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The Strategic Vulnerability in India's LPG Supply Model

Context

- India's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) challenge is not a temporary shortage but **a structural imbalance** rooted in the widening gap between domestic production and consumption.
- With annual demand at about 33.15 million tonnes and domestic output meeting only 40% of this requirement, the **country depends heavily on imports** for the remaining 60%.
- In effect, India's LPG demand is roughly 250% of its indigenous production.
- This mismatch is particularly concerning because LPG in India is primarily a household fuel, making its supply critical to everyday life rather than flexible industrial use.

Nature of India's LPG Dependence

- **Household-Centric Consumption**
  - A defining feature of India's LPG usage is that it is overwhelmingly consumed in domestic kitchens, with commercial usage accounting for less than 10%.

    - Unlike industrial consumers, households cannot easily reduce consumption or switch fuels in response to shortages.
    - This makes LPG demand in India highly inelastic and socially sensitive.
- **Rigid Demand Structure**
    - Because LPG is essential for cooking, disruptions in supply directly **affect millions of households.**
    - This distinguishes India from countries where LPG is used more flexibly across sectors, allowing for adjustments during supply constraints.

Geopolitical Risks and Supply Vulnerability

- **Dependence on a Single Corridor**
    - Around 90% of India's LPG imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz. This **heavy reliance on a single route** exposes the country to geopolitical risks.
    - Recent tensions have demonstrated that this corridor cannot be assumed to remain consistently secure.
- **Long-Term Strategic Implications**
    - Even if current disruptions ease, the **perception of risk** associated with this route has fundamentally changed.
    - India must now incorporate this uncertainty into its long-term energy planning.

Global Comparisons: Why India is More Exposed

- **Lessons from Japan**
    - Japan appears more import-dependent than India, yet it is less vulnerable.
    - LPG serves only about 40% of Japanese households, while electricity and city gas dominate residential energy use.
    - Additionally, Japan **maintains over 100 days of LPG reserves**, providing a strong buffer against disruptions.
- **Contrasts with China and South Korea**
    - In China, LPG demand is driven largely by the petrochemical sector rather than households.
    - South Korea relies more on natural gas and electricity for residential energy.
    - These **diversified consumption patterns reduce their vulnerability** compared to India.
- **India's Unique Exposure**
    - India's risk stems not just from how much LPG it imports, but from where it is used.
    - The heavy concentration in household kitchens makes its dependence particularly difficult to manage during disruptions.

Storage Constraints and Market Realities

- **Limited Strategic Reserves**
    - India's operational LPG storage provides about **15 days of cover.**
    - However, dedicated underground reserves amount to only about 140,000 tonnes, roughly 1.5 days of national demand.

    - This limited buffer leaves the country exposed to prolonged supply shocks.
- **Tight Global Supply**
    - The global LPG market is not highly flexible. A few Asian countries absorb more than half of the exportable supply, leaving little surplus available.
    - In the event of disruptions**, India may struggle to secure alternative** cargoes quickly.

Policy Measures to Reduce Vulnerability

- **Prioritising Domestic Supply for Households**
    - India should differentiate LPG usage by reserving **domestically produced LPG** and refinery outputs for household consumption.
    - Petrochemical industries should increasingly rely on imported feedstock rather than competing with domestic kitchens for supply.
- **Expanding Strategic Storage**
    - Building a larger LPG buffer is essential. A reserve covering **two to three weeks of household demand,** approximately 1.3 to 1.9 million tonnes, would significantly enhance resilience.
- **Promoting Alternative Cooking Solutions**
    - A sustained push toward electric cooking can gradually reduce dependence on LPG.
    - Urban and semi-urban households with reliable electricity should be encouraged to adopt induction cooking.
    - Expanding piped natural gas (PNG) networks can also help in densely populated areas, but electricity remains the most scalable alternative.

Conclusion

- India’s LPG problem is **not a short-term disruption but a structural vulnerability** embedded in its energy system.
- The combination of high demand, limited domestic production, concentrated import routes, and heavy reliance on household consumption creates a **uniquely fragile situation.**
- Addressing this challenge requires more than increasing imports; it demands systemic reform.
- By prioritising domestic supply for essential use, expanding storage, **diversifying energy sources, and reducing household dependence on LPG**, India can move toward a more resilient and secure energy future.

The Strategic Vulnerability in India’s LPG Supply Model FAQs

Q1. Why is India’s LPG problem considered structural rather than temporary?

Ans. India’s LPG problem is structural because demand far exceeds domestic production, creating a long-term dependence on imports.

Q2. Why is India more vulnerable to LPG shortages than other countries?

Ans. India is more vulnerable because LPG is mainly used in households, where demand cannot be easily reduced or substituted.

Q3. How does the Strait of Hormuz affect India's LPG supply?
Ans. The Strait of Hormuz is critical because about 90% of India's LPG imports pass through it, making supply highly exposed to geopolitical risks.

Q4. What advantage does Japan have over India in LPG security?
Ans. Japan has greater LPG security because it uses more electricity and city gas in households and maintains large storage reserves.

Q5. What is one key solution to reduce India's LPG dependence?
Ans. One key solution is to promote electric cooking so that fewer households rely solely on LPG for daily needs.

Source: **The Hindu** `

The Puzzle of Missing Urgency Around Learning

Context

- India is facing a **significant learning crisis**, as repeatedly highlighted by the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER).
- Despite some recent improvements and strong policy initiatives focused on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), the issue has not generated the urgency required at the grassroots level.
- This **disconnect between policy intent and on-ground action** raises an important question: why does a crisis of such scale fail to provoke immediate response?
- A key explanation lies in the concept of **salience**, the extent to which a problem is recognised, prioritised, and acted upon by society.

Understanding Salience in Public Policy

- Salience plays a crucial role in determining whether **policies translate into real change.**
- Systems evolve not merely through well-designed frameworks or increased funding, but when stakeholders collectively acknowledge the importance of an issue and take responsibility for addressing it.
- An **illustrative example is Vietnam.** Research by the RISE Programme at the Blavatnik School of Government found that Vietnam achieved strong learning outcomes despite limited resources.
- The key factor was a shared societal commitment to education, what researchers described as a collective wanting to.
- In contrast, **India's efforts,** though supported by policies such as the National Education Policy (2020) and the NIPUN Bharat Mission**, have yet to fully translate into widespread urgency at the local level.**

The Gap Between Policy Intent and Ground Reality

- While policy frameworks in India clearly prioritise FLN, their impact is **diluted at the field level.**
- School management discussions and parent-teacher interactions often focus on infrastructure issues, such as buildings, sanitation, and teacher shortages, rather than on actual learning outcomes.

- This indicates that learning, as a goal, has not yet become a **central concern for communities** and local institutions.

Factors Contributing to Low Salience

- **Intangibility of Learning Outcomes**
  - Learning is difficult to observe directly. Unlike visible issues such as poor infrastructure, a lack of comprehension can remain hidden.
  - Classroom practices may create an illusion of learning, and concepts like oral reading fluency are not widely understood, leading to underestimation of the problem.
- **Weak Accountability Structures**
  - Children lack voice, and many parents are unable to effectively evaluate learning. Decision-making remains centralised, while local bodies have limited influence.
  - Additionally, the migration of the middle class to private schooling reduces pressure on public institutions.
- **Underestimation of the Crisis Scale**
  - Even informed stakeholders often fail to grasp the magnitude of the problem. Data indicating low learning levels can be surprising or dismissed, preventing the mobilisation of adequate responses.
- **Misalignment of Responsibility**
  - There is a widespread perception that while schooling is the state’s responsibility, learning depends on the child or family.
  - This belief undermines the importance of systemic factors such as teaching quality, curriculum design, and institutional support.
- **Psychological and Political Barriers**
  - Acknowledging the crisis is difficult for educators and policymakers who have focused on expanding access to schooling.
  - Politically, admitting widespread learning deficits can carry risks, leading to reluctance in openly addressing the issue.
- **Prevailing Fatalism**
  - A sense of inevitability often surrounds systemic challenges, discouraging efforts for change. However, evidence suggests that improvement is both possible and achievable.

The Way Forward: Building Salience

- One effective approach is conducting **local-level assessments** that allow parents and officials to directly observe children’s learning levels.
- This transforms the issue from an abstract concept into a tangible reality.
- Furthermore, it is essential to **clearly communicate the scale of the problem** and highlight proven solutions.
- Interventions such as **Teaching at the Right Level** and structured pedagogy have demonstrated significant success in improving foundational learning outcomes.

- Equally important is creating systems of accountability that ensure those responsible for delivery are motivated to act.
- Strengthening community engagement and empowering local institutions can help generate bottom-up pressure for change.

Conclusion

- India’s learning crisis is not merely a failure of policy or resources, but a failure of collective prioritisation.
- Without sufficient salience, even the most well-designed initiatives struggle to achieve impact.
- The path forward lies in ensuring that **learning outcomes become a shared societal priority.**
- Only when communities, educators, and policymakers recognise the urgency of the issue and act collectively can meaningful and sustained improvements in education be realised.

The Puzzle of Missing Urgency Around Learning FAQs

Q1. Why are learning outcomes often difficult to address compared to other issues?
Ans. Learning outcomes are difficult to address because they are not easily visible and can be mistaken for actual learning in classroom activities.

Q2. What role do accountability structures play in the learning crisis?
Ans. Weak accountability structures contribute to the learning crisis by limiting the ability of parents and communities to hold educators and institutions responsible.

Q3. Why has policy intent not translated into effective outcomes in India?
Ans. Policy intent has not translated into effective outcomes because learning lacks visibility and urgency at the ground level.

Q4. How does Vietnam serve as an example in the discussion?
Ans. Vietnam serves as an example of how strong collective prioritisation of learning can lead to better educational outcomes even with limited resources.

Q5. What is one suggested way to improve learning outcomes in India?
Ans. One suggested way to improve learning outcomes is to make learning levels visible through local assessments that engage parents and communities.

Source: The Hindu