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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# At 250, Can America Still Reinvent Itself?

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY



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 **The Indian Express**   4 July 2026   **GS2**

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## THE LIFT LINE

On 4 July 2026 the United States turns 250. The Semiquincentennial arrives at a moment of institutional stress, yet the deeper question for the world, and for India, is whether the American system’s capacity to self-correct, from **judicial review** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/judicial-review/>) to checks and balances, still holds. A February 2026 Supreme Court tariff ruling suggests it may.

## WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The US at 250 is a lens on constitutionalism, institutional **resilience** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/resilience/>) and the shifting India-US relationship, all recurring GS2 concerns.

**GS Paper 2:** Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries; **bilateral** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/bilateral/>), regional and global groupings involving India; effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India’s interests; important international institutions.

**Prelims angle:** US Semiquincentennial (America250), Marbury v. Madison, IEEPA, COMPACT and TRUST frameworks, H-1B fee, **Paris Agreement** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/paris-agreement/>) exit, BTA.

**Mains angle:** Institutional self-correction, the separation-of-powers check on the executive, and India’s strategic-autonomy response to US unpredictability.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

4 July 2026 marks 250 years since the US Declaration of Independence, the Semiquincentennial, coordinated by the Congress-chartered, non-partisan U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission (“America250”). The US Constitution of 1787 (in force 1788), with its 27 amendments, is the world’s oldest written national constitution still in force. Its capacity for reinvention rests significantly on judicial review, established in Marbury v. Madison (1803).

The second Trump administration took office on 20 January 2025 under an “America First” banner. A striking test of institutional self-correction came on 20 February 2026, when the US Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) does not authorise the President to impose tariffs, holding that this power belongs to Congress under Article I. The IEEPA tariffs were terminated on 24 February 2026, a judicial self-correction of executive overreach (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/overreach/>).

## THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

### The self-correction thesis

The editorial’s core claim is that American institutions, at 250, retain the capacity to correct their own excesses. The tariff ruling is Exhibit A: the judiciary constrained the executive and restored a power to the legislature, exactly the separation-of-powers design the Constitution encodes. This capacity, rather than any single administration’s policy, is what makes the system durable.

### What it means for India

For India, US unpredictability is a strategic variable to be managed. After a cumulative tariff of about 50 per cent in 2025, a February 2026 interim framework lowered India’s reciprocal tariff from 25 to 18 per cent. A final Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) remained unsigned as of mid-2026, with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal describing it as “very close.”

TRACK	DEVELOPMENT	STATUS
Tariffs	About 50 per cent (2025), then cut to 18 per cent (Feb 2026 interim)	BTA unsigned as of mid-2026
Strategic frameworks	COMPACT (umbrella), TRUST (technology)	Launched at 13 Feb 2025 Modi-Trump summit
Mobility	H-1B \$100,000 per-new-petition fee from 21 Sept 2025	India about 71 per cent of beneficiaries
Multilateralism	US exited Paris Agreement (effective 27 Jan 2026) and WHO	Widens global governance gaps

### The strategic scaffolding

At the Modi-Trump summit on 13 February 2025, two frameworks were launched: COMPACT as the umbrella and TRUST for technology, replacing the Biden-era iCET. On mobility, a \$100,000 fee per new H-1B petition took effect on 21 September 2025, significant because Indians are about 71 per cent of H-1B beneficiaries. The US also exited the Paris Agreement (effective 27 January 2026) and the WHO, widening gaps in global governance.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

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Distinguish policy from architecture. Policies swing with administrations; architecture, the Constitution, judicial review, federalism (<https://ujijari.com/terms/federalism/>) and the separation of powers, is designed to absorb and correct those swings. The February 2026 tariff ruling shows the architecture working. For India, the analytical takeaway is multi-alignment: engage the US deeply on technology and trade, but hedge through strategic autonomy so that no single administration's turn can dictate India's trajectory.

## THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Imagine the US system as a ship with a self-righting keel. Waves (executive overreach, populist surges) heel the ship hard over, but the keel of checks and balances, weighted by judicial review, pulls it upright again. The tariff ruling is one such righting moment. For India, standing on its own vessel alongside, the lesson is to keep its own keel, strategic autonomy (<https://ujijari.com/terms/strategic-autonomy/>), deep enough that the American ship's rolls do not capsizes the partnership.

## WAY FORWARD

- India should conclude the BTA on balanced terms while diversifying export markets to reduce single-partner dependence.
- Deepen COMPACT and TRUST cooperation in critical and emerging technologies, where interests align most durably.
- Manage the H-1B mobility shock by strengthening domestic tech ecosystems and negotiating on services access.
- Fill multilateral (<https://ujijari.com/vocab/multilateral/>) gaps left by US exits (Paris, WHO) through plurilateral and Global-South leadership, consistent with strategic autonomy.

## PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

Relevant PYQ threads: 2021 GS2 “The USA is facing an existential threat in the form of a China...” (India-US-China); 2017 GS2 on comparison of constitutional schemes; questions on judicial review.

**Practice question (15 marks, 250 words):** “The strength of the United States at 250 lies less in its policies than in the capacity of its institutions to self-correct.” Discuss with reference to recent developments and the implications for India-US relations.

Sources: *The Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/>)

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