

A crude shock from Moscow

Russia now accounts for a little less than half of India's oil imports but the current political instability raises serious questions about the long-term reliability of supply

S DINAKAR
26 June

These are testing times for India's energy security. Nearly one of two barrels of crude oil imported into the country comes from Russia — the highest ever for any crude-supplying nation — a country that after last week's mutiny by a close associate of President Vladimir Putin looks increasingly unstable to be relied on for large purchases of oil.

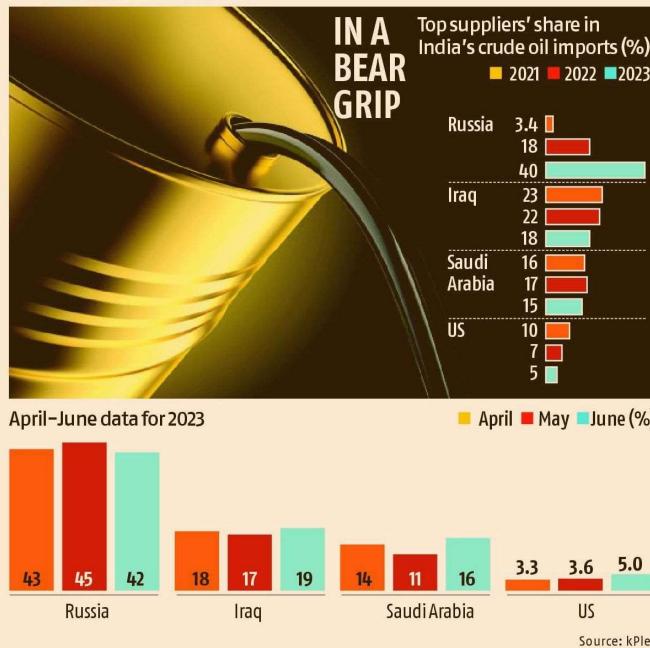
Civil war in Russia was averted after Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, an ally of Putin, prevailed upon Yevgeny Prigozhin, the leader of the Wagner group, which supplies private armies to nations to fight wars including the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. An uneasy truce prevails in Russia after Prigozhin marched into a border city and took control. Reports said that he was just 300 kilometres from Moscow when Lukashenko managed to convince him to scrap the advance and move to Belarus, in return for the Kremlin removing treason charges.

Though this may appear to be an internal Russian problem, growing instability and Putin's diminishing authority have consequences for India because imported crude meets over 87 per cent of India's oil needs, and Russia accounts for 45 per cent of that requirement, according to trade data. India secures discounts of \$8 to \$13 a barrel against European benchmark Brent crude on purchases of Russian oil, according to state oil refining officials.

The risks of disruption in supplies and output is reflected in the case of Sudan where a civil war led to the carving of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011, leaving state-run explorer ONGC with around \$600 million in outstanding payments, according to government data.

There are no interruptions to supplies of Russian oil, with shipments to India still at near-record levels this month. But internal strife in Russia does raise questions especially because India is pursuing long-term contracts with Russian state-oil producer Rosneft instead of restricting purchases to the spot market.

New Delhi wants to further increase purchases of Russian oil, an industry official said. State-run refiners are, however, not very comfortable with over 40 per cent dependence on



Russian oil, preferring a wider palette of suppliers. Moreover, Indian refineries are not equipped to process such high volumes of Russian Urals crude, the official added, because existing plants lack the equipment to convert residues or the bottom of the barrel into valuable fuels like diesel.

State-run refiner IOC, the country's biggest refiner, agreed last month to a term contract to source around 365,000 barrels a day (b/d), or over a fifth of its total oil imports, from Russia, and fellow refiner BPCL is in talks with Rosneft to source a little over 100,000 b/d on term basis. Indian imports of discounted crude oil from the Russian Federation hit an all-time high in May, with IOC becoming the biggest importer of Russian oil, Kpler data shows.

Not everyone thinks this heavy dependence is a major problem. "These are opportunistic purchases, which can be easily downsized or reversed if circumstances so demand, as long as there is no shortage in global crude supply," said Vandana Hari, an oil industry expert from Singapore, adding, "The only 'danger' here, I suppose, is India

getting used to the idea of securing 40 per cent of its crude at a 30 discount."

"As of now, there is no reason to believe that Western sanctions against Russia would be lifted any time soon, which means the Russian crude outlets are limited to China and India," she added.

But domestic political considerations could play a role in keeping India hooked on cheap Russian oil. "With the general elections approaching, top priority seems to be to keep petroleum prices within the manageable limits for the economy as well as for the ordinary consumer," said Narendra Taneja, a leading Indian energy expert.

It is not domestic pump prices alone. Along with China, India is helping keep a lid on global crude oil prices. When the Ukrainian war began in February 2022, prices of India's crude oil basket surged to \$116 per barrel in June from \$85 in January, before moderating to \$75 this May. This cooling of prices was in no small measure due to China and India lifting a combined 4.5 million b/d of Russian oil, nearly 5 per cent of global oil demand.

Though China and India account for nearly all Russian oil exports, the share of Russian crude in China's overall crude oil basket is less than half of India's share, according to estimates by the US-based Energy Intelligence Group. China is still the biggest buyer of Russian oil, hitting a new record of 2.3 million b/d in May. Beijing buys more of the lighter, sweet Russian grades such as ESPO, which are sanctioned. India buys more of the heavier, higher sulphur Urals grade that trades below the \$60 a barrel price cap imposed by Western nations.

The share of Russian oil in India's crude basket has increased to 40 per cent this calendar year compared to 18 per cent last year and 3 per cent in 2021. In May, India's Russian oil supplies exceeded the combined shipments of the next six biggest shippers including Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, UAE, Kuwait and the US. Supplies from Iraq, India's biggest crude supplier in 2021, have dropped by 5 percentage points to 18 per cent this year while Saudi supplies have stagnated at 16 per cent.

Explaining the risks of opportunistic purchases in India's crude basket, R Ramachandran, an oil industry consultant and former refining head at BPCL, said that in the past Indian refiners preferred security over profitability, but the advent of US shale oil introduced India to an alternative market, enabling an expansion of crude suppliers. From plants only designed to process Arab Mix grades, Indian facilities can now process more than 100 crudes, he said. But Gulf nations led by Iraq, Kuwait, UAE and Saudi Arabia are still the most reliable suppliers, which can assure both volumes, and reliability, because of their proximity to India. "When everybody's gone, Saudi Arabia says that it will still be the last man standing," he said.

The international oil order is going through a fundamental and structural change ever since the beginning of the crisis over Ukraine. There are, broadly speaking, two poles now: the old one dominated by the American dollar and the new one with Russia and China (and yuan). Therefore, Russia will now stay as a significant supplier of crude to India probably in the same league as Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Taneja said. But political turmoil in Moscow could well destabilise the stability of this supply.

Aramco sees 'sound' oil outlook for H2 on China, India demand

'Overall, we believe that oil market fundamentals remain generally sound for the rest of the year,' says Saudi Aramco CEO Amin Nasser

KUALA LUMPUR: Saudi Aramco believes market fundamentals remain "sound" for the second half as demand from emerging markets led by China and India will offset recession risk in developed markets, CEO Amin Nasser told an industry gathering on Monday.

But other executives at the Energy Asia conference in Kuala Lumpur were divided, with Malaysia state oil firm Petronas reporting a slowdown in demand for petroleum and petrochemicals in the second quarter and growing refinery capacity putting pressure on the market, *Reuters* reported.

"Overall, we believe that oil market fundamentals remain generally sound for the rest of the year," said Nasser, who heads the world's largest oil company.

"Despite the recession risks in several OECD countries, the economies of developing countries – especially China and India – are driving healthy oil demand growth of more than 2 million barrels per day this year," he told the conference.

Although China faces economic headwinds, the transport and petrochemical sectors are still showing signs of demand growth, he added.

Brent crude futures are



Crude oil supplies from Russia and Iran have also held up despite Western sanctions, offsetting production cuts by Saudi Arabia and other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

down about 14 per cent since the start of the year as rising interest rates hit investor appetite, while China's promising economic recovery has faltered after several months of softer-than-expected consumption, production and property market data.

Crude oil supplies from Russia and Iran have also held up despite Western sanctions, offsetting production cuts by

Saudi Arabia and other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

While a failed mutiny by mercenaries in Russia over the weekend has raised concerns about political instability and pushed up oil prices, none of the industry executives and officials speaking on the first day of the conference mentioned it during their onstage remarks.

Highlights

- » 'Although China faces economic headwinds, the transport and petrochemical sectors are still showing signs of demand growth'
- » 'There's not much geopolitical impact on the market now. It is dominated by economics, not geopolitics'
- » Brent crude futures are down about 14 per cent since the start of the year as rising interest rates hit investor appetite

"There's not much geopolitical impact on the market now. It is dominated by economics, not geopolitics," Daniel Yergin, vice chairman of S&P Global, said on the sidelines of the event.

Russell Hardy, CEO of Vitol, the largest independent oil trader, said the industry probably faces a period of reasonably strong fundamentals in the next three or four months, but uncertainty with Russian sup-

ply and Chinese demand make it more difficult to forecast market balances and where prices are going.

"What has happened so far this year is the supply side has slightly overperformed, particularly Russia, where there were expectations of production loss as a result of the difficulty getting oil to market because of the sanctions," he said.

Sazali Hamzah, Petronas' executive vice president and CEO of downstream, was less optimistic, saying that demand for petroleum and petrochemicals started slowing in the second quarter despite a recovery in jet fuel consumption.

He expects new refining capacity coming online this year to put "a lot of pressure on the market".

"We believe in second-half of this year we will still see weak demand, and that will be extended to part of next year," he added.

Looking ahead, Vitol said oil demand could peak around 2030.

"We got it peaking in about 2030 and a gradual decline out to 2040 ... And then (it's a) rapid decline thereafter as the EV fleet and energy transition takes over," Hardy said. AGENCIES

BRENT UP AT \$74.39

Crude Oil Inches Higher After Turmoil in Russia

Reuters

London: Oil prices rose nearly 1% in choppy trading on Monday, as investors balanced concerns about global demand growth against upcoming supply disruptions that could get exacerbated by political instability in Russia.

Brent crude futures were up 54 cents, or 0.7%, at \$74.39 a barrel at 12:33 p.m. EDT (1633 GMT), while U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures rose 48 cents, or 0.7%, to \$69.64 a barrel. A clash between Moscow and Russian mercenary group Wagner was averted on Saturday after the heavily armed mercenaries withdrew from the southern Russian city of Rostov under a deal that halted their rapid advance on the capital.

However, the challenge has raised questions about President Vladimir Putin's grip on power and some concern about possible disruption of Russian oil supply.



Equity, oil mkts can relax as Russia turmoil wanes

Monsoon, fund flows, corporate earnings season are key drivers in India: Experts

PUNEET WADHWA
New Delhi, 26 June

Equity and oil markets can breathe easy for now, as the developments in Russia are unlikely to trigger a runaway rally in crude oil prices, said analysts.

India, which imports nearly 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements, has been dependent on cheap Russian oil over the past few months. This has kept inflation — a sore point for the equity markets — in check.

For the Indian markets that are expected to remain volatile amid these developments, analysts believe, the progress of monsoon, fund flows — both foreign institutional investors (FIIs) and domestic — and the upcoming corporate earnings season back home remain the key.

At the macro level, besides the geopolitical developments, global central bank policies and China's economic progress will also be watched, analysts said.

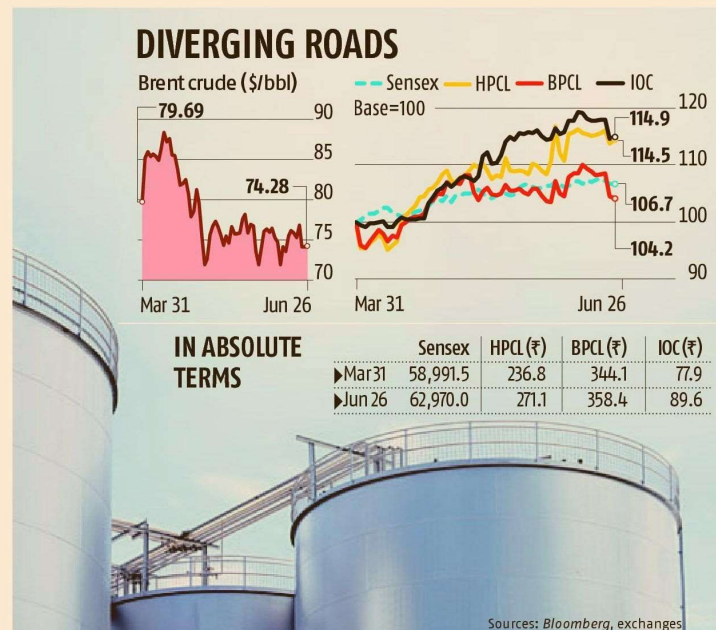
The conflict between Moscow's leadership and Prigozhin, the chief of mercenary group Wagner, had escalated into an open insurrection last week.

However, the Russian mercenaries, who had advanced most of the way to Moscow, have stopped — at least for now, de-escalating a major challenge to President Vladimir Putin's grip on power.

Paul Hickin, an independent oil market expert, believes that it will take a much bigger geopolitical risk than developments in Russia for the oil prices to break out of their current range of \$70-\$85 a barrel.

He believes there will be some geopolitical risk premium added to the oil prices in the short term.

"Developments in Russia have always wrong-footed the oil markets, even when the country invaded Ukraine. Oil prices had surged past the \$100 a barrel mark on risk of shortages back then. The recent developments are like a storm in a tea cup for the oil markets, which will settle soon. The markets will eventually focus on other important things, like the devel-



opments in China, its economic recovery and its impact on demand for oil. It is difficult for oil prices to break out of their \$70 a barrel to \$85 a barrel range in the backdrop of recession fears in the US and Europe, slow pace of demand recovery in China and support from OPEC+," Hickin said.

Brent crude oil prices shot up by over 3% over the weekend to around \$74.5 a barrel, following the developments in Russia

Brent crude oil prices had shot up by over 3 per cent over the weekend to around \$74.5 a barrel, following the developments in Russia.

So far in calendar year 2023 (CY23), oil prices have dropped by around 11 per cent, data shows.

Meanwhile, India's rising imports of Russian oil hit a record high of nearly 1.95 million barrels per day (bpd) in May, reports suggest. This is nearly 40 per cent of India's oil needs.

As a result, oil imports from Iraq, at 801,400 bpd, hit a three-year low. Imports from Saudi Arabia were at

616,100 bpd and fell to the lowest since September 2021, data suggests.

Discounted Russian oil purchase saw the share of imports from the Middle East — traditionally India's go-to destination for crude oil purchase — decline to an all-time low of about 39 per cent in May from 44 per cent in April, according to reports.

Analysts expect the markets to remain choppy over the next few weeks. They remain in a wait-and-watch mode as regards developments in Russia and the progress of the monsoon at home.

"Markets may remain choppy, given the recent interest rate hike by the Bank of England and the US Fed, hinting at two more rate hikes this year. Concerns regarding China's growth also point towards a challenging environment for the global economic recovery. Technically, the Nifty is likely to gather momentum only above 18,888. Support is seen at 18,555 levels," said Prashanth Tapse, senior vice-president for research at Mehta Equities.

Focus on ensuring stable power grid and renewables, not on green hydrogen: GTRI

'The report said that green hydrogen is 6-8 times more expensive than standard energy options'

NEW DELHI: India should focus on ensuring a stable power transmission system and increasing renewables in the energy mix rather than on capital-intensive green hydrogen, think tank GTRI said in its report on Monday.

Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that global private investments in green hydrogen are low, with rich countries providing substantial subsidies.

India should carefully con-

sider the viability and costs before subsidizing its use, GTRI co-founder Ajay Srivastava said.

The report said that green hydrogen is 6-8 times more expensive than standard energy options, making it economically challenging and the cost of producing green steel using this hydrogen is 40-60 per cent higher compared to regular steel.

"India should focus on stabilizing grid power and

increasing its renewable energy share rather than investing in an expensive green hydrogen ecosystem," it said adding the transportation and storage of green hydrogen require specialized infrastructure due to its flammability and corrosiveness, increasing costs and safety concerns.

It also said that India should evaluate using grey and blue hydrogen to a greater degree.

Hydrogen is called grey, dark blue, light blue or green

based on the intensity of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere during its production. Hydrogen, the product, remains the same in all cases.

Grey hydrogen account for almost all the Hydrogen used in the world. It is primarily used in oil refining (33 per cent), ammonia for making nitrogenous fertilizers (27 per cent), methanol (15 per cent) and steel making (3 per cent).

At the current price, for green hydrogen to become

widely adopted in any country, massive government subsidies and policies would be required to make other energy sources more expensive, it said.

"Therefore, while India can engage in research-level activities related to Green Hydrogen, subsidizing its use may not be advisable," it added.

It said that green hydrogen is a promising new energy source, but it is still in its early stages of development and is expensive.

PTI

India and Total Energies hold talks on restarting Mozambique LNG project

Rishi Ranjan Kala
New Delhi

India's Oil Ministry and French oil and gas major Total Energies held deliberations on restarting the much-awaited \$20 billion liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in Mozambique.

Oil Secretary Pankaj Jain met Total Energies CEO Patrick Pouyanne last month and discussed on resuming operations at the project in the southern African nation, which was halted in 2021 due to security concerns.

Foreign Minister S Jaishankar had also visited Mozambique in April this year as part of India's plan to deepen trade and diplomatic ties with the African countries.

KEY PROJECT

The project assumes importance due to logistical convenience, as Mozambique is close to India's west coast, which has the maximum number of LNG terminals, sources said.

Besides, its geographic location, it is positioned well to meet the demands of the Atlantic and Asia-Pacific markets as well as tap into the growing energy requirements of the West Asia, and India, one of the sources added.

Three Indian PSUs — ONGC Videsh (OVL), Bharat PetroResources (BPRL), and Oil India (OIL) — hold a total of 30 per cent stake in the project, which was first expected to commence operations in 2024 but has now been delayed to 2027 due to change of ownership and security at the project site, sources said.

The project was halted in 2021 after Total Energies declared *force majeure* following IS-linked insurgents attacking civilians in Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province, where the natural gas project is coming up. Sources said that discussions also focussed on resuming



GEOGRAPHICAL ADVANTAGE. The project assumes importance due to logistical convenience, as Mozambique is close to India's west coast

The project was halted in 2021 after Total Energies declared *force majeure* following an attack by IS-linked insurgents against civilians in Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province

operations at the offshore field development and two LNG trains. Efforts are on to resume the project by July-August 2023. It is now expected to be fully operational by 2027.

The project will restart once *force majeure* is lifted, which is likely to be very soon. More clarity on cost escalation matters will come in the next 2-3 months as talks progress, a source said.

A senior government official said the project was delayed due to a change of ownership from Andarko to Total. In 2019, Total Energies acquired Anadarko Petroleum's 26.5 per cent stake in the project for \$3.9 billion. Insurgent activity in the area is another key concern.

"Currently, Total has pub-

lished a humanitarian report and an action plan, which have been decided by the Mozambique LNG partners based on the recommendations in this report. Now, a foundation will be created with a budget of around \$200 million to be used for the socio-economic development of Cabo Delgado," he added.

LNG PROJECT

The Area-1 block, located in the deep-waters of Rovuma Basin offshore Mozambique, is one of the largest gas discoveries in offshore East Africa, with estimated recoverable resources of around 65 TCF.

It includes the development of the Golfinho and Atum fields located in Offshore Area 1 and the construction of two liquefaction trains with a total capacity of 13.1 million tons per annum (MTPA). It can be scaled up to 43 MTPA.

Total Energies' EP Mozambique Area 1 holds 26.5 per cent stake alongside ENH Rovuma Area Um (15 per cent), Mitsui E&P Mozambique Area 1 (20 per cent), ONGC Videsh Rovuma (10 per cent), Beas Rovuma Energy Mozambique (10 per cent), BPRL Ventures Mozambique (10 per cent), and PTTEP Mozambique Area 1 (8.5 per cent).

India-Guyana talks on energy sector make swift progress

Shashank Mattoo &
Rituraj Baruah

NEW DELHI

Talks between India and Guyana to cooperate in the oil and gas sector are progressing quickly, according to persons aware of the matter. As part of its energy diversification strategy, India has been reaching out to the South American nation to develop new suppliers of energy.

Guyana has become the world's newest oil power after discoveries of crude oil reserves equivalent to more than 11 billion barrels in 2015.

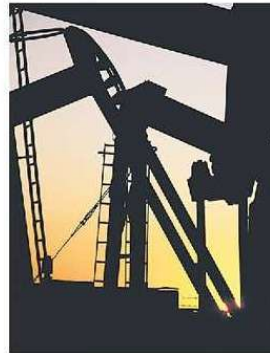
The two sides are expected to sign an MoU on oil and gas cooperation in the near future that will pave the way for private firms in both countries to strike exploration deals.

Guyana's Vice-President Bharrat Jagdeo had spoken of oil and gas cooperation with India during a visit to India in February this year.

In an exclusive interview with Mint, Jagdeo spoke of collaboration on developing oil blocks and providing skilled Indian talent to help Guyana develop its energy sector.

"We also explored the possibility of India examining the abundant resources that we've had outside of those that are on auction now," Jagdeo said at the time.

Talks on possible Indian involvement in the lucrative Starbroeck offshore oil block



India has been mobilising new suppliers of energy.

have also progressed. The oil block is operated by US oil major ExxonMobil. Guyana's government has revealed plans to take back 20% of the oil block from ExxonMobil and explore bilateral partnerships to develop this part of the oil block.

"Next year, ExxonMobil will have to give up 20% of their holdings. So, all of those will be available for some form of bilateral engagement, where we can actually see joint production or exploration related activities," Jagdeo said.

Guyana is also expected to put up 14 offshore oil blocks for auction in July. Energy major including ONGV Videsh Ltd (OVL) has been looking at opportunities in the region.

India is looking to diversify its import sources of crude oil and is considering purchasing the fuel from Guyana, Canada, Gabon, Brazil and Colombia.

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ONGC announced a significant milestone with the successful linkage of Panna Process Platform with subsea pipelines, which lie approximately 70 KM offshore at a depth of around 65 meters. Currently, the Panna Process Platform is producing 3.6 Million Metric Standard Cubic Meters of natural gas per day from the field. ONGC has achieved a significant cost reduction of approximately USD 43,000 per day by connecting the platform with subsea pipelines, ensuring faster and hassle-free evacuation of gas. The Panna-Mukta oilfield consists of two adjacent offshore oil fields northwest of Mumbai. Additionally, the submarine pipeline connection minimizes the production downtime associated with tanker changeovers & eliminates demurrage charges during adverse weather conditions.



गडकरी बोले- पूरी तरह एथनॉल से चलेंगी गाड़ियां

■ विशेष संवाददाता, नई दिल्ली

आने वाले समय में सड़क पर एथनॉल से चलने वाली गाड़ियां दौड़ेंगी। यानी उसमें पेट्रोल और डीजल की जरूरत नहीं होगी। परिवहन एवं राजमार्ग मंत्री नितिन गडकरी के अनुसार जल्द ही ऐसी गाड़ियां लाई जाएंगी जो पूरी तरह एथनॉल से चलेंगी। उन्होंने यह बयान नागपुर में एक कार्यक्रम में दिया। उन्होंने वजाज, TVS और हीरो स्कूटर का नाम लेते हुए कहा कि ये गाड़ियां भी 100 फीसदी एथनॉल पर चलेंगी। हालांकि, उन्होंने यह नहीं बताया कि ऐसा कब तक संभव हो सकेगा।

गडकरी ने कहा कि वह हाल ही में मर्सिडीज बेंज कंपनी के चेयरमैन से मिले जिन्होंने एक इलेक्ट्रिक वीकल लॉन्च किया था। चेयरमैन ने उनसे कहा कि वे आगे केवल इलेक्ट्रिक गाड़ी ही बनाएं। गडकरी ने कहा कि वे अगस्त में टोयोटा कंपनी की कैमरी कार लॉन्च करेंगे, जो 100% एथनॉल से चलेगी और 40% बिजली भी पैदा करेगी। अगर आप इसकी तुलना पेट्रोल से करेंगे तो यह 15 रुपये प्रति लीटर बैठेगी।



क्या हैं सरकार के इरादे

अगर देश में पूरी तरह से एथनॉल पर चलने वाली गाड़ियां आ जाती हैं तो इससे कई फायदे हो सकते हैं। एथनॉल पेट्रोल के मुकाबले सस्ता मिलेगा लिहाजा सरकार का इंपोर्ट बिल कम होगा और सबसे ज्यादा इससे गन्ना उगाने वाले किसानों को फायदा होगा जिससे रूरल इकॉनमी को भी बूस्ट मिलेगा। अच्छी बात यह भी है कि पूरी तरह से एथनॉल बेस्ड इंजन बनाने में कार और टू वीलर कंपनियों को इंजन में बहुत ज्यादा बदलाव भी नहीं करने पड़ेंगे। जब इसके लिए कोई खास इन्वेस्टमेंट नहीं होगा तो ऐसी गाड़ियों के लिए ज्यादा कीमत भी नहीं चुकानी पड़ेगी। लेकिन इतनी ज्यादा मात्रा में एथनॉल बनाने के लिए क्या हमारे पास इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर है? पूरे देश में इसे कैसे मुहैया कराया जाएगा? ऐसे कुछ सवाल भी हैं। हालांकि, इससे देश की ऑटोमोबाइल इंडस्ट्री की किसी खास पयूल पर निर्भरता कम होगी।

पेट्रोल और डीजल की कीमतें स्थिर

नई दिल्ली, वार्ता। वैश्विक स्तर पर तेल की कीमतों में तेजी लौटने के बावजूद घरेलू स्तर पर पेट्रोल और डीजल की कीमतें आज भी स्थिर रही, जिससे दिल्ली में पेट्रोल 96.72 रुपये प्रति लीटर तथा डीजल 89.62 रुपये प्रति लीटर पर पड़े रहे। हिन्दुस्तान पेट्रोलियम कॉर्पोरेशन की वेबसाइट पर आज जारी दरों के अनुसार, देश में आज पेट्रोल और डीजल की कीमतों में कोई बदलाव नहीं हुआ है।