

Discounts dip but Russian crude keeps flowing

New Delhi: The flow of Russian crude to India remains unabated in spite of discounts shrinking to \$1.5-2 per barrel as market factors and input requirement continue to drive refiners' choice in the absence of any govt directive for or against those imports amid US and EU pressure.

"We are buying crude as per the economics. We are not making any extra effort for increasing or decreasing Russian crude (purchase)," IndianOil chairman Arvinder Singh Sahney said on Thursday.

Coming from the head of India's largest state-run refiner and a major buyer of Russian crude, the statement can be construed as an indication the govt remains undaunted by western pressure against purchase of those barrels.

Govt sources said a team of officials from the external and commerce ministries is set to visit Russia for further talks on a Rupee-Rouble trade, something both countries have been pursuing for years.

Several cargoes of Russian crude

Bloomberg/File



Several cargoes of Russian crude were delivered to western ports last week, contrary to foreign media reports of India pausing purchase of Russian oil

were delivered to western ports last week, contrary to foreign media reports of India pausing purchase of Russian oil. Describing those reports as "wrong", Sahney pointed out that Russian oil was not sanctioned like Iranian or Venezuelan crude but is only subject to a price cap.

He said the US had set the price cap at \$60/barrel, among other curbs, after

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. EU's latest curbs have lowered the cap to \$47 (at current oil prices). There is no curb on buying Russian oil within these conditions. Sahney said buying (clean) Russian oil even at small discounts could make sense for refiners if the yield pattern of that particular grade suits the production plan at a given point. "If the pricing and characteristics of the crude suits our scheme of processing, we buy," he said, explaining the monthly variations in the quantity of imports from Russia or the US.

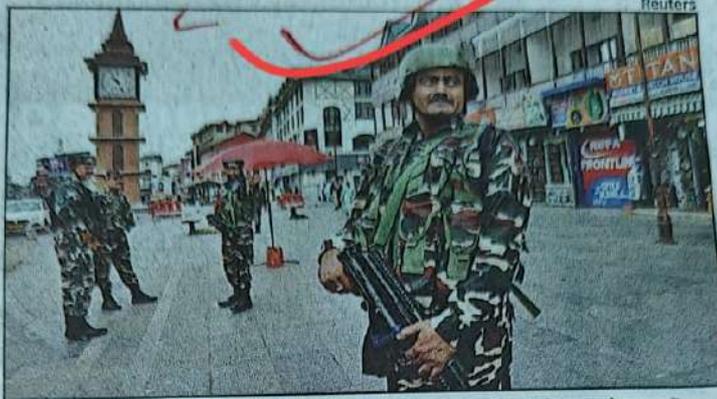
Separately, executives of other refining companies said the wind-down provisions in the US penalty on New Delhi allow import of Russian crude loaded upto seven days from the order, after which the 25% additional tariff will be imposed on Indian goods exports.

"We'll continue to import Russian oil but won't violate sanctions," said an executive of a major refining company. TNN

Can't ignore Pahalgam while deciding on J&K statehood: SC

Not The Time To Muddy Waters: SG; File Reply In 8 Weeks: SC

Dhananjay.Mahapatra
@timesofindia.com



Forces patrol the streets of Srinagar on the eve of Independence Day. Supreme Court's 2023 judgment upholding the Centre's decision to scrap Article 370 was on the basis of SG's assurance that 'restoration of statehood shall take place at the earliest', petitioners said

New Delhi: Supreme Court on Thursday sought the Centre's response to a petition seeking restoration of statehood to Jammu & Kashmir, but said such a decision could not be taken without considering prevailing ground situation and incidents like Pahalgam, where terrorists had killed 26 people in cold blood on April 22.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for Zahoor Ahmed Bhat, said that the judgment of SC's 5-judge bench led by then CJI and comprising current CJI B R Gavani had on Dec 11, 2023, upheld the Centre's decision to scrap Article 370 that gave special status to J&K and the bifurcation of

the state into two UTs — J&K and Ladakh on the basis of SG Tushar Mehta's categorical "restoration of statehood shall take place at the earliest and as soon as possible" assurance. After more than one and half years, statehood had not been restored, Sankaranarayanan said.

Mehta said elections to the assembly of J&K had been held, as was promised in 2023 to the apex court. "SC is aware of the peculiar situation prevailing in J&K.

Several aspects have to be taken into consideration before a decision on granting statehood to J&K can be taken. This is not the time (for petitioners) to muddy the waters," he said.

The CJI Gavai-led bench agreed with the SG. "One has to take into consideration the ground realities prevailing in J&K. The Pahalgam incident cannot be ignored," the bench said, and asked the Centre to file its response to the statehood demand in eight weeks.

In the Dec 2023 judgment, the five-judge bench had recorded: "The solicitor general stated that the statehood of Jammu & Kashmir will be restored (except for the carving out of Union Territory of Ladakh). In view of the statement we do not find it necessary to determine whether the reorganisation of the State of Jammu & Kashmir into two Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir is permissible under Article 3 of the Constitution."

"However, we uphold the validity of the decision to carve out the Union Territory of Ladakh in view of Article 3(a) read with Explanation I which permits forming a Union Territory by separation of a territory from any state. We direct that steps shall be taken by Election Commission of India to conduct elections to the legislative assembly of Jammu & Kashmir constituted under Section 14 of the Reorganisation Act by 30 Sept 2024. Restoration of statehood shall take place at the earliest and as soon as possible," the five-judge bench had said.

Alaska red flag for India as Trump heads out for meeting with Putin

Tariffs On India Could Go Up If US-Russia Talks Don't Go Well, Warns Treasury Secy

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: When elite Indian Air Force pilots, including the celebrated Squadron Leader Shivangi Singh, India's first female Rafale flyer, participated in US-led Red Flag exercises in Alaska at the Elmendorf and Eielson Air Force Bases (AFBs) a year ago, flying half way across the world with a panoply of India's air assets including Russian-made jets, little could anyone have imagined that Washington would be red-flagging New Delhi for buying oil for Moscow.

But here we are: As US President Donald Trump headed out to the very same Elmendorf AFB to meet Russia President Vladimir Putin on Friday, Trump aides left little doubt that India would pay the price if Washington failed to bend Moscow to its whim.

"If things don't go well, then sanctions or secondary tariffs (on India) could go up," treasury secretary Scott Bessent said in an interview to Bloomberg TV, setting the stage for New Delhi to be the fall guy, while providing an off-ramp for China, which buys more Russian oil than India does.

Maintaining that he's "not going to get ahead" of the mercurial president, who's "the best at creating leverage for himself," Bessent offered a remarkable insight into why Western powers are reluctant to punish China: when he asked the leaders at the table at the recent G7 summit in Canada whether they were willing



Russian President Putin said on Thursday that the US was making 'sincere efforts' to halt the war in Ukraine and suggested Moscow and Washington could agree to a nuclear arms deal as part of a wider effort to strengthen peace

to put a 200% secondary tariff on Beijing, "everybody wanted to see what kind of shoes they were wearing," a reference to China's manufacturing might that has the west in a stranglehold.

Bessent's remarks came even as Trump tempered expectation from what will be the Putin's first visit to America in nearly a decade and the first domestic US-Russia summit since 1988, saying it could just be a prelude to a tri-lateral meeting that will also bring in Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky within days.

The US president will meet the Russian leader in one-on-one closed-door meeting kicks off at 11.30am Alaska time, followed by a broader delegation session over a working breakfast at the Elmendorf AFB.

Alaska a witness to closest US-India strategic embrace

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: Elmendorf and its companion Eielson AFB are the bases where India and the US have had their most corroborative military embrace over the years. In June last year, the IAF brought a breathtaking array of its air assets to Alaska, when the shoe was on the other foot, and China was in the US doghouse.

Flying half-way across the world, an IAF contingent, including a complement of female flyers with Sq Ldr Shivangi Singh, winged their way on eight Rafale fighter jets led by Sq Ldr Mohit Tyagi and Group Captain RS Sidhu, the commanding officer of the Rafale Squadron. They were supported by mid-air refuelling from two Russian made IL-78 refuelers and a 250+ member crew on three US-made C-17 Globemaster III aircraft, both of which India has bought.

Neither China nor Pakistan, much less Russia, was in on the exercises, which also had participation from UK's Royal Air Force, the German Luftwaffe, and the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf). Red Flag-Alaska, the USAF crowed at that time, "serves as an ideal platform for international engagement and the exercise has a long history of including Allies and partners."

Indeed, Alaska came on the Indian radar (and vice-versa) as far back as 2004 when crew and aircraft from Elmendorf AFB came to Gwalior for the

Cope India exercises, flying in on F-15C Eagles while the IAF rolled out its Su-MK, Mirage 2000, Jaguar, MiG 27, and MiG-21 Bison. In less than a decade, as the Bush years gave way to the Obama era, there was enough comfort that India sent out the more advanced SU-MKI and even deployed two IL-78 aerial refuelling tankers and two C-17 transport aircraft for the Red Flag exercises in Alaska in 2016.

By the turn of the decade, things looked so hunky-dory that Indian troops were also being sent to Alaska for Yudh Abhas exercises, including cold weather survival and mountaineer training. In 2021, some 350 troops from the 7th Battalion of the Madras Regiment were airlifted to Elmendorf by IAF's No. 81 squadron for two weeks of training.

The high-point of India's Alaska engagement came in 2024 when India sent Sq Ldr Shivangi Singh and five women officers involved in maintenance and support roles, calling it "a milestone for gender diversity in the IAF." The experience of ferrying long distances while undertaking air-to-air refuelling en route, New Delhi said, was both an enriching and thrilling takeaway.

Although President Trump is letting the air out of the relationship, with the possibility of torpedoing it altogether over tariff issues, Indian officials remain optimistic that it is a passing phase and US-India ties will endure.

An Israeli min announces plan that will effectively split West Bank into two

Reuters

Tel Aviv: Israeli far-right finance minister Bezalet Smotrich announced work would start on a long-delayed settlement that would divide the West Bank and cut it off from East Jerusalem, a move his office said would "bury" the idea of a Palestinian state.

The Palestinian govt, allies and campaign groups condemned the scheme.

The construction on a tract of land east of Jerusalem named E1 has been under consideration for more than two decades, and is especially controversial because it is one of the last geographic links between the major West Bank cities of Ramallah and Bethlehem. The two cities are 22 kilometres apart by air. But once an Israeli settlement is completed, it would require Palestinians travelling between cities to drive several kilometres out of their way and pass through multiple checkpoints.

Standing at the site of the planned settlement in Maale Adumim on Thursday, Smotrich, a settler himself, said PM Netanyahu and US President Trump had agreed to the revival of the E1 development, though there was no immediate confirmation from either.

"This reality finally buries the idea of a Palestinian state, because there is nothing to recognise and no one to recognise," Smotrich said on Thursday. "Whoever in the world is trying to recognise a Palestinian state today will receive



Israeli forces demolished houses in eastern areas of Gaza City overnight, killing at least 17 people in aerial and tank fire, local health authorities said

our answer on the ground. Not with documents nor with decisions or statements, but with facts. Facts of houses, facts of neighbourhoods," he said.

Israel froze construction plans at Maale Adumim in 2012, and again after a revival in 2020, because of objections from the US, European allies and other powers who considered the project a threat to any peace deal with the Palestinians.

Palestinians fear the settlement building in the West Bank will rob them of any chance to build a state of their own in the area.

Smotrich's spokesperson said the minister had approved the plan to build 3,401 houses for Israeli settlers between an existing settlement in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, the Palestinian president's spokesperson, called on the US to pressure Israel to stop settlement building. AGENCIES

Samudrayaan in sight, India takes a 5,002m plunge

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: In a first-of-its-kind expedition, India sent an aquanaut 5,002m deep into the ocean as part of the country's Deep Ocean Mission, which involves development of crewed and uncrewed submersibles and deep-sea mining technologies, aimed at harnessing resources from the Exclusive Economic Zone and continental shelf.

As part of Indo-French research collaborations, two Indian aquanauts — Jatinder Pal Singh and Raju Ramesh — successfully completed one deep dive each in the North Atlantic Ocean in the French submersible "Nautile" on Aug 5 and 6. Happening as it did around a month after Shubhanshu Shukla became the first Indian to reach International Space Station, Union earth sciences minister Jitendra Singh Thursday called it India's quest for a double conquest. "We have an Indian going into space and an Indian going into the deep ocean almost simultaneously," he said.

Ramesh, a scientist at National Institute of Ocean Technology, went 4,025m down on Aug 5, followed by a dive of 5,002m by Navy commander (retd) Singh

'Shukh may meet PM this weekend'

Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, the second Indian to travel to space and the first to visit ISS, is expected to arrive in India this weekend and is



set to meet PM Modi before leaving for hometown Lucknow to meet family, reports **Surendra Singh**.

This was revealed by space minister Jitendra Singh, who said Shukla will return to Delhi for National Space Day celebrations on Aug 23.

on Aug 6. "This expedition was conducted as part of Deep Ocean Mission. One of the verticals of DOM aims to develop technology to harness non-living ocean resources and a submersible which can carry humans to the deepest parts of the ocean," said M Ravichandran, secretary, ministry of earth sciences.

He said more dives will be undertaken in the same submersible before India conducts a deep dive in indigenous 'Matsya 6000' submersible, which could happen around Dec 2027, under 'Samudrayaan' project.