

India finalises request letter for 114 Rafales, to send it to France soon

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, May 24

INDIA HAS finalised the Letter of Request (LoR) for the procurement of 114 Rafale fighter jets for the IAF and is expected to send it to France “very soon”, within the “next few weeks”, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Around 90 jets from this set of 114 are to be manufactured in India through a collaboration between the French manufacturer Dassault Aviation and an Indian company, while the rest will arrive in fly-away condition.

Senior officials said that soon after France responds to the LoR, India will formalise the Request for Proposal (RFP) for acquisition.

An LoR is a formal government-to-government document used to initiate such procurement, under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) or Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) route, outlining the capabilities, quantities and technical

requirements needed.

In such procurements, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) first grants its approval, following which the LoR is issued. Once the foreign government responds, mentioning the price, availability and logistical support, negotiations take place between the two sides. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has to grant approval before the final contract is signed.

In this case, the LoR came three months after the DAC cleared the long-awaited proposal to buy the Rafales under an inter-governmental deal. IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal AP Singh is scheduled to visit France early next month before Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits later in June.

The IAF already operates 36 Rafales, and the Navy is set to induct 26 Rafale M aircraft for carrier operations over the next few years. The procurement of additional Rafales will help

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Rafales

minimise logistical and training costs.

The indigenous content of the jets would be nearly 50 per cent. While having complete access to the source code is unlikely, India has been negotiat-

ing to obtain the Interface Control Documents (ICD) for the jets, to be able to integrate indigenous weapons such as Astra and BrahMos-NG. An ICD is a technical blueprint on how an aircraft's onboard systems communicate with external weapons, sensors and equipment.

The Government is aiming

to sign the contract by the end of this year, once commercial negotiations conclude and the CCS approves the acquisition.

The process for the acquisition of modern fighter jets for IAF has picked up over the past year after a long wait of nearly 18 years. The Rafales will be critical in filling the gap in the

IAF's fighter squadron strength, which stands at 29 against the sanctioned strength of 42. They are expected to bridge this capability gap until the maturity of India's indigenous fighter programmes, LCA Mk1A, LCA Mk2 and the fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).

'Centre offering Ladakh unique governance model; demand for Statehood to continue'

Leh Apex Body co-convenor says Ladakh has been promised protection under Article 371 as the govt. is 'adamant on not giving Sixth Schedule status to the Union Territory'; on being offered the provision of U.T. with a legislature, he says 'there are many issues that are to be discussed with the govt.'

INTERVIEW

Cherring Dorjay Lakruk

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Last Friday, the Union Home Ministry proposed a new mechanism to grant Ladakh greater legislative, financial, and administrative powers within the existing Union Territory framework. The proposal was made in a meeting with the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), the two major civil society bodies from Ladakh.

Cherring Dorjay Lakruk, co-convenor, LAB and the president of the influential Ladakh Buddhist Association, spoke on the proposed agreement. Edited excerpts:

What were the issues discussed during the May 22 meeting with the Home Ministry?

The Union government has reservations about Sixth Schedule status and also in

granting Statehood to Ladakh. They never agreed to these two demands in the talks held in the past.

During the last round of talks (February 4), they offered safeguards available under Article 371 A of the Constitution. On May 22, we did raise our existing demands. We said if you cannot give Statehood, then give us U.T. with legislature, even that was not acceptable to them as Ladakh would then have to generate its own revenue without Central assistance. The government has promised us legislature at U.T. level and protection under Article 371. If they do not concede to Sixth Schedule, Article 371 is acceptable.

Since 2020, you have been demanding Statehood and the Sixth Schedule. Is this not a climbdown from your original demands?

The government is adamant on not giving Sixth Schedule status to Ladakh. It said the entire State cannot be included under Sixth Schedule. It is not true; Meghalaya is an example. Under this provision, legislative powers are there with districts but un-



der Article 371, we will get safeguards for land, employment, environment at the U.T. level.

Will you continue to demand Sixth Schedule or Statehood?

The Centre has agreed broadly to the proposal and intense negotiations will go on to decide the nitty-gritty of it. We are not abandoning our demand for Statehood. Even if at present, Statehood is not possible, we will continue with the demand.

So, what you are being offered is a unique arrangement by the Centre where the head of the elected representatives will not be referred to as a Chief Minister?

This is a unique arrangement in the entire country. The government did not say that the elected head cannot be referred to as a Chief Minister. We are yet to get a clarity on what the elected members would be known as. There are many issues that are to be discussed with the government. They will come up with a proposal and we will also send ours.

Is there a timeline?

We have said that we will submit our proposal within a week, but the government has not fixed a deadline or a timeline. We insisted that it should be done as soon as possible. The problem is Home Ministry calls for a meeting and then they forget about it for the next four to five

months. It is being stretched and we want the issues to be resolved and finalised soon.

Was the September 24, 2025, violence in Leh city, where four people were killed during protests, discussed in the meeting with the Ministry?

We reiterated our demand for compensation to the next of kin of the deceased and those injured during the violence and also insisted on withdrawal of criminal cases against the locals. The government said when the final agreement is reached, then these issues can be looked into sympathetically.

Does the government agree that the four persons were killed in police firing?

It is beyond doubt that they were killed in police firing, nobody else fired other than the police that day. The judicial inquiry led by retired Supreme Court judge [Balbir Singh Chauhan] is yet to submit its report. Those who deposited before the commission have been cross-exa-

mined. We are waiting for the final report. There have been multiple breaks as the judge is in Delhi.

The government had earlier detained climate activist Sonam Wangchuk under National Security Act and now he is participating in the talks. What is his role in the ongoing negotiations?

He is like any other member of the Leh Apex Body. He attended the sub-committee meeting (May 22) and will participate in the high-powered committee meeting (led by Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai) next.

Why are you protesting since 2020?

When we were part of Jammu and Kashmir, we were protected by Article 370 of the Constitution. Our land was safe from outsiders. Since Article 370 was removed, we are without safeguards. There is a lot of barren land here, if outsiders come and settle here, we will be minorities in our own land. People feared this and that is why we hit the streets.

Rubio, Jaishankar stress need for 'unimpeded' maritime trade

'Tactical' relations the U.S. has with other countries will not come at the 'expense' of strategic alliance with India, says U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio; Trump speaks over the phone at an event, says India can 100% count on the U.S. President

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

The United States works with many countries at a "tactical" level, but those relations will not disturb the strategic partnership with India, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said here on Sunday.

Addressing a joint press conference at the Hyderabad House lawns, Mr. Rubio said the idea of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" went beyond the Indo-Pacific to other "international waters" and accused Iran of blocking the Strait of Hormuz while sponsoring proxy terror groups.

Speaking on the occasion, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar acknowledged the disruption to supply chains because of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran, and said that both India and the U.S. had "very strong interest" to ensure "safe and unimpeded maritime commerce".

"As far as our relations with other countries, yeah, we have relations and we work at the tactical level, for example, and in many other ways with countries all over the world. So does India. That's what respon-



Pivotal talks: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio addressing the press at Hyderabad House in New Delhi after their meeting on Sunday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

sible nation states do but I don't view our relation with any country in the world as coming at the expense of our strategic alliance with India..." Mr. Rubio said. He was responding to a question on the Pakistan-U.S. ties that are being discussed worldwide because of the prominent role that Pakistan has been playing in bringing the conflict in the Gulf to a pause.

Mr. Rubio, who arrived in India for a four-day visit on Saturday, held a day-long meeting with Mr.

Jaishankar and other officials of the Indian side including Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, in which energy, bilateral trade, and visa issues for skilled Indian workers were among the items discussed.

Trump speaks

Later on Sunday night, U.S. President Donald Trump called Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "great friend" and said India can "count on me 100%". In a telephone call with U.S. Ambassador Sergio Gor, which was played out loud

during an event at the Bharat Mandapam celebrating 250 years of U.S. independence, where both Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Rubio were present, Mr. Trump said the U.S. was closer to India than ever. "I love the Prime Minister.. I am a big fan [of Mr. Modi]... we have never been closer to India and India can count on me 100% and our country. If they [India] ever need help, they know where to call," Mr. Trump said.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

Congress targets Modi over Rubio's trade claim

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi over U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's statement that India has committed to purchasing \$500 billion worth of American goods over the next five years, the Congress on Sunday alleged that the "compromised PM" was going the extra mile to appease his "good friend".

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh questioned why key announcements relating to India's foreign policy and bilateral engagements were emanating from Washington rather than New Delhi. Noting that India's annual imports from the U.S. stood at \$52.9 billion, he said this would have to be doubled to honour the commitment claimed by Mr. Rubio.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

Rubio, Jaishankar stress for maritime trade

Mr. Rubio's visit to India is the first by a senior official from Washington since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28. He claimed that the war had "clear goals" and accordingly, the U.S. campaign had destroyed Iran's Navy and "long-range missile capability, saying 'Iran can never possess a nuclear weapon'."

He focused on the chokehold that Iran has sustained on the Strait of Hormuz. "And look what they're doing now. They are holding hostage civilian vessels, including ships that have now been stuck in the Persian Gulf. They have laid mines in an international waterway. And yet, despite all of that, the United States remains committed to finding a peaceful, a diplomatic solution to this crisis," said Mr. Rubio.

Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi, who visited New Delhi earlier this month, had said the Strait of Hormuz falls within the territorial waters of Iran and Oman and that "there is no international waters in between."

The visiting dignitary and Mr. Jaishankar both referred to the challenges that have emerged before the energy market in recent months and sought an end to the stalemate. "We are working on having an open Strait of Hormuz without tolls," Mr. Rubio said, contradicting Iranian officials who had claimed in Delhi that Iran would start charging money from the transiting ships for the services that it provides in the Strait.

Mr. Jaishankar outlined India's varied interests covering strategic and energy domains. India is among "very few countries" that have "very strong relations" with the U.S. Israel, Iran and the Gulf countries, he said. However, he cited the "current situation in Hormuz' and said that to deal with the prevailing risks, it is necessary to diversify India's energy supplies.

Responding to a question on the Trump administration taking a tough line on trade relations with India, Mr. Rubio said it was not aimed at India alone and that it was a general trade policy that the Trump administration came up with to counter the "outsourcing-based" economy of previous U.S. administrations.

(With inputs from PTI)

Quad grouping is 'vital', says Japan's Foreign Minister

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

Responding to concerns that the Quad has lost its relevance, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi has said that the four-nation grouping remains a "vital framework". In a written interview with *The Hindu* ahead of the Quadrilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday, Mr. Motegi indicated that "cooperation over critical minerals" needed for green energy and high technology would be at the top of the meeting agenda.

Japan is working on critical minerals' projects in India, he said while calling for improved infrastructure, more tax subsidies, and protection for intellectual property rights.

The Quad meeting, which will see External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar host Mr. Motegi, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, is expected to take stock of the conflict in West Asia, the Strait of Hormuz blockade, and U.S. President Donald Trump's visit this month to China. It will also set the agenda for the Quad Summit that has not taken place since 2024 amid In-



Toshimitsu Motegi

dia-U.S. tensions on a number of issues.

"The Quad remains a vital framework among countries that share fundamental values and strategic interests. It has delivered concrete results across a wide range of areas, including maritime security, economic security, and cybersecurity," Mr. Motegi said, but side-stepped queries on why the mechanism finds little mention in strategy documents of member countries.

He declined to respond to a specific question on whether the U.S.'s torpedoing of the Iranian ship IRIS Dena in the Indian Ocean on March 4 would be raised by fellow Quad members, given their agenda of ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

CONTINUED ON

» PAGE 10

Quad grouping is 'vital': Japan's Foreign Minister

Although the Quad Foreign Ministers met twice in 2025, the grouping has found little or no mention in recent strategic documents issued by the U.S., Australian, and Japanese governments.

The U.S. National Security Strategy, released in November 2025, says the country will “encourage New Delhi to contribute to Indo-Pacific security”, including through the Quad, but did not detail its plans for the grouping any further.

On May 2, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi announced Japan's ‘Updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ policy during a visit to Vietnam, a document that mentions the Quad just once, in the context of the critical minerals initiative.

The Japanese Foreign Minister said Tuesday's meeting would discuss “regional and global situations” and send “an unwavering message that the Quad would continue to robustly advance practical cooperation toward the realisation of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)”.

In April, Ms. Takaichi had also proposed a “Partnership On Wide Energy and Resources Resilience (POWER Asia)”, at an event attended virtually by Mr. Jaishankar that will coordinate on oil, gas and renewables procurement, financing and storage mechanisms to deal with the energy crisis as a result of the Iran conflict.

“The countries most affected by disruptions in the supply of energy and resources passing through the Strait of Hormuz are those in Asia, and these impacts extend to all countries closely connected through supply chains,” Mr. Motegi told *The Hindu*.

Suicide bombing attack near railway track kills at least 24 in Pakistan's Baloch province

Associated Press

QUETTA

At least 24 people were killed and over 70 wounded in Pakistan's Balochistan province on Sunday when a suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle near a railway track as a passenger train passed through Quetta, the provincial capital, officials said.

The outlawed Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) later claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement sent to journalists. The militant group, which demands independence from Pakistan's central government, said it targeted a train carrying security personnel.

The attack, in an area usually having security forces present, badly damaged several nearby buildings and smashed more than a dozen vehicles parked along the road, according to eyewitnesses. Footage shared online showed two of the train coaches overturn from the force of the explosion and catch fire, sending thick black smoke into the air.

Doctors at local hospitals said more than 20 people were under treatment in critical condition.

Pakistan's President Asif



Security personnel and local people carry out rescue efforts at the site of the explosion in Quetta, Pakistan, on Sunday. AP

Ali Zardari, who denounced the bombing, said militants and their backers sought to undermine Pakistan's role in regional and international peace efforts. He promised in a statement that his country "will defeat terrorists, their facilitators, financiers and those providing them safe havens."

Strongly condemning the attack, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, in a post on X, called it a "cowardly act of terrorism" and offered condolences to the families of the victims.

Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti said the militants targeted "innocent civilians, including women and children," and vowed to "hunt [those responsible down]".

A medical emergency has been declared at hospitals in Quetta following the explosion, and an investigation has been launched, Balochistan provincial government spokesperson Shahid Rind said.

Restive region

The oil- and mineral-rich region in southwestern Pakistan has long been the scene of a low-level insurgency with security forces, government installations, and civilians in the province and elsewhere in the country being frequently targeted.

In November 2024, at least 26 people, security personnel among them, were killed in a similar attack on a train station in Quetta, which was also claimed by the BLA.

India can count on me 100%... anything India wants, they get: Trump

Shubhajt Roy

New Delhi, May 24

JOINING AN event hosted by the US Embassy here to celebrate the 250th anniversary of America's Independence Day, US President Donald Trump, in a live phone call on Sunday, assured his "100 per cent" support to India.

"I love India... I love the Prime Minister. (Narendra) Modi is great. He's my friend, and I just want to say a very, very good evening to everybody this

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Business as Usual

By EP UNNY



*Mother Teresa's
Nobel Peace Medal

Trump

morning here, and this evening there. And I just want to say, you're great. We've never been closer to India, and India can count on me 100 per cent and our country," Trump said.

"We have a record economy, a record stock market. And anything India wants, they get. And I'm a big, big fan of Prime Minister Modi," he said.

Trump was on speaker phone with US Ambassador Sergio Gor, who called him up at around 9 pm IST (11.30 am in Washington DC), as about 1,500 guests, including US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, attended the event.

Addressing the event at Bharat Mandapam, Rubio said: "... We know that so much of what we achieved in our history has been built in partnership with other countries around the world, with which we share so much. And one of those relationships that I am so excited about going into... given the challenges and the opportunities of this new era, is India. It's one of those countries that I know that we have this very valuable strategic partnership with, and we share so many values and so many common interests."

“I will try to go through other celebrations of our 250th birthday in different parts of the world, although I doubt any will have a production like this one, but I want you to know that part of my visit here is also to reinforce how important this relationship is, how exciting it is, and how many opportunities we have to do things together. If I think about all of the key issues and all of the key opportunities of the modern economy, India and the US together are... perfectly positioned to work together on these issues to achieve a better life for the people of the United States, for the people of India, and frankly, for the people of other countries working together as well,” he said.

“Today, our two countries approach the world with certain common attributes. We are both political democracies, we are market economies, and we are open societies. These shared traits have, in recent times, been strengthened by a convergence of national interests, and that is precisely what has enabled us to overcome the hesitations of history. Our strategic partnership is expressed now in a very wide range of activities. They span trade and investment, defence and security, critical and emerging technologies,” Jaishankar said.

Music composer A R Rahman was among those who performed at the event.

Trump says U.S. will not 'rush into a deal' with Iran, blockade to remain

Negotiations are proceeding in an orderly and constructive manner, says the U.S. leader; Republican lawmakers express fears of a deal favourable to Iran; report says new agreement to reopen Hormuz Strait for 60 days, put off nuclear talks

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Sunday that he had told U.S. negotiators "not to rush into a deal" with Iran, amid anticipation – and mounting criticism – of an agreement to end the war in West Asia.

"The negotiations are proceeding in an orderly and constructive manner, and I have informed my representatives not to rush into a deal in that time is on our side," Mr. Trump wrote on his Truth Social account.

"The Blockade will remain in full force and effect until an agreement is



Tide seekers: Children play by the water on a beach in Bandar Abbas, Iran as vessels are seen in the Strait of Hormuz. REUTERS

reached, certified, and signed."

The U.S. has imposed a blockade of Iranian ports since April 13 after Tehran virtually halted traffic through the economically vital Strait of Hormuz in

response to the U.S.-Israeli attacks on Iran that began on February 28.

"Both sides must take their time and get it right," Mr. Trump wrote in the same post. "Our relationship with Iran is becoming

a much more professional and productive one. They must understand, however, that they cannot develop or procure a Nuclear Weapon or Bomb," Mr. Trump wrote.

Details of potential deal

While the White House has not released aspects of the deal, Iran Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on Saturday that the two sides were nearing "a memorandum of understanding, a kind of framework agreement composed of 14 clauses," in "a trend toward rapprochement."

Several voices, notably among Republican lawmakers close to Mr.

Trump, expressed fears of an agreement favourable to Iran as supposed aspects of the deal that began to leak.

According to news outlet Axios, a possible agreement would extend the current ceasefire by 60 days, during which the Strait of Hormuz would be reopened, Iran would freely sell oil, and negotiations would be held on Iran's nuclear programme.

The top Republican senator overseeing defence policy, Roger Wicker, said that agreeing to a "rumoured 60-day ceasefire" would mean, "everything accomplished by Operation Epic Fury would be for naught!"

Ebola toll tops 200 in DRC, other African countries seen at risk

Agence France-Presse

ADDIS ABABA

Officials in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) updated the death toll from the Ebola outbreak to 204 late on Saturday.

A Health Ministry statement said 204 deaths had been recorded in three provinces of the central African country, from 867 suspected cases. One person in Uganda has died.

The World Health Organization has declared the outbreak of the highly contagious haemorrhagic

fever an international emergency.

On Saturday, the African Union's health agency warned that more countries on the continent were at risk of being affected by the Ebola virus, in addition to the DRC and Uganda.

"We have 10 countries at risk," said Jean Kaseya, head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, listing Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia.

The U.S. ends Russia oil waiver, implications for India

The United States' decision to tighten restrictions again on Russian seaborne oil may seem like another chapter in the sanctions battle over the Ukraine war. But beneath the headlines lies a much larger story – one that directly affects India and much of the developing world.

The issue is no longer just Russia. It is whether the global energy system can withstand simultaneous geopolitical shocks without causing prolonged inflation, supply insecurity and economic instability across Asia. For over three years, the world has attempted an unprecedented balancing act: keeping one of the largest oil exporters under heavy sanctions while trying to maintain stable energy prices. That balancing act is becoming increasingly fragile. The latest restrictions come at a sensitive moment. Oil markets are already unsettled by conflict in West Asia, persistent disruptions in maritime trade routes and growing concerns over the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most critical oil transit chokepoint. In such conditions, even policy signals from Washington can alter freight rates, insurance premiums and crude price expectations almost overnight.

Why India cannot ignore this development India imports nearly 90% of its crude oil and is the world's third-largest importer as well as one of the fastest-growing energy consumers. Unlike many developed economies, where energy demand has plateaued, India's energy needs will keep rising with industrialisation, urbanisation and expanding mobility. It is this reality that shapes India's energy choices.

When Russian crude began flowing into India in large volumes after 2022, many in the West viewed it through a geopolitical lens. India saw it



Shrikant Madhav Vaidya

Former Chairman of IndianOil Corporation Ltd. and an energy strategist

The world's emerging economies are increasingly being caught between geopolitics and energy survival

as an economic stabiliser during a period of extreme volatility. Russian oil helped moderate inflationary pressures, improved refinery economics and reduced dependence on any single region. It provided supply flexibility at a time of great turbulence in global energy markets. Critics often frame the debate as morality versus commerce. But energy-importing countries rarely have that luxury.

For countries such as India, energy affordability directly affects transport costs, food inflation, fertilizer subsidies, manufacturing competitiveness and household spending. A sustained rise in crude prices quickly spreads through the wider economy.

When sanctions meet market reality

Global oil markets are operating with little room for psychological comfort. The world has already seen disruptions in the Red Sea, attacks on shipping infrastructure, growing military tensions involving Iran, tighter tanker availability and sharply higher war-risk insurance premiums. In such conditions, constraining one of the world's largest oil suppliers inevitably unsettles markets, even if physical supply losses remain limited at first.

Oil markets react not only to shortages but also to the fear of shortages. That fear alone can drive prices sharply higher. Ironically, this exposes a contradiction at the heart of the western sanctions policy.

The U.S. and Europe want to reduce Russia's oil revenues. But they also want lower inflation, stable fuel prices and uninterrupted global energy flows. Increasingly, these objectives are colliding with each other. The harder sanctions become, the greater the risk of tightening global supply balances. Once oil prices rise sufficiently, Russia can continue earning substantial revenues despite lower export volumes. In some cases, higher global prices can partially offset the impact of sanctions themselves. This explains why the sanctions policy has repeatedly oscillated between aggressive rhetoric and tactical flexibility. Markets eventually force pragmatism.

The temporary waivers and carve-outs of recent years were not merely signs of policy inconsistency; they reflected energy-market realities. The uncomfortable truth is that the modern global economy still runs overwhelmingly on hydrocarbons. Despite the rapid growth of renewables, oil remains central to transport, aviation, petrochemicals, agriculture and global trade logistics. The world may speak of transition, but it still functions on molecules.

For India, the challenge is even more complex. The Strait of Hormuz remains a major strategic vulnerability, carrying nearly one-fifth of global

oil trade. A large share of India's crude oil and LPG imports transit through these waters. Any escalation in the region could disrupt supplies, raise shipping costs and delay deliveries. This is why Russian crude evolved into something larger than a discounted barrel for Asia. It emerged as a diversification mechanism during a period of growing uncertainty in West Asia.

The larger lesson from these developments is that energy security itself is changing shape. In earlier decades, countries were concerned mainly with access to physical supply. Today, vulnerabilities are far more complex. Energy flows can now be disrupted by shipping restrictions, insurance controls, financial sanctions, tanker blacklisting, payment barriers and maritime security risks. In effect, global energy has become deeply entangled with financial and geopolitical architecture.

India's long-term energy strategy

This changing landscape has major implications for India's long-term strategy. India cannot rely indefinitely on opportunistic crude sourcing during crises. The country needs a broader and more resilient energy framework. That means expanding strategic petroleum reserves, diversifying crude sourcing regions, strengthening domestic exploration, improving refining flexibility, accelerating gas infrastructure, expanding alternative energy pathways and reducing dependence on vulnerable maritime chokepoints. At the same time, India will need to preserve strategic autonomy in energy decision-making.

The emerging global order is becoming increasingly fragmented. Energy trade is no longer governed purely by economics; it is increasingly shaped by sanctions regimes, strategic rivalries and competing geopolitical blocs. For major importing countries, excessive dependence on any single geopolitical camp carries long-term risks. India's approach therefore reflects not neutrality, but realism.

The years ahead are likely to witness repeated tensions between geopolitical objectives and energy-market stability. The world is entering an era in which sanctions, wars, maritime insecurity and supply-chain disruptions may become recurring features rather than temporary exceptions. That makes resilience more important than ideology. In the end, energy systems obey physical realities, not political slogans. Tankers must still move. Refineries must still operate. Economies must still function. Nations that fail to build diversified and resilient energy systems may discover that, in the 21st century, economic sovereignty increasingly depends on the ability to navigate a fragmented and unstable energy world.

How energy shocks travel into India's economy

The implications for India extend far beyond crude prices alone. Modern energy disruptions now transmit through multiple interconnected channels

Energy shock	Immediate impact	Secondary impact on India
Higher crude oil prices	Costlier imports	Inflation and rupee pressure
Strait of Hormuz disruption	Supply uncertainty	LPG and fuel logistics stress
Shipping insurance surge	Higher landed crude cost	Refining margin pressure
Russian crude restrictions	Reduced supply flexibility	Higher sourcing costs
Freight disruptions	Delayed cargoes	Inventory and stock management strain

Sources: IEA, Energy Institute Statistical Review, industry and shipping estimates

China sends astronaut on year-long space mission as it eyes 2030 moon landing

Reuters

Jiuquan, May 24

CHINA SENT three astronauts to its space station on Sunday, one of whom will stay for a year, a record length for the country, enabling the study of long-duration human physiology in space as Beijing works towards its ambition of a crewed moon landing by 2030.

The Shenzhou-23 vessel launched at 11:08 pm using the Long March-2F Y23 carrier rocket from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China, with three Chinese astronauts on board.

Payload specialist Li Jiaying, a former Hong Kong police inspector, is the first astronaut from the city to take part in a Chinese space mission. The other crew members are commander Zhu Yangzhu and pilot Zhang Yuanzhi, both from the People's Liberation Army's astronaut division.

One of the three is to stay on the Tiangong space station for a year, one of the longest space missions ever but short of the 14-

The Shenzhou-23 vessel launched using the Long March-2F Y23 carrier rocket from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China

1/2-month record set by a Russian cosmonaut in 1995. That astronaut will be decided later, depending on the progress of the mission, the China Manned Space Agency said on Saturday.

China has sent astronauts to its space station almost a dozen times, but this launch comes amid an accelerating race to the moon with the US, which has warned about what it alleges are Beijing's plans to colonise and mine lunar territory and resources. NASA is seeking to achieve a crewed moon landing in 2028, two years ahead of China. The US aims to establish a long-term lunar presence as a stepping stone to eventual human exploration of Mars.