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**IMPORTANT**

**EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS**

**DELHI CENTRE:**  
636, Mukherjee Nagar  
New Delhi-110009

**PRAYAGRAJ CENTRE:**  
1/1/8A, Stanley Rd,  
Maharana Pratap Chauraha,  
Civil Lines, Prayagraj, UP - 211002

 **9555-124-124**

 **sanskritiias.com**

## GS2: INDIAN POLITY

### THE HINDU PAGE: 1

# Manipur stir on; Kukis want President's Rule back

Thousands take to the streets demanding the unconditional release of all hostages

State paralysed by protests and the 48-hour shutdown called by apex body of Kuki tribes

Citizens' groups seek high-level investigation, and special security zones in vulnerable areas

**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 in the State amid outrage over the continued "targeted persecution" of the community.



**Mounting tension:** Protesters demand release of Kuki hostages and justice for three slain church leaders on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

According to Manipur's Home Minister Govindas Konhoujam, 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 organi-

sations helped secure the release of 28 hostages on Friday.

#### Hostage situation

Unconfirmed reports said 10 more hostages were released on Saturday, but the Kuki-Zo groups said 14

community members continued to be in captivity.

Protesters at the rally organised by the Committee on Tribal Unity demanded the immediate, safe, 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 permanent security guarantee for civilians and vulnerable villages, the esta-

Unconfirmed reports say 10 more hostages were released, but Kuki-Zo groups say 14 still held captive

establishment of special security zones in conflict-prone areas, and an expedited political engagement with Kuki-Zomi extremist groups under the Suspension of Operations pact.

"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.

#### Memo to Home Minister

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.

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 under the Constitution of India.

## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### THE HINDU PAGE: 3

# India rejects award by Court of Arbitration on pondage at hydel projects on Indus system

**Jacob Koshy**  
NEW DELHI

India on Saturday rejected an award reportedly issued by the Court of Arbitration (CoA) at The Hague on May 15, concerning maximum pondage at Indian hydroelectric projects on the Indus river system, reiterating that it does not recognise the tribunal as legitimately constituted.

“India categorically rejects the present so-called award, just as it has firmly rejected all prior pronouncements of the illegally constituted CoA,” Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, adding that any decision of the body was “null and void.” India’s decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, he said, remained in force.

No official communication of the award is publicly available on the website



A dam on the Indus river system in Reasi, J&K. PTI

of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which acts as the secretariat to the CoA. The recent press release listed there is dated May 11, which announced the conclusion of a three-day hearing held on April 28 on Pakistan’s request for interim measures and the status of the Treaty itself.

The CoA is a five-member arbitral panel constituted in January 2023. It was set up at Pakistan’s request after Islamabad challenged the design of India’s

Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects. India has refused to participate, arguing that the technical questions involved fall within the remit of a Neutral Expert appointed in parallel by the World Bank.

“In its August 2025 Award on Issues of General Interpretation, the CoA ruled largely in Pakistan’s favour, restricting how India calculates permissible pondage for run-of-river plants under the Treaty,” Mr. Jaiswal said.

## GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY

### THE HINDU PAGE: 8

# Why is the Prime Minister advocating austerity?

What are the seven set of suggestions that Prime Minister Narendra Modi made for the public?  
How has the war in West Asia impacted various sectors in India and how will these cutbacks help?  
What measures is the government taking?

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

The story so far:

Over the past week, a series of nudges, policy changes, and public messages have sought to influence the behaviour of Indian consumers, companies, and farmers. At the heart of this push is an effort to reduce India's imports of oil and petroleum products, gold, and fertilizers, and involves everyone from the Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues to industry leaders and associations.

What was the Prime Minister's message?

On May 10, during a speech in Secunderabad, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid out a seven-fold set of suggestions for the Indian public to help the economy and the government's finances weather the storm created by the war in West Asia.

The Prime Minister asked Indians to prioritise working from home; reduce petrol and diesel usage by using public transport and electric vehicles; reduce the use of cooking oil; stop buying gold for at least a year; buy Indian-made products rather than foreign ones; pause foreign travel; and adopt natural fertilizers instead of using imported chemical ones.

The Opposition, along with several other commentators, questioned the timing of his appeals, coming as they did right after the conclusion of Assembly elections in some key States. Neither the political leadership nor the bureaucracy mentioned any impending problems in the run-up to the elections. The critics point out that in fact, the Prime Minister and several of his Cabinet colleagues flew across the country to campaign in Tamil Nadu, Kerala,

India's Current Account Deficit is set to grow to about 2.5% of the GDP in this financial year, from 1.4% in the quarter ended December 2025

West Bengal, and Assam, where they also organised several road shows. These questions relate more to the timing of the message than to whether remedial action is needed at all.

Why are these cutbacks needed?

It is now well established that the war in West Asia has created a global energy crisis. One of the aspects of this crisis is that the prices of oil and gas have shot up. A year ago, the price of Brent Crude – one of the benchmarks for oil – stood at \$65 a barrel; it is now around \$110.

India imports 85-90% of its oil requirement. This means that any time the price of oil goes up internationally, the country's import bill increases. Oil alone makes up about 17% of India's total goods import basket. That is why three out of Mr. Modi's seven suggestions were aimed at reducing fuel usage and oil imports.

The war has also led to an increase in the price of gold as investors flock to it as a 'safe haven' asset in times of uncertainty. Indians have a cultural affinity for the yellow metal that defies any price movement. While the price of gold increased by 45-60% over the last year, the volume of India's gold imports fell only about 5% in the same period. The value of these imports increased 24%. In other words, the higher price only impacted the demand for gold at the margins; the bulk of purchases has continued.

A third major trend is the depreciation of the rupee. The currency breached the ₹96-to-a-dollar mark on May 15 before closing a little higher at ₹95.96. A year ago, the currency was trading at about ₹85 to a dollar. Throughout this period, the Reserve Bank of India has been stepping in to stabilise the fall of the rupee and reduce volatility, mainly by selling the dollars in its reserves and absorbing rupees in the market. As a result, the Reserve Bank of India's foreign exchange reserves fell to \$552.4 billion as of May 8, 2026, from \$581.4 billion a year earlier – a decline of about \$29 billion.

Foreign Institutional Investors have been pulling out large sums from Indian markets. When they do this, they sell in rupees and are repatriated in dollars, creating another significant channel of dollar outflows.

Taken together, all this means that India's Current Account Deficit (CAD) – the amount by which its imports of goods and services exceed exports – is set to grow to about 2.5% of the GDP in this financial year from 1.4% as recently as the quarter ended December 2025.

A sustained high CAD has several serious knock-on effects for the economy and has led to several crises for the Indian government since Independence. It is therefore clear why the government is seeking to act now to prevent

such an outcome.

Has the government also taken some measures?

Over the last week, the government has taken several measures to support these efforts. Effective from May 13, it doubled the effective tax to be paid on the import of gold and silver to a total of 18.4% from the previous 9.2%. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade has also tightened the conditions under which gems and jewellery exporters can import gold duty-free. On May 16, the government also restricted the import of silver.

The prices of petrol and diesel were hiked on May 15 by ₹3 a litre each, in an attempt to reduce demand. The price of CNG was increased by ₹2 per kg. A rough calculation by *The Hindu* shows that this would earn oil marketing companies an additional ₹4,400 crore per month. However, this is not much when compared to the loss they are currently bearing, which the government said amounts to about ₹1,000 crore a day on petrol, diesel and LPG. This means further fuel price hikes could be imminent.

Notably, in a rare occurrence, Mr. Modi himself took to social media to deny a news report that the government was considering imposing a temporary cess on foreign travel. Mr. Modi and several of his Cabinet ministers have also reduced the sizes of their convoys.

Will these steps work?

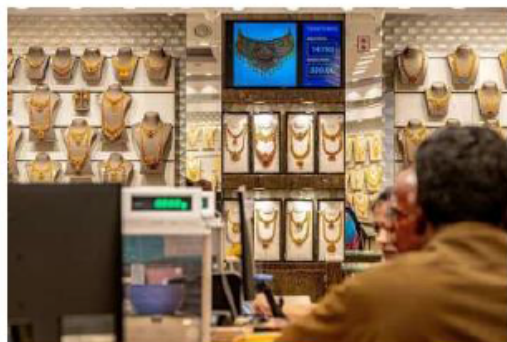
Several of the measures called for by the Prime Minister and implemented by the government might work at the margins, but some might lead to negative consequences as well. For instance, higher fuel prices may deter unnecessary travel, but unless offices implement a 'work from home' policy again, employees will have no option but to travel to work and bear the higher cost. Overall, higher fuel costs are inflationary in nature. Further, the diesel and CNG price hike is likely to make public transport costlier.

History has shown that higher gold prices do not necessarily deter purchases and can, in fact, lead to an increase in smuggling, as happened in 2013 when import duties were raised.

Asking farmers to switch to natural fertilizers and hold off on buying chemical ones is a workable medium-term strategy, but would be disruptive in the short term. Agricultural output, already expected to be under strain due to a below-normal monsoon and stronger El Nino this year, will suffer further.

An analysis by *The Hindu* has also shown that the growth in foreign spending by Indians is not on travel, which is contracting, but on foreign equity, debt, and immovable assets.

Short of draconian measures, there are few short-term measures that will effectively solve the CAD issue. Various governments have struggled to make India more competitive on exports. Unless that changes, and dollar inflows rise substantially, such crises are likely to recur.



A display board showing the rates of gold and silver in a jewellery showroom in Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu, on May 14. R. VENGADESH

## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### THE HINDU PAGE: 8

# Why has RSS called for dialogue with Pakistan?

**What did RSS leader Dattatreya Hosabale say about ties with Pakistan and what reactions did his remarks trigger in India and Pakistan? Can his statement be read as reflecting government policy? What has the RSS's stance on talks with Pakistan been?**

Nistula Hebbar

**The story so far:**

Last week, Dattatreya Hosabale, the second in command in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological motherhood of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said in an interview to news agency Press Trust of India (PTI) that India should persist with attempts at a dialogue with Pakistan. His statement triggered reactions from Pakistan, leaders of political parties in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), India's former Chief of Army Staff, and from the Opposition.

**Why have Mr. Hosabale's remarks made news?**

There have been a lot of comments on not just the substance of the remarks, but also their timing, coming as they do close on the heels of the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor, which followed the 2025 terror attack in Pahalgam in J&K that left 16 people dead. The Narendra-Modi led National Democratic Alliance government has consistently held that there can be no dialogue as long as Pakistan-backed terror groups continue to carry out attacks in India. In the light of the filial relationship between the RSS and the BJP, Mr. Hosabale's views have therefore raised queries as to whether the Union

RSS office bearers maintain that the context of Hosabale's remarks had more to do with the organisation's long-held beliefs than with the organisation's long-held beliefs than with any immediate preoccupation with dialogue and discourse

government was being provided political cover to change its stance on talks with Pakistan.

**What has been the RSS's record with regard to talks with Pakistan?**

RSS office bearers maintain that the context of Mr. Hosabale's remarks had more to do with the organisation's long-held beliefs than with any immediate preoccupation with dialogue and discourse. They point out that Mr. Hosabale's remarks, taken in full, made it clear that while there was no trust in Pakistan's political and military leadership, people-to-people contact remains the most crucial aspect of engagement, in keeping with the RSS's own ideas about civil society engagement. The remarks are therefore not comments on what the government should or should not do, but relate instead to what the RSS has been saying for a while.

**What has the RSS said about relations with Pakistan in the past?**

In April 1964, Deendayal Upadhyaya and Ram Manohar Lohia issued a joint statement on relations with Pakistan. At the time, the latter, while canvassing support from Opposition parties for an anti-Congress front, had reached out to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the political wing of the RSS and the precursor to the BJP.

Both Lohia and Upadhyaya agreed that the division between India and Pakistan was historically proven to be based on artificial grounds (reflected in the RSS's conception of an Akhand Bharat or undivided Indian subcontinent) and the governments of the two countries always indulged in *tooti baatchet* (piecemeal dialogue) and *tooti vichar* (piecemeal thinking) instead of establishing a comprehensive framework for talks. The concept of Akhand Bharat as a loose Hind-Pak Mahasangh also finds mention in the statement.

This may be too far in the past. But even more recently, the RSS, and indeed Mr. Hosabale himself, has advocated for dialogue. In 2015, at the conclusion of an RSS-led Samanvay Baithak or coordination meeting with all its frontal organisations, Mr. Hosabale had, in an answer to a question, said: "India is part of SAARC and has family-like cultural relations with neighbouring

countries, be it Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan or Bangladesh. It was one body which was divided to form Pakistan and Bangladesh. It is natural that people living there are part of the same family. Sometimes relations [go bad], like it happens between brothers and so we also discussed how we can improve our relations with those who are historically and geographically attached to us."

Similar sentiments were expressed in 2017 as well, after another joint meeting between the BJP and the RSS.

**What were the reactions to Mr. Hosabale's recent comments?**

Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed the remarks, calling them a "positive development" and hoping that "sanity will prevail in India". In J&K, National Conference president Farooq Abdullah said that he is "glad that somebody is now thinking that war is not an option." Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti said "talks are the only headway" to address the issues between the two countries. India's former Chief of Army Staff, General Manoj Naravane (retd.), also welcomed the statement as a positive sign for engagement between the two countries, especially at a delicate time in bilateral relations. The Congress criticised the remarks, with MP Manish Tewari asking: "What has 'materially changed since the Baisaran [Pahalgam] massacre?"

**Can Mr. Hosabale's statement be extrapolated to reflect government policy?**

The answer is complicated. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a product of the Sangh Parivar and has publicly acknowledged this fact. His government has been one of the most intensely ideological in India's history, fulfilling some of the core issues on the RSS agenda including the reading down of Article 370 and the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya.

With regard to the relationship with Pakistan, matters stray into a territory that is more dynamic, and affected by both internal and external events. The RSS's views have been quite consistent for a long time; therefore, governmental intervention, which also depends on immediate circumstances, may not usually follow the same trajectory. What the comments suggest is that whenever or if ever Mr. Modi seeks to initiate dialogue with Pakistan, he will have political cover from the ideological parent of the BJP.



RSS leader Dattatreya Hosabale speaking to PTI in New Delhi. PTI

# GS 3: ECONOMY

## THE HINDU PAGE: 8

### *Why has Air India cut international flight operations?*

Why has it been so severely impacted?  
Which routes have been affected? How are other international airlines coping?

**Jagriti Chandra**

**The story so far:**

Last week, Air India announced sweeping international schedule cuts between June and August, including a nearly 40% reduction in North America operations and significant cuts across SAARC and Southeast Asia.

**Which international routes have been affected?**

According to airline sources, a total of 145 weekly flights across North America, Europe, Southeast Asia, SAARC, and the Far East have been removed, resulting in an overall 27% reduction in international flight operations.

In North America, Air India's most critical international market, weekly flights will be reduced from 51 to 33, which is a 39% decline. Services on routes such as Delhi-Chicago, Delhi-Newark and Mumbai-New York are being temporarily suspended, although the airline has added four extra Mumbai-Newark flights, taking that route to seven weekly services.

In Europe, schedule changes have been made on routes to Paris, Copenhagen, Milan, Vienna, Zurich, and Rome where altogether 34% of flights have been withdrawn. But services to London, Manchester, and Amsterdam remain unaffected.

The impact of the war in West Asia has extended well beyond westbound routes, with services to Southeast Asia, SAARC, and the Far East seeing the sharpest reductions.

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East seeing the sharpest reductions. About 57% of flights to places including Kathmandu, Dhaka, Colombo, Bangkok, Shanghai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Ho

Chi Minh City have been withdrawn. Services to Singapore have also been cut considerably, with 21 weekly flights connecting Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai to the country being withdrawn.

Further east, Delhi-Melbourne and Delhi-Sydney flights have reduced from seven to four flights per week.

## GS 3: ECONOMY

### THE HINDU PAGE: 8

#### What are the reasons for these cuts?

The reductions in flight capacity are a direct fallout of the West Asia conflict, which has forced airlines operating between Asia and Europe to avoid the conflict-hit airspace for safety reasons. As a result, Air India has been forced to adopt longer flight paths, increasing travel times to North America by nearly five to six hours. The revised routes now include refuelling stops in Vienna and Copenhagen.

For Indian carriers, the disruption has been compounded by Pakistan's ban on the use of its airspace by Indian airlines since Operation Sindoor in April 2025. This puts them at a clear disadvantage compared to European peers such as Lufthansa.

#### Have other airlines been affected?

The sharp reduction in international flights is not limited to Air India alone. IndiGo saw a 21% reduction in its international flights in April, while carriers such as SpiceJet, Akasa Air, and Air India Express recorded cuts of more than 50%, albeit on a much smaller international network base. However, Air India has borne the biggest brunt of the disruption as it remains the only Indian carrier operating flights to North America and dominates Indian operations across several European destinations, where IndiGo is still a relatively new entrant.

By April, jet fuel prices had already risen by 30% amid escalating tensions in the Gulf, creating another major challenge for airlines, where fuel accounts for nearly 40% of operating costs. And while airlines have imposed fuel surcharges and raised airfares to offset rising costs, they are increasingly concerned about the point at which higher ticket prices could begin to deter passengers from travelling.

The network rationalisation is therefore an attempt by the Air India Group to stem mounting losses as operational pressures intensify. Air India posted a loss of ₹26,700 crore in FY2025-26 amid multiple headwinds, including the Pakistan airspace ban and travellers avoiding the airline in the aftermath of the crash in Ahmedabad on June 12 last year.

#### What are the global trends?

The regional conflict has hit the Gulf carriers the worst, with the International Air Transport Association reporting a 61% decline in international passenger traffic carried by them in March. Beyond the Gulf, the Lufthansa Group cancelled 20,000 short-haul flights operated by its subsidiary, Lufthansa CityLine, until October to save jet fuel while also moving to consolidate operations and improve the efficiency of its long-haul connections.

Qantas has announced a 5% reduction in domestic capacity and a 2% cut in international flights in response to soaring jet fuel prices. While it has added capacity on select Europe routes, it has also scaled back elsewhere, including withdrawing its Bengaluru-Sydney service.

## GS 2: SOCIAL ISSUES (EDUCATION)

## THE HINDU PAGE: 9

*Test in turmoil***NEET-UG**

Following a question-paper leak, this year's medical entrance exam, taken by over 22 lakh students, has been cancelled and rescheduled

**Bindu Shajan Perappadan**

**O**n May 12, the National Testing Agency (NTA), acting on inputs from central and law-enforcement agencies about a possible paper leak and examination irregularities in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test - Undergraduate (NEET-UG), 2026, cancelled the entrance exam.

This isn't the first time that the exam or the agency conducting it has come under scrutiny over allegations of malpractice. However, this is the first time the annual, all-India medical entrance examination, conducted for admission to over 10 medical courses, has been cancelled. A re-test has now been scheduled for June 21.

Through this exam, students compete for over 2.8 lakh seats for bachelor courses in dental surgery, veterinary science and animal husbandry, nursing, physiotherapy and audiology and speech-language pathology, among others. MBBS remains the most sought-after course, with around 1.29 lakh seats available. Admission to top government medical colleges typically requires a score of 650-720 marks.

The NEET-UG question paper consists of 180 compulsory questions with +4 marks awarded for every correct answer and -1 mark for every incorrect answer. NEET-UG is con-



ducted in 13 languages and is an objective-type (multiple-choice) examination where each question has four answer options. The exam contains MCQs from Physics, Chemistry, Botany, and Zoology.

This year, NEET-UG was held on May 3, with about 22.79 lakh candidates registering for the exam, of whom around 22.05 lakh appeared. The exam was conducted at 5,432 centres across 551 cities in India and 14 cities abroad.

Following the paper leak, confirmed by the Central Government, it has been alleged that about 120-140 questions in the leaked question paper matched those in the actual NEET-UG 2026 exam. NTA Director General Abhishek Singh said the exam "cannot be permitted to stand" and that the decision to cancel it was taken to preserve the transparency, fairness, and credibility of the process.

The idea of an all-India common medical entrance exam was first proposed by the Medical Council of In-

dia (MCI) in 2010. A decade later, the MCI was dissolved amid allegations of corruption and lack of transparency, and replaced by the National Medical Commission.

**Legal challenges**

NEET, introduced to create a standardised, single admission test for medical institutions across India, was first conducted in 2013. The exam immediately faced legal challenges from several States and private colleges, prompting the Supreme Court to temporarily cancel it.

In 2016, the Supreme Court restored NEET, and since then it has been the mandatory entrance for admission to government, private, deemed, and central medical institutions, including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

Besides the legal battles, NEET also faced allegations of language and syllabus disparities, paper leaks and grace-mark disputes in 2024. The K. Radhakrishnan committee, set up af-

ter the 2024 allegations, identified weak links in the system such as overdependence on outsourced staff and private centres, weak CCTV and surveillance systems, insecure transport and storage of question papers, and the risk of conducting a massive pen-and-paper exam for over 20 lakh students on a single day. It also recommended biometric verification, encrypted digital paper delivery and hybrid/online testing models.

Following the 2026 NEET-UG controversy, proposed changes for next year's exam include a likely shift from the offline Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) format to a Computer-Based Test (CBT) mode. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced on May 15 that the government plans major reforms to improve security and transparency.

The K. Radhakrishnan committee has also recommended that the NTA, established in 2017 by the Central Government as an autonomous testing organisation under the Ministry of Education, needs restructuring, along with tighter centre-level security for the exams it conducts. The NTA conducts several exams, including Joint Entrance Examination (Main), Common University Entrance Test, UGC - National Eligibility Test, and several recruitment and fellowship tests.