

# India voices concern on US visas but sees alignment with Rubio

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● **Trump has ramped up restrictions and fees for H-1B visas**

● **Rubio headlined a gala party in New Delhi for the 250th anniversary of US independence**

AFP | New Delhi, India

India voiced concern yesterday over a US visa crackdown, striking a rare critical note even as it expressed broad alignment with Secretary of State Marco Rubio on other fractious issues.

Paying his first visit to India, Rubio said the two democracies were on the same page on all major issues, brushing aside recent unease in New Delhi over trade, China and the Iran war.

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar agreed that the two countries had a "convergence of national interests in many areas" but publicly took Rubio to task over President Donald Trump's assault on visas.

Jaishankar said he "apprised Secretary Rubio of challenges that legitimate travellers face in respect of visa issuance".



India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar (R) and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio address a joint press conference following their meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi

Rubio, who is paying an unusually long four-day, four-city trip to India, called the country "one of our most important strategic partners in the world".

"While we cooperate to deal with illegal and irregular mobility, our expectation is that legal mobility should not be adversely impacted as a consequence," he said, noting that visas were key for US-India tech cooperation.

Trump, who has made curbing non-Western immigration a key political priority, has ramped up restrictions and fees for H-1B visas used largely by Indian tech

workers, sending applications tumbling.

The Trump administration followed up Friday by saying that applicants for permanent residency, even when in the United States legally, must leave for processing, likely splitting up many families for extended periods.

Last month, Trump reposted a far-right commentator who

described India as a "hellhole" and inaccurately alleged that Indian immigrants lack English proficiency.

Asked about racist remarks in the United States about Indians, Rubio said, "Every country in the world has stupid people".

"Our nation has been enriched by people who come to our country," said Rubio, the son of

Cuban immigrants.

He acknowledged there would be "bumps" as the United States reforms immigration but said the changes were in response to a "migratory crisis" and "not India-specific".

**Trade deal finalised soon**

Rubio later headlined a gala party in New Delhi for the 250th anniversary of US independence, in which invited guests, some decked out in red, white and blue, could pose next to cutouts of Trump, Rubio and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing the crowd by speakerphone held up by Ambassador Sergio Gor, Trump hailed his rapport with Modi and boasted, "anything India wants, India gets."

The tariffs were eased after the arrival in India in January of US ambassador Sergio Gor, who had been a top political aide to Trump.

Addressing the party, Gor said he expected the interim trade deal to be signed "in the next few weeks".

Rubio, who is paying an unusually long four-day, four-city trip to India, called the country "one of our most important strategic partners in the world".

"It begins with the fact of our shared values. We are the two

largest democracies," Rubio told the news conference.

"Our nations are strategically aligned on all of the key issues that will define the new century -- all the great challenges that are before us now in the modern era," he said.

Jaishankar, asked about Pakistan's new role in mediating on Iran, said the United States was free to choose its own partners but acknowledged that differences will emerge between the two countries.

"The Trump administration has been very forthright in putting forward its foreign policy outlook as America First," Jaishankar said.

"We have a view of India First," he said.



**The H-1B visa is a US work visa designed for highly skilled foreign professionals in fields such as technology, engineering, medicine and finance.**

## Rescuers search for 20 missing after Philippine building collapse

AFP | Angeles City, Philippines

Rescuers were racing yesterday to free two workers pinned under a building that collapsed in the northern Philippines, killing a Malaysian man and leaving 20 people missing.

The search for survivors continued as night fell, with firemen shining small lights into the rubble for signs of life.

Twenty-six people have been rescued so far after the nine-storey building collapsed in Angeles City, 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of the capital Manila.

The disaster also damaged a nearby hotel and killed a 65-year-old Malaysian guest, Mohd Rezal bin Abdullah, officials said.

The man, from Malaysia's



Twenty people were listed as missing after the collapse of the nine-storey building under construction in Angeles City

northern Sabah state, had managed to communicate with rescuers by phone while pinned under a hotel wall shortly after the collapse at 3:00 am Sunday (1900 GMT Saturday), acting Philippine fire chief Rico Kwan Tiu told AFP. "Unfortunately, when we retrieved him just now, he was already lifeless," he added.

## Gaza flotilla activists return to Ireland, UK

AFP | Dublin, Ireland

British and Irish activists who were part of a Gaza-bound flotilla seized and deported by Israel returned to London and Dublin on Saturday, following global condemnation over their treatment.

Among the Irish activists who arrived at Dublin Airport via Turkey were Margaret Connolly, sister of Irish President Catherine Connolly.

She recounted being held

with the other detained activists in "containers", where she said several people risked hypothermia.

Several supporters sporting keffiyeh scarves and Palestinian flags turned out to welcome the Irish activists, who described being "abused" and "tortured" in detention.

"We were split in groups and the next couple of days were some of the most horrific times I've ever experienced," said activist Tom Deasy.

## Ebola toll tops 200, other African countries seen at risk

AFP | Addis Ababa

Officials in the Democratic Republic of Congo updated the death toll from the Ebola outbreak to 204 late Saturday, hours after the Red Cross said three volunteers had died there and Uganda confirmed three new Ebola cases.

A Health Ministry statement said 204 deaths had been recorded in three provinces of the vast central African country, from 867 suspected cases. The last World Health Organization toll on Friday put the number of deaths at 177 from 750 suspected cases.

The World Health Organization has declared the outbreak of the highly contagious haemorrhagic fever an international emergency.

On Saturday, the African Union's health agency warned that more countries on the continent were at risk of being affected by the Ebola virus, in addition to the DRC and Uganda.

"We have 10 countries at risk," said Jean Kaseya, head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), listing Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia.

Mr. Kaseya said "high mobility and insecurity" in the re-



People wait to be attended at the Mongbwalu General Referral Hospital, as aid agencies intensify efforts to contain an Ebola outbreak caused by the Bundibugyo virus in Mongbwalu, Democratic Republic of Congo

gion were helping spread the disease.

The new cases confirmed in Uganda on Saturday (May 23) bring to five the total confirmed in the East African country since it was detected there and in the DRC on May 15. One person in Uganda has died.

The Health Ministry named the new patients as a Ugandan driver, a Ugandan health worker and a woman from the DRC. All are alive.

Ebola is a deadly viral disease that spreads through direct contact with bodily fluids. It can cause severe bleeding and organ failure.

The current epidemic centres on the conflict-wracked eastern DRC, where it was detected in

Ituri province, which borders Uganda, before spreading to South Kivu.

**First known victims**

The Red Cross said on Saturday that three Congolese volunteers had died in Ituri after apparently contracting Ebola there.

The three "were carrying out dead body management activities on March 27 as part of a humanitarian mission unrelated to Ebola", said the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

"At the time of the intervention, the community was not aware of the Ebola virus disease outbreak... They are among the first known victims."

**Russia targeted Ukraine with 600 drones, 90 missiles: Ukrainian army**

AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

Russia targeted Ukraine with 600 drones and 90 missiles in massive overnight strikes, including a medium-range ballistic missile, the Ukrainian air force said Sunday.

Air defences intercepted 549 of the drones and 55 missiles, the air force said on Telegram, as officials in the capital Kyiv and its surrounding region reported four people had been killed and more than 60 wounded.

## Heatstroke kills 16 in India

AFP | New Delhi

At least 16 people have died of heatstroke in southern India so far this summer, officials said yesterday, as a heatwave grips swathes of the country following official health warnings. Temperatures in several cities across the South Asian country of 1.4 billion people have recently hovered well above 45 °C.

The deaths were reported in the southern state of Telangana, with revenue minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy calling for "statewide vigilance" to safeguard public health.