



Trump's '\$21m for voter turnout' claim triggers political row in India



India's governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) called the payout an "external interference" and accused the opposition Congress party of seeking this intervention

Trump vowed to boost the US economy and soon after returning to office, he created the Department of Government Efficiency (Doge), led by Musk, to slash federal spending and jobs. Musk says Doge's mission is to save taxpayer money and cut national debt. One of its biggest moves - now making global headlines - is a crackdown on USAID, the US agency overseeing humanitarian aid since the 1960s. Musk, who has called USAID a "criminal organisation", announced on Sunday that funding for several projects had been cancelled.

The cuts included \$486m for the "Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening", with "\$21m for voter turnout in India" and "\$22m for inclusive and participatory political process in Moldova".

Defending Doge's cuts, Trump said India "had a lot of money" and was among the world's highest-taxing nations. On Thursday, he doubled down, questioning the \$21m spend on "India's voter turnout".

The latest comments came a week after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first Washington visit under Trump's second term, where Trump announced expanded military sales, increased energy exports and plans for a trade deal and new defence framework. "I guess they were trying to get somebody else elected. We have got to tell the Indian government," the US president said at a summit in Miami. The same day, BJP leader Amit Malviya shared a clip of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi speaking at an event in London before the 2024 general election.

In the clip, Gandhi can be heard saying that major democracies like the US and European countries were "oblivious that a huge chunk of democratic model has come undone [in India]".

"Rahul Gandhi was in London, urging foreign powers - from the US to Europe - to intervene in India's internal affairs," Malviya alleged in his post on X. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh dismissed the claim and urged the government to report on USAID's decades-long support to governmental and non-governmental institutions during