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www.tathastuics.com



enquiry@tathastuics.com

Plot No.B 22, Bada Bazar Road, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi-110060

Topics Covered

- India's Russian oil cuts predate U.S. tariffs: data
- Commission for Air Quality Management
- Recognise the critical role of the childcare worker
- Post-facto environmental clearances
- Reset with Riyadh

India's Russian oil cuts predate U.S. tariffs: data

The 25% additional tariff by the U.S. came into effect on August 27 while government figures show a reduction in energy imports from Russia in the previous months compared with 2024; a Commerce Ministry official said Trump tariffs were imposed at the same time and they were a factor to consider, but they are not driving Indian policies

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

India is implementing a larger strategy to reduce its dependence on oil imports from Russia, with the higher tariffs imposed by the U.S. coming at a time when India was already cutting its Russian oil imports, according to an analysis of official data. This has been confirmed by government officials.

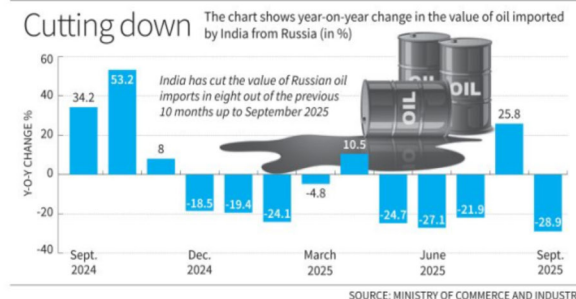
An analysis by *The Hindu* of government trade data shows India's oil imports from Russia in September 2025 – the first full month during which the U.S.'s 50% tariffs on Indian imports were applicable – were 29% lower in terms of value and 17% lower in terms of volume than in September 2024.

However, the data show that this is part of a larger strategy rather than a reaction to the tariffs, half of

which were imposed as a "penalty" for importing Russian oil.

Bigger strategy

The Russian oil-related 25% additional tariff by the U.S. on Indian imports came into effect on August 27. However, data show that India had cut the value of Russian oil imports in eight of the previous 10 months up to September 2025, compared with the corresponding period of 2024. In five of these months – February, May, June, July, and September – the cuts exceeded 20% each. "India has known for a while now that its dependence on Russian oil imports had grown too high and so it was already working on a plan to reduce this," an official in the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry told *The Hindu* on the condition of anonymity, given the sensitivity of the issue.



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"The Trump tariffs had come during that time," the official said. "Yes, they are a factor to be kept in mind, but they are not driving Indian policies."

Since the 50% tariffs were imposed, U.S. President Donald Trump has been repeatedly claiming that India will be cutting its imports of Russian oil, so

mething the Indian government has neither confirmed nor denied.

Separately, formal trade talks between India and the U.S. have resumed after a brief hiatus, with statements again being made about a tranche one of a Bilateral Trade Agreement expected to be concluded "soon".

Several Indian Minis-

ters, including External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, have asserted that India will make its energy import decisions as per its needs and best interests, and not under duress.

Declining share

The reduction of Russian

oil is not just in absolute terms, but also in terms of its share in India's total oil imports.

Russian oil accounted for about 41% of India's total oil imports in September 2024, which came down to 31% by September 2025. However, rather than a one-off, the data confirm that this is part of a longer process.

Russia's share in India's oil imports grew from 1.6% in 2020-21 to 2% in 2021-22, before steadily jumping to 19% in 2022-23, 33.4% in 2023-24, and 35.1% in 2024-25.

The first six months of 2025-26 had, however, snapped this four-year increasing trend, with Russia's share falling to 32.3% in the April-September period.

Diversified imports

Russia's war in Ukraine, the resultant sanctions on it by

the U.S. and Europe, and the discounts it provided India resulted in a significant shift in India's oil import basket for a few years after the war started, with an increasing dependence on Russia.

Some of that is now reversing itself as India has started shifting away from Russian oil.

In 2021-22, the U.S. accounted for 9.2% of India's oil imports and the UAE accounted for 12.4%. This was when Russia accounted for only 2% of India's oil imports.

By 2024-25, Russia accounted for 35.1% of India's oil, while the shares of the U.S. and the UAE had fallen to 4.6% and 9.7%, respectively.

In the first six months of 2025-26, the U.S. share has once again increased to 8% and that of the UAE to 11.7%, even as Russia's share has fallen to 32.3%.

India's Russian oil cuts predate U.S. tariffs: data

India's imports of Russian oil fell sharply in September 2025, but this drop is not mainly because of the new 50% U.S. tariffs.	Year	Russia's Share
	2020-21	1.6%
	2021-22	2%
Data shows that India had already started reducing Russian oil imports for many months before the tariffs came in.	2022-23	19%
	2023-24	33.4%
The government believed that India had become too dependent on Russia and was working on a plan to diversify its oil sources.	2024-25	35.1%
	2025-26 (Apr-Sep)	32.3%

Diversified imports

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Why Was India Reducing Russian Oil Already?

Strategic Interpretation

India wants to avoid:

- Overreliance on one supplier
- Geopolitical vulnerability
- Future sanction-related supply shocks
- Diplomatic imbalance

This aligns with India's long-term policy of **energy diversification and strategic autonomy**.

Overall Assessment

- **India is deliberately diversifying** its oil imports to reduce risks, balance suppliers, and keep prices stable.
- **U.S. tariffs may have sped up the trend**, but India had already begun reducing reliance on Russia.
- **India maintains strategic autonomy**, avoiding the appearance of bowing to U.S. pressure or alienating Russia.
- **This reflects a more mature energy diplomacy**, where India balances major powers and makes independent, pragmatic decisions.

Commission for Air Quality Management

Apex court allows CAQM to take 'proactive' steps to keep air pollution in check in Delhi

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday gave the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) a free hand to take "any proactive measure" to curb air pollution throttling Delhi-NCR after the statutory body proposed to include choice Stage IV curbs of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) like work from home and 50% of office attendance in the ongoing Stage III of GRAP itself.

"Any proactive measure of CAQM to reduce air pollution is always welcome," Chief Justice of India B.R.



Remedial measures: Water being sprinkled to control air pollution in the national capital on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Gavai, heading a Bench comprising Justice K. Vinod Chandran, observed in an order. The court said the CAQM must, however, consult stakeholders and take everyone on board.

The court was responding to a note submitted by the CAQM proposing short-

term and long-term measures against air pollution choking Delhi-NCR.

Amicus curiae, senior advocate Aparajita Singh, highlighted a CAQM recommendation to exempt BS-III emission vehicles from the protection of an August 12 court order, which barred

authorities from taking any coercive steps against owners of 10-year-old diesel and 15-year-old petrol vehicles. The CAQM also proposed including the Stage III restriction of staggered office timings in Stage II.

Sports events in schools

The court also directed the CAQM to look into the issue of schools conducting sports events in November and December. Ms. Singh said such events virtually amount to putting children in a gas chamber. The court made it clear that the CAQM must pass the necessary directions to the States concerned on this issue. The court posted the next hearing for December 10.

The Supreme Court has allowed the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) to take **any proactive** steps needed to reduce Delhi-NCR's severe air pollution.

Commission suggested adding tougher restrictions from **GRAP Stage IV**—like work-from-home and 50% office attendance—into the current **Stage III** itself.

GRAP Stage IV (Severe+ / Emergency Category)

Stage IV is the **highest level** of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for Delhi-NCR.

Activated when air quality reaches **Severe+ (AQI > 450)** or when pollution is expected to rise to emergency levels

The Court agreed but said CAQM should **consult all stakeholders** before acting. It also asked CAQM to examine issues such as:

- Whether BS-III vehicles should be exempt from earlier protection orders. (BS-III vehicles = older, more polluting vehicles with outdated emission standards.)-

BS-VI: Latest and much stricter standard (from April 2020)

- Whether **staggered office timings** should start earlier under Stage II.
- Whether schools should stop holding **sports events in November–December**, as this exposes children to highly polluted air.

The **Commission for Air Quality Management** is a **statutory authority** created by the Government of India to **monitor, control, and improve air quality** in the **National Capital Region (NCR)** and its adjoining states.

It was set up under the **CAQM Act, 2021**.

Key Powers and Functions:

1. Makes and enforces rules to control air pollution
2. Coordinates all pollution-control agencies
3. Can ban or regulate polluting activities
4. Has powers similar to civil courts

Recognise the critical role of the childcare worker

The UN has declared **October 29 as International Day of Care and Support** to highlight the importance of unpaid care work, most of which is done by women and girls and is often ignored and undervalued. India has a long history of childcare efforts, and a major turning point was the launch of **ICDS in 1975**, which now runs **14 lakh Anganwadi centres**.

These centres reach millions of children but childcare workers remain **underpaid, undervalued, and poorly trained**, despite their crucial role.

Recognise the critical role of the childcare worker

On July 24, 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to declare October 29 each year as International Day of Care and Support. This resolution recognised the critical role of comprehensive care and support policies, aimed at reducing, redistributing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work, to the well-being of society and all its members – in particular, children, older persons and persons with disabilities – more so, as a disproportionate share of care and domestic work is undertaken by women and adolescent girls. It also remains invisible, undervalued and unaccounted for in national statistics, and neglected in economic and social policymaking.

India has had a long history of care provision with institutions outside the family emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the work of educationists such as Tarabai Modak and Gijubai Badheka. These pioneering efforts, with developmentally appropriate practices, gradually declined as modern childcare provisioning emerged post-Independence. With modern childcare mostly in the private, voluntary sector, low-income families, those who needed childcare services the most, were excluded.

The report of the study group on the development of the preschool child, submitted to the Government of India in 1972, with Mina Swaminathan as its convener, transformed the history of childcare services in the country. It set out a clear social justice agenda, emphasising a holistic approach to address the health, nutrition and developmental needs of the young child, especially from poor and marginalised communities.

This resulted in the launch of the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS) in 1975. It is one of the world's largest early childhood development programmes today, with 1.4 million Anganwadi (childcare) centres operating across the country, reaching 23 million children, and serviced by around 2.4 million Anganwadi workers and helpers. Based on estimated population projections, and the need to reach over 60 million children by 2030, this number is likely to almost double to 2.6 million centres with over five million workers.

Underpaid and undervalued

As several national and global studies have revealed, despite recognising the importance of care for societal growth and well-being, care-workers have remained underpaid and undervalued, and their contributions to the early development of the child not fully recognised. The pressure on the ICDS to rapidly expand to ensure universal coverage has led to a lower emphasis on pre-service and in-service training to build competencies of the care-workers in practice-based learning, that is crucial for quality childcare. This is partly driven by the perception of early years teachers as carers, addressing



NITYA RAO
 is Professor, School of Global Development, University of East Anglia, U.K.

primary needs of food, hygiene and immunisation, not as professionals. The devaluation of their roles, of not being treated as professional workers, results not just in low pay but also a lack of attention to working conditions (including paid leave), social security benefits, opportunities for career advancement, and collective organisation and representation. In many States, their wages, in the range of ₹8,000-₹15,000 a month, are barely on a par with the minimum wages for unskilled workers.

The impact of climate change

In the context of climate change, the need for good quality childcare services for the rural and urban poor is rapidly rising. There is sufficient evidence to show that poor women and children are the worst affected by the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, such as floods or droughts. They confront reduced access to health and care services, alongside diverse and healthy food. While the Sustainable Development Goals suggest the need for a more equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men in households, climate change is forcing many men to migrate out of their rural homes to urban centres in search of work.

Apart from their own dire circumstances, as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic in India, their physical absence makes such sharing impossible. When families migrate to urban areas, the higher costs of living – in particular rentals – make it imperative for women to find work too, which is often domestic and care work in the homes of the middle classes. There is, however, little care provision for their own children, with only 10% of Anganwadi centres currently functioning in urban areas.

The Government of India's Time Use in India 2024 survey confirms the feminisation of care-work, with women spending an average of 426 minutes a day (over seven hours) on unpaid domestic and care work as against 163 minutes (over two hours) by men (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation). Together, this would constitute 15%-17% of GDP. Smaller scale studies demonstrate clear links between the mother's lack of time for care and feeding and child undernutrition, as visible in the persistently high child stunting levels at over 35%. Only 11% of children aged six months-23 months had a minimum acceptable diet (National Family Health Survey 5, 2019-21), raising cognitive and developmental concerns.

In this context, Mobile Crèches and the Forum for Crèches and Childcare Services (FORCES) organised the India Childcare Champion Awards on October 28, 2025 in New Delhi. The awards were presented across seven categories that honoured excellence and dedication in the field of childcare – the Mina Swaminathan Special Jury Award for Best Creche Worker, Best Creche Worker, Best Creche Supervisor, Best Local Leader, Best NGO, Childcare Champion, and

Gratitude to CSR Funders in Childcare. The awards sought to give recognition to frontline childcare workers and supervisors as well as local panchayat leaders, employers and civil society organisations. It was to celebrate their tireless efforts working on the ground, within communities, and at the policy level to make quality childcare accessible and equitable for all.

The event gave voice to childcare workers, bringing out clearly not just the fact that these workers were skilled professionals but that they were also change makers, challenging social norms and structures. The workers spoke about breaking caste and class barriers, building self-confidence to overcome social stigma and dealing with critiques of themselves by their families and communities, as working with 'dirty' children.

Slowly, but surely, they have built trust with parents and emotional bonds with the children, hoping to give them a chance in life that they would not otherwise have. Caring for the children of migrant workers is even more demanding as the parents work full-time, often living in poor conditions. Children here confront a range of health issues, so care-workers have, in addition, become advocates for health insurance, for clean and adequate space and care infrastructure, amongst others. They play multiple roles – as children playing with children, as carers nurturing them, and as adult decision-makers, monitoring their key milestones, and intervening when needed.

Match the standard in Scandinavia

Recognition of childcare workers is clearly a first step in highlighting their critical role in providing quality, nurturing care, and laying the foundation for a strong and inclusive nation. Yet, there is a lot more to do – apart from ensuring that they have decent wages and working conditions, there is a need to redirect resources to both skill-building of these care-workers and the strengthening of care infrastructure. There is still little provision for the child below the age of three years, with only 2,500 of the over 10,000 crèches approved under the Government of India's Palna Scheme, currently operational. As compared to the current public investment of approximately 0.4% of GDP, the ambitions of universalising good quality care would need a tripling of budgetary allocation to between 1%-1.5% of GDP – the standard in Scandinavian countries that have universal childcare coverage.

A focus on care spotlights the rights of women and children. Achieving this requires both individual and systemic changes. Recognition of the knowledge and skills of childcare workers has to be accompanied by rules and policies that ensure adequate resources and voice to the sector. Decentralisation, convergence and collective ownership are critical if the rights of women workers and underprivileged children are to be realised.

The childcare worker in India needs better policies, decent wages and working conditions, and a strengthened care infrastructure

Climate change, migration, and rising urbanisation have increased the need for quality childcare, especially for poor families.

Women still do far more unpaid care work than men, affecting child nutrition and development.

To improve childcare quality, India needs:

- Better pay and working conditions for workers
- More investment in childcare infrastructure
- Stronger training
- Policies that match global standards (like Scandinavia)

Post-facto environmental clearances

The Supreme Court has reversed its May 2025 order that completely stopped post-facto environmental clearances (approvals given after a project has already begun).

India's environmental laws — the Environment Protection Act and EIA rules of 1994 and 2006 — clearly require **“Environmental Clearances-EC first”**, meaning projects must get approval before starting.

Earlier judgments like **Common Cause (2017)** and **Alembic (2020)** also said post-facto clearances are not allowed.

Breaking the rules Post-facto clearance must remain the exception, not the rule

The majority decision by a Bench of the Supreme Court to reverse its May 2025 order, which had stayed the grant of post-facto environmental clearances, illustrates the difficulty of dealing with the seemingly irreversible consequences of a much-abused law. The controversy is also about the form of the Environment Ministry's instruments that normalised these exceptions. The Environment (Protection) Act 1986 and EIA notifications of 1994 and 2006 are framed around prior environmental clearance (EC), which means that large construction and industrial projects must not start work until an authority has assessed their consequences. Decisions by the Court including *Common Cause (2017)* and *Alchemist Pharmaceuticals (2020)* treated post-facto EC as impermissible where prior EC was mandatory. The order in May, in *Vanashakti*, read this as ruling out post-facto ECs altogether for such projects. The new majority does not say 'EC first' is no longer the rule but locates a narrow space for post-facto clearances by relying on *Alchemist*, *D. Swamy*, and others to allow 'regularisation' when considerable resources have already been committed, usually with fines. This still means that the Ministry can maintain 'EC first' as the legal default and allow post-facto clearances only in rare, highly constrained cases. In any case the spirit of the EC regime remains *ex ante*. A clearance granted after construction has begun or finished cannot replicate the EIA's rationale, which is to make environment-related decisions before the potential cumulative consequences are underway. Post-facto clearances can only impose penalties, prescribe mitigation or order closure or demolition. Even if the judiciary permits such ECs in some circumstances now, the clearances will be remedial and sit uneasily with the structure of environmental jurisprudence in India since the 1990s. The majority's concern about differential treatment of past and future violators is also understandable, even if its remedy is not. *Vanashakti* struck down the 2017 notification and subsequent Environment Ministry office memoranda that facilitated post-facto ECs, but it let existing post-facto ECs stand. The majority treated this as discriminatory, which is fair, but unequal treatment during a shift from a permissive to a stricter regime is to be expected during regulatory housecleaning. Its existence does not by itself require that an old route be revised. The Court has also recalled the bar on post-facto ECs and reopened the legal question indicating that limited post-facto regularisation is not in itself untenable. In the end, the Ministry must treat post-facto ECs as exceptional not least because they are inherently at odds with the legal framework. Any complaint about discrimination between past and future violators should be addressed by tightening legacy clearances, not by normalising post-facto regularisation.

However, post-facto clearances cannot replace the purpose of EIA, which is to assess environmental impact before damage happens. Such clearances only allow punishment, mitigation, or closure, making them a poor fit with India's environmental law framework.

The Court was also concerned about discrimination: earlier, the *Vanashakti* judgment struck down the 2017 notification enabling post-facto ECs but allowed older post-facto approvals to remain. The majority felt this was unfair.

Finally, even if the Court has opened the door slightly, **post-facto clearances** must remain rare, because they conflict with the whole logic of environmental protection. Any fairness issues should be solved by tightening old clearances, not by making post-facto approvals normal.

Reset with Riyadh

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) visited the White House. This visit officially ended the short period of tension between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.

Why were relations bad earlier?

- In 2018, Saudi journalist **Jamal Khashoggi** was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Turkey.
- U.S. intelligence said **MBS ordered the killing**.
- Joe Biden had promised to punish MBS for this.

Trump defended MBS and said:

- MBS "knew nothing" about the killing.
- He will sell Saudi Arabia **tanks, F-35 fighter jets**, and give access to **advanced American computer chips**.
- Saudi wants these chips to build **huge data centres** and become a tech powerhouse.

Reset with Riyadh

US seems to have de-hydrated Saudi Arabia and Israel in its West Asia plans. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to the White House marked the official end of a brief chill in relations between the most powerful country and the most in turmoil Arab state. This has in a low after Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi dissident journalist in the U.S., was murdered inside the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul in October 2018. U.S. intelligence agencies later concluded that MBS had ordered the killing. During his election campaign, Joe Biden had vowed to hold MBS accountable. Yet, it was Mr. Biden who took steps to rehabilitate the prince. He travelled to Jeddah in July 2022 where he greeted the host to the Saudi throne with a hug. Donald Trump, who brokered the 2020 Abraham Accords, has been keen to deepen America's traditional ties with its Arab partners. On Tuesday, he defended MBS's human rights record, claiming that the prince "knew nothing" about Khashoggi's murder. He also promised to sell tanks and F-35 fighters to Saudi Arabia, despite Israel's objections. It will also get access to America's most advanced computer chips. MBS is seeking to build vast data centres to transform Saudi Arabia into a technological power house. Historically, Saudi Arabia's skewed human rights record has played little role in shaping its relationship with Washington, long anchored in geopolitical and energy interests. There have been moments of strain, such as the 1973 oil shock, the post-9/11 distrust or the chill after the Khashoggi murder, but both sides have consistently prioritised strategic alignment over values. One prominent complication, however, has been Israel. America's closest regional ally, which does not have formal diplomatic ties with Riyadh, after the Abraham Accords were signed, the Biden administration pushed Saudi Arabia to join the framework by normalising ties with Israel. MBS had said in September 2020 that Saudi Arabia and Israel were in an advanced stage of negotiations. But the October 7 Hamas attack and Israel's genocidal Gaza war halted the momentum. Today, Saudi Arabia says it remains open to joining the Accords, but only if there is a credible, time-bound path towards a two-state solution to the Palestinian question — a position Israel opposes. Mr. Trump appears to have realised both the regional competition and Israel's intransigence. He now seems prepared to deepen ties with Saudi Arabia without demanding an immediate commitment to recognise Israel. In effect, he has de-hydrated Saudi Arabia from the Abraham Accords, for now, choosing instead to cultivate direct, stronger ties with the kingdom, which he views as central to his broader West Asia plans.

Why does the U.S. care so much about Saudi Arabia?

Because the relationship is built on:

- **Oil & energy cooperation**
- **Geopolitical interests** (countering Iran, stability in West Asia)

Where does Israel fit into this?

1. Israel is America's closest ally in the region.
 2. The U.S. wanted Saudi Arabia to join the **Abraham Accords (normalising relations with Israel)**. Saudi Arabia was close to agreeing in 2023.
- But after the Oct 7 Hamas attack and the Gaza war, Saudi paused talks.

Saudi Arabia now says:

It will recognise Israel only if there is a real and time-bound plan for a two-state solution (creating a Palestinian state).

Israel doesn't agree with this.

Trump's new strategy:

- He is strengthening U.S.–Saudi ties without forcing Saudi Arabia to recognise Israel immediately.
- This is called de-hyphenation — treating Saudi Arabia separately from the Abraham Accords.