

Russian Customer India Defies U.S. Oil Pressure

By SHAN LI

NEW DELHI—India is digging in its heels and resisting pressure from the U.S. to curb purchases of Russian oil, despite threats by President Trump to retaliate by imposing higher tariffs on India.

Last week, Trump said he would place a 25% tariff on Indian imports to the U.S. in retaliation for India's large-scale purchases of cheap Russian oil. Then, on Monday, the president said he would be "substantially raising" tariffs on Indian goods—on top of the 25% duty—because of the "massive amounts" of Russian oil that India buys.

Political experts said that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is calculating that Trump will decide that ties between the two countries are too critical to jeopardize in a trade spat. Many Indian experts believe that Trump is spotlighting the issue to gain leverage in trade negotiations with New Delhi—and that he will drop it once a deal is signed.

In recent years, the U.S. has grudgingly accepted India's close ties with Russia because New Delhi is considered a crucial partner in countering China's growing power.

"The view is that this is not going to affect the overall relationship, and that we don't have to kowtow," said Sreeram Chaulia, dean at O.P. Jindal Global University's School of International Affairs in Sonipat.

India has taken advantage of discounted oil prices from Russia following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. By late 2024, India took in over one-third of Russia's oil exports, second only to China at nearly 50%, according to the Ob-

server Research Foundation, an Indian think tank. Before the war, India bought most of its oil from Gulf countries.

Russia also continues to export significant volumes of energy to buyers such as Turkey, Japan and some European Union states.

New Delhi has repeatedly defended its purchases as necessary to support its economy and keep energy prices steady for its huge population. Monday, India's Foreign Ministry said that its imports of Russian oil ramped up only after its traditional supplies were diverted to European countries during the Ukraine war.

The ministry also accused the U.S. and the EU of operating a double standard—continuing to trade with Russia

while penalizing others for doing the same.

When facing pressure from bigger powers, India has also historically defended its autonomy in foreign policy, Chaulia said.

Over the weekend, Modi vigorously defended India's right to give priority to its own economic well-being in the current "atmosphere of instability."

The White House has rapidly ratcheted up pressure on India as Trump looks for ways to push Russian President Vladimir Putin toward ending the Ukraine war. Trump has vowed to impose tariffs on countries that do business with Moscow, and threatened India with a "penalty" for continuing to buy Russian goods.

Stephen Miller, deputy chief of staff at the White House and a top aide to Trump, accused India on Sunday of taking advantage of the U.S. on trade and of financing the war by buying Russian oil.

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