Manipur protest on; Kukis want President's Rule back

Thousands take to the streets demanding the unconditional release of all hostages; shutdown extended; they demand special security zones in vulnerable areas, stronger protection for civilians

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Thousands of Kuki-Zo people took to the streets in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi districts of Manipur on Saturday, demanding the unconditional release of Kuki hostages and justice for three church leaders killed in an ambush by extremists on May 13.

In a memorandum to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, several Kuki civil society groups called for the reimposition of President's Rule in the State. The protest rallies coincided with the extension of a 48-hour total shutdown called by the Kuki Inpi Manipur, the apex body of Kukis.

According to Manipur's Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam, more than 38 Kuki and Naga people were held captives by various groups after the killing of three church leaders. Security forces and community-based organisations helped secure the release of 28 hostages on Friday. Unconfirmed reports said 10 more hostages were released on Saturday, but the Kuki-Zo groups said 14 community members continued to be in captivity.

Mounting tension: Protesters demanding the release of Kuki hostages and justice for three slain church leaders at Kangpokpi in Manipur on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Protesters at the rally held by the Committee on Tribal Unity demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all Kuki hostages and the "urgent implementation of the charter of demands" submitted to the Centre.

These demands include a National Investigation Agency probe into the killing of the church leaders, a security for civilians and villages, the establishment of special security zones in conflict-prone areas, and an expedited engagement with Kuki-Zomi extremist groups under the Suspension of Operations pact.

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Call for President's Rule amid Manipur protests

"The continued captivity of innocent civilians was not merely unlawful detention but an act of terror against a people," KIM president Ch. Ajang Khongsai told the gathering.

During the "mass rally for justice" in Churachandpur, the Kuki Women Organisation for Human Rights (KWOHR) and other civil society groups submitted a memorandum to Mr. Shah, condemning the killing of three Kuki-Zo religious leaders and raising concerns over continued violence in the region. The KWOHR alleged that the ongoing violence was linked to "proxy attacks" carried out against the Kuki-Zo people, and expressed concern over repeated incidents of violence, displacement, and insecurity in the region.

The KWOHR called for the re-imposition of President's Rule in Manipur, strengthening of security deployment in Kuki-Zo areas, a high-level investigation into the killings and related incidents of violence, and the fulfilment of the long-standing demand for a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo people under the Constitution of India.

WEST ASIA WAR

Singapore pips UAE as India's second largest export destination

Exports to Singapore surged by 180% in April to $3.2 billion

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, May 16

INDIA'S TRADE flows have begun shifting amid the prolonged closure of the Strait of Hormuz since March, as traders have begun finding alternate routes to export goods amid disruption in trade with countries in the West Asia region, an analysis of data shared by the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed.

The most notable shift in trade routes was seen in the two transshipment hubs that India has free trade agreements (FTA) with - UAE and Singapore. Replacing UAE, Singapore became India's second largest export market in April, registering a five-fold jump compared to February.

The Strait of Hormuz was closed on March 2. While exports to Singapore surged by 180% in April to $3.20 billion compared to $1.14 billion a year ago, exports to UAE slipped by 36% to $2.18 billion last month compared to $3.43 billion a year ago. Exports from Singapore have been rising month-on-month too since February amid the disruption in trade with UAE.

On the import side too, the West Asia war has led to new import partners. Energy exporters such as Oman, Peru and Nigeria broke into India's top 20 import sources. Shipment from Oman alone more than tripled to $1.48 billion in April compared to $429.58 million.

These changes come as traditional sources of energy are facing restrictions. Imports from Qatar in March slipped by 47% to $537.34 million compared to $1.03 billion during March last year. However, imports from Saudi Arabia recovered sharply in April to $3.85 billion compared to $2.06 billion in March.

On the import side too, the war has led to new import partners. Energy exporters such as Oman, Peru and Nigeria broke into India's top 20 import sources. REUTERS

The war in West Asia has led to a sharp jump in global energy prices, with the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and damage to Gulf nations' energy infrastructure adversely impacting supplies. For India, in addition to a widening of the import bill and a cloudy outlook for exports, the conflict has directly impacted the rupee, which has fallen to multiple record lows against the US dollar on its way to tumbling 5.2% since the end of February.

To ward off further pressure on the currency, the government has been taking austerity measures to ease the strain on the use of foreign currency and reduce fuel consumption. In addition to a hike in the import duty on precious metals, oil marketing companies on Friday increased the pump price of petrol and diesel for the first time in four years.

The Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman, is a critical maritime choke point that accounted for about a fifth of global oil flows before the West Asia war began on February 28. Since then, vessel movements through the strait have been effectively halted, leading to an unprecedented global energy supply crisis.

According to the latest assessment by the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), West Asian oil producers Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain collectively shut in 10.5 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil production in April, up from 8.9 million bpd in March.

The EIA has also revised upwards — by 19%— the estimated West Asia oil production shut-in for March from its earlier estimate of 7.5 million bpd. The estimated shut-in in April is a little over 10% of the global liquid fuels consumption.

'Global financial situation extremely arduous'

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

The global financial environment has become increasingly challenging, with U.S. 30-year Treasury yields crossing 5%, the U.K. 10-year yield rising above 5.2%, and Japan's 30-year yield touching 4%, said V. Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Advisor, Government of India.

According to him, much of the FDI India attracted over the past two decades came during an era of near-zero interest rates and quantitative easing, when global capital actively sought higher returns in emerging markets.

"With that phase now over, India must compete in a world where 5% risk-free long-term interest rates have raised the benchmark for every dollar of investment entering the country," he stated while delivering keynote at the PanIIT Alumni Meet.

V. Anantha Nageswaran

Three major forces

Highlighting the changing global landscape, Dr. Nageswaran pointed to three major forces redefining the world order: intensifying great-power competition, fractures within Western alliances and China's unprecedented manufacturing dominance.

India's goods trade deficit stood at 8.5% of GDP in FY24, and even after excluding oil and coal imports, the deficit stood at 3.5% of GDP, indicating a structural rather than cyclical challenge.

At the same time, foreign direct investment (FDI), after accounting for repatriation and outflows by Indian firms, has reduced significantly, with global investors watching India closely but not committing capital at the scale required, he observed.

Global flows selective

Dr. Nageswaran noted India's goods trade deficit remained structurally significant and global capital flows were becoming more selective in a high-interest-rate environment.

"India's potential is not a given. It must be claimed deliberately," he said, emphasising the coming decades would be shaped not by any single government, but by the collective choices of citizens, institutions and industry leaders.

Dr. Nageswaran urged that, "India is at a fork, not in crisis and must move with speed, confidence and strategic clarity."

On manufacturing, he said India must simultaneously focus on labour-intensive sectors such as garments, footwear and food processing while also building capabilities in semiconductors, batteries, advanced electronics and specialty chemicals.

Energy reserves

Calling for greater urgency in building strategic reserves and accelerating nuclear energy adoption, he said a country aspiring to host semiconductor fabs, battery gigafactories and data centres cannot treat nuclear energy as a distant horizon.

On the rise of artificial intelligence and its impact on employment, he said, AI would compress routine cognitive work and narrow entry-level hiring, making deep expertise and skilled trades more important.

The country required at least eight million new jobs or livelihoods every year, however trade skills such as electricians, skilled construction workers and technicians will remain among the most protected and essential jobs in the emerging economy.

Stressing India's next 25 years would be determined by collective choices of institutions and individuals, he said the country could no longer afford slow decision-making and delayed execution in an increasingly fragmented world order.

Reality check of govt.'s LPG stock claim

Govt. assured people that India had 45 days of LPG 'rolling stock,' implying there was enough stock and no need for panic; this came as a puzzle to many since India had rather limited LPG storage capacity and needs regular shipments to the extent of one shipload of LPG arriving every day

NEWS ANALYSIS

M. Kalyanaraman
Debayan Tewari
CHENNAI

A few days ago, the government assured the people that India had 45 days of "rolling stock" in LPG, implying there were enough stocks and there was no need for panic.

The implication came as a puzzle to many since India has rather limited LPG storage capacity and needs regular shipments from abroad to the extent of an average of one shipload of LPG arriving every day.

Precious commodity: A worker handles a filled LPG gas cylinder amid reports of nationwide shortage of the cooking fuel. ANI

Total LPG capacity

As per government data, India has a total LPG tankage capacity of some 1.6 million tonne of which some 53% is in import terminals, some 31% in bottling plants, 16% in refineries and related facilities.

As per government data, this would account for some 17 days of consumption as per January 1, 2026 consumption figures, assuming all the tanks are full, no fresh LPG came in and none were produced in Indian refineries in that period.

Long-term storage

India has almost negligible long-term storage such as caverns unlike, say, Europe in the case of natural gas.

One could say that a few days can be added to the figure of 17 given the cutbacks in bulk LPG and commercial LPG supplies. There is always LPG currently under transportation as cylinders within India and that could be considered too.

Yet, this still leaves a large shortfall from the claimed figure of 45 days even if all the tanks are full, unless the government has considered the LPG on ships, which have been ordered and are on their way, as inventory.

It is industry practice to consider certain types of import shipments as inventory though they may not be considered reliable buffer stocks. The term "rolling stock" usually applies to goods transported by train.

The Hindu has been able to track 15 LPG tankers that left various ports in the U.S. for India using open-source marine traffic data.

Crystal Explorer, which left Houston, was scheduled to arrived in Ennore, Chennai, on Friday (May 15), while the tanker Hannibal reached Mangaluru on Saturday (May 16), as per *marinetraffic.com*.

The tanker Ethane Opal had discharged its cargo and left the Dahej port on Thursday.

The LPG tankers Vega Sky and Jirisan Explorer are scheduled to arrive in Vishakhapatnam and Ennore respectively on May 22, as per *marinetraffic.com*. Jia Yuan (Dhamra) and BW Aries (Vishakhapatnam) are likely to reach India this month.

Future Ace, which set sail from the port of Nederland in the U.S., is now in the Bay of Bengal abutting the Odisha coast. While *marinetraffic.com* did not show its final destination, it is nearing port of Dhamra.

Marine data show that the tankers Gas Planet, Pinza and Shergar, that have recently left the U.S., are likely to reach Vishakhapatnam in the third week of June. Ethane Pearl and Clipper Guardian are scheduled to dock at Dahej and Haldia respectively by mid-June or thereafter.

The combined deadweight of these 15 ships is 8.38 lakh tonne.

Among the 15 tankers, two vessels – Ethane Crystal (bound for Dahej) and Badrinath (Mangalore) – are going to Port Louis in Mauritius, where they are likely to refuel before heading towards India.

Boom in marine fuel

According to *Business Insider Africa*, Port Louis has seen a boom in marine fuel sales after the surge in marine traffic around the Cape of Good Hope, effected by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and threats of disruptions in the Red Sea.

On Thursday, LPG tanker Marshall Island-flagged Symi appeared to be sailing in the Gulf of Oman.

The vessel has been in the Persian Gulf since early March, having loaded its cargo at Ras Laffan in Qatar. It was among the 20 ships marked for evacuation by the government since it was critical to India's energy needs.

Reports said another LPG tanker, the Vietnam-flagged NV Sunshine had transited the Strait of Hormuz and has entered India and is now off the Gujarat coast. It too had switched off its AIS while sailing through the chokepoint. The combined dead weight of the two vessels is 81,572 tonne.

More LPG vessels

The vessels described above could carry some one million tonne of LPG but the list is not comprehensive. There could be more such vessels and spot purchases the government can make from vessels already loaded. India's post-war LPG consumption in March was some 2.4 million tonne – a drop of 6 lakh tonne compared with normal months. Import deficit was about 1 million tonne, made up by higher local output. By this account, 1 million tonne of shipment could add to another 12 days.

NO CURB ON ITS IMPORT FOR PROCESSING, VALUE-ADDED EXPORTS AS JEWELLERY

After duty hike, govt curbs silver imports to aid rupee

ENS Economic Bureau
New Delhi, May 16

THE GOVERNMENT on Saturday put silver imports for domestic consumption under the restricted category, requiring prior government approval.

This follows a series of steps taken over the last few days to discourage precious metal imports, which strain the current account and increase forex outflow due to high global prices.

On Wednesday, the government raised the customs duty on imports of gold and silver to 15% from 6%, and on platinum to 15.4% from 6.4% to moderate these non-essential imports amidst the West Asia crisis.

A day later, it put a quantitative limit of 100 kg on the import of the yellow metal under a key export scheme to curb misuse of the duty-free import facility for value-added exports.

As per a Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) notification, imports of bars containing silver up to 99% would now be in the restricted category if it is meant for domestic consumption.

However, silver imported for processing and value-added exports as jewellery would continue to be unrestricted.

Imports by 100% export-oriented units and units located in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) shall also not be subject to any restrictions provided the imported goods are not sold in the domestic tariff area. Rising imports of gold and silver amidst their rising prices in the past one year have been a cause of concern. With the onset of war in West Asia from February 28, the government has taken steps over the past week to curb imports and conserve foreign exchange in an uncertain global atmosphere.

Silver imports increased by 157% to $411 million in April. REUTERS

In 2025-26, silver imports increased by 150% to $12.05 billion. In volume terms, however, the increase was only 42%, reaching 7,334 tonnes. International prices of the metal rose 74% in the year.

Similarly, gold imports increased 24% to $71.98 billion in the last financial year. This occurred despite a 4.7% drop in gold import volume to 721 tonnes, as international gold prices increased by 30% during the year.

The demand for these metals remained robust even in April with gold imports increasing 81.7% on year to $5.6 billion while silver imports increased 157% to $411 million.

As a large importer of crude oil, India remains vulnerable to elevated energy prices and supply-side disruptions, which can increase the import bill, exert pressure on inflation, and the current account deficit, officials said at the time of the duty hike on gold and silver last week. "In such circumstances, prudent management of the country's external sector becomes essential," an official had said. Officials said precious metals, while culturally and financially significant, are "predominantly consumption and investment driven" in nature and that such imports involve "substantial outflow of foreign exchange".

A depreciating rupee is adding to the country's import bill burden. India's foreign exchange resources, therefore, must be prioritised towards essential imports such as crude oil, fertilisers, industrial raw materials, defence requirements, critical technologies, and capital goods, the official had said. Over the last few years, India has seen significant foreign exchange outflows on account of higher imports of precious metals and spending on overseas travel under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS).

The pressure on India's external sector has been felt amid the ongoing West Asia war, with forex reserves plummeting by $32 billion in 10 weeks since the onset of the conflict, and crude oil prices continuing to hover above $100 a barrel. **WITH FE**

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PM stresses close ties as he addresses the diaspora and meets Dutch royalty

India's aspirations no longer limited to its borders, Modi tells Indian community in the Netherlands; in the second leg of his five-nation tour, he meets the King and Queen of the Netherlands and 'exchanges perspectives on boosting ties'; the country hands back Chola dynasty copper plates to India

Press Trust of India
THE HAGUE

Describing India as a "land of opportunities", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Saturday that the country was undergoing an "unprecedented transformation" and its aspirations were "no longer limited to its borders".

Addressing the Indian community in The Hague, the Prime Minister said that India was dreaming big and its youth aspired to reach the sky.

Mr. Modi arrived in the Netherlands on Friday after a brief stopover in the UAE on the second leg of his five-nation tour to further deepen bilateral cooperation in areas such as trade, technology, defence and renewable energy. The countries in the itinerary include Sweden, Norway, and Italy.

He met King of the Netherlands Willem–Alexander and Queen Maxima and discussed issues of mutual interest. He also held wide-ranging talks with his Dutch counterpart, Rob Jetten, focusing on trade, investment, and critical technologies.

"Met His Majesty King Willem-Alexander and Her Majesty Queen Máxima at the Royal Palace. It was wonderful exchanging perspectives on boosting India-Netherlands friendship across key sectors like technology, innovation, sustainable growth, commerce and water resources," Mr. Modi posted on X after the meeting.

He said that India and the Netherlands were "connected by shared interests and a shared belief in building a future-ready planet".

Both sides noted the close cooperation in the areas of sustainability, climate action, digital technology, innovation, fintech and blue economy, and expressed commitment towards further strengthening India–Netherlands relations, the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, said in a post on X.

The Prime Minister was paying a second trip to the country after a 2017 tour and comes at what officials described as an "important juncture" in India–Netherlands ties.

Warm welcome: Narendra Modi waves at the crowd during a community event in The Hague, Netherlands, on Saturday. ANI

Officials in the Ministry of External Affairs said the visit carries a "rich and substantive agenda" and is expected to consolidate the strategic dimensions of the partnership that have emerged through sustained engagement between the two countries.

India and the Netherlands have significantly expanded cooperation in recent years beyond traditional sectors such as trade, investment and the priority areas of water, agriculture and health.

Saying that India offers immense opportunities, Mr. Modi invited Dutch companies to design, innovate and manufacture in the country. In his remarks at the CEO Roundtable, the Prime Minister said today's India is a symbol of scale and stability and no country in the world can match its speed in infrastructure, clean energy, and connectivity. This is why India is contributing 17% to global growth, he said.

Mr. Modi, accompanied by Mr. Jetten, also witnessed the signing of an agreement between Tata Electronics and ASML, a Dutch multinational corporation, to support semiconductor fabrication in Dholera, Gujarat.

The Netherlands also handed back 11th–century Chola dynasty copper plates to India, in an event attended by Mr. Modi, signifying the strengthening of ties between the two countries.

The 21 copper plates, belonging to the times of Rajaraja Chola I and brought to the Netherlands in the 1700s from present-day Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu which was then under Dutch control, are considered the most significant surviving records of the Chola dynasty and are among the important artefacts of Tamil heritage held anywhere outside the country. India has been pursuing the return of the plates, known in the Netherlands as the Leiden Plates, since 2012.

Trust and transparency

Highlighting that India and the Netherlands are working together to create a trusted, transparent, and future-ready supply chain, Mr. Modi told the Indian diaspora in his over 40-minute speech that the Netherlands would become the "natural gateway" for Indian businesses to enter Europe, and added that the Indian diaspora could serve as a trusted bridge in this journey.

"From energy security to water security, the Netherlands and India are working together. Our cooperation on green hydrogen is very important. And the historic trade agreement between India and the EU will further strengthen the partnership between India and the Netherlands," he added. He urged all "friends of India" in the European country to increase cooperation with India as much as possible. "This will also increase India's potential, and the return on your investments will also be higher. This is Modi's guarantee," he said. The Prime Minister assured the diaspora that the Government of India stood firmly behind every Indian living abroad and remained committed to their welfare.

NINTH ARREST SO FAR; HAD COMPLETE ACCESS TO BOTANY, ZOOLOGY PAPERS: CBI

Pune botany prof held for NEET leak, was NTA's subject expert

Plotted with co-accused for deals with 70-75 students: Probe

Mahender Singh Manral, Nirbhay Thakur & Soham Shah
New Delhi, Pune, May 16

A SENIOR professor of botany at a prominent private college in Pune who was appointed by the National Testing Agency (NTA) as a subject expert has become the ninth person to be arrested in the sweeping multi-city investigation into the question paper leak that led to the cancellation of NEET (UG) 2026 earlier this week.

Fifty-seven-year-old Manisha Gurunath Mandhare, who teaches at the junior college of the Modern College of Arts, Science and Commerce, popularly known as Modern College, was arrested in Delhi, a spokesperson for the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said on Saturday.

Manisha Mandhare and P V Kulkarni (right) were involved in the exam process on behalf of the National Testing Agency: CBI

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COURT PULLS UP CBI FOR CLOSING 2024 UGC-NET LEAK CASE

Mandhare's arrest came a day after the CBI arrested P V Kulkarni, a retired professor of chemistry, in connection with the leak in Pune. Kulkarni, who was remanded in 10 days' CBI custody by a court in Delhi on Saturday, too was involved in the examination process on behalf of the NTA, the CBI has said.

The investigation has found that Kulkarni and Mandhare allegedly struck deals with at least 70-75 students, promising to provide them with the questions of chemistry and biology

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NTA flags list of paper setters and translators on its radar to CBI

Abhinaya Harigovind
New Delhi, May 16

WITH THE CBI arresting two persons associated with the process of preparing the NEET-UG question paper, the National Testing Agency (NTA) is learnt to have flagged a list of names of question paper setters and translators who are "on the agency's radar" to the CBI. The NTA is also learnt to be overhauling its existing list of question paper setters and translators ahead of the retest scheduled for June 21.

With the breach being traced to the first stage where the question paper originates — the exam process involves a sequence of steps, from setting of the question paper to the printing press and the exam centre — the NTA is now learnt to be "doing away" with a set of question paper setters and translators, whose names it has also submitted to the investigating agency.

NTA sources said the agency is trying to ensure a "foolproof" retest by replacing a set of people who were earlier associated with the process.

On Friday, the CBI arrested P V Kulkarni, a retired lecturer from Pune, identifying him as the "source of the NEET-UG

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Putin to visit China on May 19, hot on heels of Trump's trip to Beijing

Putin and Xi will work to 'further strengthen the comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation'; the visit follows Trump's China trip, which did not resolve tensions over Ukraine or Iran; China has not condemned Russian invasion

Agence France-Presse
MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin will travel to China on May 19 for a two-day visit, hot on the heels of U.S. President Donald Trump's trip to Beijing, the Kremlin said on Saturday.

During the trip, the Russian leader will discuss with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping how to "further strengthen the comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation" between Moscow and Beijing, according to a Kremlin statement.

Mr. Putin and Mr. Xi will "exchange views on key international and regional issues" and sign a joint declaration at the conclusion of their talks, it added.

Close ties: Xi Jinping shakes hands with Vladimir Putin following their talks at the Kremlin, in Moscow in 2025. REUTERS

As part of the visit, Mr. Putin is also scheduled to discuss economic and trade cooperation with Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

The announcement of Mr. Putin's trip comes just after Mr. Trump wrapped up on Friday the first visit to China by a U.S. President in nearly a decade, with the grand reception belying a roster of unresolved trade and geopolitical tensions, including over the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

Although Mr. Trump and Mr. Xi discussed the more than four-year-long conflict – as well as the U.S. leader's stalemated war with Iran – the Republican President took off from China without appearing to secure a breakthrough on either front.

Negotiations to end the fighting in Ukraine, brokered by the United States, have appeared stalled since the beginning of the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran which broke out on February 28. Before Mr. Trump arrived in China, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy asked the U.S. leader to raise the matter of how to stop the conflict during talks with Mr. Xi.

Moscow has ruled out a ceasefire or comprehensive negotiations with Ukraine unless Kyiv caves to the Kremlin's maximalist demands.

While China has regularly called for talks to end the fighting, it has never condemned Russia for sending troops into Ukraine and presents itself as a neutral party.

NIGERIAN PRESIDENT SAYS EARLY ASSESSMENTS CONFIRM ELIMINATION

ISIS deputy chief killed by US, Nigerian forces: Trump

Reuters
Washington, May 16

ABU-BILAL AL-MINUKI, the second in command of ISIS globally, has been killed in an operation conducted by US and Nigerian forces in the northeast of the African country, US President Donald Trump and his counterpart in Nigeria, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, said.

Trump announced the strike in a Truth Social post late on Friday in the United States, with Tinubu on Saturday describing it as a "significant example of effective collaboration in the fight against terrorism".

"Tonight, at my direction, brave American forces and the Armed Forces of Nigeria flawlessly executed a meticulously planned and very complex mission to eliminate the most active terrorist in the world from the battlefield. Abu-Bilal al-Minuki... thought he could hide in Africa, but little did he know we had sources who kept us informed on what he was doing," Trump said on Truth Social.

In a statement posted on X, Tinubu said early assessments confirmed the elimination of al-Minuki — also known as Abu-Mainok — along with several of his lieutenants, during a strike on his compound in the Lake Chad Basin. The Nigerian Army, also on X, said the strike was carried out in Metele in Borno State, where troops carried out a precision air-land operation in close coordination with US Africa Command (AFRICOM). Borno has endured an insurgency waged by Boko Haram and its splinter group Islamic State West Africa Province for 17 years that has killed thousands and displaced 2 million people. The latest operation, carried out under Nigeria's ongoing counter-insurgency initiative, commenced at approximately 12:01 a.m and concluded around 4 a.m. on Saturday and was executed with no casualties or loss of assets, the army added.

Al-Minuki, a Nigerian national, was designated a "specially designated global terrorist" by the Biden administration in 2023, according to the US Federal Register. The US carried out strikes targeting Islamic State-linked militants in Nigeria in December. Since then, Washington has deployed drones and 200 troops to provide training and intelligence support to the Nigerian military against Islamic State and al Qaeda-linked insurgencies that are spreading across West Africa.

42 students missing after Nigeria school attack, says lawmaker

Maiduguri: At least 42 Nigerian school children were missing on Saturday a day after suspected Islamist militants attacked a school in the insurgency-hit northeastern Borno state, a senator for the area said.

Residents said on Friday that armed men abducted an unknown number of students from Mussa Primary and Junior Secondary School in Askira-Uba Local Government Area while classes were in session.

Ali Ndume, senator for Borno South district, where the school is located, said in a statement that school authorities informed him that 32 students were abducted from the school while another 10 were seized from their homes close to the school. Nigeria's police and military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Borno — an area the size of Ireland that borders Cameroon, Chad and Niger — remains the epicentre of an insurgency by the Boko Haram Islamist militant group that has lasted more than 15 years. No group has claimed responsibility for Friday's attack. REUTERS

"Tonight, at my direction, brave American forces and the Armed Forces of Nigeria flawlessly executed a meticulously planned and very complex mission to eliminate the most active terrorist in the world from the battlefield..."

DONALD TRUMP
U.S. PRESIDENT

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Trump says Xi agrees Iran must open the Strait

War shouldn't have started, says Chinese President

Trevor Hunnicutt & Jana Choukeir
Aboard Air Force One, Dubai, May 16

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said Chinese President Xi Jinping had agreed Tehran must reopen the Strait of Hormuz, though China gave no indication it would weigh in.

Flying back from Beijing on Friday after two days of talks with Xi, Trump said he was considering whether to lift US sanctions on Chinese oil companies buying Iranian oil. China is the biggest buyer of Iranian oil.

"I'm not asking for any favors because when you ask for favors, you have to do favors in return," Trump said when asked by a reporter on Air Force One whether Xi had made a firm commitment to put pressure on the Iranians to reopen the vital strait.

Xi did not comment on his discussions with Trump about Iran, although China's foreign ministry criticised the war, calling it a conflict "which should never have happened, has no reason to continue".

Iran has effectively shut the strait, which carried one-fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supply before the US and Israel launched attacks on February 28. The disruption to shipping has caused the biggest oil supply crisis in history, sending oil prices skyrocketing.

Ebrahim Azizi, who heads the Iranian parliament's national security committee, said on Saturday that Tehran had prepared a mechanism to manage traffic through the strait along a designated route that would be unveiled soon.

Azizi said only commercial vessels and parties cooperating with Iran would benefit, and that fees would be collected for specialised services provided under the mechanism.

Thousands of Iranians were killed in the US and Israeli airstrikes. Thousands more have been killed in Lebanon in fighting between Israel and the Iran-backed group Hezbollah, though Israel and Lebanon agreed on Friday to a 45-day extension of a ceasefire that has tamped down the conflict there.

The US paused its attacks last month but began a port blockade. Tehran, which carried out strikes against Israel, U.S. bases and Gulf states after the war began, has said it will not unblock the strait until the US ends its blockade. Trump has threatened to resume attacks if Iran does not agree to a deal.

"We don't want them to have a nuclear weapon, we want the straits open," Trump said in Beijing, alongside Xi.

Iran, which has long denied that it intends to build a nuclear weapon, has refused to end nuclear research or relinquish its hidden stockpile of enriched uranium, to Trump's frustration. **REUTERS**

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Canada deepens its defence ties with Nordics after Trump threats

Maria Cheng
Cambridge Bay, May 16

SINCE US President Donald Trump's barrage of threats to seize Greenland, authorities on the frozen island have been seeking help from a northern ally: Canada.

A reserve unit of the Canadian armed forces called the Rangers has long maintained a year-round presence in mostly inaccessible Arctic communities. For three years, authorities in Greenland and Denmark have consulted with Canadian officials on how to set up their own version of the Rangers — conversations that grew more urgent with Trump's threats and growing fears of Russian hostility in the Arctic.

"The rhetoric coming out of the White House has sped up efforts to rebuff the idea that Arctic communities need the US to come in and save them," said Whitney Lackenbauer, an honorary lieutenant-colonel Canadian Ranger involved in the talks, who spoke with Reuters during a recent 5,000-kilometre Arctic snowmobile trek by the Rangers. "The Nordic countries and Canada, we're increasingly realizing we can come together in military and diplomatic ways to send a message that carries moral weight."

A member of the 41 Canadian Brigade Group, in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada. REUTERS

As Canada attempts to pivot away from relying on the U.S. to protect its vast Arctic, PM Mark Carney is strengthening ties and exchanging security tips with the Nordic countries, which he describes as trusted partners. Canada's increased defence collaboration with the Nordics is part of Carney's effort to strengthen alliances between what he calls "middle powers" in a world where the United States is considered a less reliable partner.

The White House said Trump's leadership has prompted allies "to recognize the need to meaningfully contribute to their own defence" and that the Arctic is a critical region for US national security and the economy. **REUTERS**

SHAURYA SSB 8368104529

Pakistan is set to raise its IMF-backed defence Budget by nearly PKR 100 bn

Press Trust of India
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan is expected to raise its defence Budget by about PKR 100 billion in the upcoming fiscal year as the government prepares its Budget under an International Monetary Fund (IMF)-backed reform programme that projects a sharp rise in revenues, according to a media report.

The *Dawn* newspaper, citing the IMF staff report issued after the completion of the third review of the $7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and the second review of the $1.4 billion Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF), reported that defence expenditure for 2026-27 was estimated at Pakistani rupees (PKR) Rs 2.665 trillion, up from PKR 2.564 trillion this year.

More funding: Pakistani army soldiers sit in a vehicle as they patrol at D Chowk near the President's House in Islamabad. REUTERS

The IMF projected Pakistan's total federal revenues for 2026-27 at PKR 17.144 trillion – that's more than PKR 2 trillion higher than the current fiscal year and represents a 13.5% increase, the report said.

It said Pakistan had also committed to increasing the combined expenditure of the federal and provincial governments by 0.2% of GDP to a total of PKR 4.227 trillion, while digitising all federal and provincial government payments by June 2027.

As part of wider reforms linked to the IMF programme, the government will identify the 10 top corruption-prone institutions by the end of this year for detailed analysis and audit. The provincial anti-corruption agencies are also expected to be strengthened.

The government has also given an undertaking not to introduce new incentives for special economic zones, export processing zones, and special technology zones, while phasing out existing incentives by 2035 to create what the report described as a level playing field for all.