

# India's gas demand to RISE 6% in 2024: IEA

NEW DELHI, Jan 28 (PTI)

INDIA'S natural gas demand is expected to rise by 6 per cent in 2024 with a rise in consumption in fertiliser units, power generation and industrial sectors, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). Following the 7 per cent year-on-year decline observed in 2022, India's primary gas supply rose by 5 per cent in 2023, with growth primarily driven by the petrochemical, power generation, refinery and industrial sectors.

"Natural gas demand in India is expected to increase by 6 per cent in 2024, mainly supported by higher gas use in industry (including in the fertiliser sector) and stronger gas burn in the power sector amid the development of its national pipeline grid and city gas infrastructure," IEA said Gas Market

Report released last week.

India's natural gas demand had risen to 64 billion cubic meters in 2023. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports rose by 7 per cent on the year to 29 billion cubic meters last year, with import dependency at 44 per cent of the nation's natural gas consumption. Domestic production was up 6 per cent on the year to 35 billion cubic meters on the back of a rise in output from Reliance Industries' KG-D6 block.

"We expect India to increase its LNG imports in 2024 by 7 per cent, fuelled by demand from the power and fertiliser sectors, as the country plans to stop importing urea by 2025," IEA said. Natural gas extracted from below surface and seabeds is used to make fertiliser, generate electricity, convert into CNG to run automobiles, piped to households.

# Nepal, China to sign BRI projects plan

KATHMANDU, Jan 28 (PTI)

NEPAL and China will sign the implementation plan of the Belt and Road Initiative “very soon”, Deputy Prime Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha said on Saturday, nearly seven years after the two neighbours inked an agreement to undertake ambitious Beijing-backed infrastructure projects in the Himalayan nation.

“Once we sign the implementation plan, we will move into the implementation phase,” Shrestha, also the Minister for Home Affairs said while addressing an event here.

## China tries to lure France

BEIJING, Jan 28 (PTI)

CHINESE President Xi Jinping has offered to “break new ground” to give a fillip to the China-France ties, days after French President Emmanuel Macron’s high-profile visit to India during which the two countries unveiled an ambitious defence roadmap besides intensifying cooperation.



# 15 months on, China may appoint ambassador to India

## Former Envoy To Afghanistan & Romania May Be Sent To Delhi

Getty Images

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**New Delhi:** After going 15 months without an ambassador in India, China may finally be ready to appoint its next envoy, as Sino-Indian ties remain plagued by border issues, not least the delayed completion of the disengagement and de-escalation process in eastern Ladakh.

It is learnt that senior diplomat Xu Feihong, who has served as ambassador to Afghanistan, is China's pick to head its mission here. Xu has also been China's ambassador to Romania and is currently posted as assistant minister for foreign affairs.

The formalities for the appointment of the new envoy are still not complete though and it's far from clear when he will actually take office.

China's previous ambassador to India, Sun Weidong, had left in Oct 2022. The delay in the appointment of the new ambassador has come in the



**DRAGON'S ENVOY:** While India will be happy to receive the ambassador, it's unlikely to make any significant or immediate difference to the current state of relationship

middle of the most turbulent phase in bilateral relations in decades, sparked by the 2020 Galwan clashes and Beijing's reluctance, as India has repeatedly emphasised, to heed bilateral agreements for border peace and tranquillity. However, while the border situation still remains abnormal with heavy deployment by both sides, no violent confrontation has been reported in recent months.

While India will be happy to receive the ambassador, it's unlikely to make any significant or immediate difference to the current state of relationship, especially as India heads to polls. The government has continued to maintain that ties can't be normalised till China fully addresses the situation in eastern Ladakh, which resulted from the 2020 military standoff, and foreign minister S Jaishan-

kar said in an interview to TOI earlier this month that India must show perseverance and endurance on China. He added that beyond the boundary issue, it's even about how India is perceived as a strategic entity. In its military and diplomatic talks with China to fully resolve the standoff in eastern Ladakh, India's position has been that the relationship can progress only by maintaining peace and tranquillity at the border.

China says the border issue should not be linked to bilateral relations and points to the fact that the two sides have achieved disengagement at four places in eastern Ladakh. However, there are other places like Depsang and Demchok where the stalemate is yet to be broken. Both sides have held 20 rounds of corps commander-level meeting to resolve the standoff, with focus now on resolution of the remaining issues and maintenance of peace on the ground in the interim.



# Must recognise challenges to tackle: CJI

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**New Delhi:** Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, speaking at the Supreme Court's 75th anniversary celebrations on Sunday, said, "Our ability to remain relevant as an institution requires us to recognise challenges and begin difficult conversations: first, we must emerge out of the adjournment culture to a culture of professionalism; second, we have to ensure that the length of oral arguments does not interminably delay judicial outcomes; third, the legal profession must provide a level playing field for first generation lawyers — men, women and others from marginalised segments who have the will to work and the potential to

succeed; and fourth, let us begin the conversation on long vacations and whether alternatives such as flexi-time for lawyers and judges is possible."

Justice Sanjiv Khanna said rising cost of litigation, mainly because of expenses related to court hearings and the delay, is a matter of serious concern and requires innovative solutions, one of which could be universal use of technology, from trial courts to the highest court. He agreed with the PM that the court judgments must be in simple language and as brief as possible.

Justice B R Gavai, like the CJI, argued for inclusivity in the judiciary. "The judiciary, Parliament and executive have been emphasising the need for diversity and repre-

sentation of various sections of society in the judiciary. We have been making active efforts to ensure this, and our efforts shall continue. Since the chief justices of the high courts are present here, I would earnestly request them to keep this in mind while making recommendations of elevations for various high courts."

CJI Chandrachud said the SC, since its inception, has been guided by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy that every decision must be beneficial to the poorest of the poor and the weakest. The aim for the future, he added, is to make the justice delivery mechanism accessible to the last man in the remotest part of the country.

In the presence of chief justices of Mauritius, Bangla-

desh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan, the CJI said India is going through a period of social and demographic transformation with ever increasing participation of women in all spheres of life and the stress on inclusion of the marginalised sections of society.

"Traditionally, the legal profession was a profession of elite men. Times have changed. Women now constitute 36.3% of the working strength of the district judiciary. In the recruitment examination for junior civil judges conducted in several states, more than 50% of the selected candidates were women. In Supreme Court, we hire law clerks-cum-research associates to assist the judges, out of which 41% candidates are women this year," he said.



# Houthi hit on Russian crude forces traders to assess risks

A missile attack on Friday on a tanker taking Russian fuel through the Gulf of Aden may prove to be a defining moment for an oil market that had previously been somewhat immune to months of Houthi militants' attacks on merchant trade.

Why the calm? Because much of the oil flowing through the Red Sea and Suez Canal came from Russia and — so the theory went — it might be safe. The Houthis themselves signaled Russian ships had nothing to fear, and Moscow is an ally of their sponsor Iran. Oil tankers generally had been largely spared.

But Friday's attack made one thing clear: whatever assurances Yemen's Houthis offer, they don't extend to a ship's cargo if the vessel itself has even a tenuous link to the US, UK or Israel. The Houthis had said they were targeting Israeli assets because of the war in Gaza, and then extended their reach to US and UK vessels after those countries launched airstrikes in Yemen.

The attack means that a greater slice of the 3 million barrels a day of Russian cru-

## 'No disruption in flows to India'

**New Delhi:** The Red Sea attacks have not impacted the flow of crude oil to India but freight has gone up due to rerouting via the Cape of Good Hope, HPCL chairman Pushp Kumar Joshi said. India, the world's third-biggest oil importer, gets a bulk of its Russian supplies through the Red Sea. AGENCIES

de oil and fuel that has been flowing through the Red Sea to reach customers in Asia could be at risk. And Russian volumes matter to the global market — despite sanctions imposed because of Moscow's own war in Ukraine. With oil prices popping about \$2 higher on Friday, here are some of the questions that oil traders will be considering when they return to their desks on Monday morning.

## Will Red Sea Transit Stop?

This is unlikely, either for trade in general or to the flow of petroleum in particular.

The decision to transit depends mainly on four things:

## 'Auto, electronics mfg vulnerable'

**New Delhi:** Longer disruptions at the Red Sea trade route may hurt manufacturing lines of sectors like electronics, automobiles, chemicals, consumer goods & machinery, economic think tank GTRI has said. It said companies relying on just-in-time manufacturing can be vulnerable. AGENCIES

the willingness of the owner, that of the crew and the charterer — and profit.

## Is Russian Oil a Target?

Probably not. The international maritime database Equasis lists the manager of the Marlin Luanda — the tanker that got attacked — as a firm called Oceonix Services Ltd. in London. For the Houthis, that may have been enough of a link. But fuel on the Marlin Luanda was different to a lot of Russian petroleum in one crucial way: it was being hauled using western service providers as it was priced within cap allowed by US sanctions. BLOOMBERG



# UN urges reversal of funds halt by 9 nations as famine looms

## France Says No New Funds For UNRWA For Now Amid Claim Of Staff Role In Oct 7 Strike

**Doha/Geneva:** UN officials implored countries to reconsider a pause in funding for the UN agency for Palestinians on Sunday, vowing that any staff found to be involved in Hamas' attack on Israel would be punished and warning that aid for some two million people in Gaza was at stake. At least 9 nations have paused funding for the UN refugee agency for Palestinians (UNRWA) following allegations by Israel that a dozen of its 13,000 staff in Gaza were involved in the Oct 7 attack.

The US, which is the agency's largest donor, cut funding over the weekend, followed by eight other countries, including the UK, Germany and Italy. Together, the nine nations provided nearly 60% of UNRWA's budget in 2022. On Sunday, the French foreign ministry announced that France has not planned a new payment to fund UNRWA in the first quarter of 2024, but would decide when the time comes what action to take in conjunction with UN and its main donors. France called the allegations "exceptionally serious". However, Norway and Ireland said they would continue funding.

"While I understand their concerns - I was myself horrified by these accusations - I strongly appeal to the governments that have suspended their contributions to, at least, guarantee the continuity of UNRWA's operations," UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres said, vowing to hold to account "any UN employee involved in acts of terror". He said this could include criminal prosecution - a rare move within the global body since most staff enjoy functional immunity. Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA commissioner-general, also



Reuters  
Palestinians shelter at a tent camp in Rafah. Since the Oct 7 attacks, most of Gaza's 2.3m people have become reliant on the aid UNRWA provides

## Biden says 3 US service members killed in drone hit in Jordan; Amman says in Syria

**Washington:** Three US service members were killed and dozens wounded during an unmanned aerial drone attack on US forces stationed in northeastern Jordan near the Syrian border, President Biden and US officials said Sunday. However, a spokesman for Jordan's government said the attack was not on Jordanian soil but in Syria. Muhannad al Mubaidin said the attack had targeted the US Al-Tanf base in Syria.

Biden blamed Iran-backed groups for the attack. "While we are still gathering the facts of this attack, we know it was carried out by radical Iran-backed militant groups operating in Syria and Iraq," he said.

At least 34 personnel were

urged countries to "reconsider their decisions before UNRWA is forced to suspend its humanitarian response". A UN investigation into the Israeli allegations is currently under way.

More than 26,000 people have been killed in Israel's military campaign against Hamas in

being evaluated for possible traumatic brain injury, a US official said. The deaths marked the first fatalities of US troops in the region since war began in Gaza. Biden said the attack occurred on Saturday night.

The attack is a major escalation of the already tense situation in West Asia. While the US has thus far maintained an official line that Washington is not at war in the region, it has made strikes against Iran-backed Houthis that have been attacking vessels in the Red Sea. "We will carry on their commitment to fight terrorism. And have no doubt - we will hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner of our choosing," Biden said. REUTERS

Gaza. With flows of aid like food and medicine into the territory just a trickle of pre-conflict levels, deaths from preventable diseases as well as the risk of famine are growing, aid officials say. Since the Oct 7 attacks, which killed 1,200 people in Israel, most of Gaza's 2.3 mil-

lion people have become reliant on the aid UNRWA provides. A UN-appointed expert on the right to food warned that funding cuts meant that famine was now "inevitable" in Gaza.

Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry said the pause would lead to more suffering for Palestinians. "Is this action linked to the policy of collective punishment used against civilians in Gaza?" he said. The Turkish foreign ministry also urged countries that had paused funding to reconsider their move. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas accused Israel of leading an oppressive campaign against the agency. Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri said the Israeli accusations against UNRWA were a challenge to the International Court of Justice's decision that ordered Israel to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza.

UNRWA's role has long been criticised by Israel which alleges it has supported Hamas for years - an allegation the agency denies. Israel has not yet publicly given details of UNRWA staff members' alleged involvement in the attack on Israel. Guterres said 12 staff members had been implicated and that nine had been terminated, one was dead and the identities of the other two were being clarified. UNRWA was set up to help refugees of the 1948 war at Israel's founding and provides education, health and aid services to Palestinians in Gaza, West Bank, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Even before the conflict, UNRWA was struggling to secure funds and warned that it was on the verge of collapse. Many of its 13,000 employees are refugees and at least 150 have died since the war began. REUTERS, AP & AFP



# Truce deal near? US, Israel, Egypt, Qatar hold talks in Paris

Paris: William Burns, the head of the US Central Intelligence Agency, as well as top Egyptian, Qatari and Israeli officials were



CIA chief Burns

in Paris on Sunday working towards a ceasefire in Gaza, sources said. French authorities were also in touch with these four nations with the aim of negotiating a halt to Israel-Hamas hostilities. The NYT said Saturday that US-led negotiators were getting closer to a deal under which Israel would suspend its war in Gaza for about two months in return for the release of more than 100 hostages. Quoting unidentified US officials, it said negotiators had developed a draft agreement that would be discussed in Paris. AFP

# Where is Hamas getting its arms? Increasingly, from Israel

The very weapons that Israeli forces have used to enforce a blockade of Gaza are now being used against them. Israeli military and intelligence officials have concluded that a significant number of weapons used by Hamas came from an unlikely source: the Israeli military itself.

For years, analysts have pointed to underground smuggling routes to explain how Hamas stayed so heavily armed despite an Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. But recent intelligence has shown the extent to which Hamas has been able to build many of its rockets and anti-tank weaponry out of the thousands of munitions that



A 2021 photo of explosives engineers removing an unexploded Israeli missile in Khan Younis. Such unexploded ordnance is the main source of explosives for Hamas, say experts and officials

failed to detonate when Israel lobbed them into Gaza, according to weapons experts and Is-

raeli and Western intelligence officials. Hamas is also arming its fighters with weapons stolen from Israeli military bases.

What is clear now is that the very weapons that Israeli forces have used to enforce a blockade of Gaza over the past 17 years are now being used against them. Israeli and American military explosives have enabled Hamas to shower Israel with rockets and, for the first time, penetrate Israeli towns from Gaza. "Unexploded ordnance is a main source of explosives for Hamas," said Michael Cardash, the former deputy head of the Israeli National Police Bomb Disposal Division and an Israeli police consultant.

"They are cutting open bombs from Israel, artillery bombs from Israel, and a lot of them are being used, of course, and repurposed for their explosives and rockets." Weapons experts say that roughly 10% of munitions typically fail to detonate, but in Israel's case, the figure could be higher. One 750-pound bomb that fails to detonate can become hundreds of missiles or rockets. The Israeli military said that it was committed to dismantling Hamas but did not answer specific questions about the group's weapons.

Israeli officials knew before the October attacks that Hamas could salvage some Israeli-made weapons, but the scope has

startled weapons experts and diplomats alike. Israeli authorities also knew that their armories were vulnerable to theft. The Oct 7 attacks showcased the patchwork arsenal that Hamas had stitched together. It included Iranian-made attack drones and North Korean rocket launchers, the types of weapons that Hamas is known to smuggle into Gaza through tunnels. Iran remains a major source of Hamas's money and weapons. But other weapons, like anti-tank explosives, RPG warheads, thermobaric grenades and improvised devices were repurposed Israeli arms, according to Hamas videos and remnants uncovered by Israel. NYT



# Iran launches 3 sats amid West's missile concerns

Jerusalem: Iran said Sunday it successfully launched three satellites into space with a rocket that had multiple failures in the past, the latest for a programme that the West says improves Tehran's ballistic missiles.

State TV described one as a research satellite, while the other two were nanosatellites focused on GPS and communication respectively. There have been five failed launches in a row for the Simorgh programme, a satellite-carrying rocket.

Western nations remain worried about Iran's rapidly expanding nuclear programme. The US intelligence's 2023 worldwide threat assessment said the development of satellite launch vehicles "shortens the timeline" for Iran to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile because it uses similar technology. That report specifically cites the Simorgh as a possible dual-use rocket. AP