

Breaking Free from Mediocrity

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has struck the right chord by demanding that educational institutions in Jammu and Kashmir place investment in human capital, innovation, and research at the top of their agenda. But let us be blunt: this is not a polite suggestion—it is an ultimatum. Unless J&K's higher education system shakes off its inertia and abandons the “Sab chalta hai” mindset, it will condemn an entire generation of students to mediocrity and missed opportunities. The truth is harsh. Our universities have, for decades, produced degree-holders, not innovators. They have clung to outdated syllabi, resisted change, and shown little appetite for research that addresses real-world challenges. Students, meanwhile, are left to navigate a system where rote memorization matters more than problem-solving, and where the curriculum seems more suited to the 1980s than the 21st century. This is not just an academic failure—it is an economic and social betrayal. Sinha's call for revolutionary curriculum reform is therefore not just desirable, it is non-negotiable. If J&K wants to be part of India's march towards becoming a global knowledge power, its universities cannot remain stuck in the past. They must align themselves with cutting-edge global trends—artificial intelligence, biotechnology, clean energy, climate science—while at the same time addressing the unique local challenges of the Union Territory. Anything less is a disservice to both students and society. Equally important is the demand for interdisciplinary education. Complex problems cannot be solved within rigid academic silos. Climate resilience, rural development, public health, or even counter-radicalization efforts demand insights from science, social sciences, and humanities working together. If our universities cannot foster such cross-pollination of knowledge, they risk producing graduates ill-equipped to deal with reality. But the biggest hurdle remains mindset. The Lieutenant Governor rightly condemned the prevailing “Sab chalta hai” attitude that has crippled progress in education. This casual complacency has allowed mediocrity to thrive, and it must be smashed. Faculty cannot hide behind excuses. They must reinvent themselves, embrace continuous learning, and inspire students to think boldly. The induction programme for newly recruited faculty at the Central University of Kashmir is a welcome move, but far more needs to be done to overhaul teaching quality across the board. And then comes research—or rather, the shocking lack of it. J&K's universities must transform from being knowledge consumers to knowledge creators. That means funding, yes, but also accountability. Research must not be confined to journals gathering dust in libraries. It must translate into patents, start-ups, innovations, and solutions that directly benefit society. The stakes are too high for half-hearted measures. J&K sits on a demographic goldmine—its youth. But if these young people are handed nothing more than stale syllabi, outdated degrees, and unemployable skills, that goldmine will turn into a ticking time bomb of frustration. Investing in human capital is not about lofty ideals; it is about survival, progress, and dignity for the next generation. Sinha's message is clear: reform or perish. J&K's universities must wake up, shake up, and gear up for the future—or risk being left in the dust of history.

India's Russian Oil Windfall a Myth, New Report Claims

■ RAVISH HANDOO

In the intricate and ever-shifting landscape of global energy politics, few developments have been as dramatic and debated as India's burgeoning oil trade with Russia. What began as a pragmatic economic decision by the world's third-largest oil importer has since morphed into a complex geopolitical saga, placing New Delhi on a diplomatic tightrope between its historical ties with Moscow and its strategic partnerships with the West. While initial reports celebrated India's seemingly shrewd move to buy deeply discounted Russian crude in the wake of the Ukraine conflict, a more nuanced and critical picture has begun to emerge. Recent analyses, most notably from the global brokerage firm CLSA, suggest that the narrative of a massive financial windfall for India is largely exaggerated, with the actual net savings being a fraction of the widely publicized figures. This has reframed the discussion, moving it beyond simple economics to a deeper consideration of strategic gains, geopolitical risks, and India's evolving role in a multipolar world. The story of India's Russian oil imports is not just about barrels and dollars; it is a defining narrative of our times, weaving together threads of economic necessity, strategic autonomy, and the turbulent realignment of global power. Prior to the events of early 2022, India's energy procurement map was heavily oriented towards the Middle East, with nations like Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE serving as its primary and most reliable suppliers. Russian crude constituted a negligible fraction, accounting for less than one percent of India's total oil imports. The outbreak of conflict in Ukraine and the subsequent imposition of Western sanctions on Moscow created an unprecedented disruption in global energy markets. As Western nations moved to isolate Russia and curtail its energy revenues, Moscow responded by offering its crude oil at substantial discounts to new buyers. For a rapidly growing and energy-hungry nation like India, which imports over 85% of its oil needs, this presented an irresistible opportunity. The Indian government and its refiners moved decisively, orchestrating a tectonic shift in the country's import strategy. In a remarkably short period, Russian oil flooded the Indian market. Its share of India's import basket skyrocketed, surging to nearly 40% at its peak. By the fiscal year 2024-25, Russia had firmly established itself as India's top oil supplier, accounting for about 36% of its 5.4 million barrels per day of imports, displacing its long-standing partners. This pivot was not merely an act of opportunism but was framed by Indian officials as a crucial measure for ensuring the nation's energy security and shielding its vast population from the volatility of soaring global energy prices. The core of this strategic pivot was the allure

of the discount. In the initial phase, the price differential between Russian Urals crude and global benchmarks like Brent was significant, offering a clear economic incentive. However, a comprehensive analysis by CLSA has since challenged the scale of these benefits, arguing that the true financial gains for India are far more modest than the headline figures suggest. The brokerage firm calculates the net annual benefit to be approximately \$2.5 billion, a stark contrast to the \$10 billion to \$25 billion range often quoted in media reports. The CLSA report methodically deconstructs the popular narrative by highlighting several overlooked costs and complexities. A primary factor is the nature of the import contracts. Indian refiners primarily import Russian crude on a Cost, Insurance, and Freight (CIF) basis, meaning the price they pay includes these additional expenses. Consequently, the landed cost of the crude in India is significantly higher than the price at the Russian port, and the effective discount is much smaller than it appears. Furthermore, the discount itself has proven to be a moving target, steadily eroding over time. While the average discount hovered around a healthy \$8.5 per barrel in the 2024 fiscal year, it subsequently fell to a range of \$3 to \$5 per barrel in the following year and, in recent months, has dwindled to as low as \$1.5 per barrel. At the current discounted rates, the annualized gains could plummet to just \$1 billion, a figure that represents a tiny fraction of India's GDP. Adding another layer of complexity is the quality of the oil. Russian Urals is a heavier, more sulfurous grade of crude compared to the lighter, sweeter crudes from the Middle East or the United States. Processing this inferior quality oil is more challenging and requires refineries to blend it with more expensive, higher-quality grades to produce the desired slate of refined products like gasoline and diesel. This blending process introduces additional costs that further eat into the initial savings. Surprisingly, the CLSA analysis of official government import data reveals no clear, discernible financial gain from the shift to Russian oil. In fact, it notes that the unit price of India's overall crude import basket has, counterintuitively, moved from a discount to the Dubai benchmark before 2022 to a premium in the years since, suggesting that the massive savings are not materializing in the national import bill. This trade has inevitably drawn India into a high-stakes geopolitical chess match. The United States, particularly under the Trump administration, has been openly critical of India's purchases, accusing New Delhi of profiteering from the conflict and undermining the effectiveness of Western sanctions designed to cripple Russia's war machine. Washington's displeasure has translated into tangible policy actions, with the imposition of significant tariffs on Indian goods. These measures have escalated, with an initial 25% tariff being doubled to 50% in August 2025, directly

linking trade penalties to India's energy relationship with Moscow. This pressure has forced Indian policymakers and refiners to perform a delicate balancing act, attempting to placate Washington without completely abandoning a critical energy source. India has consistently maintained that its purchases do not violate any international laws, as there are no primary sanctions on buying Russian oil. It has also largely adhered to the price cap mechanism instituted by the G7 nations, which aims to limit Russian revenues while keeping its oil on the market to prevent a global price shock. However, the ecosystem around this trade is fraught with opacity, including the reported use of a "shadow fleet" of aging tankers with obscure ownership and insurance arrangements to transport the oil, complicating efforts to enforce the price cap. Beneath the surface of national policy, a significant portion of this trade has been driven by India's private sector, with a few corporate giants emerging as the primary beneficiaries. Reliance Industries, led by Asia's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, has been at the forefront of this shift. Its massive Jamnagar refinery complex, one of the most sophisticated in the world, dramatically increased its intake of Russian crude from a mere 3% of its feedstock before the war to an average of 50% by 2025. This refinery has transformed into a global hub for processing Russian oil and re-exporting it as refined products like diesel and jet fuel. In a striking illustration of the complexities of global supply chains, a significant portion of these refined products has been sold to the very countries that are leading the sanctions regime against Russia, including nations in the European Union and the United States itself. Data indicates that since the price cap was implemented, the Jamnagar refinery exported billions of dollars worth of oil products to the US and the EU, with a substantial portion of it estimated to have been derived from Russian crude. Nayara Energy, another major private refiner with significant Russian ownership through Rosneft, has also been a key player, sourcing a majority of its crude from Russia. This dynamic has led to accusations that Indian corporations are, in effect, providing a "back door" for Russian oil to enter Western markets, thereby diluting the impact of sanctions. Despite the controversies and the modest direct financial gains, proponents of India's policy argue that its purchases have served as a crucial stabilizing force for the global energy market. The CLSA report itself warns that a sudden cessation of Indian imports from Russia would be difficult for Moscow to absorb in the short term, potentially taking about one million barrels per day off the global market. Such a supply disruption, it argues, could cause global crude prices to spike dramatically, potentially reaching the \$90 to \$100 per barrel range and triggering a new wave of inflation worldwide. From this perspective, India is not just

serving its own interests but is also contributing to global price stability, a role that benefits all energy-consuming nations. This view casts India as a responsible swing producer in the refining market, absorbing discounted crude that might otherwise be locked out and preventing a more severe energy crisis. However, this interpretation is not universally accepted. Critics maintain that by providing Russia with a reliable and large-scale outlet for its most vital export, India is extending an economic lifeline that directly funds its military operations in Ukraine. This moral and ethical dimension hangs over the entire trade relationship, creating a deep divide between those who see it as a masterstroke of economic pragmatism and those who view it as a troubling compromise of principle. Looking ahead, the future of this pivotal energy relationship is shrouded in uncertainty, with conflicting signals emerging from various quarters. On one hand, reports suggest that under mounting pressure from the US and the threat of further tariffs, Indian refiners are preparing to modestly reduce their purchases of Russian crude. This move is seen as a token gesture to Washington, signaling a willingness to cooperate without making drastic changes. On the other hand, some trading sources indicate that Indian refiners are, in fact, planning to increase their Russian oil intake in the coming months, in a clear act of defiance against US pressure. This push-and-pull dynamic reflects the ongoing tug-of-war between economic incentives and geopolitical pressures. The long-term sustainability of the trade will depend on several factors: the persistence of the price discount, the evolution of Western sanctions and enforcement mechanisms, and the shifting calculus of India's own strategic interests. In conclusion, the story of India's embrace of Russian oil is a multifaceted saga that defies simple characterization. The initial narrative of a massive economic windfall has been convincingly challenged, revealing a reality where the direct financial benefits are far more constrained than widely believed, tempered by the costs of transport, insurance, and refining complexities. While the savings may be exaggerated, the strategic implications of the trade are profound. India's actions have positioned it as a pivotal player in the global energy market, simultaneously acting as a price stabilizer and a target of Western criticism. The trade has highlighted the remarkable agility of Indian corporations in navigating complex global markets, while also raising uncomfortable questions about profiting from geopolitical conflict. Ultimately, India's Russian oil trade is a powerful demonstration of its commitment to a foreign policy of "strategic autonomy," where it prioritizes its own national interests in a complex world, deftly balancing relationships with competing global powers. It is a calculated risk, a complex interplay of economic necessity and geopolitical ambition, and its final chapter has yet to be written.

BUILDING REGIONAL SECURITY: ROLE FOR NEW DELHI-WARSAW?

■ PIOTR OPALINSKI

India's strategic vision today extends well beyond South Asia. New Delhi recognises that stability in Europe and Eurasia directly influences the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. As NATO's eastern anchor, one of Europe's leading defence spenders, and a consistent voice on Russia and China, Poland offers India lessons, opportunities, and a channel into European security debates. Although the Polish–Indian dialogue on defence is still developing, it has great potential. For India, closer cooperation with Warsaw is not only about bilateral ties but about strengthening its influence in Europe, where decisions increasingly affect the Indo-Pacific as well. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Warsaw has taken on responsibilities far beyond its size in NATO. Defence spending has surged to over 4% of GDP, the highest share in NATO, and the armed forces are undergoing rapid modernisation with American HIMARS, Abrams tanks, F-35 jets, as well as South Korean K2 tanks and K9 howitzers. For India, this is notable in two respects. First, it shows how a mid-sized state can quickly reshape its military posture in response to existential threats – an experience India can relate to. Second, Poland's strong voice within NATO ensures that deterrence against Russia remains central to the Alliance's strategy, stabilising Europe and freeing up American resources for the Indo-Pacific. A secure Europe creates opportunities for deeper India–Europe cooperation in defence production and logistics. Few European states understand Russia as deeply as Warsaw does. Centuries of partitions,

Soviet domination, and Cold War subjugation have forged in it, a strategic culture of caution toward Moscow. Since 2022, it has emerged as one of Ukraine's staunchest supporters, providing weapons, training, and humanitarian assistance. It has also driven EU sanctions against Russia and coordinated logistics for Western aid. India should see it as an example of how middle powers can shape continental responses to aggression. While India maintains a balanced approach to Moscow, it recognises that Poland plays a vital role in preventing instability in Europe – instability that would complicate New Delhi's delicate balancing act between Russia, the West, and China. Not just Russia, Warsaw is increasingly alert to China's global posture. Skepticism has grown as Chinese investments in Central Europe have disappointed, and Beijing's “no-limits partnership” with Moscow has alarmed Polish policymakers. They have voiced concerns about supply chain dependencies, cyber vulnerabilities, and technological risks tied to China. Here, the outlook overlaps with India's. Both countries see China as a systemic competitor: for India, a territorial rival; for Poland, an enabler of Russian aggression and a challenge to the rules-based order. This convergence creates space for dialogue. NATO has recognised the importance of the Indo-Pacific, while India has strengthened ties with France, Germany, and other European powers. Defence ties between Poland and India go back decades. During the Cold War, Poland supplied equipment and expertise to upgrade Soviet-origin systems in India. Polish companies have since worked with Indian partners on tank modernisation, aviation components, and naval

equipment. In recent years, this cooperation has gained momentum. And for New Delhi, pursuing Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat, it could consider ties with a practical partner: capable of technology transfer, cost-effective solutions, and joint ventures. Promising areas could include, armoured vehicles and artillery systems, wherein NATO-compatible designs could aid India's modernisation; Air defence and drones, in which both countries are investing heavily, creating natural synergies; Training and logistics in combined arms operations. In fact, during Poland's presidency of the Council of European Union (January–June 2025), security, resilience, and partnerships in Asia were central to its priorities – themes familiar to India. For New Delhi, this was a valuable opening to deepen ties with the EU through a Central European perspective. The presidency reinforced momentum in the EU–India Strategic Partnership, gave new energy to trade negotiations, and highlighted Europe's growing focus on the Indo-Pacific. Poland's emphasis on energy resilience, hybrid threats, and supply chain stability resonated with India's concerns about maritime security and critical technologies. Though the presidency has ended, its impact remains. Poland enjoys visibility in EU policy-making, and Asia is more firmly embedded in European security debates. South Block should build on this by ensuring right perspectives are included in the EU–India dialogue. A common factor between Poland and India is that both navigate great-power competition as confident middle powers. While Warsaw relies on NATO and the EU to enhance its security, New Delhi builds coalitions like the Quad, BRICS, and SCO to expand its strategic space.

Despite different geographies, both prioritise sovereignty, deterrence, and resilience. The war in Ukraine and tensions in the Indo-Pacific highlight a simple truth: regional conflicts carry global consequences. India faces it on its Himalayan border and across the Indian Ocean. There is need to share lessons, coordinate policies, and strengthen the global security architecture. Encouraging is that signs of stronger Polish–Indian partnership are already visible. High-level visits, growing trade, and academic exchanges have created a favourable environment. Yet defence cooperation remains the most promising vector. The two sides, however, should consider elevating the relationship through three steps. One, institutionalise defence dialogue – through a 2+2 format or working groups. Two, expand defence industry cooperation – joint ventures, technology sharing, and mutual participation in defence expos. Three, link European and Indo-Pacific agendas. Both countries leadership should realise that while the two may be geographically distant, their strategic trajectories are converging. Poland, as NATO's eastern shield, and India, as the Indo-Pacific's central power, both confront assertive neighbours, invest in deterrence, and seek to shape a multipolar but stable world. For Indian readers, the message is clear: Deepening ties with Warsaw would complement India's partnerships with France, Germany, and the United States, while adding a Central European dimension to its global strategy. In today's uncertain world, both countries stand as natural allies – bound not by historical accident, but by shared recognition that security is indivisible, and that cooperation across continents is essential for a more stable order.--INFA

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