India’s Quest for Energy Security and it’s West Asia Policy

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Abstract

India’s rapid economic growth is highly dependent on stable access to energy supplies. With increasing growth in the consumption of fossil fuels, India’s dependence on imports of oil and hydrocarbons in general would increase substantially in the future which is 37.5 percent of our total imports already, making India search for energy security. Foreign policy therefore has a critical role in ensuring energy security for India. Energy security has, as a result, become a vital factor in Indian foreign policy. However, despite India’s ongoing initiatives to secure its increasing energy requirements from all over globe through its policy of diversification, West Asia remains the main source of India’s imports providing more than 65 percent of our total imports thereby making energy an important factor in India-West Asia relationship. Since the end of the Cold War India’s policy towards West Asia has been governed more by economic and energy considerations and less by the political rhetoric of the past. This paper analyzes India’s interests, challenges, and actual energy security policies towards the region and also attempts to study how far India’s Quest for Energy Security drives India’s West Asia policy.

Keywords: Energy, Diplomacy, West Asia, Persian Gulf, GCC, Foreign policy, Energy Security, Geopolitics.
Introduction

Energy is vital for the growth and survival of all living beings and it plays a crucial role in the socio-economic development and human wellbeing of a country. Energy security means different things in different places but it essentially implies ensuring uninterrupted supplies of energy to support economic and commercial activities necessary for the sustained growth of the economy. Energy security has been defined by India’s political leadership as being able to “supply lifeline energy to all our citizens as well as meet their effective demand for safe and convenient energy. …at affordable cost.”\(^1\) This same theme—the Indian energy vision—has found voice time and again among India’s senior political leadership.\(^2\) The Hydrocarbon Vision 2025,\(^3\) published by the Government of India in February 2000, set out in stark terms India’s energy security predicament. The report envisioned that India would achieve energy security ‘by achieving self-reliance through increased indigenous production and investment in equity oil abroad.’ This pioneering study placed energy security at the top of the national agenda.

However, India, as one of the fastest growing economy faces alarming challenges in meeting its energy needs and providing adequate and varied energy of desired quality to users in a sustainable manner and at reasonable costs. On the one hand if being faced by galloping demands of energy is the reality of India not being able to meet these demands domestically is another bigger reality. India’s energy consumption has outpaced its domestic production for decades. It’s not a matter of surprise that India is heavily dependent upon imports to meet its energy requirements. Fuel imports, were always an important part of India’s import basket but today they have become the largest imported commodity accounting about 37.5 percent of India’s total imports according to the current figures. (**Figure 1**)
According to BP Statistical Review of World Energy released in June 2016, India has surpassed Japan to become the world's third-largest oil consumer, with its oil demand galloping 8.1 percent in 2015. With demand of 4.1 million barrels per day, India is the third-largest consumer behind US (19.39 million bpd) and China (11.96 million bpd). India’s annual oil consumption is expected to rise to 245 million tonnes (mt) by 2020 and the country is likely to be the world’s single largest importer of oil by 2050. The share of gas in the total energy mix is expected to rise to 20 per cent in 2025; with oil and gas together accounting for approximately 45 percent of the total demand (Table 1). By 2030, the International Energy Agency projects that India will import one-third of its coal, half of its natural gas, and a whopping 90 percent of its oil. Energy security is the top priority for the Government of India in the words of Former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who says, “The quest for energy security is second only in [India’s] scheme of things to food security.’ the quest for energy security had “become an important element of Indian diplomacy and...shaping [India’s] relations with a range of countries across the globe.”

The promise of energy security is alluring but for an import-dependent country like India, energy security is no longer just a desire, but a critical imperative for an economy which is at the threshold of maturity as a growing one, requiring serious efforts by Government of India to enhance energy supplies as India faces possible severe energy supply constraints. Since India is dependent on imports for nearly 80 per cent of its petroleum requirements, energy security has become a prime government concern. India’s former petroleum minister acknowledged that even if more energy is found, India will likely find further use for it; therefore, the country would have to continue to look abroad for additional sources. Thus, energy security is a major challenge for India.
There is a growing recognition that energy security needs to be a critical component of India’s foreign policy and energy policy\textsuperscript{10}. Energy security is not only high on the global agenda but has emerged as an integral component of India’s strategic partnership with many leading energy-rich countries. Currently India’s policy for securing energy from abroad is designed to “mitigate the risks of our inevitable and growing dependence on imported hydrocarbons by getting in first with exploration contracts, negotiating bilateral, trilateral and multilateral agreements, and ensuring that our future energy security is safeguarded through all this.”\textsuperscript{11}

Foreign policy therefore has a critical role in ensuring energy security for India. Having a proactive and well defined foreign policy becomes a key in addressing India’s energy security concerns. West Asia is one such area which is exercising India’s diplomatic energies in a significant way in terms of energy security. The rapid expansion of Indian economy has made it a voracious consumer of energy and energy security has become a key foreign policy objective shaping its approach towards the West Asian region. Here fact which comes forward is that even after India’s efforts to diversify its supply sources from Africa, East Asia, Russia, US, Latin America in order to reduce risks of uncertainty in supplies of energy, West Asia still continues to be our principal supplier with supporting around 65 percent of our energy needs made through energy imports. So in order to achieve the lofty goals of energy security for the nation, West Asia can’t be ignored and India needs robust West Asia policy to achieve its desired goals in the larger interests of the Nation. Understanding India’s West Asia policy and how far energy plays a role in its policy towards the region thus became a genuine point of study. This research paper tries to find out how far energy drives India’s West Asia policy keeping in view India’s lofty ideals of searching Energy security for the nation.
1. India’s Quest for Energy Security and West Asia: An Introduction

Due to the lack of significant domestic reserves of oil and natural gas, India has looked towards the geopolitically challenging Middle East region to fulfill its requirements throughout much of its independent history.\textsuperscript{12} West Asia has been the primary source of oil imports for India; as the region has the largest reserves of Petroleum and because of the geographical proximity between India and the region for which the transportation cost is lower than imports from any other parts of the world. To have a clear understanding of the energy factor in India’s West Asia policy, it will be required to take a look at the trajectory which brought Indian foreign policy towards the Hydrocarbon rich region in the present times.

1.1 Energy and India’s West Asia Policy: A brief Background

India’s West Asia policy has undergone a significant change over the years. In the first two decades after its’ Independence in 1947, India adopted a political approach towards the region. One of the primary reasons driving India’s West Asia policy was the desire to cultivate good relations with the Muslim dominated countries of West Asia to counter any Pakistani influence. Energy security didn’t play an important role during this period in India’s engagement with the region. Though India was dependent on the West Asia for its energy imports, its requirement was very less. Furthermore most of India’s refineries were then owned by the Western oil companies as a result of country’s colonial past. These firms’ imported oil mainly from Saudi Arabia and Iran.\textsuperscript{13} From the 1970’s, economic factors and energy needs gradually replaced India’s political approach towards West Asia. The oil crisis of the 1970’s and the economic boom in the gulf that followed caused India to look diplomatically towards the oil rich countries of West Asia.\textsuperscript{14} The structural changes in the post cold War period brought a remarkable shift in India’s Foreign
policy towards the region. Economic reforms and growth have ushered in greater realism in India’s West Asia policy, with economic factors replacing political rhetoric as the principal factors shaping its policy towards the ever turbulent region. In the Post-Cold War period economic, energy security related issues took precedence over moral and ideological considerations.

However, in the current times India’s relationship with West Asia as a region is dramatically different than a generation ago. To secure the growing interest in the western neighborhood-from energy security to counter terrorism-India reoriented its policy towards the region in 2005 which we call today as “Look West Policy” where economic energy related issues have taken precedence over moral, political and ideological considerations. In July 2005 Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in a meeting of Prime Minister’s trade and economic relations committee collectively encouraged the Cabinet to pursue the ‘look west’ policy. The focal point of the meeting was to kick start the India-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) free trade agreement talks and comprehensive economic agreements with all the GCC countries.

Adoption of the Look West policy in 2005 reflects India's increased desire for engagement with its West Asian neighbours. The Gulf region is important for India because of increased cooperation in the fields of trade, business, politics and security. Several high level visits have been exchanged and important agreements signed between the two sides on a number of issues. Bilateral engagement has also gathered momentum because of similar perspectives on terrorism and piracy. India's endeavors for deeper engagement with the region has been well accepted by the Gulf countries that realize India's potential as a large, stable, democratic country and an emerging political and economic power in Asia and the world. The new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has started reinforcement of ‘Look West’ policy which he calls ‘Link West’
policy since May 2014. But before we analyse India’s West Asia policy and the role of energy in India’s foreign policy strategies towards West Asia let us take a look at India – West Asia energy ties.

1.2 India’s Energy Dependence on West Asia

West Asia weighs heavily on India’s strategic calculations as despite India’s ongoing initiatives to secure its increasing energy requirements through its policy of diversification, and procuring energy resources from other energy rich regions like Africa, Latin America and Central Asia, West Asia continues to be the principal source of India’s energy imports. It thus becomes important to analyse the future trends, opportunities and challenges that Indian foreign policy will be exposed to in the process of managing its energy security given its energy dependence on West Asia; a region that is undergoing a tumultuous process of major political and economic transformation. Looking at the percentage of India’s energy mix (Table 1) over a period of time, it becomes obvious that the share of gas demand will increase in future and here West Asia would prove very critical in getting the demands of gas fulfilled. By 2035, almost 90% of West Asian oil exports go to Asia; North America’s emergence as a net exporter accelerates the eastward shift in trade (Figure 2).

From the Indian perspective West Asia is considered in two segments-First the Persian Gulf and second the other countries of West Asia. The Persian Gulf covers the six states of GCC (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates), Iraq and Iran. Yemen can also be considered under this part because of geo-political reasons on account of its land area, population and location in the Arabian Peninsula. This region is the focal point of India’s West Asia policy because it’s the primary source of India’s Hydrocarbon imports.
The nature of India-West Asia energy partnership has undergone significant change in the recent times. By acquiring assets and developing joint partnership, India is getting involved in the exploration and production activities of these countries. Today India has Exploration and Production projects in Syria, Iran, Iraq and Yemen. (Table2). Together with this India’s Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU’s) with Iraq (2013), Iran (2012), Qatar (2012) and Syria (2009) in the field of energy. One of the favourable aspects from an energy security point of view is that India is strategically located in proximity to sources of natural gas. In the west large gas reserves in the Gulf are located in Iran and Qatar. Northwest central Asia has some of the largest gas fields outside of West Asia. Gas from these regions could thus cheaply and efficiently be transported through pipelines into India.

The domination of oil and natural gas became apparent when oil exporting countries of the West Asia occupied the six slots in India’s top 20 trade partners in 2015; UAE 3rd and Saudi Arabia acquired 4th spot, Iraq was in 16th slot; Kuwait 15th, Qatar 14th and Iran 19th. Indeed, the three smaller economies Oman (37th), Yemen (52nd) and Bahrain (63rd) do not figure in the list. Saudi Arabia 2nd; UAE 5th; Iraq 9th and Qatar 10th acquired 4 positions in India's 10 largest sources of imports in 2015. Figure 3 and figure 4 depict India’s hydrocarbon imports. Figure 5 show India’s energy imports from West Asia (2014-15) while Table 3 shows India’s energy imports from the west Asian region (in US$ million). The statistics shown amply prove India’s undeniably heavy dependence on West Asia for quenching of its increasing thirst for energy. But how far energy factor dictates or rules India’s West Asia policy needs to be looked further to have a clear picture.
2. Energy factor in India’s West Asia Policy: An Assessment

West Asia continues to be the primary source of India’s energy needs. India’s imports, mostly from the volatile region of West Asia, account for 75 per cent of the country’s energy needs, which is likely to go up to 85-90 per cent by 2020. Moreover, with falling oil prices, as the oil-rich nations compete fiercely for market, India, with her fastest growing economy, rapidly urbanising population and large unmet energy needs becomes an attractive destination for the West Asian oil-selling countries. In this context, few recent facts are quite intriguing. According to Indian government, India’s fuel consumption in September 2015 showed the fastest growth in the decade. In January 2016, India’s total fuel demand rose by about 12.7 per cent to 15.71 million tonnes. India has now overtaken Japan to become the third largest oil consumer in the world. Energy security, of course, is a key ingredient of India’s interest in West Asia. It is dependent on imports for 80% of its oil needs, of which roughly 55% is sourced from the Persian Gulf region. The ratio could decline slowly as New Delhi diversifies with an increased focus on African producers. But the rate at which India’s energy demand is growing—it is currently the world’s fourth biggest oil consumer with import dependence projected to increase to 90% by 2031—offsets this in absolute terms. The current glut in the oil market and plunge in prices means it is, for the time being, a buyer’s market. In the period to 2040, India will overtake China as the largest source of rising demand for oil. The time to begin securing its interests in West Asia is now when it holds the advantage. But is energy the only reason behind India’s relationship with West Asia? This question is often raised while discussing India West Asia ties. After having discussion on the energy factor and its prime importance in India’s relations with West Asia, let us take a look at other side of the coin which will throw ample light on the scenario and make us understand the issue a bit more.
India and the economies of West Asia have had a natural economic relationship defined by geographical proximity, cultural linkages, stronger presence of the Indian Diaspora and economic complementarity defined by India’s need for oil and West Asia’s need for human capital and food products. Cross border trade and investment flows, among other things, are key ingredients of the relationship between India and West Asia. India’s long standing policy of non-interference in internal matters of other countries and the apolitical conduct of Indian Diaspora in the region has further provided a boost to India’s reputation in the region.

The presence of a large and prosperous Indian population in the Gulf region is an additional factor other than energy that makes this region important. There are over 7 million Indian citizens living in the region. West Asia accounts for 17.5 per cent of the Indian Diaspora population, but contributes nearly 60 per cent of total remittances to India. Saudi Arabia and UAE, India’s major oil suppliers, are also the destinations of nearly 14 per cent of India’s exports. The security of energy supplies coming from the Persian Gulf is India’s important concern. For these reasons, India has an abiding interest in the security in the gulf, and in the security of the Sea lines of communication (SLOC) i.e. the security of the Straits of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb from where more than 85 per cent of the crude oil from West Asia (Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) is exported to Asian countries like China, India, Japan and South Korea.20 This is the most important oil transit channel in the world, with some 17 million barrels per day (bpd), or about 30 percent of all seaborne-traded oil, passing through in 2013, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). Thus to ensure regular and secure supplies of energy form the region demands India’s marine diplomacy. Accordingly, in recent years the Indian Navy has increased the number of port visits in the region. The Indian Navy also regularly conduct exercises with
navies of several regional countries thereby lending its hand to Indian diplomacy in expanding India’s reach in the region. Securing the supplies of oil and natural gas from West Asia is and will continue to be closely linked with the military security of the region. Another critical challenge that beset the region is the rise of the Islamic State (IS) and the spill-over effects of IS to other countries in the region and the spread of extremism to other parts of the world. Geographical proximity of the region and the spill-over effects of religious radicalism are just few of the reasons why India needs to expand the scope of its engagement in the region.

Under the light of above discussion it can be concluded that energy is central to the India West Asia relationship and is an important part of India’s West Asia policy but it is certainly not the only factor that binds the two. The West Asian region is an inseparable part of India’s foreign policy that serves mutual interest, confronts terrorism, extremism, as well as taps the investment potential. Indian Diaspora which are the source of huge remittances, geographical proximity, cultural linkages, military diplomacy in the Indian Ocean, counter terrorism and combating China’s string of pearls policy in the Indian Ocean are other factors which provide a base to this beautiful relationship. India’s relations with West Asian countries - particularly the major ones, such as Iran, Iraq and Israel - vary from very good to excellent. Apart from China, and perhaps Japan, no major power in the world can claim to have such good relations simultaneously with these three West Asian countries and the GCC countries, many of which are mutually extremely antagonistic to each other. This is a singular achievement of which India can legitimately be very proud. The single major reason for these excellent symbiotic relationships is that non-ideological pragmatism, and mutual advantage and benefit have been the bedrock of India’s policy. India’s approach has been to remain non-intrusive, non-judgmental and non-prescriptive;
India has also strictly abjured taking sides in regional disputes or exhibiting conspicuous partiality amongst regional countries.

Despite being unclear what is the framework of India’s foreign policy towards West Asia, it can be concluded that the country has adopted two principles: first, maintaining India’s energy security, that is, guaranteeing India’s access to its oil and natural gas needs without interruption and at the best prices and terms possible; and second, a continuation of Nehru’s policy, which specifies non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

**Conclusion**

Energy politics which is ruling the world stage since nineties and becoming a hot issue of concern in global relations has also become an important aspect of Indian foreign policy. Today India is deeply concerned about maintaining good relations with its energy partners and building good relations with new partners. But here one thing has to be kept in mind that India’s foreign policy has to seek a balance between its economic concerns and its diplomatic bilateral relations, to come out with concrete solutions for the challenges and problems that India’s energy diplomatic strategies are facing in the sphere of energy politics.

As far as India-West Asia relationship is concerned it has become a self-evident axiom that West Asia and the Gulf are very important to India and affect its security and prosperity directly. If you ask the average Indian, he will tell you that it is important as a source of energy, as a destination for our exports, for the remittances that our 7 million strong Diaspora in the Gulf send home, and for the pull of the holy places of one of the major religions that Indians profess,
Islam. But what is India’s official foreign policy towards the region? It’s a bit tricky question. Unfortunately India doesn’t have a clear West Asia policy as it has, in terms of East Asia.

Today India needs a coherent and dynamic West Asia policy. The sad part of India’s current West Asia policy is that it is as much fragmented as West Asia is. India deals with each and every country of West Asia separately without realizing the need to devise one policy which can work for the whole region, which doesn’t see West Asia in fragments for the purpose of securing our own interests. India’ West Asia policy needs to move ahead of the current buyer seller relationship and make it a more comprehensive one involving complementarity of interests. Here one thing should not be forgotten that if we wish to have benefit from our relations with some country and if that country has really no particular interest or if they think that we have nothing to reciprocate for them, then we cannot expect them to sustain their interest in our country. So, the concept of mutuality of interests is paramount in international relations. Thus complementarity of interests between India and West Asia should become the foundation of India’s West Asia policy if we want this relationship to blossom and flourish is future of our good.

Endnotes

1 Integrated Energy Policy, Report of the Expert Committee, ibid
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61. Rao Nirupama (2011) Foreign Secretary Address on “Maritime Dimensions of India’s Foreign Policy”, organised by National Maritime Foundation, at India Habitat Centre.
Figure 1: Share of Top Five Commodities in India’s Imports (2014-15)

Source: Economic Survey 2016, Government of India

Figure 2: West Asia Oil Export By Destination

Figure 3: India’s Crude Oil Imports (2014-15)

INDIA’S CRUDE OIL IMPORTS

- SAUDI ARABIA: 18%
- IRAQ: 13%
- VENEZUELA: 12%
- KUWAIT: 10%
- NIGERIA: 10%
- UAE: 8%
- IRAN: 6%
- ANGOLA: 4%
- MEXICO: 3%
- OTHERS(32): 16%

Source: Ministry Of Commerce, Government of India

Figure 4: India’s LNG imports (2014-15)

INDIA’S LNG IMPORTS (2014-15)

- QATAR: 82%
- NIGERIA: 7%
- YEMEN: 6%
- OTHERS: 5%

Source: Ministry Of Commerce, Government of India
Figure 5: India’s Energy Imports From West Asia (2014-15)

India's Energy Imports from West Asia (2014-15)

Source: Ministry Of Commerce, Government of India

Table 1: The Energy Mix In India (%)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>COAL</th>
<th>OIL</th>
<th>GAS</th>
<th>HYDROELECTRICITY</th>
<th>NUCLEAR</th>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>PROJECTED</td>
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### TABLE 2: STATEMENTS OF OVERSEAS PROJECTS/ASSETS

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<th>S.NO.</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Name of Project</th>
<th>Participating companies along with P.I.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>AFPC (Onland)</td>
<td>SSPD(Operator) 62.5 - 66.67 %, HES BV 33.33 TO 37.5 %, OVL 60%, IPR 25% (Operator), TOM (15%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Block 24 (onland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Farsi Offshore</td>
<td>OVL 40% (Operator), IOC 40%, OIL 20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Block 8 (onland)</td>
<td>OVL 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>Block 82</td>
<td>Medco Energi - 45% (Operator) Kuwait Energy-25% OIL-15% IOC-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Block 83</td>
<td>Medco Energi - 45% (Operator) Kuwait Energy -25% OIL -15% IOC -15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Petroleum and Natural gas, Government of India.
Table 3: India’s Energy Imports from the West Asian Region (In Us$ Million)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<td>599.46</td>
<td>1,215.37</td>
<td>248.34</td>
<td>219.19</td>
<td>605.89</td>
<td>329.85</td>
<td>359.23</td>
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<td>IRAN</td>
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<td>11,248.63</td>
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<td>15,718.33</td>
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<td>624.70</td>
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<td>15,102.54</td>
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<td>YEMEN</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERCENTAGE OF PERSIAN GULF IMPORTS TO TOTAL IMPORTS</td>
<td>62.93</td>
<td>59.93</td>
<td>58.04</td>
<td>57.53</td>
<td>60.81</td>
<td>58.37</td>
<td>58.66</td>
<td>73.18</td>
<td>74.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry Of Commerce, Government of India