

1. Trump, Musk against functioning of USAID: All about the agency

Introduction



President Donald Trump ordered a 90-day pause on foreign aid given by the United States Agency of International Development (USAID). Two top USAID security officials have also been removed after they refused to grant representatives of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) access to restricted spaces at the agency. Musk has since repeatedly called for USAID's "death", referring to it as a "criminal organisation".

Why have Trump, Musk targeted USAID?

Trump and Musk have targeted USAID for the same reasons as they have gone after multiple other departments and agencies in the federal government: to reduce spending and eliminate the perceived bloat within the US federal government.

The President had promised to downsize the federal government, and slash excessive and inefficient government spending. To deliver on these promises, Trump appointed billionaire Musk as the chief of the newly created Department of Government Efficiency whose sole mandate is to make the federal government more efficient. Musk has vowed to slash federal spending by \$2 trillion.

What does USAID do?

USAID is the "lead international humanitarian and development arm of the US government". The agency provides assistance to other countries primarily by funding non-governmental organisations (NGOs), foreign governments, international organisations, or other US agencies, often for specific programs to alleviate poverty, provide education and healthcare, among other things.

The agency managed more than \$43 billion in funds, and provided assistance to around 130 countries in FY2023. USAID employed more than 10,000 people in FY2023, with approximately two-thirds of this workforce serving overseas. USAID maintains more than 60 missions around the world.

What is the history of USAID?

Proponents of USAID argue that the agency is essential to further US influence overseas. Since the end of World War II, the US has viewed international development assistance as a key weapon in its foreign policy arsenal, one it has wielded to make new allies, and exert leverage over existing ones.

The agency was established via an executive order by President Kennedy after the US Congress in 1961 passed the Foreign Assistance Act which mandated the creation of a single agency to administer foreign aid.

What role does USAID play in India?

The US has provided development and humanitarian assistance to India since 1951. Economic aid from the US has also helped establish eight agricultural universities, the first Indian Institute of Technology, and 14 regional engineering colleges, as well as strengthen India's national programs on immunisation, family planning, maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and polio, according to the website.

However, its operations in India — as in the rest of the world — have historically come with strings and conditions attached.

For instance, USAID in 1965 gave India a \$67 million loan to build a chemical fertiliser factory in Madras (now Chennai) on the condition that a private American company be in charge of distribution, rather than the Indian government, and no additional fertiliser plants be built in the region.

In 2004, the Indian government decided to reject any foreign aid that comes with conditions. This has, over time, led to a decline in the quantum of such assistance. Since then, the role of USAID in India has gone significantly down.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. What is ELS cotton, why doesn't India grow more of this premium variety?

Introduction

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the Union Budget, announced a five-year mission to "facilitate significant improvements in cotton farming, and promote extra-long staple (ELS) cotton varieties".



What is ELS cotton?

Cotton is classified, based on the length of its fibres, as long, medium, or short staple. *Gossypium hirsutum*, which constitutes roughly 96% of the cotton grown in India, falls in the medium staple category, with fibre lengths ranging from 25 to 28.6 mm.

On the other hand, ELS varieties boast fibre lengths of 30 mm and above. Most ELS cotton comes from the species *Gossypium barbadense*, commonly known as Egyptian or Pima cotton. Having originated in South America, ELS cotton today is mainly grown in China, Egypt, Australia, and Peru.

The fabric produced using ELS cotton is of the highest quality. This is why brands producing top-of-the-line fabrics mix a small quantity of ELS with medium staple cotton to improve quality.

Why is ELS cotton not grown in India?

For the 2024-25 season, the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of medium staple cotton was Rs 7,121 (per quintal) while that of long staple cotton was Rs 7,521.

Nonetheless, cotton farmers in India have thus far been reluctant to adopt ELS cotton. This is mainly due to lower than average per acre yields. While the medium staple variety yields between 10 and 12 quintals per acre, ELS cotton has a yield of only 7-8 quintals.

Additionally, farmers growing ELS cotton are often unable to market their premium produce at premium prices.

How can the Cotton Mission help?

The mission will provide the best science & technology support to farmers involved in Cotton cultivation. The cotton production is affected by low per-acre yields, and increased pest attacks. Thus, adoption of the latest technologies would be a welcome step.

Currently, India's per acre yields are significantly lower than other countries. For instance, Brazil boasts an average yield of 20 quintals per acre, while China boasts a yield of 15 quintals. Better seeds, timely agronomic advice, and adoption of technology would help India improve in this regard, and grow premium varieties such as ELS cotton.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

3. India's Chandrika Tandon Bags Award At Grammy 2025

Chandrika Krishnamoorthy Tandon bagged Grammy

India-born Chandrika Krishnamoorthy Tandon has bagged the Grammy for her album *Triveni* under the category for the Best New Age, Ambient, or Chant Album at the award ceremony held in Los Angeles. She was awarded at the 67th Grammy Awards.

Tandon achieved her second Grammy nomination when she was named during Grammy 2025 nominations. She bagged her first Grammy nomination for the 2009 album *Soul Call*.

Grammy Awards

The Grammy Awards are awards presented by the Recording Academy of the United States to recognize outstanding achievements in the music industry. They are regarded by many as the most prestigious and significant awards in the music industry worldwide. They were originally called the Gramophone Awards, as the trophy depicts a gramophone. The first Grammy Awards ceremony was held in 1959. The 67th Annual Grammy Awards, featuring a total of 94 categories, were presented on February 2, 2025.



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The Grammys are considered one of the four major annual American entertainment awards with the Academy Awards (for films), the Emmy Awards (for television), and the Tony Awards (for theater).

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: PIB

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