

Europe's Energy Dilemma As Biden Pushes Russia Boycott

By Ashwin Ahmad

Author is a journalist, traveller focused especially on Europe and West Asia

As President Biden lands in Brussels for consultations with Nato, G7 and European partners on how best to counter “Russian aggression” in Ukraine, a key part of the conversation will focus on energy. As NSA Jake Sullivan pointed out at a recent press briefing, “the major priority for both the President and his European allies is to reduce the dependence of Europe on Russian gas. Full stop.”

“The practical roadmap for how to do that — what steps have to be taken, what the United States can contribute, what Europe has to do itself — this has been the subject of intense back-and-forth over the course of the past few days and weeks. And we will have more to say on this subject specifically on Friday, particularly with the European Commission and the European Commission President, von der Leyen,” said Sullivan.

The NSA’s remarks are easier said than done. Europe’s heavy energy dependency on Russia will not go away soon. According to the International Energy Association (IEA), the EU imports 40% of its gas and over 25% of its crude oil from Russia. This dependency hasn’t changed in 2022. Despite US and European sanctions, Moscow continues to earn \$700 million a day from its oil and gas exports which so far has flowed unabated through Soviet-era pipelines. Since the invasion on Feb. 24, Moscow has earned \$19.6 billion through energy sales.

The problem for the US will be that this model will be hard to change. As German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated on March 7 that “energy for heat generation, mobility, electricity supply and industry cannot be secured in any other way at the moment. It is therefore of essential importance for the provision of public services and the daily lives of our citizens.”

So, what compromises can the allies come to on energy? Does the Western coalition have alternatives? So far, no. Analysts point out that so far Europe has followed a strategy of “hedging”, whereby the continent plans to reduce imports of Russian energy by two-thirds over the next year, which will come down to 0 by 2027. Given that the Russia-Ukraine war is not likely to last a year, such commitments are unlikely to come to fruition. That’s not all. Despite the noise being made on Berlin’s pause of the Nord Stream II gas pipeline project, energy experts state that Russian gas to Europe is likely to remain largely unaffected for now.

“The largest quantity of gas from Russia to Europe comes through a number of pipelines which come via Ukraine and Belarus. These so far have remained unaffected,” says former diplomat and energy expert Talmiz Ahmad.

So far Europe has no alternatives, which is what is emboldening Moscow with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak warning that any rejection of Russian oil could lead to prices going as high as \$300 per barrel. Such threats are not empty ones given that the world’s top oil producers Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have remained unusually silent through the crisis.

From reportedly refusing calls from President Biden to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson coming away with no guarantees after his Gulf visit, the two nations do not seem keen to bail out the West.

Partly this stems from their unhappiness with President Biden, but mostly it's about oil stability and economics. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Russia are part of Opec+. In the wake of the pandemic when demand for oil crashed, these countries decided to resort to gradual monthly increases to keep prices stable, a strategy they have decided to stick with despite calls from the West to increase production.

“Oil prices rising is good news for all Opec+ nations, Russia included. Why would they want to ruin that by increasing production? Also, all Opec+ nations have experienced the ruin to their economies through an oil glut in 2016 and again in 2020. This makes them even less likely to do anything to trigger similar circumstances,” says Ahmad.

[Read complete article on website stratnewsglobal](#)

‘Where’s The Research?’ Why Space Institute IIST’s Tailor-Made Graduates Don’t Stay At ISRO

By Sandhya Ramesh

Many IIST graduates who are contractually obligated to work with ISRO end up leaving midway by paying fees out of their own pocket and enrolling for further studies.

When the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST) was founded in 2007, it was meant to launch a new generation of young space scientists into the control rooms of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The reality is turning out to be somewhat of a misfire.

Starting from the very first batch that joined ISRO in 2011, former IIST students have been quitting the organisation, even before their stipulated contract ends, paying lakhs out of their pocket to leave.

What experiences do these space engineers, unique to Asia, have at ISRO — and what is it that’s driving them away, leading to such a high turnover rate for younger employees?

The absence of a culture of innovation and a lack of focus on research were among the issues that cropped up when ThePrint spoke to IIST graduates and former ISRO employees, to understand the daily working lives of the students who go from India’s space university to India’s space agency.

How IIST works

Situated in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, IIST is Asia’s first university for the study of space. Together with ISRO, it comes under the aegis of the Department of Space.

Set up to meet ISRO’s rising need for engineers, the autonomous deemed university offers both B.Tech and integrated M.Tech courses, focussed around three main areas — aerospace engineering, avionics, and physical sciences. Students go through a three- or four-year programme, with roughly 160 students per batch.

Upon graduation, the students are typically “absorbed” by ISRO, subject to available positions. They are contractually obligated to work at the agency for a minimum of three years, a necessary condition for acceptance into IIST.

The very first stumbling block comes when students sign up for placements at ISRO.

“We are allowed to pick the centres we want to work at but are not allowed to apply to specific available positions,” explained Neha Chohan, a Finland-based space engineer who worked at ISRO for four years after graduation from IIST.

Students are typically informed of the number of openings available at ISRO’s different centres spread across the country geographically (and within Bengaluru) but have no choice in picking what they want to work on. This has resulted in many graduating with one specialisation and ending up working in another.

“We were absolutely not given any choice with respect to work. It was randomly assigned, or at least the assignment procedure for roles wasn’t disclosed,” said Chohan. “This was unfair because you graduate with a speciality and should at least be allowed to work in it.”

In contrast, members of the public who apply through ISRO’s public recruitment exams are made familiar with the available positions and apply to those.

The pay for a fresh batch of graduates joining ISRO is typically higher than the initial salary offered to graduates joining IT companies, but from there, the growth stalls. As government employees, all ISRO employees receive fixed and structured pay rises after every year.

However, the health and dental benefits are unparalleled, said Parth Sharma, who worked at ISRO from 2013 to 2021.

Working at ISRO

“On the technical side of things, it feels like being inside a big production house,” said Chohan. “There are so many things happening. Everywhere you go, you learn something new and get to see projects from conception to fitting in the launch vehicle and going to space. It’s an amazing feeling.”

Others ThePrint spoke to echoed the sentiment.

“The people are also very approachable, including senior engineers and well-known names,” said Sharma. “All the bosses I had in my eight years were excellent and supportive, and helped me gain wide exposure.”

Both men and women stressed that the culture is very inclusive of women. While there is a visible lack of women in the senior-most positions at the Department of Space, several female engineers have led missions and teams.

“My colleagues and seniors were wonderful too,” said a space startup founder, who had been posted to Sriharikota and joined from the very first batch of IIST graduates — and quit after just two years.

“But people quit for other reasons. In Sriharikota where I was posted, there are no hours, there are regular launches throughout the year, it’s extremely stressful, very hot, and the attrition rate is very very high,” added the founder.

At other centres too, once the novelty of being at ISRO, seeing a Kalam walk into a room to chat with you, and observing satellites being fitted into launch vehicles wears off, graduates said they quickly started to realise that the organisation only colours within well-established lines.

[Read complete article on website theprint](#)

Macron Warns against 'Escalation' After Biden Brands Putin 'Butcher'

Courtesy feance24.com

The Kremlin had reacted in fury over Biden's comments which it said narrows the window for bilateral relations, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine now into a second month.

Macron said he would speak to Putin in the next two days to organise the evacuation of civilians from the heavily bombarded port city of Mariupol.

The French leader told broadcaster France 3 that he saw his task as "achieving first a ceasefire and then the total withdrawal of (Russian) troops by diplomatic means."

"If we want to do that, we can't escalate either in words or actions."

Ukraine was making a new push to get civilians out of the city on Sunday, with an aid route agreement for people to leave by cars or on evacuation buses, said Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk.

Several attempts at establishing safe routes for civilians to flee have collapsed as both sides trade blame for violating temporary ceasefires.

Mariupol, in the region of Donetsk, has borne the brunt of Russia's assaults, and residents who managed to flee have recounted harrowing scenes of death and destruction.

About 170,000 people remain trapped in the besieged city and authorities have said they fear some 300 civilians may have died in a Russian strike on March 17 that hit a theatre being used as a bomb shelter.

In an impassioned speech from the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Biden blasted Putin over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power," the US leader said, before the White House clarified that Washington was not seeking regime change.

The Kremlin snapped back, saying "a head of state should stay sober".

'Going to die anyway'

Personal attacks, said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, were "narrowing down the window of opportunity" for bilateral relations.

"Biden is weak, sick and unhappy," said Vyacheslav Volodin, president of the lower house of parliament.

Putin sent troops into Ukraine on February 24, vowing to destroy the country's military and topple pro-Western President Volodymyr Zelensky.

But his army has made little progress on capturing key cities, and it has hit hospitals, residential buildings and schools in increasingly deadly attacks on civilians.

In Kharkiv, where authorities reported 44 artillery strikes and 140 rocket assaults in a single day, residents were resigned to the incessant bombardments.

Anna Kolinichenko, who lives in a three-room flat with her sister and brother-in-law, said they do not even bother to head down to the cellar when the sirens go off.

"If a bomb drops, we're going to die anyway," she told AFP. "We are getting a little used to explosions."

Others have found ways to cope with the shelling.

Tamara Osypchuk, 72, told AFP she wrote poetry to calm herself in her apartment in the devastated Ukrainian town of Irpin when the bombs rained down.

"The explosions were very strong. Like a volcano is exploding, as if the earth explodes," she said as she rested on a chair at an evacuation centre on the outskirts of Kyiv.

Recapture town

"I write poems and when there are explosions, I feel great inspiration."

Bombardments continued over the last 24 hours in Irpin, as well as other cities around Kyiv, said Ukrainian authorities.

Ukraine's determined fighters continue to hold back Russia's far-bigger military on the frontlines, and some units are beginning to snatch back control.

Two people were killed by shelling in the village of Stanislav, close to the city of Kherson, where Ukrainian forces have mounted a counter-offensive.

In an update early Sunday, the Ukrainian General Staff said, "the allied forces repulsed seven attacks" and destroyed eight tanks in the Donetsk and Lugansk areas of the Donbas.

The Ukrainian defence ministry said its forces had also recaptured Trostianets, a town near the Russian border that was one of the first to fall under Moscow's control.

Images published by the ministry showed Ukrainian soldiers and civilians among heavily damaged buildings and what appeared to be abandoned Russian military equipment.

Elsewhere, Russian forces took control of Slavutych, the town where workers at the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear plant live, briefly detaining the mayor, Ukrainian authorities said.

Residents of the town protested, prompting the Russians to fire shots in the air and lob stun grenades into the crowd, they added.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it was "closely monitoring the situation" and was concerned about the ability of employees at Chernobyl to rotate and return to their homes to rest.

[Read complete article on website france24.com](https://www.france24.com)

Predatory Nature Of The State!

By Sanjay Sahay

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Many democratic welfare states will never fall in this trap was the presumption, but more often than not that is not the case. The common masses, the bulwark of democracies, have been feeling the predatory nature of democratic governments. That these governments are better than the dictatorship, is not the case, this is the least it can be, but that in no way absolves them of the fact of being a predatory one. The only job in the democratic process a citizen is supposed to perform is to vote and then he ceases to exist for the next five years. The predatory nature is not generic one, it will be used as and when required, more so when the state has an axe to grind. It will be on people on whom the state can ride roughshod, without any great effort or any resistance. It can happen on adversarial groups and individuals, which are not in the government's favour.

Democracy and governments emanating out of it are supposed to be paternalistic, the mai-baap story, might be some illogical extension of feudalism. Nonetheless, it was meant to be positive and proactive. Where did it lose its way? When the objectivity of the government is lost, the predatory nature of the state starts. Have you found any government which has treated every citizen equally or at least for those who approach the government?

When the government gets aligned to a party, the behaviour to all others automatically becomes different, slowly it gets into the predatory mode. Nowhere the party is mentioned with the government, this has been done with a clear thought process of practicing fairness. Over the years the governments started having their own agendas.

Governments slowly shifted towards favouritism, which is a clear indication of its drift towards its predatory nature. The attitude that as long as you are with the government or in it, you cannot be wrong, and you will be able to get away with everything. Now all decisions get vitiated by the hard coded thought process, somebody will have to pay a price, and more often than not, it is the hapless citizens. Hapless means who cannot retort and does fall even distantly fall in the power axis. Who decides the tax slab and on what basis? So, anybody falling in the same income slab, needs to pay the same amount whatever might be the predicament, size of the family, geography, age and there can be any number of parameters, which can refine the process gainfully. No discussion is the first indication of the predator mode. Internal discussions with the same set of officials and political executives have no value.

Getting any bill mandated as a law on brute numbers, or strategy or floor management speaks of the predatory trend. When the liability is of the citizen for all his commissions and omissions, it opens floodgates for the citizen to be hauled. The government can remain incommunicado on action taken or proposed, and strike you when you are at the weakest, in need of requisite information, communication, or a government document. The discretionary use of lethal government power is another clear manifestation of the predatory nature of the government. Governments cannot and should not become predatory on the people whom they are mandated to take care of. When you feel you can be the next victim of a government on the prowl, you will get to know what predatory nature means. A sense of entitlement and govt. vs others attitude is at the core of this ailment.

PREDATORY MODE IS THE EASIEST WAY TO MANIFEST POWER.

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Nation is Indebted to:

Dr Prakash Venjamuri

At This Doctor's 'Open Home', Anyone Can Step in To Eat, Read, & Relax



Dr Prakash Venjamuri runs Hyderabad-based Andari Illu to show how simple acts of kindness can go a long way — he allows free access to shelter, food, clothes, books, and more to whoever needs it

“I lost my sister to a congenital heart anomaly and my friend to a road accident. I was 18 at the time and completely devastated. I felt like my life had lost meaning. I thought that if everyone was going to die eventually, why should we live?” Dr Prakash recalls in a conversation

He notes that grieving the loss removed the fear of death itself. “I did not give any importance to or value life. My friends used to say, ‘If you want to die, ride pillion with Prakash’,” he says.

“But over the years I learned, and decided to live a meaningful life, based on the fundamental aspects proposed by Maslow — food, clothing, shelter, and knowledge,” he adds.

This very principle has now formed the basis of Dr Prakash's work. For many years now, he has opened his doors for people across all strata of society who can cook, eat, rest, and seek clothing at his home.

Between 1986 and 1999, Dr Prakash pursued his MBBS and a Master's degree in health administration. Later, he ventured into social work, working with different NGOs for nine years. But he did not feel satisfied with what he was doing, he says.

“The NGOs always had vested interests. Some wanted money to raise infrastructure, while others traded their positions with senior government officials. I also realised that only the privileged donated for the non-profits to seek tax benefits or compulsion of CSR,” the 56-year-old says.

Dr Prakash continues, “Some NGOs run under the name of religious idols or famous personalities. I felt uncomfortable with such practices around me,” he says.

He adds these practices defeat the purpose of NGOs. “An NGO should intervene where the government and other private players fall short. But these NGOs implemented government policies or worked alongside,” he explains.

In 1999, Dr Prakash quit his job and launched an NGO in his two-storey house — Life – Health Reinforcement Group (Life-HRG). “I wanted to demonstrate that social service can be offered without using religious cards or corporate money,” he says.

Using his savings and wife's financial support, Dr Prakash offered relief to the victims of the Odisha cyclone and provided medical relief during the Gujarat riots. On other occasions, he addressed women's healthcare by flagging the issue of unethical unindicated hysterectomies. He also became a member of the Child Welfare Committee.

In 2006, Dr Prakash formed Andari Illu, which translates to 'open house'. "My wife Kameshwari and I decided to open the service for the needy. We saw that society is losing connection, and humans are becoming insensitive towards others. We aimed to display an act of kindness by offering help with fundamental needs," he notes.

"Anyone can visit between 5.30 am until 1 pm. Be it a person new to the city, a student, or an underprivileged who needs food, clothing or shelter, anyone can avail the facilities for free," he says.

Dr Prakash has a shared kitchen space where people can cook and eat with the available groceries. "Rice, oil, cooking equipment and other items are made available throughout the day," he says.

There is also a room that hosts hundreds of books. "We have a sitting area inside and outside the house. People can rest and feel comfortable. The place does not permit night stay due to limitations from the police department," he says, adding, "However, the place is open 365 days a year.

Dr Prakash claims at least 1 lakh individuals have benefitted from the house.

Rajulingam Goud, a cybercrime constable with the Telangana police, says, "I accessed the facility for two years in 2006 and 2007 while pursuing my bachelor's degree in education. I lived in a hostel in the vicinity, and it had no mess facility. Incidentally, one of my friends informed me about Andari Illu, and we benefited from it."

Dr Prakash says that some people provide furniture, while others with food. "I do not call them donations, as we do not seek charity. But I feel I have succeeded in showing that social service can be done without any fanfare or branding with a famous name or religious symbol while benefiting thousands of people," he says.

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