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India Signals Continued Russian Oil Imports Despite Trump Tariff Threats

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India has signalled its intention to maintain imports of Russian oil, despite warnings from former US President Donald Trump regarding possible tariffs on Indian goods. The move highlights New Delhi's strategic focus on energy security and long-standing ties with Moscow, as global geopolitical tensions continue to reverberate across international trade and energy markets.

On Friday, India's Ministry of External Affairs reaffirmed its commitment to a "steady and time-tested" relationship with Russia, following criticism from Mr Trump about the deepening energy links between the two nations. Speaking at a weekly press briefing,

ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated that India's energy procurement decisions are guided by market supply and global conditions, not external political pressure.

The comments follow threats made by Mr Trump to impose a 25% tariff on Indian imports if New Delhi continues to purchase oil from Russia. These remarks come amid his pledge to resolve the ongoing war in Ukraine within 24 hours of returning to office, a promise that has become central to his foreign policy platform.

India, the world's third-largest importer of crude oil behind China and the United States, has significantly increased its intake of discounted Russian oil since the start of the Ukraine conflict in February 2022. According to data from the Press Trust of India and energy analytics firm Kpler, imports from Russia jumped from 68,000 barrels per day in January 2022 to over 1.1 million barrels per day by June of the same year. Russia briefly became India's largest crude oil supplier, accounting for nearly 40% of its total imports at the peak.

Two unnamed government sources quoted by Reuters echoed Jaiswal's position, with one official noting, "These are long-term oil contracts. It is not so simple to just stop buying overnight." The International Energy Agency (IEA) reports that India depends on imports to meet 87% of its crude oil requirements.

Historically reliant on supplies from the Middle East, India began pivoting towards Russian oil following Western sanctions aimed at cutting off funding to the Kremlin. The resulting global supply disruptions contributed to a major energy price surge, with British households experiencing steep increases in fuel and electricity bills during the crisis.

India's energy demand is expected to rise steadily over the coming years, driven by its expanding economy, population growth, and surging vehicle ownership among its growing middle class. Petrol demand, in particular, has soared amid increased sales of motorbikes and cars.

While Mr Trump has previously expressed admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin, his recent rhetoric has shifted, calling Russia's refusal to agree to a ceasefire "disappointing". He has also threatened additional sanctions on Moscow and revealed that two US nuclear submarines have been deployed to unspecified "appropriate regions" as tensions escalate.

India's response underscores its determination to prioritise national interest and energy access, even amid international pressure from major powers.