Asia buys more LNG despite surging prices, El Nino clouds outlook

REUTERS, *Launceston*

Asia's imports of liquefied natural gas are likely to rise to a three-month high in October despite the surge in spot prices to the most in almost four years. October arrivals in the top-importing region are estimated at 23.31 million metric tons, the strongest since July's 23.38 million, according to data compiled by commodity analysts Kpler.

October will also be the second-highest monthly total since the outbreak of the conflict in the Middle East, which started on February 28 when the US and Israel attacked Iran. The war resulted in the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, meaning Qatar, the world's second-biggest LNG exporter with about a 19 percent market share, was largely unable to ship cargoes to buyers in Asia and Europe.

The recovery in October comes amid increased buying by China, the world's largest importer of the super-chilled fuel, with Kpler forecasting arrivals of 5.47 million tons, up from 5.20 million in September and the third-strongest month so far in 2026.

China is viewed as a price-sensitive LNG buyer, so the increase in October is a sign that demand ahead of the northern winter is outweighing the rise in spot prices. Spot LNG for delivery to north Asia rose to $29.30 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) in the week to October 16, the highest since December 2023 and almost triple the $10.40 that prevailed at the end of February prior to the outbreak of the Iran war.

The high prices had curbed China's demand for LNG to the extent that it is likely to give back the title of the world's biggest importer to Japan this year. However, Japan's October imports are expected to decline to a five-month low of 4.47 million tons by Kpler from 4.63 million in September.

This is a reflection that Japan's utilities have adequate inventories, with data from commodity price reporting agency Argus showing they had inventories of 2.54 million tons of LNG as of October 18, up 36 percent from the same time in 2025.

While Japan does buy spot cargoes, much of its LNG imports are under long-term contracts linked to the price of Brent crude oil. With Brent futures surging in recent months to trade above $100 for much of September and October, Japan's term LNG imports are likely to be more expensive, which in turn will discourage utilities from buying.

Brent's front-month contract was at $110.29 a barrel in early Asian trade on Thursday as the oil market continued to price in an extended conflict in the Middle East and the concomitant risk to supplies.

The higher LNG prices are also keeping a lid on European purchases, with Kpler estimating October imports at 9.11 million tons. While this is up from 7.76 million tons in September, it is down from the 10.59 million in October last year, extending a recent run of weaker imports in 2026 than for the same months in 2025.



A customer checks out a motorcycle at a showroom in Dhaka's Moghbazar yesterday. Motorcycle sales fell 1.3 percent year-on-year in September as higher fuel prices dampened demand, while electric two-wheeler sales gained momentum.

PHOTO: **MEHEDI HASAN**

Motorcycle sales dip as fuel costs rise

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Motorcycle sales in Bangladesh fell 1.3 percent year-on-year to 34,887 units in September, as higher fuel prices added to ownership costs and weighed on demand, particularly for commuter bikes.

Sales stood at 35,335 units in September last year, according to industry figures.

The government raised the prices of diesel, octane, petrol and kerosene by Tk 20 per litre, effective September 21. Octane rose to Tk 165 per litre from Tk 145, while petrol increased to Tk 160 from Tk 140.

Although the overall decline in September was modest, industry executives say rising fuel costs are influencing buying decisions, particularly among price-sensitive consumers.

For buyers, they said, the purchase price is only part of the expense, as fuel costs add to the burden of daily commuting.

"The growth momentum stalled after the fuel price hike on September 21, and sales of commuter bikes came almost to a standstill," said Bijoy Kumar Mondal, CEO of HMCL Niloy Bangladesh Limited, a joint venture company that manufactures and assembles Hero-brand motorcycles in Bangladesh.

Young people and newly employed workers who depend on affordable motorcycles for daily travel are particularly sensitive to fuel costs, he said.

Subrat Ranjan, managing director of ACI Motors, said the company had observed around a 10 percent decline in motorcycle demand following the fuel price hike.

"Following the fuel price hike, customers have shifted to a wait-and-see approach," he said, adding that higher running costs were making buyers more cautious.

The impact, however, varies across the market. Yamaha, the market leader among the brands listed in the supplied figures, recorded a marginal 1 percent year-on-year decline in sales to 8,284 units in September.

Honda sales fell 21 percent to 5,648 units, while Bajaj sales declined 9 percent to 4,978 units. TVS recorded a 23 percent drop to 391 units, and Royal Enfield sales fell 30 percent to 474 units.

Suzuki and Hero bucked the trend, with sales rising 15 percent to 7,548 units and 13 percent to 7,286 units, respectively.

For Royal Enfield, the decline had a different explanation.

Taskeen Ahmed, group vice-chairman of IFAD Group, the sole distributor of Royal Enfield motorcycles in Bangladesh, attributed the drop primarily to a lack of new models rather than higher fuel prices.

He described the slowdown as temporary and said the company planned to introduce new models and four colour options to attract customers and expand its market share.

Royal Enfield's relatively affluent customer base is less sensitive to fuel price changes than buyers in the commuter segment, Ahmed said.

HMCL Niloy Bangladesh's Mondal also noted growing demand for electric two-wheelers since April, with monthly sales reaching at least 5,000 units.

For Bangladesh Honda Private Limited, which manufactures and assembles Honda motorcycles in Bangladesh, affordability and fuel efficiency also remain central to meeting customers' needs.

Shah Muhammad Ashequr Rahman, the company's chief marketing officer, said Honda was focusing on reliable, fuel-efficient motorcycles to support people's mobility and connect them with work, education and everyday opportunities.

As fuel prices rise, dependable and economical transport becomes even more important for families who rely on motorcycles to earn a living, he said.

Quarterly figures suggest that the overall slowdown remains modest. Motorcycle sales totalled 98,580 units in July-September, down 1 percent from 99,376 units in the same period last year. Sales fell 7 percent year-on-year in July, rose 6 percent in August and declined 1 percent in September.

Leaders on a short lease

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

The economist Lawrence Summers once remarked that nobody has ever washed a rented car. We polish what we own and return what we borrow with the fuel light blinking. The line fits our boardrooms and, increasingly, our government. Who washes the car: the man on a short lease, or the one who must drive it for life?

A foreign CEO lands with a polished resume, a relocation package, a hardship allowance (a serviced apartment in Gulshan, driver included) and a three-year target. His local counterpart faces the same scorecard on local terms and allowances. One leaves with the results; the other stays with the consequences. The contract ends; the legacy does not.

The accusation against expatriate chiefs is well rehearsed: chase quick numbers, collect a handsome package and board the flight before the consequences clear immigration. Boards invite this when quarterly results matter more than lasting investment or local talent. When corporate politics claims a chief executive as its victim, the asymmetry turns brutal. The expatriate flies out, untroubled by retirement benefits he can afford to leave behind. The local CEO remains, fighting for his claims in a legal system that moves at its own unhurried pace.

Two recent films sharpened the question. The Governor: The Silent Saviour revisits India's economic crisis of 1991; Made in India: A Titan Story dramatises the audacity of building an Indian watchmaker. Both are true stories in which the decisive force is one no consultant can invoice: love of country. When a national project becomes personal, a leader risks more than a quarterly target.

Global business offers lessons, too. Alan Mulally left Boeing for Ford in 2006 and stayed through its turnaround and the financial crisis until 2014. Carlos Ghosn revived Nissan, then blamed his fall on a boardroom power struggle; Nissan's review found concentrated power and governance failures. An outsider can build for the long term, but results alone cannot protect an institution.



Bangladesh should welcome expertise from anywhere while demanding local teams, knowledge transfer, clear public goals and accountability after handover

The parallel runs from boardroom to cabinet. When group leadership changes, the next layer often follows: a new boss parachutes executives from his circle into subsidiaries rather than grow local leaders. Politicians do the same with trusted associates. Trust matters, but when closeness outweighs competence, companies and countries pay the price.

The political version is more acute. The interim government's advisory council swelled to 24 members at its peak; the current government has appointed 10 prime ministerial advisers and two technocrat ministers, many flown in from abroad. They bring expertise, but may lack knowledge of ground realities and a stake in the consequences. An appointment letter cannot download local understanding.

To be fair, foreign advisers bring networks and distance from party patronage. But knowing a ministry's brief is not knowing how a file stalls, who delivers a service or what a family can afford. One is read in a briefing paper; the other is learnt standing in a queue.

Many Bangladeshi business leaders build here despite uncertain rules, high costs and a bureaucratic maze. Their fortunes are tied to the same soil as their companies. That does not make them wiser by default: not every returnee is a tourist, nor every local a patriot. But the local CEO must build lasting value where his reputation and future remain. Political appointees deserve the same test: what stands after they fly home?

Leadership is measured across the full cycle, not the honeymoon. Bangladesh should welcome expertise from anywhere while demanding local teams, knowledge transfer, clear public goals and accountability after handover. The plane takes the appointee home; the consequences stay with the country.

After all, nobody washes a rented car. The least we can ask is a full tank on return, and that someone here learns to drive.

The writer is the founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd and BuildNation Lt

Meta ordered to pay $25 billion penalty to New Mexico in data privacy case

REUTERS

A judge in New Mexico ordered Meta Platforms on Wednesday to pay the state $25 billion after a jury found the company had misled consumers about the privacy of their data, hitting the company with one of the largest financial penalties in US history.

The ruling came in a case stemming from allegations that Cambridge Analytica, a British political consulting firm involved in Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, obtained data from millions of Facebook users without their consent. New Mexico had sued Meta, accusing it of lying to Facebook users in New Mexico about who had access to their data.

"Facebook's wrongdoing -- over the course of years and systematically broadcast to the public -- goes to the heart of Facebook's core business practices," Judge Francis Mathew wrote in his order, which came more than three weeks after the verdict. Mathew found that a penalty of more than $219 billion was warranted based on state law, but he reduced the figure to $25 billion. In a statement, C.J. Mahoney, Meta's chief legal officer, said the company is confident it will win on appeal.

"This ruling, and the Attorney General's approach to this enforcement, makes it all but impossible to do business in the state of New Mexico," Mahoney said. "At its core, this lawsuit seeks to impose a tax on speech to enforce new rules for what people can say online."

New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez said in a statement after the ruling the penalty was one of the largest financial penalties against a corporation in US history. Meta previously faced a $5 billion penalty from the US Federal Trade Commission in 2019 over the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Six other states settled their lawsuits against Meta related to Cambridge Analytica for $459.2 million as part of a $17.1 billion multistate settlement the company reached in August to resolve states' claims that the company's platforms had harmed teen mental health.



A woman holds a smartphone with Meta logo on it in front of a displayed Facebook logo in this illustration.

PHOTO: **REUTERS/FILE**

New Mexico's attorney general sued Meta in 2021 following revelations that Cambridge Analytica had harvested personal data from as many as 87 million Facebook users through a third-party app. The state accused Meta of lying to Facebook users in New Mexico about who had access to their data and its handling of hate speech and misinformation posted on the platform. It alleged the company knew third parties had broad access to users' data and tolerated hate speech or other harmful content when it benefited the company's bottom line.

Cambridge Analytica, now defunct, used the data for voter profiling and targeting. "It has been a long time coming holding Big Tech accountable," Torrez told a press conference in Albuquerque after Wednesday's ruling. "I think today's judgment is a clear break with that past and a very clear warning to those in this space and beyond that we intend to protect our people and protect our consumers." Mathew's decision comes as Meta faces thousands of lawsuits and pressure from lawmakers over the impact of Instagram and Facebook on teen mental health, with another trial slated to begin next week. Earlier this year, New Mexico won $942 million in a pair of trials against Meta over claims it facilitated sexual exploitation of young people on Instagram and Facebook and misled consumers about the platforms' safety.

Analyst Gil Luria, head of technology research at D.A. Davidson & Co, called the latest New Mexico ruling costly but unlikely to impact the company's value. "Meta is worth nearly two trillion dollars, and will likely continue to appeal these cases and drag them out," Luria said.

Gold hits over two-week low

REUTERS

Gold slipped to its lowest level in more than two weeks on Thursday as a rally in oil prices heightened inflation worries, with the Federal Reserve due to deliver its policy decision next week.

Spot gold slid 1.4 percent to $4,081.89 per ounce by 0902 GMT. US gold futures for December delivery fell 1.3 percent to $4,097.90 per ounce.

"Gold prices can fall further... because we are still seeing a lot of uncertainty around the energy market," said Soni Kumari, analyst at ANZ. Oil prices rallied over $2 a barrel on Thursday after more Houthi attacks in Saudi Arabia stoked concerns over a broader escalation of conflict and further disruptions to crude supplies. While gold is typically considered a hedge against inflation, higher interest rates reduce the appeal of the non-yielding asset.

Last week's US consumer and producer inflation data came in hotter than expected, largely because energy costs keep climbing. That strengthens the case for tighter policy, even though Fed officials are still expected to hold off when they meet on October 27-28.

Goldman Sachs expects one more 25-basis-point hike in December, lifting the peak policy rate range to 4.00 percent-4.25 percent.

Traders are pricing in a 91 percent likelihood of an increase in December, according to CME's FedWatch Tool. US Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) data, set for release on October 29 and closely watched by the central bank, could give more clues on rate outlook.

Retail investors fully subscribe Ambani's Jio IPO on second day

REUTERS, *Mumbai*

Appetite for the $3.2 billion IPO of billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Jio Platforms kept building on Thursday, its second day of public bidding, with orders for shares more than four times the amount available and the retail portion fully subscribed.

In what is set to be India's largest IPO and the first by Reliance in 20 years, the listing is a key plank of Ambani's long-term vision to turn Reliance Industries from an oil-and-chemicals giant into an "everything company" spanning consumer, retail and technology.

Institutional investors have led demand, with qualified institutional buyers bidding for 9.78 times their quota, exchange data showed. Retail investors, for whom around a third of the issue is reserved, covered their own portion in full by the first two hours in the second of three days of public bidding and had bid 1.29 times their quota.

The IPO has generated strong retail demand in the primary market thanks largely to the Reliance brand, with a reach well beyond Jio Platforms' telecoms business, said an analyst tracking the IPO.

For many Indian families, shareholdings in Reliance have long been a trusted nest egg, with its Mumbai-traded shares rising around 330-fold since 1990. Announcing the listing in June, Ambani described it as "a deeply emotional moment for me, for the entire Reliance Family, and millions of its shareholders." Jio helped put streaming, digital payments and online services within reach of millions of Indians through cheap data and free calls. Its next phase leans on 5G, home broadband and cloud and AI services.

On its first day of public bidding, the overall offering was filled within 90 minutes of opening, driven by institutions that snapped up their portion within minutes. It was a rare start for an IPO of this size in India, where large offerings tend to see most bids in the final hours. The IPO has been watched as a barometer of global demand for new listings, with AI-linked companies facing tougher scrutiny. About 90 percent of Jio's revenue comes from its telecoms business.

The IPO values Jio Platforms at up to $108.3 billion, potentially making it one of India's biggest companies by market capitalisation when trading starts on October 28.