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India Signals Continued Russian Oil Imports Despite Trump Tariff Warning

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India has indicated it will continue purchasing Russian crude oil despite sharp warnings from former U.S. President Donald Trump, signaling that economic pragmatism will remain a cornerstone of its energy policy. The move underscores New Delhi's commitment to securing affordable energy supplies, even as geopolitical tensions mount over Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine.

Speaking at a press briefing Friday, Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesman Randhir Jaiswal emphasized the country's longstanding ties with Russia, calling the relationship

“steady and time-tested.” Jaiswal also warned against interpreting India’s energy decisions through the lens of any third party, reinforcing its stance of strategic autonomy.

India, the world’s third-largest importer of crude oil after China and the United States, has significantly ramped up its imports from Russia since early 2022, when global sanctions were imposed on Moscow following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Prior to the conflict, India primarily sourced its oil from Middle Eastern nations. However, the availability of deeply discounted Russian crude shifted that dynamic, offering New Delhi a financial lifeline amid global inflation and supply constraints.

Data from energy analytics firm Kpler shows that Indian imports of Russian oil skyrocketed from just 68,000 barrels per day in January 2022 to over 1.1 million barrels per day by June of the same year. At its peak, Russian oil accounted for nearly 40% of India’s crude imports, surpassing traditional suppliers like Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

India’s energy dependence is substantial. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the country imports approximately 87% of its total oil requirements. With a population exceeding 1.3 billion and rapid industrial and economic expansion, its energy demands are expected to grow significantly through the end of the decade.

Despite this, President Trump recently issued a warning, threatening to impose a 25% tariff on Indian goods as retaliation for its continued oil trade with Russia. Trump, who has made ending the Ukraine conflict a priority in his campaign messaging, has expressed frustration with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s refusal to agree to a ceasefire. While Trump previously praised Putin, he has shifted tone, calling the lack of progress “disappointing” and vowing further sanctions on Moscow if necessary.

India, however, appears unmoved by the threat. Two Indian government officials, speaking to Reuters, indicated that long-term oil contracts with Russia cannot simply be abandoned. “It is not so simple to just stop buying overnight,” one official said, highlighting the logistical and economic complexities involved.

As India continues to prioritise energy affordability and economic growth, its defiance of Western pressure could pose challenges for Washington’s broader sanctions strategy. Nevertheless, India’s position reflects its broader foreign policy approach: pragmatic, non-aligned, and focused on national interest.