

# Trump administration ends lottery system for H-1B visas

The new system coming into effect from February 27, 2026, will implement a weighted selection process that will increase probability that H-1B visas are allocated to higher-skilled and higher-paid workers

WASHINGTON, Dec 24 (AP)

**THE** Department of Homeland Security said on Tuesday it was replacing its longstanding lottery system for H-1B work visas with a new approach that prioritises skilled, higher-paid foreign workers.

The change follows a series of actions by the Trump administration aimed at reshaping a visa programme that critics say has become a pipeline for overseas workers willing to work for lower pay, but supporters say drives



innovation.  
"The existing random selection process of H-1B registrations was exploited and abused by US

employers who were primarily seeking to import foreign workers at lower wages than they would pay American workers,"

said US Citizenship and Immigration Services spokesman Matthew Tragesser.

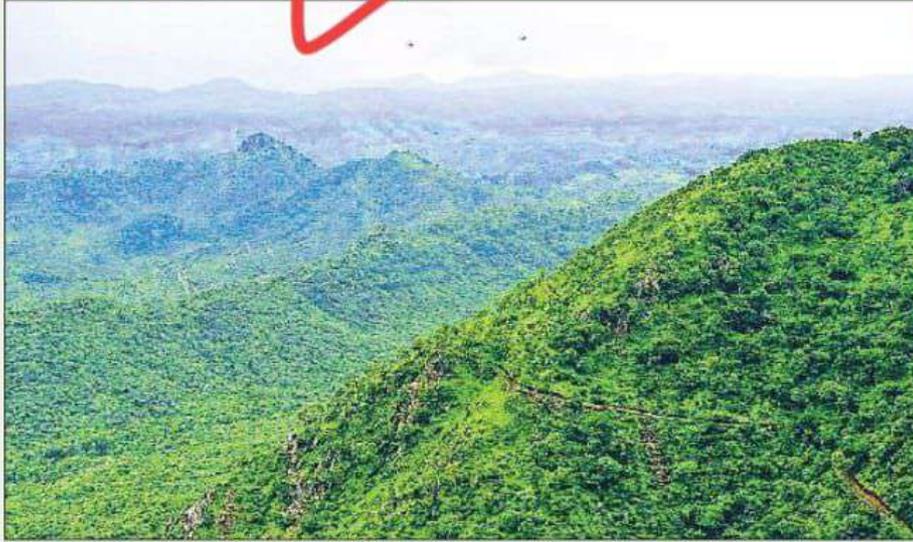
A press release announcing the new rule says, it is "in line with other key changes the administration has made, such as the Presidential Proclamation that requires employers to pay an additional USD 100,000 per visa as a condition of eligibility."

Historically, H-1B visas have been awarded through a lottery system. This year, Amazon was by far the top recipient, with more than 10,000 visas approved, fol-

lowed by Tata Consultancy Services, Microsoft, Apple and Google. California has the highest concentration of H-1B workers.

The new system will "implement a weighted selection process that will increase the probability that H-1B visas are allocated to higher-skilled and higher-paid" foreign workers, according to the press release. It will go into effect from February 27, 2026, and will apply to the upcoming H-1B cap registration season.

# Centre imposes ban on new mining leases in Aravallis



- Ongoing mining activities in Aravallis to be regulated stringently to ensure environmental protection: Officials

NEW DELHI, Dec 24 (PTI)

**THE** Centre on Wednesday issued directions to States for a complete ban on granting new mining leases in the Aravallis, officials said.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has also directed the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) to identify additional areas and zones in the entire Aravallis where mining should be prohibited over and above the areas already prohibited for mining by the Centre.

"This prohibition applies uniformly across the entire Aravalli landscape and is

intended to preserve the integrity of the range. The directions are aimed at safeguarding the Aravallis as a continuous geological ridge extending from Gujarat to NCR and at stopping all unregulated mining activities," a senior official said. "The ministry has also directed the ICFRE to identify additional areas and zones in the entire Aravallis, where mining should be prohibited, over and above the areas already prohibited for mining by the Centre, based on ecological, geological and landscape-level considerations," the official added.

The ICFRE has been directed to undertake this exercise while preparing a comprehensive, science-based Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM) for the entire Aravalli region. The plan, which will be placed in  
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# China seeks to capitalise on de-escalated tension along LAC with India: US report

■ By Yoshita Singh

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Dec 24  
(PTI)

CHINA probably seeks to capitalise on the de-escalation of tension along the Line of Actual Control with India to stabilise bilateral relations and prevent the deepening of US-India ties, according to a report by the US Department of War.

In its annual report to Congress on Tuesday on 'Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2025', the department said that in October 2024, Indian leadership announced an agreement with China.

The agreement was to disengage from remaining standoff sites along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), two days before a

meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit.

The Xi-Modi meeting marked the onset of monthly high-level engagements between the two countries, where parties discussed border management and next steps for the bilateral relationship, including direct flights, visa facilitation, and the exchange of academics and journalists, it said. "China probably seeks to capitalise on decreased tension along the LAC to stabilise bilateral relations and prevent the deepening of US-India ties; however, India probably remains sceptical of China's actions and motives. Continued mutual distrust and other irritants almost certainly limit the bilateral relationship," the report said.

# User evaluation trials of Akash-NG missile system successful: DRDO

NEW DELHI, Dec 24 (PTI)

THE DRDO on Tuesday "successfully completed" user evaluation trials of the next-generation Akash missile system, paving the way for its induction into the armed forces, officials said.

The system demonstrated high precision against diverse aerial threats, including high-speed, low-altitude and long-range high-altitude targets, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) said.

"User evaluation trials of Akash NG missile successfully completed today, meeting all PSQR requirements," it said in a post on X. During the trials, the missiles successfully intercepted aerial targets at different ranges and altitudes, "including the near-boundary-low-altitude and long-range, high-altitude scenarios," the DRDO said.



**DRDO conducts User Evaluation Trials of the Next Generation Akash (Akash-NG) missile system. (PTI)**

"Akash-NG, equipped with an indigenous RF seeker and propelled by a solid rocket motor, is a potent system for ensuring air defence against different types of aerial threats," it said.

The Ministry of Defence, in a post on X, said, "DRDO successfully completed User Evaluation Trials of the Next-Generation Akash (Akash-NG) missile system, paving the way for its induction into the Indian Armed Forces."

The system demonstrated high precision against diverse aerial threats, including high-speed, low-altitude and long-range high-altitude targets, it said.

"Equipped with an indigenous RF seeker, dual-pulse solid rocket motor, and fully homegrown radars and C2 systems, Akash-NG marks a major boost to India's air defence capability," the ministry added.

# ISRO's Christmas, New Year gift to Bharat

## Heaviest launch from Indian soil

SRIHARIKOTA, Dec 24 (PTI)

**I**N a historic Christmas eve mission, ISRO's heaviest rocket, LVM3-M6, successfully placed a heavy US communication satellite into orbit on Wednesday, a feat described by the space agency chief as a season's gift to the country.

The 6,100 kg BlueBird Block-2 satellite is part of a constellation of global Low Earth Orbit (LEO) mission to provide direct-to-mobile connectivity through satellite that would enable 4G and 5G voice and video calls, texts, streaming and data for everyone, everywhere at all times. It was the heaviest satellite to be launched from Indian soil, ISRO said. ISRO said the LVM3-M6, nicknamed 'Bahubali' for its heavylift capability, injected the satellite into its intended orbit in a textbook launch. It carried the communication satellite as part of a commercial deal between NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL) and US-based AST SpaceMobile (AST and Science, LLC).

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**'Bahubali'**  
places  
6,100 kg  
US satellite  
into orbit

## It's a proud milestone: PM

NEW DELHI, Dec 24 (PTI)

**P**RIME Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday congratulated ISRO for placing the heaviest satellite in orbit from India using the LVM3 rocket and strengthening the foundation for future missions such as the Gaganyaan.

"A significant stride in India's space sector. The successful LVM3-M6 launch, placing the heaviest satellite ever launched from Indian soil, the spacecraft of USA, BlueBird Block-2, into its intended orbit, marks a proud milestone in India's space journey," PM Modi said in a post on X.

Indian Space Research Organisation launches the BlueBird Block-2 communication satellite of AST SpaceMobile, USA, onboard its launch vehicle LVM3-M6 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. (PTI)

# Chaos at Bangladesh High Commission

## VHP, Bajrang Dal protesters clash with police

■ The protests were held against the lynching of Hindu minorities in the strife-torn neighbouring nation

NEW DELHI, Dec 23 (PTI)

**HOLDING** saffron flags and shouting slogans against the lynching of a Hindu man in Bangladesh, hundreds of supporters of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal broke barricades

and clashed with police near the fortified Bangladesh High Commission on Tuesday.

Several barricades lay in disarray as police struggled to contain the surge.

The high security area witnessed a beefed-up police presence in the morning ahead of the protest announced by the Hindu right against the lynching of a Hindu man in the strife-torn neighbouring nation.

The area had been secured

with seven layers of barricades and a reinforced presence of police and paramilitary.

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**GROWING UNREST**  
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An officer said a 1,500-strong police force was deployed ahead of the demon-

stration. He said police managed to hold the protesters about 800 metres from the high commission. DTC buses were parked as an obstacle to thwart the protesters' bid to reach the high commission.

A sea of banners and placards bobbed in the air, reading denunciatory messages against the Bangladesh government. A placard read: "Hindu rakt ki ek ek boond ka hisaab chahiye (Each drop of blood of a Hindu must be accounted for)."

(Contd on page 3)



Protesters break barricades as police officials stop Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal members during a protest outside the Bangladesh High Commission over attacks on Hindus in the neighbouring country, in New Delhi, on Tuesday. (ANI)

## B'desh summons Indian envoy

DHAKA, Dec 23 (PTI)

**BANGLADESH'S** Foreign Ministry on Tuesday summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma amid concerns over the security of Bangladeshi missions in India.

Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary Asad Alam Siam summoned