

How a War 2,000 Miles Away Shrunk India's Breakfast

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1. Explanation

When a journalist's dosa arrived at a Mumbai restaurant looking suspiciously small, he wasn't witnessing bad service – he was tasting the downstream effects of a Middle Eastern war on 1.4 billion people's kitchens.

What's Going On?

India is the world's second-largest importer of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) – the bottled cooking fuel that powers roughly 85-90% of household kitchens and most restaurants. About 90% of those imports come from the Middle East and travel through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow sea passage off Iran.

Since the outbreak of war with Iran, that shipping route has been blockaded. Supplies have collapsed, prices on the black market have spiked, and the Indian government is rationing LPG, raiding hoarders, and scrambling to source replacement cargoes from as far as the United States. Cafés are baking half as much, chaiwalas (tea sellers) are shutting down, and households are panic-buying induction stoves.

How To Think About It

This is a textbook case of energy import dependence colliding with geopolitical risk – the same vulnerability that has tripped up major economies for decades.

- Think of a hospital that buys 90% of its insulin from a single overseas factory. The factory works fine for years, then one earthquake shuts it down – and suddenly diabetic patients miles away can't get their medicine, even though demand for insulin hasn't changed at all. India's LPG dependence on the Persian Gulf is the same shape, on a national scale.
- Or think of the 1973 OPEC oil embargo, when Arab oil producers cut off the US and gas-station lines stretched for miles – same mechanism, different fuel, different decade.

Key Things To Know

- India imports about 90% of its LPG from the Middle East; only 5% of Indian homes have piped gas, so most cooking depends on physical cylinders.
- The Strait of Hormuz, where the disruption is happening, normally carries roughly 20% of the world's traded oil and gas – Iran sits right next to it.
- Restaurants and small vendors typically keep only a few days of LPG in reserve, which is why food businesses crashed within weeks.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP faces upcoming elections in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu – a cooking-gas crisis is uniquely toxic politically because it hits every household daily.
- The common misread: people assume energy crises are about cars and factories. In India, the most painful shortage is the one happening on the kitchen stove.

Why It Matters

India is projected to be the world's third-largest economy within this decade, and many of you will work for, invest in, or compete with Indian companies. This crisis shows that even fast-growing economies can be held hostage by a single chokepoint thousands of miles away – a lesson that applies equally to

Taiwan's chips, Europe's Russian gas, and America's reliance on Chinese rare earths. Understanding these dependencies is becoming a core skill for anyone going into business, policy, or engineering.

The Bigger Picture

Bernstein analysts called this India's second energy shock in quick succession (after disruptions to Russian oil) and concluded that 'electrification is no longer an option.' Watch for accelerated investment in solar, coal, and a newly opened-up nuclear sector – and watch whether the political fallout reshapes Modi's electoral map. The deeper second-order effect: every country watching India is reassessing its own chokepoints, which could speed up a global rewiring of energy supply chains away from a few vulnerable straits.

2. Key Terms Glossary

Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG)

A fuel made of propane and butane, compressed into a liquid and stored in pressurised cylinders. In India it's the dominant cooking fuel, replacing firewood and charcoal in most homes.

Strait of Hormuz

A narrow stretch of sea between Iran and Oman through which a huge share of the world's oil and gas tankers must pass. Because it's so narrow, it can be blockaded relatively easily, making it one of the world's most strategically sensitive waterways.

Rationing

When a government limits how much of a scarce good each person or business can buy, instead of letting prices rise freely. Used in wartime and supply crises to prevent the wealthy from buying everything.

Black market

Illegal trade in goods that are scarce or price-controlled, usually at much higher prices than the official rate.

Energy security

A country's ability to reliably access affordable energy. A country with high energy security has diverse suppliers, domestic production, or strategic reserves; one with low energy security can be crippled by foreign disruptions.

Electrification

The shift from fuels like gas, oil, or coal to electricity for tasks such as cooking, heating, or driving. The electricity itself can come from many sources, which is why electrification is seen as a path to energy security.

Chaiwala

A street tea vendor in India – a tiny, low-margin business that sells brewed tea (chai), often from a roadside stall using a single gas burner.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

India's ruling political party, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is the dominant force in national politics but faces stiff competition in several state elections.

3. Reading Comprehension Quiz

Circle the best answer for each question.

Q1. Which choice best states the central idea of the passage?

- A) Indian restaurants are switching to induction stoves to modernise their kitchens and cut costs.
- B) A war-driven cooking gas shortage has exposed India's deep dependence on Middle Eastern energy imports.
- C) Prime Minister Modi's government has successfully managed the LPG crisis through rationing and raids.
- D) India should abandon LPG entirely and transition fully to solar and nuclear power generation.

Q2. According to the passage, restaurants were hit quickly by the shortage primarily because:

- A) they consume more LPG per meal than most household kitchens do daily.
- B) the government rationed commercial users before rationing household consumers.
- C) they typically keep only a few days' worth of LPG cylinders on hand.
- D) induction stoves were sold out before restaurants could purchase them.

Q3. The passage indicates that all of the following are consequences of the LPG shortage EXCEPT:

- A) small tea sellers shifting to diesel stoves or closing entirely.
- B) households panic-buying induction cookers from ecommerce sites.
- C) daily wage labourers leaving cities due to high costs.
- D) the Indian government nationalising private gas distributors.

Q4. As used in the passage, the word 'curtailed' most nearly means:

- A) destroyed
- B) reduced
- C) rerouted
- D) questioned

Q5. As used in the passage, the phrase 'hot potato' most nearly means:

- A) a literal cooking ingredient affected by the shortage
- B) a profitable investment opportunity for fund managers
- C) a politically dangerous problem nobody wants to handle
- D) a temporary issue that will resolve on its own quickly

Q6. Which statement about India's energy strategy can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

- A) India is moving to diversify its energy sources after repeated supply shocks.
- B) India plans to permanently cut all energy ties with Middle Eastern suppliers.
- C) India's solar industry is already larger than its oil and gas sector combined.
- D) India will rely exclusively on nuclear power within the next decade.

Q7. The passage suggests that the LPG crisis is politically risky for the BJP primarily because:

- A) opposition parties have organised mass protests in major Indian cities.
- B) cooking gas shortages affect ordinary households on a daily, visible basis.
- C) the BJP previously promised to eliminate India's reliance on imported fuels.
- D) Prime Minister Modi has refused to comment publicly on the situation.

Q8. The author's tone in describing the dosa and the Bread & Chocolate café is best described as:

- A) outraged and accusatory toward the Indian government's response
- B) wry and observational, using small scenes to illustrate a larger crisis
- C) nostalgic for a pre-crisis era of abundant Indian cuisine
- D) skeptical of whether the gas shortage is genuinely as severe as reported

Q9. Which of the following can most reasonably be inferred about household versus commercial LPG users in India?

- A) Commercial users consume more total LPG than households do nationwide.
- B) Households are politically more sensitive consumers than restaurants are.
- C) Restaurants have larger LPG storage capacity than typical households.
- D) Households were the first group to be rationed by the government.

Q10. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A) 'The Iran war has sharply curtailed India's supply of liquefied petroleum gas.'
- B) 'Households account for about 85-90 per cent of their use. Only 5 per cent of homes are connected to piped gas.'
- C) 'Restaurants and hotels make up most of the rest of the demand.'
- D) 'India remains an oasis of energy security, availability and affordability.'

My Score: _____ / 10

4. Answer Key with Explanations

Q1. Which choice best states the central idea of the passage?

Answer: B

B captures the passage's main thread: a Middle East conflict disrupted LPG imports, revealing India's vulnerability. A confuses an effect (induction stoves selling out) for the cause. SAT Tip: For central-idea questions, pick the option that covers the WHOLE passage, not just one paragraph – if an option only describes a single section, it's too narrow.

Q2. According to the passage, restaurants were hit quickly by the shortage primarily because:

Answer: C

The passage states directly that restaurants 'typically hold just a few days' worth of LPG cylinders in reserve.' B is the tempting trap (TRAP C: plausibly true in the real world, but the passage doesn't say rationing order caused the speed). SAT Tip: When a question asks 'why' or 'because,' find the explicit causal sentence in the passage – don't accept real-world logic that the text never states.

Q3. The passage indicates that all of the following are consequences of the LPG shortage EXCEPT:

Answer: D

The passage mentions rationing, raids on hoarders, and orders from the US – but never nationalisation. A, B, and C are all explicitly described. D is TRAP C: it sounds like a plausible government response, but it's not in the text. SAT Tip: 'EXCEPT' questions reward careful elimination – check each option against the passage and cross out the ones you can verify, leaving the unsupported one.

Q4. As used in the passage, the word 'curtailed' most nearly means:

Answer: B

The sentence says the war has 'sharply curtailed India's supply' – supply is shrinking, not gone. 'Destroyed' (A) is too absolute (TRAP A: right direction, wrong intensity); the passage shows supply continues at reduced levels. SAT Tip: On vocab-in-context, substitute each option back into the sentence – the right answer keeps the sentence's original meaning intact, while extreme synonyms usually overshoot.

Q5. As used in the passage, the phrase 'hot potato' most nearly means:

Answer: C

The fund manager calls the shortfall a 'political hot potato' – an idiom meaning a controversial problem that's risky to be associated with. A is the literal-meaning trap (TRAP B: passage vocabulary used in a wrong combination). SAT Tip: When a passage uses an idiom or figurative phrase, the literal meaning is almost always wrong on the SAT – look for the figurative interpretation that fits the surrounding context.

Q6. Which statement about India's energy strategy can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

Answer: A

The passage describes expanding solar and coal, opening nuclear to private investors, and quotes analysts saying 'electrification is no longer an option' – pointing to diversification after Russia and Iran shocks. B and D are TRAP A (right direction, wrong intensity – 'permanently' and 'exclusively' overshoot). SAT Tip: Inference answers on the SAT are almost always cautiously worded – beware options containing 'all,' 'never,' 'exclusively,' or 'permanently.'

Q7. The passage suggests that the LPG crisis is politically risky for the BJP primarily because:

Answer: B

The passage notes the BJP faces upcoming elections and that households make up 85-90% of LPG use – implying the shortage hits voters directly and daily. D is contradicted by the passage (Modi did address parliament). C is TRAP C: plausible-sounding but not stated. SAT Tip: When inferring political or economic motives, ground your answer in specific facts the passage provides – never in your own assumptions about how politics 'usually' works.

Q8. The author's tone in describing the dosa and the Bread & Chocolate café is best described as:

Answer: B

The author uses light touches ('sheepishly,' 'eagerly anticipated,' the shrunken dosa) to frame a serious story – that's wry observation. A overstates the author's emotion (TRAP A: wrong intensity). SAT Tip: For tone questions, focus on the author's word choices and asides, not the seriousness of the topic itself – a grim subject can be discussed in a light, observational, or even ironic tone.

Q9. Which of the following can most reasonably be inferred about household versus commercial LPG users in India?

Answer: B

Households are 85-90% of LPG demand, only 5% have piped gas alternatives, and the article frames the crisis as electorally dangerous for the BJP – all of which implies households carry far more political weight than commercial users. A reverses the actual figures (TRAP A). SAT Tip: When two groups are compared in a passage, look for the numerical or structural facts that distinguish them – those usually drive the correct inference.

Q10. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

Answer: B

B directly supplies the numbers that establish households as the dominant, alternative-less consumer group – the basis for inferring their political sensitivity. C is the trap (TRAP B: relevant vocabulary, but it describes restaurants, not the household weight that drives the inference). SAT Tip: On evidence-pairing questions, lock in your previous answer first, then pick the quote that contains the specific FACT supporting it – not just a quote that mentions the same topic.