

Opinion **Outlook**

No dosa today: India's cooking gas crisis

Households are buying up induction stoves and chaiwalas have closed as Iran conflict hits the country's supply of LPG

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People queue for LPG cylinders in Ahmedabad. The fuel disruption is serving as a wake-up call for India, which remains dependent on oil and gas imports but is rich in solar and coal © Amit Dave/Reuters

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During a recent visit to a south Indian restaurant in Mumbai, my eagerly anticipated order of crispy lentil and rice duncce hat-shaped dosa arrived at the table far smaller than expected and in an oddly diminished form.

Sheepishly, the waiter explained the underwhelming result: a national [cooking gas shortage](#) that has left restaurants across India unable to use their gas stoves and reliant on hastily ordered electric induction and hotplate stoves or more basic charcoal and firewood. In this case, the kitchen could not deliver its signature (and gas-hungry) extra-large, crispy savoury crêpes.

The Iran war has sharply curtailed India's supply of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The world's most populous country is also the world's second largest importer of the fuel, reliant on the Middle East for roughly 90 per cent of overseas supplies, with most shipments passing through the blockaded Strait of Hormuz.

In response, the Indian government has rationed supplies to commercial users and placed orders from as far away as the US. But these measures have done little to stop the [shortfalls](#) becoming a “political hot potato”, according to one Indian fund manager whose portfolio is bearing the brunt of the energy crunch.

The gas jam has already hit Indian homes; people joined long queues to obtain the LPG cylinders they attach to gas hobs to prepare meals. Households account for about 85-90 per cent of their use. Only 5 per cent of homes are connected to piped gas. Shortages have fuelled a run on induction cookers, many of which had sold out on ecommerce sites and were rapidly cleared from appliance stores during an initial rush last month.

Restaurants and hotels make up most of the rest of the demand. They typically hold just a few days' worth of LPG cylinders in reserve. A senior Mumbai banker recently told me his office's cafeteria, like many across the country, had reduced its breakfast and lunch options. Many small food vendors and *chaiwalas*, or tea sellers, have moved to diesel stoves or closed outright, unable to absorb the cost of electricity. Many daily wage labourers, struggling with the high black market rates, have left the cities altogether.

The shortages have not spared even upmarket establishments. During my recent visit to Bread & Chocolate, a popular café on Rue de la Marine in the former French colonial enclave of Puducherry, a notice was posted on the entrance warning customers that “due to the current gas shortage we will temporarily not be selling breads . . . we will however stay open and keep things running for as long as possible”.

The café has shifted more of its operations to electric stoves and has cut back on baking as it runs down backup gas supplies. “We are really shocked about this,” one employee told me. “We used to do 60 to 90 bakes [a day]; right now we are baking only 30.”

The timing of the energy crisis is awkward for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, which had hoped to make headway in nearing election contests in opposition-run states such as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Modi described the situation as “worrisome” when he addressed parliament in late March.

More broadly, the disruption is serving as a wake-up call for India, which remains dependent on oil and gas imports but is rich in solar and coal — sources of energy that have been expanding as the economy grows. The government is also opening up the once closed-off nuclear power sector to private investors.

“India’s energy security has been tested twice in quick succession — first by disruptions around Russian oil, and now by the Iran war,” Bernstein analysts said in a recent report. “Electrification is no longer an option.”

For now, Modi’s administration is trying to calm panic buying and has even conducted raids on those suspected of hoarding or “black marketing” LPG.

India “remains an oasis of energy security, availability and affordability”, wrote oil and gas minister Hardeep Singh Puri on social media. “It is important that we remain calm, responsible, and united.”

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