

Oil for oxygen: India welcomes Saudi covid aid, boosts oil imports



NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Indian oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Friday thanked [Saudi Arabia](#) and other Middle Eastern oil producers for supplying liquid medical oxygen (LMO) to help the country in its battle with the COVID-19 crisis.

In a series of tweets, Pradhan also welcomed offers by Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar to supply containers for the next six months and for an assurance of a steady commercial supply of LMO to India.

"Deeply appreciate the initial gesture of goodwill with complimentary LMO supplies particularly from UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia," Pradhan said.

Pradhan's tweets came a day after Indian state refiners reversed steep cuts in Saudi [oil imports](#) for May at the directions from oil ministry, and placed orders for regular purchases in June.

Indian state refiners buy about 15 million barrels of Saudi oil in a months from Saudi Aramco. India, the world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer, imports more than 80% of its oil needs and relies heavily on the Middle East.

Relations between Riyadh and New Delhi were under strain earlier this year after Pradhan blamed cuts by Saudi Arabia and other oil producers for driving up crude prices.

India urged refiners to diversify crude sources to cut reliance on the Middle East and directed them to reduce intake of Saudi oil. The refiners cut purchases by more than a third in May.

An Indian oil industry source said the federal oil ministry has not asked refiners to cut Saudi [oil imports](#) after Riyadh supplied liquid medical oxygen and cryogenic tanks as India's healthcare system struggles to cope with a huge surge in cases of [COVID-19](#).

"Saudi extended the help immediately to make amends ... so they tried for rapprochement," this source added.

India's oil minister Friday also said he held talks with [Saudi Arabia](#) and other Gulf countries about supplies of liquid medical oxygen and thanked them for receiving emergency supplies.

"Had close consultations during the last week with my counterparts from [Saudi Arabia](#), UAE and Qatar on ways to increase import of LMO into India," Pradhan tweeted on Friday.

[Saudi Arabia](#)