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India's West Asia Dilemma — SPR at 64% Amid Gulf Crisis

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India's West Asia Dilemma — SPR at 64% Amid Gulf Crisis

PM Modi addressed Parliament during the Budget Session on the escalating West Asia conflict (now in its fourth week), while data revealed India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) are only 64% filled — 3.37 million tonnes out of 5.33 million tonnes capacity — raising energy security concerns amid potential Strait of Hormuz disruptions.

PM MODI'S FIVE DIPLOMATIC SIGNALS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Parliamentary statement was carefully calibrated to balance multiple competing interests:

1. **Strategic Autonomy**

India deliberately avoided condemning any specific party — neither the US/Israeli actions nor expressing condolences for the Iranian leadership. This reflects India's long-standing policy of **strategic autonomy** in West Asia, maintaining relationships with all sides.

2. Diaspora Protection as Priority

- **3,75,000+ Indians** evacuated since the conflict began
- **1,000 Indians** evacuated from Iran (including 700+ medical students)
- **700+ Indian seafarers** stuck on approximately 22 ships in the Strait of Hormuz
- Indian missions in Gulf countries operating on emergency protocols

3. Energy Diversification

India has expanded energy import sources from **27 to 41 countries** over the past 11 years, reducing single-source dependency. Russia has emerged as a major crude supplier since 2022.

4. Maritime Concerns

The Strait of Hormuz — through which **~20% of global energy supply** transits — is the choke point. Any blockade or military action there would directly impact India’s crude oil and LPG imports.

5. Diplomatic Solution

The PM emphasised “dialogue and diplomacy are the only solutions” — positioning India as a potential mediator while protecting its strategic interests.

INDIA’S STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVE — A HIDDEN VULNERABILITY

India’s SPR programme, managed by the **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL)**, a subsidiary of the Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB), maintains underground rock cavern storage at three locations:

Current SPR Status

FACILITY	CAPACITY	STATUS
Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh	1.33 million tonnes	Operational
Mangaluru, Karnataka	1.50 million tonnes	Operational (includes ADNOC stored crude)
Padur, Karnataka	2.50 million tonnes	Operational
Total	5.33 million tonnes	3.37 MT filled (64%)

How Many Days Does This Cover?

- SPR alone: **~9.5 days** of India’s crude oil consumption
- SPR + commercial stocks: **~74 days** total
- **IEA benchmark:** 90 days (India falls short by ~16 days)

Why Is It Only 64% Full?

- High crude prices during 2023-24 made strategic purchases expensive

- Prioritisation of spot market purchases for immediate refining needs
- Budget constraints for large-scale strategic stock-building
- The Mangaluru facility includes crude stored by ADNOC (Abu Dhabi National Oil Company) under a commercial agreement — 7,50,000 tonnes of this can be used by ADNOC for commercial sales

INDIA'S ENERGY DEPENDENCY — THE NUMBERS

PARAMETER	VALUE
India's rank as crude consumer	3rd globally (after US, China)
Crude import dependence	~88%
LPG import dependence	~60%
Natural gas import dependence	~50%
Annual crude import bill (2024-25)	~\$150 billion
Top crude suppliers	Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Russia, UAE, Kuwait

EXPANSION PLANS

Recognising the vulnerability, India has approved new SPR facilities:

PROPOSED FACILITY	CAPACITY	STATUS
Chandikhol, Odisha	4.0 million tonnes	Under construction
Padur Phase 2, Karnataka	2.5 million tonnes	Approved
Bikaner, Rajasthan	3.0 million tonnes	Proposed
Rajkot, Gujarat	3.0 million tonnes	Proposed
Total new capacity	12.5 million tonnes	

Once all facilities are operational, India's SPR capacity would rise to **17.83 million tonnes** (~28 days of crude consumption from SPR alone).

INDIA'S EVACUATION TRACK RECORD

India has a proven record of large-scale evacuations from conflict zones:

OPERATION	YEAR	LOCATION	INDIANS EVACUATED
Kuwait Airlift	1990	Kuwait/Iraq	1,76,000 (largest air evacuation in history)
Operation Sukoon	2006	Lebanon	2,280
Operation Safe Homecoming	2011	Libya	15,400
Operation Rahat	2015	Yemen	4,640 Indians + 960 foreigners
Vande Bharat Mission	2020	Global (COVID)	67 lakh+
Operation Kaveri	2023	Sudan	4,000+
Current (2026)	2026	West Asia	3,75,000+ (ongoing)

THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ FACTOR

The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil choke point:

- **Width:** ~33 km (navigable channel: 3 km each way)
- **Daily crude transit:** ~20 million barrels
- **Share of global seaborne oil:** ~20%
- **Countries bordering:** Iran and Oman
- **India's exposure:** Massive — most Gulf crude reaches India through this strait

Any disruption to Hormuz traffic would immediately spike global crude prices and force India to dip into its already thin SPR buffer.

UPSC RELEVANCE

ISPRL, SPR locations and capacities, Strait of Hormuz, IEA 90-day benchmark, I2U2 Group

MAINS GS-II:

India's West Asia policy, strategic autonomy, diaspora protection

MAINS GS-III:

Energy security, SPR infrastructure, crude import dependence

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVES (INDIA):

Managing agency: ISPRL (Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited)

Under: OIDB (Oil Industry Development Board), Ministry of Petroleum

Total capacity: 5.33 million tonnes (3 facilities)

Locations: Visakhapatnam (AP), Mangaluru (Karnataka), Padur (Karnataka)

Current fill: 3.37 MT (64%)

Days coverage (SPR alone): ~9.5 days

Total coverage (SPR + commercial): ~74 days

IEA benchmark: 90 days

ADNOC AGREEMENT:

Abu Dhabi National Oil Company

Stores crude at Mangaluru facility

7,50,000 tonnes available for ADNOC commercial use

India gets first right of refusal during emergencies

EXPANSION PLANS:

Chandikhol (Odisha): 4 MT — under construction

Padur Phase 2: 2.5 MT — approved

Bikaner (Rajasthan) + Rajkot (Gujarat): 6 MT combined — proposed

INDIA'S EVACUATIONS:

Kuwait Airlift (1990): 1,76,000 — largest air evacuation ever

Operation Rahat (2015, Yemen): 4,640 Indians + 960 foreigners

Current West Asia: 3,75,000+ evacuated

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

I2U2 Group: India, Israel, UAE, USA

IMEC: India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (G20, 2023)

India-Oman-UAE: Indian Navy conducts regular exercises in Arabian Sea

CAATSA: US law sanctioning countries buying Russian/Iranian weapons

India's crude import bill: ~\$150 billion annually

Sources: [The Hindu](#), [PIB](#), [Vajiram & Ravi](#)

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