russia, Ukraine and the United States. In their talks, Trump emphasized hopes of achieving peace, but also underscored that Ukraine must step up for its own security. Zelenskyy, for his part, reiterated that Ukraine will continue to resist and must receive substantive support—not just promises.

2. The U.S. military launched another strike on a suspected drug trafficking vessel off the coast of Venezuela [\(BBC, October 17\)](#)

U.S. military forces carried out another lethal strike on a vessel in the Pacific Ocean suspected of transporting illicit drugs, marking a sharp escalation of America's maritime anti-narcotics operations. The operation, announced by the Pete Hegseth-led defence establishment, occurred roughly eight hours after a prior strike on another drug-smuggling boat and resulted in three fatalities, while U.S. personnel were unharmed. Intelligence reportedly tracked both vessels along a known trafficking corridor in international waters, and administration officials described the campaign as targeting “narco-terrorists” who threaten U.S. borders. This latest action brings the tally to nine such strikes since early September, and — critically — is the first to occur in the Pacific theatre, rather than the Caribbean, signaling a broader geographical scope for U.S. interdiction efforts. The operation and its rhetoric, including comments from Donald Trump suggesting possible expansion of strikes to land-based targets, are fuelling tensions with regional allies such as Colombia, raising questions about sovereignty, legal authority, and the U.S.'s evolving posture in the hemisphere.

3. U.S. declared it will share sensitive nuclear-powered submarine technology with South Korea ([Business Standard, October 20](#))

The United States has announced it will share its highly guarded nuclear-submarine technology with South Korea, a major shift given how sensitive this capability has been historically. The move came after a meeting between President Donald Trump and South Korean President Lee Jae-myung, with Lee emphasising that South Korea intends to modernise its alliance with the US and boost its contribution toward joint defence efforts. Lee also clarified that his country is seeking nuclear-fuelled submarines—rather than nuclear-weapons per se—so that it can deepen its role in regional security and support US operations in the region more robustly. Given the strategic environment—particularly in view of North Korea’s advancing submarine programme—the announcement marks a significant development: the US is offering access to one of its most guarded military technologies at a time when the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific is under growing pressure.

4. The U.S. Department of the Treasury announced it would impose sanctions on Russia’s two largest oil companies (Rosneft and Lukoil), escalating pressure on Moscow to agree to an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine. ([Washington Post, October 18](#))

The U.S. government has imposed sweeping new sanctions on Russia’s leading oil giants, Rosneft and Lukoil, marking one of the most direct economic measures yet in response to Moscow’s ongoing war in Ukraine. The decision reflects Washington’s growing frustration with Russia’s continued aggression and its reliance on energy exports to sustain its war effort. U.S. officials described the sanctions as a strategic effort to cut off key financial lifelines for the Kremlin, urging allied nations to adopt similar measures. The move is expected to disrupt parts of Russia’s global oil trade, though analysts caution that its overall effectiveness will depend on how rigorously the restrictions are enforced and whether they extend to intermediary firms and trading partners. This escalation highlights the intensifying economic confrontation between the U.S. and Russia, with energy once again emerging as the central battlefield in the broader geopolitical struggle.

5. The USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft-carrier strike group was ordered to deploy to the Caribbean as part of a broadened U.S. military campaign against drug-trafficking in Latin America ([New York Times October 24](#))

The United States has deployed the USS Gerald R. Ford, its most advanced and expensive aircraft carrier, along with a full strike group, to the Caribbean in what is being described as a major show of force aimed at countering drug trafficking and transnational criminal networks. Officially presented as part of an anti-narcotics operation, the move marks a significant expansion of U.S. military presence in the region and comes amid rising tensions with Venezuela. The deployment signals Washington's intent to project power across the Western Hemisphere, blending security and geopolitical objectives under the banner of counter-narcotics enforcement. Analysts view it as a possible pressure tactic against the Maduro government, reflecting a growing U.S. willingness to use military muscle in Latin America to influence regional dynamics and reaffirm its strategic dominance in the face of competing global powers.

6. The U.S. Vice President J. D. Vance declared that the West Bank would not be annexed by Israel, calling a recent Israeli parliamentary vote “a stupid political stunt.” (Al Jazeera, October 23)

U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance strongly condemned the Israeli parliament's recent vote to apply Israeli law to parts of the occupied West Bank, a move widely viewed as an initial step toward formal annexation of Palestinian territories. In remarks to reporters, Vance described the decision as “a very stupid political stunt,” warning that it risked inflaming regional tensions and undermining the fragile ceasefire efforts underway in Gaza. He reaffirmed that the United States remains firmly opposed to any unilateral annexation, reiterating that President Donald Trump's administration does not support extending Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank. Vance emphasized that such actions could damage Israel's standing internationally and jeopardize its long-term security by alienating key partners in the Arab world. The statement marked one of the most direct rebukes of Israeli policy by a senior U.S. official in recent months and underscored Washington's growing unease with hardline political moves within Israel that could derail ongoing diplomatic and peace-building initiatives.

7. Trump-Xi hold Trade Talks in Malaysia, promise to avoid a full-blown trade war (Economic Times, October 25)

The United States and China held high-level trade talks in Kuala Lumpur on October 25 in an effort to de-escalate mounting economic tensions and prevent a renewed trade war that could disrupt global markets. Both delegations signaled a willingness to stabilize relations ahead of the upcoming meeting

between President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping, emphasizing the importance of maintaining open communication channels. The discussions centered on some of the most sensitive issues driving bilateral friction—chief among them access to critical minerals, export controls on advanced technologies, and the security of global supply chains. U.S. officials pressed for greater transparency in China’s export policies and sought assurances over the continued flow of essential materials for high-tech industries, while the Chinese side demanded the easing of American restrictions on its tech firms and semiconductors. Though no major breakthroughs were announced, the talks were seen as a cautious but constructive step toward restoring confidence between the world’s two largest economies at a time of heightened geopolitical and economic uncertainty.

8. The U.S. conveyed that it would be part of the cease-fire/peace mediation in Southeast Asia: a framework deal between Thailand and Cambodia was signed with U.S. participation ([Reuters, October 25](#))

Cambodia and Thailand have signed a new, expanded ceasefire agreement aimed at ending months of escalating border tensions that have left dozens dead and displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians. The accord, brokered with the support of U.S. President Donald Trump, builds upon an earlier truce reached three months ago and represents a significant step toward restoring stability along one of Southeast Asia’s most volatile frontiers. Under the agreement, both sides have committed to withdrawing heavy artillery and armored units from the border region, initiating a joint landmine clearance program, and facilitating the safe return of displaced civilians. The deal also includes the release of 18 Cambodian prisoners detained by Thai forces and the establishment of an ASEAN-led observer mission to monitor adherence to the ceasefire terms. Beyond its immediate humanitarian importance, the accord underscores a renewed U.S. diplomatic presence in regional conflict mediation and highlights ASEAN’s emerging role as a stabilizing force in Southeast Asia’s complex security landscape. Regional analysts have welcomed the agreement as a rare success in cooperative peacebuilding but caution that sustained trust and political will are essential to ensure the truce evolves into a lasting peace settlement.

9. Trump ordered the resumption of U.S. nuclear-weapons testing for the first time in 33 years, citing parity with China and Russia ([PBS News, October 30](#))

Former President Donald Trump suggested that the United States may resume nuclear weapons testing for the first time in over three decades, signaling a major potential shift in U.S. defense and arms

control policy. He indicated that such a move would be justified if rival powers like Russia and China were conducting similar activities, framing it as a matter of strategic parity and national security. Although Trump did not specify whether the tests would involve full-scale nuclear detonations or limited experimental trials, his remarks immediately sparked alarm among arms control experts and global observers. Critics warned that resuming nuclear testing could undermine decades of non-proliferation efforts, destabilize existing treaties, and trigger a new arms race at a time of heightened geopolitical tensions. The suggestion also raised questions about Washington's broader nuclear posture and whether the U.S. might shift toward a more aggressive deterrence strategy in response to perceived advances by its adversaries.

10. US sings 10-year Defence Pact with India ([Reuters, October 30](#))

The United States and India have signed a landmark 10-year defense cooperation agreement, marking one of the most significant strategic developments in their bilateral relationship in recent years. Announced by U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, the pact aims to institutionalize long-term military collaboration across multiple domains, including joint operations, intelligence and information sharing, defense technology development, and industrial cooperation. The agreement underscores a shared commitment to ensuring regional stability and countering emerging security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, particularly amid concerns over China's growing military assertiveness. It also includes provisions for greater interoperability between U.S. and Indian forces, regular high-level defense dialogues, and expanded cooperation on cyber and space security. For India, the deal is expected to bolster indigenous defense production and access to advanced American technologies, while for Washington, it strengthens a key partnership that supports its strategic objectives in Asia. Analysts view the agreement as a clear message of intent — that the U.S. and India are deepening their defense partnership not just for immediate security needs, but as a cornerstone of a broader, long-term Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at maintaining a free, open, and rules-based regional order.

11. India's exports to US fell by 37.5% in the quarter from May to September, first visible effect of tariffs ([Times of India, October 31](#))

A new report by the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has revealed a dramatic 37.5 % decline in India's exports to the United States between May and September 2025, underscoring the heavy toll of recent U.S. tariff increases. Key sectors—most noticeably smartphones, pharmaceuticals and gems & jewellery—have suffered steep drops: smartphone shipments collapsed by nearly 58 %, while the

gems & jewellery segment plunged by almost 60 %. Labour-intensive industries such as textiles, chemicals, agri-foods and machinery, which contribute a significant share of India's U.S. exports, also saw declines of around one-third. Even sectors that had been tariff-exempt or faced uniform duties were hit, revealing broader structural vulnerabilities. Exporters warn that, unless India swiftly adapts through market diversification and policy support, countries like Vietnam, Thailand and Mexico could permanently capture Indian export market share.

12. Trump claims that Pakistan has been undertaking secret nuclear tests **(Hindustan Times, October 31)**

Donald Trump recently asserted that Pakistan has been secretly conducting underground nuclear-weapons tests, adding that the United States will resume its own nuclear testing program in response. He claimed that Pakistan, along with countries like Russia, China and North Korea, has been carrying out hidden nuclear detonations “where people don't know what's happening... you feel a little bit of a vibration.” The remarks marked the first time a U.S. president publicly accused Pakistan of such clandestine nuclear activity. Islamabad swiftly denied the allegations, reaffirming that it will not resume nuclear testing and that it has not conducted any explosive tests since the late 1990s. Observers noted that there is no open evidence of recent Pakistani nuclear explosion tests, and warned that the unfounded claim could undermine global arms-control norms, raise regional tensions in South Asia, and weaken trust in established non-proliferation frameworks. The episode has triggered strategic jitters among analysts who fear that the mere suggestion of resumed testing by any nuclear-armed state could destabilize the delicate balance of deterrence and encourage a broader arms race.

About the Author

Yuvvraj Singh is a Research Assistant at Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), focusing his research on the USA and its implications on the Global South. He holds a Master's and Bachelor's in Political Science (with specialisation in International Relations) from Kirori Mal College, Delhi University. He has previously worked at ORF, NITI Aayog, and Ministry of External Affairs (ICWA), researching on a range of topics concerning the Global South, Conflict, Maritime Security, and Sustainability. His research has also been published at several national and international fora like The Diplomat, RT, Indian Council of World Affairs, among others. He can be reached at yuvvraj.claws@gmail.com.



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