

Russian crude imports cut India's oil bill by \$8bn in FY24

New Delhi: India saved an estimated \$7.9 billion in oil import in the 11 months of 2023-24 financial year ended March 31, compared to \$5.1 billion over the whole of 2022-23, by purchasing higher volumes of Russian crude at deep discounts, ICRA Research said on Tuesday, reports **Sanjay Dutta**.

The savings leads to a "compression" of 15-22 basis points in India's current account deficit-to-GDP ratio in 2023-24, it said. However, it added that if the low levels of discounts prevail, India's net oil import bill could widen to \$101-104 billion in 2024-25 from \$96 billion in 2023-24, assuming an average crude price of \$85 per barrel.

Based on commerce ministry data, the note pegs the share of Russian crude in India's oil import basket rising to about 36% during the April 2023-February 2023 period, marking a jump of 1700% from about 2% in 2021-22.

Israel-Iran clash reinforces need for solid air defence

DESI & VIDESHI SYSTEMS

INDUCTED

S-400 Triumpf | 380-km range
> 3 squads deployed under ₹40,000 crore deal with Russia in Oct 2018

> Rest 2 squads delayed to 2025-26

Barak-8 MR-SAM | Over 70-km range
> Jointly developed with Israel under projects initially worth ₹30,000 crore.

> Being inducted by IAF, Navy & Army

Akash | 25-km range
> IAF inducting 15 squads of Akash-1 & 2 systems for ₹10,900 crore

> Army has 2 regiments for ₹14,180 crore. Ordered 2 more for ₹8,160 crore

Spyder | 15-km range
> Israeli low-level quick-reaction anti-aircraft missile system



PROJECTS

Ballistic Missile Defence

> Indigenous 2-tier shield
> Phase-1 (interceptor missiles with 4.5 Mach speed) for 2,000-km range enemy missiles. Not yet deployed.

> Phase-2 (interceptor missiles with 6-7 Mach speed) for 5,000-km range missiles. Under development.

LR-SAM under Project Kusha | 350-km range

> Should be ready by 2028-29.

> IAF plans 5 squadrons for ₹21,700 crore.

VSHORADS | 6-km range

> ₹1,920 crore project underway

> Limited units inducted by IAF & Army

Shorter Range | Older Russian Igla-1M (5-km), OSA-AK-M (10-km) Pechora missiles & upgraded L-70 anti-aircraft guns (3.5-km)

> Newer Russian shoulder-fired Igla-S (6-km) systems

> ₹7,669 crore contract in March with L&T for 61 "flights" of close-in weapon systems (derivatives of L-70 guns)

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New Delhi: Missile defence is technically complex, and very expensive. It's virtually like firing a bullet to stop an incoming bullet. But with the sheer operational criticality of air and missile defence systems being reinforced by the tit-for-tat attacks between Israel and Iran, India needs to majorly crank up efforts to make its airspace as impregnable as possible.

India has taken some strides in the arena but much more clearly needs to be done for an effective multi-layered integrated air and missile defence shield, with an overlapping network of early-warning and tracking sensors, reliable command and control posts, land and sea-based batteries of advanced interceptor missiles.

Unlike India, Israel of course has only a small territory to defend. And it did so effectively on April 13, thwarting Iran's mass missile and kamikaze drone attack with its wide array of defence systems, from the short-range Iron Dome

to long-range Arrow, as well as help from some others like the US.

India's air defence systems are geared towards protecting only some vital areas and installations. "India is simply too vast to be effectively protected from all kinds of aerial threats. But yes, apart from buying bullets, we need to invest much more in bullet-proof jackets as well. Missile defence is now an overwhelming tactical necessity rather than a strategic one," a senior officer said.

For one, India needs to get cracking on operationally deploying its indigenous two-tier ballistic missile defence (BMD) system, which as per DRDO is designed to track and destroy nuclear and other ballistic missiles both inside (endo) and outside (exo) the earth's atmosphere at altitudes from 15-25 km to 80-100 km for "a higher kill probability".

After "successfully completing" a series of tests for Phase-1 of the land-based BMD system quite a while ago, the DRDO also conducted the maiden flight-trial of

a sea-based interceptor missile in April last year.

IAF, of course, now has three squadrons of Russian S-400 Triumpf surface-to-air missile systems, which can detect, track and destroy incoming strategic bombers, jets, spy planes, drones and even some intermediate-range ballistic missiles at a range of 380-km. They are deployed in north-west and east India to cater for both China and Pakistan.

Delivery of the remaining two S-400 squadrons, under the \$5.4 billion contract inked in 2018, has been delayed to 2025-26 due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

Parallely, India is developing its own long-range surface-to-air missile (LR-SAM) system under the ambitious Project Kusha. With an interception range of around 350-km, this air defence system should be ready by 2028-29.

Then, there is the Barak-8 medium range surface-to-air missile (MR-SAM) systems, with an over 70-km range, jointly developed with Israel.

2nd hottest April ever in South, E India mean temp at 51-yr high

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South India experienced its second hottest April on record in terms of maximum temperatures while the average mean temperature in east and northeast India was the highest for the month in 51 years, IMD data reveals, attesting to the torridly hot conditions that these regions have been witnessing over the past few weeks.

The last few days have seen heat records fall in three of biggest cities — Bengaluru, Kolkata and Mumbai.

The South as a whole recorded an average maximum temperature of nearly 37.2 degrees Celsius during the month — surpassed only by 37.6 degrees C logged in April 2016 in records going back to 1901 — IMD's monthly temperature data reveals. Bengaluru witnessed its hottest ever April. The metro, once famous as the Garden City, recorded 13 extremely hot days, including six in a row, during the month.

Eastern India has been baking in April heat during a prolonged spell of extreme weather. As per IMD's data, the average mean temperature in the region (east and

APRIL ROAST



HOTTEST PLACES ON TUESDAY | **47.2°C** in **Kalaikunda** (Bengal), **47.1°C** in **Baharagora** (Jharkhand), **46.4°C** in **Baripada** (Odisha)

SOUTH INDIA

37.2°C | Avg max temp this April in **South India**, 2nd highest since 1901. Highest was **37.6°C** in 2016

> Hottest April on record in **Bengaluru**

38.3°C | All-time high max temp in **Alappuzha** (Kerala) on Monday

EAST INDIA

28°C | Avg mean temp (in east & NE region), highest for April since 1973. Avg min temp (**22.1°C**) highest ever for month

43°C in **Kolkata** (Dum Dum), its highest temp in April and fourth highest ever

Students stream back as Kannauj govt school principal turns classroom into pool

Concerned over a sharp drop in attendance at a govt school in UP's Kannauj because of the heat, principal Vaibhav Rajpoot turned a classroom into a makeshift swimming pool, reports **Isha Jain**. The attendance instantly shot up: From 38 to 65 students. Curious locals trooped to Model Primary School in Tirwa's Mahsaunapu to watch the little ones make a big splash. "We chose a 18x20 feet classroom to convert it into a pool. The information about this fun activity was circulated on WhatsApp to ensure everyone got to know about it," Rajpoot said. **P 5**

NE, as per IMD classification) during the month was the highest since 1973, with the average night temperatures the highest ever in April. Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar have been reeling under

extreme heat. On Tuesday, Kolkata (Dum Dum) logged 43 degrees C, its highest temperature in April and fourth highest for any month.

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IMF's \$1.1 bn loan cleared for Pak

WASHINGTON/ISLAMABAD,
Apr 30 (PTI)

THE IMF has approved an immediate disbursement of the final tranche of USD 1.1 billion to Pakistan as part of a bailout package, emphasising that the cash-strapped country needs to take tough measures to bring its economy back on track.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Board's decision on Monday came after the global lender completed the second and final review of Pakistan's economic reform programme supported by the IMF's Stand-By Arrangement (SBA). With this development, the disbursements under the SBA reached around USD 3 billion.

NETANYAHU VOWS TO INVAD Rafah 'with or without deal'

TEL AVIV, Apr 30 (AP)

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged on Tuesday to launch an incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are sheltering from the 7-month-long war.

Netanyahu said Israel would enter Rafah to destroy Hamas' battalions there "with or without a deal." Israel and Hamas are negotiating a cease-fire agreement meant to free hostages and bring some relief to the Palestinians in the besieged enclave.

"The idea that we will stop the war before achieving all of its goals is out of the questions. We will enter Rafah and we will eliminate Hamas' battalions there — with a deal or without a deal, to achieve the total victory," Netanyahu said in a meeting with families of hostages held by militants in Gaza, according to a statement from his office.

Netanyahu has vowed to achieve "total victory" in the war and has faced pressure from his nationalist governing partners to launch an offensive in Rafah, which Israel says is Hamas' last major stronghold.

Hopes have risen in recent days that the sides could move toward a deal that would avert an Israeli incursion into Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population are sheltering.

The international community, including Israel's top ally, the US, have raised an alarm over the fate of civilians in Rafah if Israel invades.

Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected stopping the war in return for hostage releases, and says an offensive on Rafah is crucial to destroying the militants after their Oct. 7 attacks on Israel triggered the conflict. His government could be threatened if he agrees to a deal because hard-line Cabinet members have demanded an attack on Rafah.

LS POLLS

Phase 1 turnout at 66.14%, Phase 2 66.71%, says EC

NEW DELHI, Apr 30 (PTI)

A VOTER turnout of 66.14 per cent was recorded in phase one and 66.71 per cent in phase two of the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission said on Tuesday.

On Tuesday, the Congress, CPI-M and TMC questioned the EC over the delay in announcing the final voter turnout figures for the first two phases of the Lok Sabha polls, 11 days after the first round of polling on April 19.

Officially sharing the turnout figure, the poll panel said in phase one of the elections, 66.22 per cent of male and 66.07 female electors turned up to vote. The turnout for registered third-gender voters stood at 31.32 per cent.

In the 2019 polls, the turnout in the first phase stood at 69.43 per cent.

In the second phase of elections held on April 26, the male voter turnout was recorded at 66.99 per cent, while the female turnout stood at 66.42 per cent. As many as 23.86 per cent of the registered third-gender voters came out to vote.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in phase two, the turnout was 69.64 per cent.

In phase one, 102 seats went to poll, while in phase two elections were held in 88 constituencies.

According to the poll panel, out of 21 states and union territories which went to polls in the first phase, 11 recorded a higher turnout of women voters. These are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Lakshadweep, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

In the second phase where 13 states and UTs went to poll, six registered a higher women voter turnout. These are Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Kerala and West Bengal.

The EC made it clear that the final turnout will only be available post-counting with the counting of postal ballots and its addition to the total vote count.

Postal ballots include postal ballots given to service voters, absentee voters -- those above 85 years of age, persons with disabilities, those on essential services and voters on election duty.

Daily accounts of such postal ballots received are given to all candidates, it noted.

10 Naxals killed in Chhattisgarh

NARAYANPUR/RAIPUR, Apr 30 (PTI)

TEN Naxalites including three women were killed in an encounter with security forces on the border of Narayanpur and Kanker districts of Chhattisgarh on Tuesday morning, police said.

This was a second major blow to the Naxalites within 15 days. The site of Tuesday's encounter was 30 km south of Kalper village in Kanker where 29 Naxalites were killed in a gunfight with security forces on April 16, said a senior police official.

Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister Vijay Sharma termed the latest operation as a major success while also appealing the Naxalites to come forward for talks and give up the path of violence.

The encounter took place around 6 am in the forest between Tekmeta and Kakur villages in Abhujmad area, a Naxalite stronghold, when a joint team of the police's District Reserve Guard and Special Task Force was out on an anti-Naxal operation, a senior police official said.

The operation had been launched on Monday night based on inputs about the presence of armed Maoists in the region, he said.

After the guns fell silent, the bodies of ten Naxalites, including three women, were recovered, he said. An AK-47 rifle and an INSAS rifle besides other arms, ammunition and explosives were recovered from the spot, the official said.

The identity of the slain Naxalites was yet to be ascertained. Deputy CM Sharma congratulated the security personnel for the success. No personnel was harmed during the gunfight, he noted.

"The State Government led by Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai wants a solution to this issue through talks. If any Naxalite, or a big or small group wants to talk through video call or a mediator, we are ready and will arrange better rehabilitation for them. We urge them to join

A joint team of the police's District Reserve Guard and Special Task Force was out on an anti-Naxal operation encounter took place around 6 am in forest between Tekmeta and Kakur villages in Abhujmad area, a Naxalite stronghold

the mainstream. We want peace to prevail in Bastar and development to take place there," Sharma said.

As many as 91 Naxalites have been killed this year so far in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region which comprises seven districts including Narayanpur and Kanker, according to police.

Navy should be operationally ready to deter adversaries: Adm Tripathi

NEW DELHI, Apr 30 (PTI)

SHORTLY after assuming charge as the 26th Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi on Tuesday said the Navy should remain operationally ready at all times to deter potential adversaries in view of the emerging challenges in the maritime domain.

Admiral Tripathi, regarded as a communication and electronic warfare specialist, took the reins of the force following the retirement of incumbent R Hari Kumar after a career spanning four decades.

An alumnus of the Sainik School Rewa, Admiral Tripathi was serving as the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff.

The admiral took charge of the Navy at a time when various strategic waterways, including the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, were witnessing security challenges, especially with Houthi militants targeting merchant ships in the region.

"Over the years, our Navy has evolved into a combat-ready, cohesive, credible, and future-proof force, for which I want to thank all the esteemed former Chiefs of the Navy," he told reporters.

"The existing and emerging challenges in the maritime domain mandate the Indian Navy to remain operationally ready to deter potential adversities at sea in peace and to win the war at sea when asked to do so," he said. "That will remain my singular focus and endeavour," the new Navy Chief said.

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Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi (L) shakes hands with outgoing Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar during a guard of honour ceremony before assuming charge as the 26th Navy chief, at the South Block in New Delhi, on Tuesday. (PTI)