



Chintan
Research
Foundation

SEPTEMBER 2026
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

CHINTAN CHRONICLES

Interview with

**Sir Ian
Blatchford**

What's Inside

**I.N.D.I.A. – Intelligent Networks Driving Industrial Advancement | Post-Presidential Visit:
A Korean Perspective on Nurturing the India–Korea Economic Relationship | India–Bangladesh
Relations: Recalibrating Bilateral Partnership in Times of Transition & Many More**

ABOUT US

Chintan Research Foundation (CRF) is an independent think tank dedicated to shaping policy through rigorous research and thought leadership. With a strong focus on fostering collaboration between policymakers and industry, CRF integrates practical insights into its research and advocacy efforts. It conducts comprehensive research to support informed decision-making and engages with stakeholders through discussions, events, and publications. CRF's research is focused on three core domains – Climate Change & Energy Transition, Economy & Trade, and Geopolitics & Strategic Studies.

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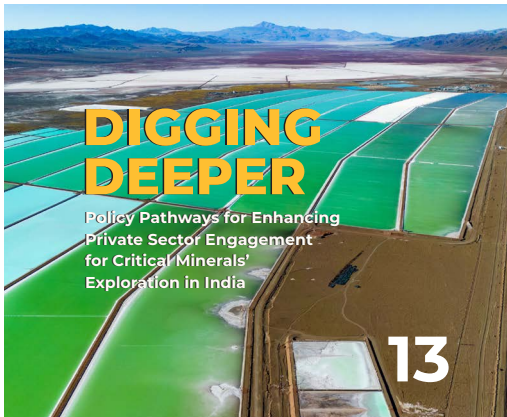
05

President's Message

06

IN CONVERSATION

Sir Ian Blatchford on
Reimagining the Role of
Knowledge Institution



RESEARCH

13

Centre for Climate Change
and Energy Transition

15

Centre for Economy
and Trade

17

Centre for Geopolitics and
Strategic Studies

TABLE OF
CONTENTS

CHINTAN CHRONICLES

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



25

External Engagements

28

Op-Eds

35

Upcoming Events

18

DIALOGUES

I.N.D.I.A. – Intelligent Networks Driving Industrial Advancement

Global South Convening on Clean Technology Minerals & Supply Chains

Defining India's AI North Star: A Strategic Vision for Sustainable AI Leadership

The Contested Indo-Pacific: Economic Security, Energy Transitions and Strategic Rivalries

Post-Presidential Visit: A Korean Perspective on Nurturing the India-Korea Economic Relationship

Navigating Non-Tariff Measures: Strengthening India's Trade Strategy

India-Bangladesh Relations: Recalibrating Bilateral Partnership in Times of Transition



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This edition features an insightful conversation with Sir Ian Blatchford, Director of the Science Museum Group, on the role of museums in shaping public understanding of science, building trust, and connecting societies. His reflections on India's scientific achievements, cultural influence, and UK-India collaboration offer valuable perspectives on how India can more confidently tell its story to the world.

The breadth of our recent engagements reflects issues shaping India's economic and strategic landscape. AI remained a key focus through *Defining India's AI North Star: A Strategic Vision for Sustainable AI Leadership*, and *I.N.D.I.A. – Intelligent Networks Driving Industrial Advancement*, which examined AI's potential to accelerate industrial transformation and advance the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

Our Global South engagement continued through the *Global South Convening on Clean Technology Minerals & Supply Chains* where CRF partnered with the Council for Critical Minerals Development in the Global South, advancing partnerships across the clean technology value chain. Our special talk, *Post-Presidential Visit: A Korean Perspective on Nurturing the India-Korea Economic Relationship*, organised with EGROW, explored opportunities to deepen bilateral economic cooperation.

Looking ahead, our forthcoming events span multilateral, regional, climate, and strategic priorities. The *BRICS Dialogue 2026* will examine BRICS's role as a Global South platform, while our BIMSTEC engagement will explore regional electricity cooperation and energy security. In partnership with the Australian High Commission, *Partners in Green Transition* will bring an Indo-Pacific perspective to climate action ahead of COP31. The *Eastern Himalayan Dialogue* in Kalimpong will bring regional voices into wider development conversations, while our India-ASEAN engagement will examine maritime security, energy, trade, and supply-chain resilience.

These engagements reaffirm CRF's commitment to rigorous research, informed dialogue, and partnerships that turn ideas into action. I hope this edition offers valuable insights into our work and our shared endeavour to advance a more prosperous, resilient, and globally engaged India.

Warm regards,

Shishir Priyadarshi
President, CRF





Sir Ian Blatchford

on Reimagining the Role of Knowledge Institution

In an engaging conversation with CRF, Sir Ian Blatchford, Director and Chief Executive of the Science Museum Group and Director of the Science Museum, shared his insights on how knowledge institutions are adapting to the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly interconnected world.

You began your journey as a historian of science before moving into leadership roles across major cultural institutions and museums. Looking back, what formative experiences shaped your belief that museums are not merely custodians of the past, but active agents shaping public thought and future trajectories?

I have worked in both the private and public sectors, which is unusual for a museum director. There is often heated political debate centred on the relative merits of each, but having worked in both, I am certain that neither is especially special: they have different strengths and weaknesses, but neither has

unique access to the truth. In recent decades, both sectors have struggled to stand as trusted voices in society, with the public suspicious of their motives and track record. What fascinates me is that, in annual public polls, doctors, nurses, and museum curators emerge as the most trusted voices in society, year after year, with very high per cent scores. Why is that? Well, during the COVID-19 pandemic, my own museum was not only collecting stories and objects about the pandemic, but was also serving as a vaccination centre. It was an important statement about confidence in the vaccine, and, in addition, our Science Director was writing regular blogs, which many doctors asked their patients to read as a way

IN CONVERSATION

of addressing the swirling mass of unscientific nonsense circulating online. Museums are seen as the last bastions of old-fashioned analogue values such as research, scholarship, public service, and balanced narratives.

Across the institutions you have led, you have had to constantly balance preservation with public engagement. In today's context, where 'relevance' is often driven by immediacy and accessibility, how do you ensure that institutions remain intellectually rigorous while still meaningfully engaging wider audiences?

I would argue that my museum has a unique prestige and insight when talking about the future. The first visitor I showed around was Bill Gates, and I often quote his comment that the museum offers a fresh insight into the future because our historic collection – the largest and most important science history collection in the world – helps to frame and contextualise innovation. The world faces major challenges in climate, energy, and health, and media coverage often carries a dose of hysteria, as if humanity has never confronted daunting issues before. To a historian, this is nonsense! We pair cutting-edge science with historical precedent. I have a rather disdainful view of seeking 'relevance' because it too often emerges in exhibitions and other museum programmes as a rather unpleasant mixture of patronising and apologetic lecturing to the public.

Global debates around restitution, representation, and decolonisation are becoming more assertive, often intersecting with geopolitics and national identity. What importance do science museums hold in such a context, and do they face such challenges of narratives, and if so, how do you navigate them?

These debates certainly exist, and we are conscious of them. History is not a sealed box of facts, and new stories and insights deserve a welcome, but there is ample evidence to show that

millions of museum visitors worldwide are aware of restitution and decolonisation debates, but their primary focus is on looking to the future. And even on history, my mantra has been: additions, not subtractions. By this I mean that visitors are profoundly interested in learning about people whose contribution to science has been invisible or downplayed in the historical records and making sure that they are restored to history. It feels more inspiring than an overt agenda of subtracting from the achievements of over-criticised and already prominent historical figures.

People sometimes ask me if the legacies of the British Empire impede our museum's work in India, and in over 25 years of working there, I can say that has not been my experience. I have found that what has been more crucial has been our passion for recognising that global power and influence are shifting towards the Global South. We have long been reflecting that in our collecting. Not only is science a truly global endeavour, but some of the greatest issues we face, with climate change and health care being the obvious examples, are inflicting severe impacts beyond the West. I think the key to our work in India has been founded on respect, reciprocity, and excitement about the country's journey.

With the return of great power competition and increasing geopolitical rivalry, do you see museums and cultural institutions playing a more explicit role in soft power diplomacy? Are we, in your view, entering a phase of 'cultural decoupling', and how might that reshape international collaborations in the cultural and knowledge sectors?

In my time as Director, I have noticed a marked increase in the prestige and power of museums. If there is a sense of shifting powers based on defence and growth, there is also a battle for cultural respect. But there is also a unique opportunity for an institution like mine to find some common ground and unifying narratives. For example, we are building the most truly international space

collection of any museum in the world and are regarded by all the major space agencies as an 'honest broker' in that endeavour. We work with, for example, the space enterprises of China, India, Japan, and Korea, and that cuts across any tensions based on economic and military rivalry.

India possesses a deep civilisational and scientific legacy, yet often under-leverages storytelling. From your perspective, what does India do uniquely well in this space, and where is there untapped potential, in particular for organisations such as Chintan Research Foundation, which is set up with the mission of putting India's perspective strongly before the world?

I think India might do more to celebrate its achievements since Independence, especially in science. I really enjoyed a visit to the Prime Ministers' Museum in Delhi because I learnt so much about innovations in energy, computing, and agriculture. One question is whether the Indian Government might adopt a more conscious soft power strategy to promote its achievements and values. India is proud of its self-sufficiency, but as the population and economy power ahead, Chintan might help frame a debate about what this might mean for India's obligations and opportunities as a cultural power too. It is a live

issue for me because my museum is keen to persuade Delhi and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to engage a global audience over the country's space achievements and be less cautious about telling that story. Finally, it is important to explore the potential economic value of the cultural brand too. I attended the first WAVES conference in Mumbai and all the speakers, including the Prime Minister, urged the audience to embrace the storytelling power of an ancient and vibrant country. The argument goes like this: Hollywood recycles the same narratives over and over, and a global audience may now be hungry for Indian myths, history, and perspectives.

Sustainability is emerging as a defining theme for institutions worldwide. From integrating green energy practices to curating public-facing narratives around climate and clean technology, what has been your experience in embedding sustainability within museum ecosystems, given that your museum has one of its kind green energy galleries? What lessons could countries like India draw from these efforts to build such museum ecosystems, especially through private sector collaboration?

Our partnership with Adani Green Energy, who supported our Energy Revolution Gallery at the



IN CONVERSATION

Science Museum, is helping us tell a powerful story about how the world can generate and use energy more sustainably. I think that some of the responses to our alliance with Adani Green taught us a great deal about two things. First, many in the Global North are ill-informed about the energy needs and aspirations of the South. Not only does India need to make a staggering transition, but it also needs to maintain growth and do all of this in probably the most price-sensitive market in the world. Second, India has a large number of conglomerates whose businesses range across fossil fuel extraction and renewable energy, and this duality makes total sense in India but is not understood in Europe; and yet these private companies are the only players with the capital and innovation to underpin India's journey to net zero in 2070.

All the museums in our Group have taken great strides in embedding sustainable practices. We have reduced our Scope 1 and 2 emissions by almost 70 per cent and have introduced new clean energy sources, like installing pioneering ground source heat pumps at our museum in Manchester. Gallery and exhibition installations now minimise waste and prioritise recycling, and we engage with all our suppliers, in everything we buy, to maximise good practice. To be frank, I have heard too many major cultural institutions make some noise on green issues but achieve limited change on the ground. Most of our younger visitors do not praise our work in this field because they just expect it as a sane response to climate change and their own futures.

I have not seen much climate or sustainability storytelling in Indian cultural institutions, which is surprising. Our major alliance in India is with the National Council of Science Museums, and we have done major education and touring exhibition projects with them. My cherished dream would be to forge a ten-year alliance with them, funded by state and private money, to produce displays and exhibitions outlining the problems and opportunities for India. In a country with so many great technology companies, it would be amazing to find a digital content partner too, so that we can reach every city and village.

With growing economic integration and cross-border partnerships, various institutions are increasingly becoming a part of the broader ecosystem of exchange. How do you see museums contributing to this landscape, if any, as enablers of dialogue, innovation, and even economic collaboration between countries?

The United Kingdom (UK) and India are talking about many collaborations well beyond the recent trade agreement. One example is sharing innovations in health care. I believe that in drug and vaccine development, and in artificial intelligence (AI) and data, Indian

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India is proud of its self-sufficiency, but as the population and economy power ahead, Chintan might help frame a debate about what this might mean for India's obligations and opportunities as a cultural power too.

IN CONVERSATION

entrepreneurs could support the transformation of our National Health Service (NHS). There is a crucial role for my museum in arranging a dialogue and as one of the host venues for the Indian Global Forum held in the UK every year. One of my frustrations is that two nations with relative advantages, such as a common knowledge of English, could easily form a glorious museum/education alliance to celebrate innovations between the UK and India. To tell that story beyond our borders would reflect well on both of our countries.

In your opinion, what kind of synergy or collaborations can be built between think tanks working on new ideas and shaping ideals, particularly CRF and the museum ecosystem, to translate research and policy insights into compelling public communication? What specific partnership models would you suggest?

The simple answer is that publication marks step one, and not an end in itself. CRF and my museum have a great web of connections, and the best research needs to be showcased in a range of globally significant events, such as the Raisina Dialogue. The space for digital events has become saturated, and there is no substitute for in-person events when real people meet in real spaces! In the museum sphere, we are members of the key museum alliances in the United States of America (USA), Europe, and Asia, and their gatherings are very influential. We should also consider exchanging skills with, perhaps, CRF researchers and expert museum curators pairing up to work on some projects. It would certainly help my museums to know more about the CRF's forward research plan because that would help to inspire early thinking about storytelling and communication. I say this with some feeling because the Royal Society here in the UK, probably the most venerable scientific body in the world, has sometimes been surprised at the muted response to its excellent reports, and I think the issue is often a recurring one: design the



key messaging and dialogue plan long before the report goes to print, otherwise the vital impact is tagged on at the end of a process.

Leadership in cultural institutions often involves navigating difficult trade-offs between scholarship and spectacle, autonomy and funding, tradition, and reinvention. Could you reflect on a particularly challenging decision that tested these boundaries, and what it revealed about the kind of leadership such institutions require today?

The obvious example is criticism by some activists of our sponsorship alliance with Adani Green Energy, which provided the funding for the Energy Revolution Gallery. Having set out our position publicly, we held fast to the partnership because we maintained a firm belief in the ability of the private sector to deliver change, but also such strong networks in India that we were confident that the Global South perspective would matter more in the long term. I think it is crucial for cultural leadership to be able to

IN CONVERSATION

distinguish between social media noise and real issues, and stand undaunted by controversy if our principles are solid. I have been amazed by how many leaders in climate and in business sent supportive messages in private about our decisions whilst not wanting to comment publicly. Another defining moment was giving a lecture to 300 science students at Delhi University and mentioning some of the criticism we had received, and their reaction ranged from incomprehension to annoyance given their perception that India has every right to economic growth. They understood that the pathway was bound to be complicated, and it was also a timely reminder that any leader should avoid the 'all young people think' trap because I found those students ambitious, energetic, and certain that they could shape a great future for their country. To be frank, I felt that some of the critics would do well to spend some time in India and hear a fresh perspective.

Perhaps the most important aspect of leadership is thinking for ourselves and retaining editorial independence, and this is vital if we are to preserve the public's trust. This can mean turning down funding. We might easily raise huge sums for exhibitions on AI, but the companies who would finance these would expect an evangelical, unquestioning approach that is misaligned with what our visitors want: calm information, not hype. I used to be a banker, so I celebrate private enterprise, but I am not dazzled by it. I know that we will reach millions, at home and in India, if we provide a 'safe space' for citizens to encounter innovation.

What message or advice would you like to share with our young researchers? Additionally, what do you see as the two or three key priorities for CRF in the coming years?

My advice to researchers is to remember that one influential audience comprises time-poor, stressed-out political and business leaders who are beset by the competing and noisy demands

of endless stakeholders. What they want from research institutes is insightful ideas with practical applications, written with some degree of political nous. There has been a big debate in the USA and UK about how some researchers have retreated from the pragmatic in recent years. If you talk to social scientists from a grand old generation that is now long retired, they lament that in the 'old days' their research made useful recommendations, whereas too many papers now wage obscurantist battles about linguistics. Over the years, I have seen some research leaders move into political careers, and often they have not thrived because it is easy to underestimate how much a political life requires a special kind of agility and skill.

I am exaggerating to make a point, but before pressing send on your research paper, engage in a little thought experiment, and imagine you are the Chief of Staff to a shockingly busy minister, exhausted by media appearances and international travel. What are they looking for? Research that will bring real change and joy!

I would name just one priority. Whilst the world fixes its attention on the current American–Chinese rivalry, India has the time to ask itself some bold questions. Before long, India could become the largest economy in the world. What leadership obligations might this bring, and is the long-cherished 'non-aligned' mindset still fit for purpose in that context? For example, might India support the economic vibrancy of Africa, taking a different approach to the Chinese 'Belt and Road' strategy? For instance, through India's leadership in the Global Solar Alliance, in spreading excellent and affordable health care, or in a UK–India science education ambition on the continent?

I am confident that CRF can inject great value and imagination into these fundamental questions.

Deeksha Verma, Associate Consultant, Research and Communications, at the Centre for Climate Change and Energy Transition (CCET), CRF opened the discussion by exploring how extreme heat could be understood as a globally coordinated adaptation challenge rather than a purely domestic one. Drawing on global and Indian evidence, she showed highlighted how mitigation has built extensive international institutions and binding commitments over three decades, while adaptation, and heat adaptation specifically, has not followed the same trajectory. The discussion also considered how identical temperatures produce unequal risk depending on humidity, urban form, income, and institutional preparedness. Mr Mandar S Joshi and Dr Pooja Sehbag participated as discussants, and Dr Debajit Palit conducted the final review.



Global Heat Risk and the Case for Coordinated Adaptation

31 July 2026



Currency Asymmetry Shaping Global Economy

7 August 2026

Utsav Nayak, Research Analyst, Centre for Economy and Trade (CET), CRF discussed his research on the relationship between monetary power, economic growth, exchange rates, and export sophistication. Using data from 11 countries during 2002–2026, he noted that monetary power has no significant direct relationship with GDP growth after accounting for country differences and global shocks. The discussion also highlighted that currency depreciation does not necessarily increase export sophistication, measured through the Economic Complexity Index. Persistent depreciation may instead create a ‘depreciation trap’ by raising import costs, inflation, foreign-currency debt burdens, and limiting investment. The discussion suggested that monetary dominance and depreciation are not reliable standalone development strategies; technological capability, institutions, investment, and productive capacity are more important for long-term economic upgrading.



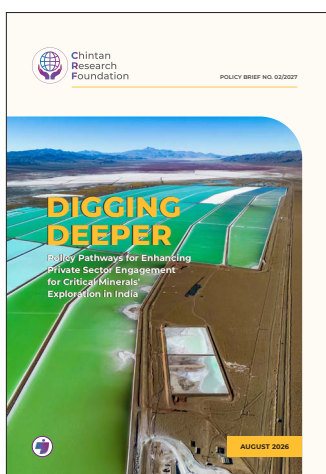
By Unnati Patnaik
Research Intern



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Waste to Watts and Beyond: Turning India's Waste Crisis into an Energy Security Opportunity

India generates nearly 62 million tonnes of municipal solid waste annually, with volumes expected to rise sharply, while significant quantities remain uncollected or poorly treated. This brief examines whether India's municipal waste streams are suitable for promoted waste-to-energy technologies. The research assesses challenges affecting waste availability and suitability as feedstock for waste-to-energy systems. It adopts a mixed-methods approach combining CPCB datasets, city-level waste characterisation studies, and consultations with policy researchers, practitioners, and experts, focusing on waste composition, collection and segregation, municipal capacity, and scheme implementation. The study identifies four bottlenecks: inadequate region-specific waste composition data, weak segregation and collection systems, limited municipal capacity, and fragmented implementation. Consequently, waste reaching treatment facilities often differs from the feedstock requirements of conversion technologies. The paper concludes that expanding waste-to-energy capacity alone cannot address India's municipal waste challenge. Effective waste-to-energy systems require the correct sequencing



By Meheli Roy Choudhury
Research Associate



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Digging Deeper: Policy Pathways for Enhancing Private Sector Engagement for Critical Minerals' Exploration in India

This brief examines the supply-chain risks facing India's clean energy transition and Viksit Bharat vision due to dependence on imported critical minerals, despite significant domestic geological potential. It argues for a shift from state-led exploration towards an investment-driven ecosystem with stronger private sector participation. It identifies barriers to private investment and draws on international best practices to propose reforms, including addressing an unfavourable risk-reward framework, regulatory delays, inadequate geological data, weak intellectual property protection, and shortages of specialised skills and expertise. The objective is to create a more attractive investment environment. The analysis finds that private participation is constrained by a weak junior mining ecosystem, prolonged regulatory clearances, and inadequate geological information. The brief recommends fiscal risk-sharing, internationally recognised mineral reporting standards, demand assurance through preferential domestic procurement, streamlined regulation, technological integration, and stronger domestic refining and recycling capabilities.



By Shagun Mangain
Research Analyst

By Dr Akanksha Jain
Research Associate



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Reimagining India's Energy Transition: The Role of Coal-to-Chemicals and Hydrogen Pathways

This brief examines India's energy transition amid disruptions in West Asia, focusing on balancing decarbonisation, energy security, and industrial competitiveness. Coal gasification offers a pathway to address these vulnerabilities. The brief evaluates coal gasification as part of India's energy and industrial transition, drawing on stakeholder insights and secondary literature. It considers techno-economic viability, lifecycle emissions, industrial value creation, energy security, import substitution, and long-term decarbonisation to identify opportunities, constraints, and policy. Coal gasification can shift coal from direct combustion to a feedstock for producing methanol, hydrogen, ammonia, dimethyl ether, and monoethylene glycol. Opportunities are strongest where domestic demand, import dependence, technological readiness, and competitiveness are high. Clustering can improve efficiency through shared utilities, water recycling, and carbon transport infrastructure. The brief concludes that coal gasification should complement renewable energy as a strategic pathway for producing critical molecules domestically. Its sustainability depends on indigenous technology, lifecycle emissions assessment, and large-scale CCUS. Policymakers should establish a national CCUS roadmap and technology-neutral frameworks to support net-zero objectives.



By Anika Sahay
Research Intern



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LiFE in a... Metro: Why Cities Need Both Infrastructure and Sustainable Behaviour

This paper analyses how Mission LiFE's push for sustainable behaviour in Delhi cannot succeed through individual Sustainable Urban Behaviour (SUB) alone. By comparing contrasting neighbourhoods, such as Pitampura and Ajmeri Gate, the paper shows how access to green space, water, and infrastructure shapes residents' ability to adopt sustainable habits. The paper uses Swachh Bharat to demonstrate that lasting behavioural change requires infrastructure and institutional follow-through, rather than relying solely on awareness campaigns. This is particularly important given the uneven distribution of resources across Delhi, which affects the extent to which residents can realistically adopt sustainable practices. For Mission LiFE to foster lasting sustainability, individual behavioural changes must be paired with equitable urban planning, robust municipal infrastructure, and strong institutional support.



By Abhijit Mukhopadhyay
Senior Research Consultant

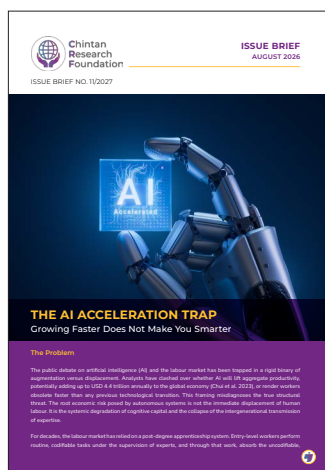
By Neha Varshney
Research Intern



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High Expectations from India-UK CETA: A Reality Check

This paper analyses the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which came into force on 15 July 2026, marking a milestone for market access and deeper economic integration between the two economies. It uses a composite-score methodology for HS 2-digit chapters, based on market share, CAGR, and share gain to identify the sectors most likely to benefit from CETA. The study analyses bilateral trade data from 2021–2025 and uses trade indicators, including the Trade Intensity Index and Revealed Comparative Advantage, to identify product lines at the HS 4-digit level with the greatest potential under CETA through the WITS SMART partial equilibrium model. The findings show that engineering and capital goods, energy and fuels, pharmaceuticals and chemicals, textiles and apparel, and iron and steel emerge as India's leading export sectors, while gems and jewellery, engineering goods, and beverages dominate UK exports to India. The paper concludes that effective utilisation of CETA is not driven by tariff reduction alone and, therefore, tariff reductions will not ensure export growth.



By Nishit Patil
Research Analyst



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The AI Acceleration Trap: Growing Faster Does Not Make You Smarter

This brief analyses how artificial intelligence threatens cognitive capital by disrupting the apprenticeship pipeline through the automation of entry-level tasks. Rather than focusing primarily on job displacement, it examines how reduced opportunities for early-career learning may weaken the production of future experts. The brief uses an overlapping generations economic framework and a dynamic mathematical model of knowledge accumulation to examine this process. The analysis demonstrates that maintaining collective knowledge requires continuous human cognitive effort to offset natural decay, while tacit knowledge remains fundamentally experiential. Early labour-market data showing sharp declines in junior hiring further indicates that AI substitution is disrupting this learning process and accelerating geometric knowledge decay. The brief concludes that unguided automation risks producing a fragile steady state of knowledge collapse. It recommends using AI as an augmenting tool and establishing robust reskilling structures to preserve critical human judgement and sustain the accumulation of expertise.



By Utsav Nayak
Research Analyst



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Why Europe's Capital Markets Remain Fragmented: Political Economy and Structural Barriers

The brief analyses the incomplete integration of Europe's Capital Markets Union (CMU), arguing that fragmentation stems from structural political economy rather than regulatory insufficiency. Heterogeneity across insolvency, securities, and tax regimes increases cross-border investment costs, while decentralised supervision and national interests impede harmonisation. The brief examines how behavioural factors, including fragmented pension systems, persistent home bias, and limited retail participation, constrain capital market depth and liquidity. The analysis finds that incremental reforms have improved disclosure, listing rules, and market access but have not addressed the institutional foundations of fragmentation. This brief contends that durable integration requires stronger European Union (EU)-level supervision through an empowered European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), deeper insolvency and tax harmonisation, pension reform, and recognition of the political trade-offs inherent in redistributing financial activity. It concludes that completing the CMU is a strategic prerequisite for Europe's competitiveness, innovation capacity, and global financial influence.



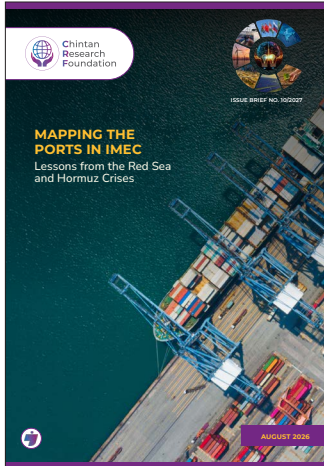
By Ishita Sharma
Research Intern



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The WTO's Moratorium on Electronic Transmissions Needs More Than Yet Another Extension

This opinion column analyses the WTO's long-standing moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions and how a temporary arrangement introduced in 1998 has persisted without resolving fundamental questions surrounding digital trade. The analysis examines unresolved questions concerning the definition and legal classification of electronic transmissions, the application of customs concepts to digital transactions, and the relationship between the moratorium and domestic measures. It also considers growing divergence in regional and bilateral trade agreements and the implications for businesses and policymakers. It is found that continuity has increasingly substituted for resolution, creating uncertainty over scope, valuation, taxation, regulation, and policy space. The lapse of the moratorium at MC14, alongside interim arrangements adopted by members, highlights the persistence of this unresolved framework. It argues that future discussions should move beyond repeatedly extending temporary arrangements towards clearer multilateral rules addressing these foundational questions and providing greater certainty for digital trade.



By **Lakshmi Kusuma Kotha**
Research Analyst



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Mapping the Ports in IMEC: Lessons from the Red Sea and Hormuz Crises

This brief analyses the strategic vulnerabilities created by dependence on critical maritime chokepoints, particularly the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea (Bab el-Mandeb and Suez Canal), where recent disruptions have highlighted risks to global trade. Against this backdrop, the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) has gained attention as a potential alternative for enhancing global trade resilience. The analysis examines how maritime crises reshape trade networks, port hierarchies, and connectivity patterns, while assessing IMEC's strategic significance. It identifies ports as the backbone of the corridor and critical nodes determining its efficiency and viability. The brief finds that, while IMEC offers opportunities to diversify trade and reduce vulnerabilities, challenges remain, including capacity constraints at key ports, weak overland linkages, political uncertainties, and coordination gaps. However, growing diplomatic momentum, initiatives such as the IMEC Ports Club, and commercial cooperation create prospects for stronger integration. It concludes that strengthening port capacity, connectivity, security, and network redundancy will be essential for IMEC's long-term success and resilience.



By **Tanya Mittal**
Research Intern

By **Dr Cchavi Vasisht**
Associate Fellow

What India Can Learn from South Africa's Women in Politics

This opinion column analyses why women's strong political participation does not translate into equal representation in higher political offices, comparing India and South Africa. While South Africa has reached nearly 45 per cent women's representation in Parliament through proportional representation, party commitments and institutional mechanisms, India remains at 13.6 per cent in the Lok Sabha, despite women making up around 46 per cent of rural elected representatives. The findings indicate that India needs a stronger pipeline from grassroots leadership to state and national politics, greater representation of women in winnable constituencies, and political representation that reflects social diversity. The paper concludes that reservation alone is insufficient. Party structures, resources, and political opportunities must enable women to build lasting careers in politics and translate strong participation into more equal representation in higher offices.



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I.N.D.I.A. – Intelligent Networks Driving Industrial Advancement

Roundtable Discussion | 27 July 2026 | The Ambassador, New Delhi



India's manufacturing sector has matured significantly through initiatives such as Make in India, the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, and a growing ecosystem of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). However, as we look towards the target of Viksit Bharat 2047, steady and incremental growth is no longer sufficient. To achieve the status of a fully developed economy, a profound transformation is required in industrial productivity, precision, and global competitiveness.

Hosted under Chatham House rules, the roundtable was convened to understand how deploying artificial intelligence (AI) at scale across India's industrial sector could compress developmental timelines that once took decades into years. The objective was to move beyond aspiration and engage directly with the concrete frameworks required to embed AI systematically into India's industrial base. Participants engaged on these frameworks, with the resulting policy brief to be shared with relevant industry stakeholders.

The primary outcome of the roundtable was the formulation of concrete, cross sectoral policy recommendations designed to systematically integrate AI into India's industrial base. These actionable strategies, which include establishing an Industrial AI Readiness Score for MSMEs and building a shared Industrial AI Commons, have been converted into an actionable policy brief and aim to drive the massive productivity and innovation leaps required to achieve a \$30 trillion economy by 2047

Global South Convening on Clean Technology Minerals & Supply Chains

Event | 7 August 2026 | Le Meridien, New Delhi

CRF released a policy brief, authored by Meheli Roy Choudhury, titled 'Digging Deeper: Policy Pathways for Enhancing Private Sector Engagement in Critical Mineral Exploration'. We also facilitated a visit by delegates to Inverted, a start-up and manufacturer of electric vehicle batteries. The convening, hosted by the Council for Critical Minerals Development in the Global South, gathered over a hundred delegates, including representatives from governments, investment agencies, industry, and regional organisations across Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America, to engage in dialogue and build partnerships spanning the full clean technology value chain, from minerals exploration and processing to clean technology manufacturing.

Discussions sought to fill a critical gap by centring Global South priorities, enabling policy exchange, supporting partnership building focused on investment, and advancing common priorities on trade, investment, and technology.

The discussions highlighted several priority areas for action, including improving access to finance for early-stage exploration, enhancing regulatory certainty, strengthening local processing and manufacturing capabilities, and fostering greater collaboration between governments, industry, and investors.



Defining India's AI North Star: A Strategic Vision for Sustainable AI Leadership

Roundtable Discussion | 11 August 2026 | CRF, New Delhi



CRF, in collaboration with The Dialogue, organised a roundtable to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can help drive economic growth, improve public service delivery, and strengthen India's global competitiveness, while also navigating complex questions around technological sovereignty, resource constraints, and sustainability. Against this backdrop, the roundtable explored what should constitute India's long-term strategic vision, or North Star, for AI.

The roundtable deliberated on the pathways required to achieve these ambitions sustainably. By bringing together perspectives from government, industry, academia, and civil society, the session aimed to develop a shared understanding of the policy, institutional, and ecosystem interventions needed to build a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready AI ecosystem that delivers long-term value for India.

The roundtable examined how AI can help drive India's economic growth by strengthening public service delivery, in the process enhancing the nation's global competitiveness. Discussions focused on defining India's long-term strategic "North Star" for AI while addressing technological sovereignty, resource constraints, and sustainability. Stakeholders from government, industry, academia, and civil society highlighted the policy, institutional, and ecosystem interventions needed to build a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready AI ecosystem.

The Contested Indo-Pacific: Economic Security, Energy Transitions and Strategic Rivalries

Special Talk | 12 August 2026 | CRF, New Delhi

CRF hosted a guest lecture with Dr Amit Gupta, Senior Advisor, Forum of Federations, Ottawa, examining the contested Indo-Pacific, with a focus on economic security, energy transitions, and strategic rivalries.

Dr Gupta placed US–China rivalry at the centre of the emerging regional order. He argued that economic interdependence persists despite strategic competition, while the technological contest may ultimately be determined less by superiority than by accessibility, affordability, and global adoption. He highlighted China's advances in artificial intelligence, semiconductors, electric vehicles, drones, robotics, and research, alongside growing constraints on Western military reach and the erosion of American soft power.

The discussion characterised the international system as economically bipolar, militarily shaped by contextual deterrence, and no longer unipolar. It also examined China's military preparedness, India's leadership of the Global South, the future of multilateral institutions, maritime security, Afghanistan, and strategic chokepoints.

The principal takeaway for India was the need to strengthen indigenous capabilities, invest more deeply in science and engineering, secure meaningful technological partnerships, and exercise strategic patience while navigating an increasingly contested and fluid international order.



Post-Presidential Visit: A Korean Perspective on Nurturing the India–Korea Economic Relationship

Special Talk | 17 August 2026 | IIC Annexe New Delhi



In association with EGROW, CRF hosted a Special Talk by Professor Wongi Choe, Professor of Indo-Pacific Studies, Korea National Diplomatic Academy (KNDA), Seoul; Founding Head, Center for ASEAN–India Studies, KNDA (2018–2025); and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea. The talk covered the growing Special Strategic Partnership between India and the Republic of Korea, which now includes cooperation in trade, investments, technology, manufacturing, infrastructure, innovation, and economic security. The recent Presidential visit has added further momentum to bilateral engagement. The talk brought together diplomats, policymakers,

academics, industry representatives, and other stakeholders for an informed discussion on the evolving India–Korea economic relationship.

The talk offered a Korean perspective on the political and diplomatic dimensions shaping economic cooperation, with a special focus on identifying opportunities to deepen bilateral engagement. The discussion also explored emerging areas of mutual interest and identified key priorities for taking the economic partnership forward.

Navigating Non-Tariff Measures: Strengthening India's Trade Strategy

Exclusive Interaction | 20 August 2026 | CRF, New Delhi

Roundtable on Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) examined why India struggles to convert market access into actual export growth, even as tariffs come down. A measure becomes a genuine barrier only when it cannot be met; NTMs accumulate over time as a stock, unlike tariffs, which are a flow.

Several themes recurred. India lacks a cohesive strategy on technical regulations – Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)/Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) chapters get signed into Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) but are never operationalised sector-by-sector. Domestic standards are often process-based rather than product-based, creating certification inconsistencies across identical Harmonized System (HS) codes. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) face compounding disadvantages: insufficient financial and technical support, no accessible single-window information portal, and consultants who exploit government opacity due to a lack of live regulatory data.

Concrete recommendations included a national NTM information dashboard, pre-vetted Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) templates for future negotiations, standardisation attachés in key missions, and low-cost carbon-accounting software for Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) compliance. Debate surfaced over whether foreign investment helps MSMEs meet global standards or whether all exporters should meet a uniform high bar regardless of firm size.

The discussion closed on MRAs: their real purpose is securing acceptance of India's test reports abroad, which ultimately requires either standards harmonisation or formal recognition of India's conformity-assessment bodies – highlighting a persistent structural gap.



India–Bangladesh Relations: Recalibrating Bilateral Partnership in Times of Transition

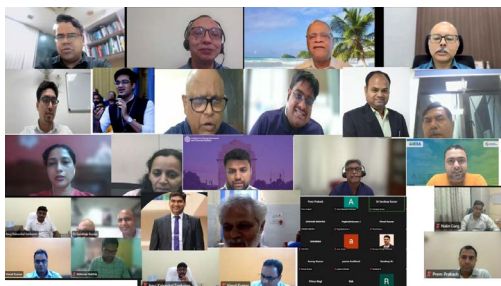
Exclusive Interaction | 21 August 2026 | CRF, New Delhi



CRF convened a closed-door roundtable discussion on India–Bangladesh relations, bringing together scholars, practitioners, academics, policymakers, and members of India's strategic and defence community to examine the evolving and recalibrated contours of New Delhi's engagement with Dhaka. The session featured expert remarks by Amb. Anil Trigunayat, Maj Gen. J.S. Nanda, Prof. Sreeradha Datta, Dr Smruti Pattanaik, Brig. Rahul Bhonsle, Prof. Medha Bisht, Nayanima Basu, Dr Dhrubajyoti Bhattacharjee, and Jayanta Roy Chowdhury.

The discussion examined Bangladesh's evolving domestic political landscape, as the country marks two years since the removal of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from power. The roundtable underlined the need for a pragmatic, broad-based, and forward-looking approach to India–Bangladesh relations, with an emphasis on strengthening trust, sustaining cooperation, and engaging with diverse political and social constituencies in Bangladesh.

Through this discussion, CRF sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of Bangladesh's ongoing political transition and its implications for India's neighbourhood policy.



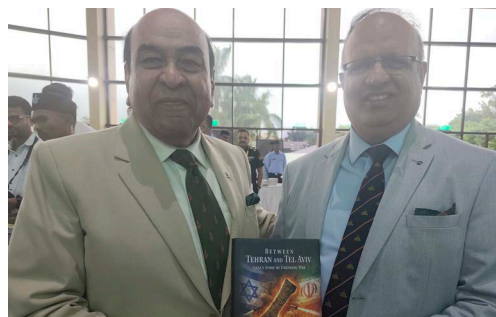
Dr Debajit Palit delivered an online lecture at NTPC School of Business (NSB) on 'Decarbonisation without Disruption: India's Roadmap towards Energy Independence', explaining the need for a systemic energy transition in India and advocating a renewable phase-in approach.

Dr Debajit Palit delivered the keynote address at the International Symposium on 'Governing the Climate Crisis and Just Transitions', organised by TERI, University of Leeds, Krea University, and FLAME University. He presented context-specific decarbonisation models for Global South countries.



Col Rajeev Agarwal (Retd) participated in a closeddoor roundtable discussion organised by India Foundation on 'India and the Gulf: Evolving a New Doctrine'. The discussion focused on options for India to secure its national interests amid the West Asia conflict and highlighted the need for a coherent Gulf doctrine that accounts for regional risks, Arab Gulf anxieties, Iran's position on the Strait of Hormuz, Israel's confrontation with Tehran and American power.

Col Rajeev Agarwal (Retd) presented his monograph, *Between Tehran and Tel Aviv: Gaza's Story of Unending War*, to the Hon. Governor of Bihar, Shri Syed Ata Hasnain, who was pleased to receive a copy of the monograph.



Dr Debajit Palit represented CRF at the Business Today Infrastructure Summit, where he shared perspectives on 'Energy Security in an Uncertain World' and emphasised the electrons-first pathway for India's decarbonisation strategy, advocating 'electrons over molecules' through electrification of transport, industry, and other end uses.

Dr Debajit Palit was interviewed by ANI News on the Khavda Renewable Energy Park Project. He noted that Khavda has a planned capacity of 30 GW, while the Adani Group aims for 50 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030 – 10% of India's targeted 500 GW. With around 20 GW already supplying green electricity to India's grid, he highlighted the project's role in expanding clean electricity generation.



Col Rajeev Agarwal (Retd) participated in a Hindi podcast with Smita Sharma on the Board of Peace and Gaza, bringing his expert commentary in his lucid and sharp style to one of India's most widely spoken languages.



Col Rajeev Agarwal (Retd) participated in a panel discussion on the theme 'Bharat Ahead' on the popular YouTube channel, Gunner Shot, with Lt. Gen. P.R. Shankar (Retd) and Gen. Abhay Dayal.

Dr Debajit Palit participated in a fireside chat at the Republic TV Infrastructure & Realty Summit on 'Powering Urban Infrastructure'.



Dr Debajit Palit delivered an online class as part of a live interactive session on 'Electricity Sector for Energy Transition', a course by FSR Global. He discussed planning distribution networks, electricity tariff design and revenue recovery, and alternatives to on-grid electricity, particularly mini-grids, with more than 40 participants from across countries.

Col Rajeev Agarwal (Retd) delivered a talk on 'Changing Strategic Landscape of Gulf Security and Implications for India' for foreign officers attending the Naval Higher Command Course at the Naval War College, Goa.



News Article ©

Iran Looks to Trump Friend for Support as US War Intensifies



Col Rajeev Agarwal (Retd) was quoted extensively in a Newsweek article by Tom O'Connor, titled 'Iran Looks to Trump Friend for Support as US War Intensifies'.



Dr Monish Tourangbam participated in and spoke at a closed-door roundtable on 'US–China Relations and Implications for India', hosted by CCAS in Chandigarh. The discussions examined China's evolving domestic political and economic dynamics and their impact on its external behaviour. His intervention focused on US–China competition and India's strategic choices.

Dr Cchavi Vasisht was featured on The Nationalist View discussing her co-edited book, *Perspectives From and Within India and its Neighborhood*. The conversation addressed India's evolving regional policy, China's growing regional footprint, project delivery gaps, connectivity, youth engagement, and political shifts across Nepal, Bangladesh, & Myanmar.



Omkar Dhanke participated in the talk 'Nuclear Renaissance: The Opportunities and Challenges', delivered by Prof. M. Sai Baba and organised by CAPSS. The talk examined opportunities and challenges in India's nuclear power sector following the SHANTI Act, 2025, highlighting a skilled workforce, safety-first culture, assured fuel supply, and public acceptance as key levers for achieving the 100 GW target.

Dr Bidisha Bhattacharya spoke with Montek Singh Ahluwalia, former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, on India's widening current account deficit, rupee stability, the path to 8% growth, and Tamil Nadu's fiscal turnaround.



The Indian EXPRESS **Suicide blast at Swat peace rally: The many layers of violence in Pakistan province**

The bombing incident in Swat Valley on Sunday has drawn attention to the anti-militant rallies held in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which often gather thousands of protesters to demand peace and stability from the government.

Written by: **Tabish Shams** 5 min read New Delhi Aug 5, 2025 9:31 PM IST



Dr Anchita Borthakur was quoted in the article titled 'Suicide blast at Swat peace rally: The many layers of violence in Pakistan province' in The Indian Express.

Mandar S Joshi participated as a discussant in the roundtable 'From Risk to Resilience: Strengthening India's Power Systems', organised by Climate Policy Initiative (CPI). The discussion focused on mainstreaming resilience into planning, regulation and procurement, and adopting a system-wide approach to energy security.





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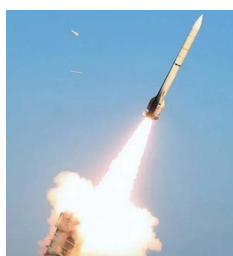


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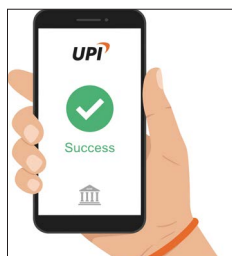
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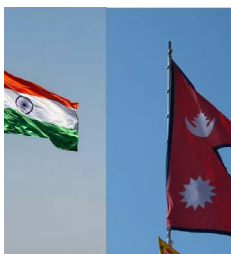
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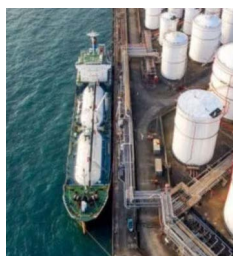
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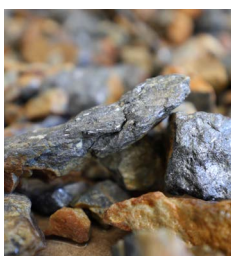
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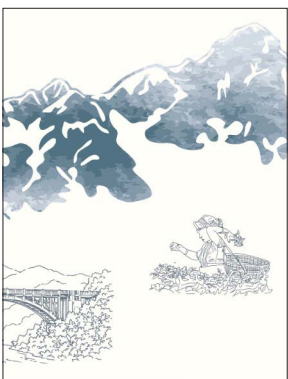
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Partners in Green Transition: Advancing Ambition, Action and Partnerships for COP31

Event | 23 September 2026 | The Claridges, New Delhi

CRF, in collaboration with the Australian High Commission, is organising a one-day COP symposium to foster dialogue on emerging climate and energy transition priorities relevant to the broader Indo-Pacific region and beyond. The symposium will serve as a strategic platform to explore opportunities for collaboration in the lead-up to the 31st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (COP31) and contribute to discussions on implementation-oriented climate action, with participants exploring opportunities for collaboration and advancing implementation-oriented climate action.



Eastern Himalayan Dialogue@2026: The Eastern Himalayas: Towards a Strategic, Resilient, and Inclusive Future

Policy Dialogue | 28 September 2026 | Kalimpong

The Eastern Himalayan Dialogue 2026, convened by the Chintan Research Foundation and the Eastern Himalayan Center for Public Policy in Kalimpong, will bring together policymakers, experts, industry, civil society, and local communities to examine the region's strategic, developmental, environmental, and governance priorities. Focusing on connectivity, economic opportunities, climate resilience, and institution-building, the Dialogue will align regional aspirations with national priorities. It aims to generate practical policy recommendations, strengthen stakeholder networks, and mainstream the Eastern Himalayas within India's development and strategic discourse.



Strengthening India-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Conference | 30 September 2026 | India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

The conference aims to examine vulnerabilities in critical maritime chokepoints and their impact on India-ASEAN trade and energy security. It will explore lessons from the Strait of Hormuz crisis for the Malacca Strait and the wider Indo-Pacific maritime domain, alongside supply chain resilience, energy diversification, and the effectiveness of existing regional mechanisms in responding to maritime disruptions. Bringing together policymakers, industry stakeholders, and strategic experts from India and ASEAN countries, the dialogue will focus on identifying practical avenues for cooperation, strengthening crisis preparedness, and reinforcing a rules-based maritime order.



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