



# COLABA

## CONVERSATION

CREATIVITY, COMMUNITY &  
COMMERCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

2021  
RAPPORTEURS'  
REPORT



महाराष्ट्र शासन



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# INTRODUCTION



**AKSHAY MATHUR**

Director, Observer Research Foundation  
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On 2 February 2021, Observer Research Foundation (ORF), in collaboration with the Government of Maharashtra, launched ‘Colaba Conversation’—Mumbai’s signature forum for discussing international policy issues affecting the city, the nation, and the world.

Held over two days and with 20 sessions of panels, conversations, and keynotes, the conference saw speakers from over 20 countries deliberate on issues of global cooperation. In keeping with ORF’s gender-first policy, 34 women experts comprised more than half of the 65 speakers from across the world. Participants



included leaders from government, industry, media and civil society, and they deconstructed and debated the key themes in politics and policies that will be vital to the emergence of a new global order.

The conference theme—‘Creativity, Commerce and Communities in the Indo-Pacific’—was motivated by the growing importance of the region. The Indo-Pacific has now replaced the Asia-Pacific as the world’s primary theatre of geopolitics and geoeconomics, making India a primary stakeholder on strategic issues of the region.

Mumbai’s thriving international business centre, creative ecosystem and diverse communities made it an ideal venue for discussing emerging governance issues facing the global community. Named after ‘Kulaba’, one of the seven islands that created the archipelago of Mumbai, the Colaba Conversation served as a medium for multi-stakeholder engagement and dialogue.

Against the backdrop of an increasingly chaotic and contested world order, the discussions focused on globalised cities, green finance, digital governance, and para-diplomacy, with a particular cross-cutting focus on geoeconomics. Of course, this year, all conversations took place in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The focus on para-diplomacy explored the role of sub-national leaders and governments in shaping global developments by directly seeking perspectives from leaders on the changing role of states and cities in global, national and regional policymaking. A key takeaway from the discussions was that international coordination between cities has been catalysed because of the cooperation on climate adaptation and

sustainability. This cooperation has provided new impetus for cities and sub-regions to engage with and learn from each other.

The focus on global cities examined how city governance, city planning, the allocation of resources, investments and financing, and gender-sensitive budgeting are being integrated with community engagement to build back not only better but together. The conversations also discussed how coastal cities are being designed and funded in the current geopolitical and geoeconomics context and whether there is a need for establishing a global policymaking forum for cities.

The focus on green finance explored the possibility of India defining its own ‘new green deal’. There are lessons that India can learn from other global cities. Mumbai’s application and admission to C-40, a global forum for cities working on sustainability, illustrates that cities can play a role in mitigation and adaptation in the run-up to COP-26. There are many global efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. But the conversations reminded us that much more needs to be done for the conservation of scarce and natural resources. Indeed, conservation is critical to overcoming the climate threat, but it is increasingly being left out in the global climate discourse.

The focus on digital governance explored the need to regulate new technologies and the role of digital multinationals in ensuring technology is human-centric and accountable, and creates livelihoods for workers. As the conversation progressed, it became clear that there is a demand for some form of regulatory control—even government supervision—on the new technologies and initiatives related



to digitalisation. There is a global concern of widespread disruption and also a yearning that the new digital technologies be made available and accessible to all.

Besides the four pillar themes, the dialogue had sessions on geoeconomics, especially to explore the role of Mumbai compared to other financial centres in the region, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai and Shanghai. Mumbai's rise in the Indo-Pacific region is intrinsically tied to India's economic rise. Therefore, the rise of Mumbai's global appeal is dependent on how intricately and effectively the central, state and city governments work with each other to put the hardware and software in place to attract talent, capital and technology. The city needs to capitalise on and channel the finances, technology and talent that are available in increasing measures. Sessions on trade, globalisation and multilateralism reiterated this guidance by calling for India to engage

globally on economic issues with more fortitude and clarity. A conversation on the Arabian Sea with experts from the Gulf and East Africa, and a similar conversation on the Indo-Pacific with experts from the US, Australia, Japan and China, helped frame the importance of India, particularly Mumbai, in the geopolitics and geoeconomics of the region.

At the end, it became clear that rethinking a new global governance architecture will need both short-term responses guided by the evolving nature of the pandemic, and long-term ones that will be influenced more by fundamental shifts in global affairs.

We hope that the Colaba Conversation will continue to be a platform through which these developments are monitored by the international community.







## SPEAKERS



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**ELENI KOUNALAKIS**  
Lieutenant Governor,  
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**THERESA SCHOPPER**  
Minister of State, Ministry  
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Mayor, Christchurch,  
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## MODERATOR



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## INAUGURAL SESSION

# THE CITY, THE STATE AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

*Kashish Parpiani*

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a belated acknowledgment of the significance of cities in comprehensive disaster response strategies. Under the 'new normal' of increased mobilisation towards sustaining community tracing and social distancing guidelines, the oft-overlooked agency of local authorities has returned to the fore. Although previous disasters, such as terror attacks and climate change-related eventualities, underscored the relevance of local mobilisation, their temporospatial characteristic would eventually mean a return to deferring to federal mandates. But the prolonged search for an effective COVID-19 vaccine has meant social

## WELCOME REMARKS



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## INAUGURAL ADDRESS



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mobilisation efforts are the only credible path to stemming the virus' spread. Even as vaccination efforts now gather steam, cities and their local administrative bodies will remain at the forefront of the protracted fight against the pandemic.

In noting the criticality of local mobilisation towards “disciplined and determined” contact-tracing efforts, Uddhav Thackeray cited the global recognition received by Dharavi—a densely-populated ghetto in Mumbai known for its constricted bylanes, use of community toilets, and small-scale production units of utility goods. Similarly, in noting Christchurch’s work on expediting equitable post-pandemic recovery, Lianne Dalziel argued, “It is at the city level where local relationships and partnerships come to the fore. It is we who can facilitate and support community-led adaption planning, and where recovery is best led in partnership with communities. And that is why, cities are pioneering the work on resilience.”

Beyond the contemporary challenge of the coronavirus pandemic, panelists also recounted the significance of cities and subregions in broader foreign policy linkages. Citing Hamburg’s outsized share in Germany’s total maritime transport to India (74 percent in 2019), Almut Möller said, “While we follow our national government’s pointed direction, the city of Hamburg itself is a driving force of Indo-Hamburg relations with its independent agenda and activities.” Similarly, Eleni Kounalakis noted the centrality of California in the broader trajectory of US-India bilateral ties. Noting the doubling of California exports between 2009-19, Kounalakis underscored two-way trade between India and California to have exceeded US\$10 billion.

Beyond commerce, Theresa Schopper noted Baden-Württemberg’s subnational partnership with Maharashtra to have honed a shared focus



on issues like digitalisation, artificial intelligence and new mobility. Furthermore, Schopper noted that the partnership, which has been in place since 2015, to have originated at the municipal level owing to Stuttgart and Mumbai having had institutional linkages for over 50 years. Similarly, Margaret Beazley underscored the Australian government's recognition of subregional partnerships in its 'An India Economic Strategy to 2035'. New South Wales' sister-state relationship with Maharashtra and Gujarat form the basis of the strategy, towards meeting India's needs in the critical realms of infrastructure development, financing models and technology adoption.

Finally, another crucial domain of city-level stewardship has been the common fight against climate change. While some entities have chosen to focus on administrative and efficiency standards within their own borders, other have transcended borders to forge subregional linkages. On the former, Thackeray alluded to his government's efforts in elevating the agency of the state's forest department designating the 800-acre Aarey Colony as a reserved forest

area, and providing an impetus to environment-friendly mass transportation services. On cross-border subregional cooperation, Schopper noted joint efforts with Kounalakis in drawing attention to the role and responsibilities of subnational governments in climate protection. Baden-Württemberg and California are founding jurisdictions of the Under2 Coalition—a group of subnational leaders representing federal states, countries, regions and municipalities from six continents. In aiming for a common climate protection policy across various countries and continents, the Under2 Coalition has already seen more than 220 subnational regions come onboard as signatories, representing over one billion people and around 43 percent of the global economy.

Even as the mantle of formulating and executing foreign policy will expectedly remain with federal governments, the increasingly complex challenges of an interdependent world will spur global cities and subregions to build their own international relationships.

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## DAY 1: PANEL 1

# TOWARDS RESILIENT CITIES: LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

*Aditi Ratho*

**S**trengthening both physical and social infrastructure and creating institutional means of raising resources to be deployed at times of crises are vital requirements to enhance resilience and accelerate recovery post the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has unearthed several fissures in the administration and planning of urban areas, which must be fixed to manage future shocks. The pandemic affected cities more than rural and peri-urban areas given the high densities of people and dwellings. Therefore governance, urban planning, data management and the allocation



of resources, investments and financing must be integrated with civic engagement to build back better, stronger and together.

According to Ashwini Bhide, Mumbai is the prime example for how cities can leverage resources for pandemic management. As a city, Mumbai is used to different types of crises due to its geography and extreme weather conditions. It is able to leverage its resources as an almost financially autonomous entity that has a ready resource pool of technology, business and enthusiastic citizen communities that can come together for pandemic management. What allowed Mumbai to avoid a second wave of the pandemic was nimble and swift decision-making, interdepartmental coordination without rivalry, transparency of information in the public domain, and a robust network of voluntary organisations and media. These elements were crucial to ensure that data gathering was regular and transparent, which helped disseminate services to all vulnerable citizens better.

In the area of public transit in particular, resilience is generally equated with the ability to deliver services despite challenges and disruptions, whether the weather or a global health crisis. COVID-19 exposed the vulnerabilities in public transit at a scale never imagined, with ridership across the world falling to historic lows. Regina Ramos echoed Bhide's argument that in times of crises, the ability to act swiftly and deliberately in an informed manner with close coordination between agencies is of utmost important.

The decentralisation of field organisation was another element that worked to stem the incessant

tide of the pandemic in Mumbai, according to Bhide. Citywide ward level war rooms were connected to citizens 24x7 to get feedback and revert with the required service. Similarly, according to Ramos, Boston's inter-jurisdictional communication proved to be incredibly useful, with sustained public engagement proving vital to act swiftly and decisively. A real-time crowding application was developed during the pandemic in Boston, which helped riders plan and anticipate the trips and guided them as to how crowded trips might get.

Shruti Narayan compounded this message by suggesting bringing back 20-minute cities—where you have all your essential services within a 20-minute radius, which will help in swift dissemination of services during crises as well.

According to Nicholas Brooke, the pandemic has been a wakeup call to look at risk from a much wider lens; risk assessment should now include climate change, natural disasters, financial crises and the failure of city systems and governments. Narayan also claims that ecological destruction is resulting in an increasing number of pandemics and therefore climate change is an important lens through which to look at urban development.

There is a need to adopt resilient agenda to mitigate adverse effects of such future events, and this needs to be collaborative—beyond neighborhood, district and city government levels. The involvement of the public and private sector is crucial during pandemic management, Brooke added. Sharing important information and data is not a business risk, as spurring innovation requires data to be readily available.

Planning for future pandemics should also integrate planning for a greener and healthier lifestyle. For instance, having broad walkways means people are not too close to each other but also encourages people to walk more, said Narayan.

As Brooke said, the key to resilient cities is moving from 'just in time' to 'just in case'. Urban governance must therefore be prepared to change gear and reinvent post-pandemic as well as during it. This way, possibilities and strengths can be unearthed along with fissures.

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## MODERATOR



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## DAY 1: PANEL 2

# SUSTAINABLE ENTREPÔTS: DESIGNING AND FINANCING COASTAL CITIES

*Prithvi Iyer*

Coastal cities have historically been the hubs of economic activity and the centre of geopolitical interests. However, how they project their identities is changing rapidly. Coastal cities have moved beyond the traditional idea of an 'entrepôt' to efficiently deliver on logistical, managerial and global trade services. But in addition to dealing with ever-growing infrastructure needs, they also face heightened climate challenges. Coastal cities must therefore be viewed differently than other cities of similar size and scale. What do coastal cities need in terms of infrastructure? What kind of social and economic imperatives confront these entrepôts? How do we build them

to be more sustainable and scalable? What can global coastal cities do to share knowhow on the delicate balance between tourism, trade, infrastructure and environmental responsibilities?

According to Shirley Rodrigues climate mitigation and adaptation are the most critical challenge for cities in general, and coastal cities in particular, to overcome even as they prepared for recovery from the pandemic. “Cities cannot afford to ignore environmental recovery as they plan for economic recovery,” she said. London, despite reeling under the impact of the pandemic, has resolved to keep climate related issues a top priority. The Mayor of London’s New Green Deal mission aims to double the size of the city’s green economy by 2030 and accelerate job creation by tackling the climate and ecological emergency, improving air quality and building resilience. “We know it’s a challenging target, but we can’t fail the future generations by at least not trying,” Rodrigues stressed.

Claudia Warning stressed on the importance of finance to address larger socioeconomic challenges. The bilateral developmental agenda between Germany and India have put cities at the front of efforts to respond to the needs of the urban poor, mitigate and adapt to climate change and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The recently signed Indo-German partnership for green urban mobility seeks transformative efforts for improved air quality, road safety and low-emission public transport in Indian cities. Germany’s KfW Development Bank has provided €2 billion since 2013 for sustainable and climate-friendly urban mobility projects, a major part of which is funding India’s urban metro systems. Germany has also dedicated €500 million for coastal urban resilience, coastal security and coastal infrastructure in Chennai and Kochi.

Big coastal cities such as Mumbai, Jakarta or Hong Kong have a “great responsibility” while exploiting the blue resources, Warning said. “Most large coastal cities are facing huge threats owing to rising sea levels, and therefore it is all the more critical for them to ensure that their blue resources remain pollution free,” she added.

There is also urgent need for city planning in Africa and Asia to cater to the enormous population growth, which, as per several estimates, is expected to increase by 2-3 billion over the next 30 years. The population growth will be very uneven and mainly concentrated in the large urban agglomerations, which are already grappling with the problem posed by increased densities. “This is a huge challenge not only for India, but for the entire world and the cost of not meeting this challenge is too high for the world to pay,” Ted Baillieu warned.

Disruptions caused by big tech, big finance, big media have been aggravated by the pandemic, while the future of coastal cities is still based on the assumption that trade in goods and commodities is going to continue to be free and a dominant component of national economies backed by strong rules-based multilateralism at its core. The current Indian government has undertaken several big changes and collaborative reforms in banking, taxation, roads, rail, utilities and farming, and has also initiated the ambitious Sagarmala project for port development. But the challenge for India is in terms of getting the strategy right and delivering on its collaborative efforts. Baillieu cautioned against trying to make every coastal city do the same thing. “All big port cities around the world have a well-defined purpose and are backed by strategies to enable them achieve their defined objectives. It will be pertinent to ensure development of entrepôts, but with a strategy to



achieve its own unique purpose and objective,” he remarked. This will need an overarching national strategy and one that varies as per the unique needs and purpose that is delineated for a coastal city. Countries like India need not depend on their traditional coastal cities, but therefore also look for developing green field entrepôts in line with a strategy that sets aside national expenditure and attracts private investment. Nations like India must identify key locations for such green field entrepôts and make them work for maritime trade as well as for the development of the connected hinterland.

Rafiq Dossani illustrated the example of the US’s Silicon Valley and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to question the all-pervasive focus on the development of coastal cities. Coastal cities made sense as the centres of growth about three decades ago when there was a preponderance of international maritime trade. But in a world driven by services-led digital economy, coastal cities are no longer the engines of economic growth. He highlighted the example of Los Angeles, which despite being a coastal city, has “long been overtaken in its economic primacy by Silicon Valley, which is nowhere near the coast”.

Dossani, however, agreed that the argument for coastal cities is still relevant in the developing world, and in that context, he highlighted the BRI as a key learning opportunity. Nearly 50

percent of BRI’s development is focused on ports development and improving infrastructure in coastal areas that are not necessarily large coastal cities—for example Gwadar rather than Karachi in Pakistan and the port of Kyaukpyu instead of Yangon in Myanmar. “If you can take an area which has potential in terms of connectivity, and ensure that the connectivity is provided to the outside world through port development and within the country through rail and road links, you can actually make coastal cities work,” he explained.

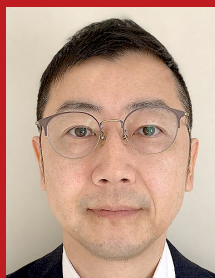
Dossani also said that Mumbai has the opportunity to become an offshore finance hub given the growing uncertainties in other regional hubs like Hong Kong and Singapore. However, he was quick to remind that Mumbai needs much more than just infrastructure to leverage its locational advantage—clear rules for capital convertibility and robust regulatory environment, which are problems for not just Mumbai but for India to overcome.

Speaking about India’s regional strategy in the context of the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, both aimed at offsetting its capital constraints and utilising its own technical skills for large scale projects, he urged India to display firmer political commitment in the geopolitical context that these projects are based on.

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## MODERATOR



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## DAY 1: PANEL 3

# RELOCATING MUMBAI IN THE POLITICS AND ECONOMICS OF THE INDO- PACIFIC

*Kalpita Mankikar*

With the spotlight of geopolitics shifting to the Indo-Pacific, India's financial capital is all set to see rapid development as a pulsating hub of innovation for the region. As India's financial powerhouse, Mumbai is a key location of investment, supply chains, talent incubation, business bastion and city of reel dreams. What role can Mumbai play in the emerging geopolitics and geoeconomics of the Indo-Pacific? How can India project economic diplomacy via Mumbai?



The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted economic activity, and nearly all sectors have been adversely affected as domestic demand and industrial production were hit amid the global lockdowns. Mumbai has great economic prospects, and better policy frameworks will enable robust post-pandemic revival. According to Peter Varghese, Mumbai can play a key role in generating economic reform ideas and is adept at contributing to dialogues on restructuring the financial system or land and labour rules.

In recent years, the lustre of Hong Kong as a financial hub has begun to diminish. In June 2020, a tough security legislation was cleared to check terrorism, curb subversion and collusion with foreign powers. Human rights campaigners say the law in effect dismantles the “one country, two systems” framework, which is supposed to safeguard Hong Kong’s autonomy, which has underpinned the city’s role as one of the world’s important financial centers. Several nations are vying to draw financial professionals to recreate the island’s success. Zhiwu Chen said that Hong Kong’s decline as a financial and trade centre will give Mumbai a great opportunity. He noted that Mumbai has an edge over other cities eager to replicate Hong Kong’s success as it has an open mindset, and that efforts must be made to encourage the Indian diaspora abroad to move back to realise these goals.

Over the last few years, plans have been discussed to create an international financial centre in Mumbai on the lines of such facilities

in Singapore and the United Arab Emirates, but the efforts of the state government have come to naught. Moreover, the central government has also prioritised the Gujarat International Finance Tech-City over Maharashtra’s project. However, building capacities, such as through investment in transport and logistical infrastructure, will bring focus back to the city and cater to financial sector professionals, making Mumbai an attractive destination, said Toshihiko Kurihara.

Mumbai must capitalise on its existing advantages in the financial sector, Akshay Mathur said. Despite Mumbai housing the headquarters of several large businesses, Singapore remains the preferred destination for arbitration. There should be more investment in creating regulatory frameworks to establish an arbitration centre in the city, Mathur added.

Attempts to dismantle China-centric supply chains in the post pandemic period has given rise to an unhealthy race among Indian states to usher in industry. Varghese pointed to competitive federalism being the key to India’s economic success, and with its large economy and industrial base, Maharashtra is showcasing itself as an attractive place to invest in by constantly improving the infrastructure.

While the outlook for Mumbai remains buoyant, it must make efforts to reduce transaction cost and improve governance. Zhiwu posited that the city could consider appointing foreign nationals as judges to improve business confidence. Citing

the example of Hong Kong, where the final court of appeals has 18 jurists of foreign nationality, Zhiwu said this gives foreign businesses some confidence that their commercial disputes can be redressed better under “impartial conditions”. He cautioned that such a move could see some backlash from nationalist elements, but said that judges from common-law nations could play a key role.

In the aftermath of the pandemic there were institutional efforts to wean away global supply

chain from China, but some experts say that the opportunity cost of moving out from there could be huge for some companies. Rajeshwari Rajagopalan said that Mumbai can plug into the attempt to build strong supply chains in the Indo-Pacific provided hurdles related to land acquisition, tariff and market access issues are sorted out.

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## MODERATOR



**MITALI  
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## DAY 1: PANEL 4

# DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: A COMMUNITY-LED DATA ECONOMY

*Shashidhar KJ*

**T**he United Nations Secretary-General's 2019 roadmap for digital co-operation places the creation of digital public goods (DPGs) front and centre of efforts to bridge the digital divide. But what exactly are DPGs? Mitali Mukherjee proposed a workable definition—DPGs are essentially interconnected systems that have the power to enhance people's lives. These will have to meet the criteria of first-mile necessity and create more equity for whoever it reaches.

Would the internet qualify as a DPG? "Just like we have and need highways, access to water and clean air, in the digital age, certain things



like the internet are very essential,” said Ephraim Kenyanito. However, DPGs will need collaboration between private companies and state-controlled public systems. “But what is different about digital public goods, unlike the offline public goods that are maintained by states, is that they are more individual-driven. Many technical engineers come together to build a part of the ecosystem,” he added.

Indeed, the internet was possibly the first DPG. The US Department of Defense created ARPANET as a precursor of interconnected computer systems in the 1970s, subsequently opening it up to the private sector to develop commercial extensions. The governance of the internet is now overseen by private entities like the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers and the Internet Engineering Task Force, which manage the internet protocol addresses and the domain name system.

The current massive and ubiquitous nature of the internet was achieved through open-source technologists contributing resources little by little and correcting mistakes in the systems, showcasing why DPGs must be open source. Amandeep Gill said that local solutions have the potential for rapid scaling at the global level in the digital sphere and hence all future DPGs must necessarily be open source. “In every space, you can have global collaboration. And in the open-source world it is about global collaboration where people can build software and have some attribution to it so that it can introduce transparency and move away from black box approaches to software. So, then it becomes a global useful good.”

Gill also presented a longer view of what DPGs are. Following the Second World War, ports, roads and other infrastructure projects were funded by public money, but “more recently, there has been a reflection on digital public goods. Is the notion of digital public goods simply an addition of digital to the ideas of non-rivalry and non-exclusion that we associate with public goods or is it something more? In my opinion, this goes beyond just extending the notion of roads and ports to digital infrastructure,” he said.

Gill elaborated that there are three layers to the internet—the infrastructure layer, the logic layer and the application layer. Over the last decade, there has been misuse in the application layer, which houses most of the modern internet including social media services. There is a need to bring in laws for data privacy and protection by building digital guard rails to protect people. At the same time, there have been many missed opportunities to make people’s lives better because disparate networks are not connected to each other, highlighting the need to build digital common rails. “We need to come to sophisticated and updated understanding of digital public goods, where we go beyond infrastructure and connectivity to agency over use,” he added.

Oluwatosin Durotoye urged the consideration of perspectives from the global South, where access to the internet connectivity is a primary issue. “We have 4.9 billion Internet users globally, and about 50 percent of the population is still excluded from digital technologies. There is even a usage gap in the connected world. There are 3.3 billion people who have mobile broadband and use mobile internet services so again about

25 percent of the least connected countries in the world are in Africa. So even if there are these digital public goods, the question that I pose is what good is to us if we can't access it?"

The world will have to come together to address the problem of digital inequality and treating the internet access as a public good, Juila Pomares said. "We have to talk about how we can reduce these inequalities in the world but also within the countries as well. Within communities itself.

When these inequalities increase, it increases anger and instability." Pomares highlighted the need for politicians and rule-makers to embrace digital means. "We have seen in Latin America a massive take up and use of digital devices. And if you look at the websites of the political parties, there is a very slow transformation from face-to-face interactions to digital ways to communicate with electorates. Political parties and leaders need to embrace this kind of transformation otherwise that digital gap is going to widen."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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DAY 1: IN CONVERSATION 1

# AMERICA'S VISION FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC



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America, United States

*Kashish Parpiani*

Donald Trump's ascent to the US presidency in 2016 sparked consternations over his 'America First' worldview. The Trump administration did indeed upend several long-standing tenets of post-Cold War US foreign policy, validating the fears of liberal internationalists. It infused a national security dimension in transnational commerce, coaxing partner nations to burden-share in US efforts for collective security, and jettisoned US stewardship on addressing global challenges. Towards the Indo-Pacific, however, Trump honed a



constructive record and put in place an extensive military and economic framework to shore up US primacy.

The ideological underpinnings of this were evident in the Trump administration's early national security literature. The administration's maiden National Security Strategy (NSS 2017) primarily defined the contours of US priorities in the Indo-Pacific. Nadia Schadlow, who was the principal author of the NSS 2017, discussed Trump's record and prospects of continuity under Joe Biden with Dhruva Jaishankar, executive director of ORF America.

According to Jaishankar, the NSS 2017 was crucial for its "clear articulation" of US foreign policy priorities on China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. The NSS 2017 announced a return to the era of "great power competition" by focusing on the broad-spectrum threats to US primacy posed by Russia and China, and challenging post-Cold War assumptions of China being a constructive part of the US-led liberal order, technology being an unmitigated good in the contest between democratic and autocratic models of governance, and the US continuing to remain uncontested militarily. According to Schadlow, in purporting the Indo-Pacific to be a primary theatre of concern, the NSS 2017 acknowledged the US's competition with China in "a more forthright way because unless we did so, we [the US] would remain behind and our competitiveness across domains would be reduced."

In basing its approach to the Indo-Pacific on this outright recognition of the threat posed by

China, the Trump administration furthered the framework of strategic decoupling to reduce US vulnerability in key sectors. This was most apparent in the protracted US-China trade war, wherein the Trump administration sought to leverage Washington's trade deficit with Beijing to coax market reforms or at least exact Chinese compliance on balancing bilateral trade. This policy was coupled with sustained confrontation in other domains, like the campaign against China's rising primacy in the telecommunications sector and a more proactive US maritime posture in the South China Sea.

In the Indo-Pacific, this also led to a dampening of the 'America First' worldview's penchant for unilateralism, with the Trump administration's emphasis on security ties with traditional allies like Japan and nascent partners like India and Vietnam. Citing these gains, Schadlow underscored that the Biden administration is "going in with a strong position vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific and China." Furthermore, on the Indo-Pacific, she noted the Biden administration will have "an excellent opportunity" to build on the Trump administration's policy across the military, economic, and political domains.

After all, through its emphasis on increased burden-sharing, the Trump administration encouraged regional actors like Australia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to become increasingly vocal on their apprehensions regarding Beijing's transgressions in the South China Sea or the handling of the COVID-19 outbreak. On the US's economic proposition for the region, the Trump administration honed a

distinctive record with its emphasis on revitalising the Export-Import Bank of the United States, establishing the International Development Finance Corporation and partnering with like-minded regional actors to establish the Blue Dot Network. In doing so, the Trump administration stressed on high-standard, progressive US and US-allied investments in the region, in contrast to China's debt-trap propositions under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Although the Biden administration's foreign policy agenda is currently in a nascent stage, the narrowing partisan divide between Republicans and Democrats on matters pertaining to China is adding credence to the hope for continuity. An emergent US bipartisanship on the need for the country to devise a comprehensive response to the threats posed by China will only further the Trump administration's record in the Indo-Pacific.

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## DAY 1: IN CONVERSATION 2

# REFORMULATING THE NARRATIVES ON TRADE AND GLOBALISATION

*Shruti Jain*

In the aftermath of World War II, the lack of a formal international organisation to ensure a liberal and non-discriminatory trading system hindered the progress made towards achieving a free and fair world trading order. The first Uruguay Round led to the constitution of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1948; however, due to its non-binding nature, it failed to have any substantial impact on the outcomes of multilateral trade negotiations. Later, with the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, a new era of global economic cooperation began.



The WTO deals with the regulation of trade between participating countries under an umbrella of trade agreements and a dispute resolution process. However, amidst growing protectionism, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the WTO to maintain its mandate. It is in this context that David Rasquinah highlighted the importance of trade for domestic, public and economic diplomacy, and explored India's role in building a new narrative on trade and globalisation.

### **Free Trade and Globalisation**

As mercantilism faded by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, a free trade-driven new world order emerged. Fuelled by the Ricardian principle of comparative advantage, free trade shunned autarky and became imperative to the growth of a country's economy. According to the Ricardian theory of comparative trade, gains from trade can be maximised if nations export those goods in which they have a comparative advantage so all participating countries can benefit from international trade.

At present, however, bilateral disagreements over intellectual properties, agricultural subsidies and e-commerce are growing. As China's share of exports in the global economy increases, the country has become an active member of the WTO as a defendant and complainant. A rise in nationalism and change in political currents has

also led many member nations to implement several tariffs. Growing regional trade blocs are an additional threat to the unanimity of the WTO. The weakening of the WTO can result in an increase of trade tensions and undermine free and fair international trade.

### **Trade and Emerging Economies**

International trade has always been a point of contention between developed and developing economies. In his book *Kicking Away the Ladder*, South-Korean economist Ha Joon Chang highlighted the paradox of high income countries 'kicking away' the economic ladder for developing countries. According to Chang, while climbing the economic ladder of success, high-income countries implemented high tariffs and sectoral industrial policies, disregarded intellectual property rights and did not have independent central banks. The common argument is that developed nations are hypocritical to deny the same rights to developing countries.

However, while it is important to consider economic history during policymaking, it is also necessary to note that countries like China and India have decided to become much more open in embracing the 'Washington Consensus' and have consequently reaped its benefits. Additionally, as South Korea shifted towards an export-oriented policy in the 1950s and 1960s, its GDP exploded—according to the World Bank, post South Korea's

export-oriented policies, its per capita gross national income increased from US\$67 in early 1950s to US\$30,000 in 2018. South Korea is a perfect example of how international trade can improve a country's economic growth prospects.

The multilateral trade and dispute settlement systems have been under scrutiny for years. In

this context, Rasquinha emphasises the need for India to lead the emerging economies in revitalising the WTO and safeguarding the interests of other developing countries. With a global rise in protectionist tendencies and trade disputes, the role of WTO in preserving the liberal economic system is more crucial than ever.

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## DAY 1: PANEL 5

# CITIES 20: ESTABLISHING A GLOBAL POLICYMAKING FORUM FOR CITIES

*Sayli Mankikar and  
Aniket Pawar*

**T**he twenty-first century belongs to cities. It is a departure from the traditional global governance design that tends to focus on nation-states. Cities are emerging as their own centres of economic growth and political churn.

For cities participating in global cooperation, issues of urban infrastructure finance, a blue print for social and inclusive planning, and setting common goals to meet climate and sustainability goals is important.



Given that several institutionalised city global forums already exist, there is a need to look at it holistically.

Cities are far more powerful alliances to improve security, prosperity, often across international borders. Intercity alliances are the new currency of urban foreign relations. Cities are no longer just norm takers, they are norm makers, Peter Rimmele said.

What are the needs and characteristics of city-states and how can a global policy be designed to establish a renewed pan-city conglomeration?

Financing infrastructure and supporting sustainable city growth is complex. It needs just interventions that lead to eventual independence.

According to Joachim von Amsberg, financing infrastructure in Asia cannot be thought of without pondering on what it would mean for the cities. Infrastructure investment is not only focused in megacities, but also medium- and small-sized cities. It may be in spaces where the vast majority of people live and wealth is generated, but also where the most social, environmental and urbanisation problems exist.

While global city arrangements provide opportunities, they could create urban dystopias. The population of Africa, currently about 1.2 billion, will double by 2050. Most of this population will move to megacities for a better life, which will see a growth in slum areas and the triple challenges

of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment becoming more pronounced, according to Anil Sooklal. He expressed fear over the consequent potential marginalisation of African youth and women, and urged governments to take greater responsibility to ensure they do not become outliers.

Why should cities enter into global arrangements with other cities? A pan-city forum may at times be biased, and the heterogeneity of participating cities may get obfuscated. This depends on several factors, including the level of devolution, decentralisation and even the clout that a city holds nationally and internationally.

Maitreyi Bordia Das pointed out that despite having knowledge-sharing capacities and learning capabilities, it still remains to be seen if cities make the cut. The crux of city capacity really is about the clout and whether finances will be made available if not tied to defined programmes. The larger question remains if the forums do anything for the cities or if they are merely a good political thing to do.

A city can still exercise clout in international forums by showcasing its policymaking capabilities and demonstrating its good practices. In this way, it also acquires national and global credibility.

Over half of all existing city networks are transnational in nature, and have facilitated policy and expertise exchange. Ian Klaus argued that such networks have put pressure or increased the

voice of city leaders at international organisations and multilateral fora. Some networks are advocating for change in terms of power in the national setting, including access to finance, and reforms in multilateral regional development banks. But how do these pan-city global networks lobby for domestic political change? The existing networking frameworks must be remodeled, but this cannot be done by one organisation alone.

Collective thinking is needed to inspire domestic and international policymakers by city-level solutions. Cities are laboratories that can provide important policy guidelines and best practices that the countries can learn from and emulate. The role of civil society groups and academia in such networks must be understood, especially when they result in good outcomes for their cities.

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## DAY 2: PANEL 6

# A NEW VISION FROM BUSINESS FOR POSITIONING MUMBAI IN THE WORLD

*Dhaval Desai*

**A**s home to India's biggest corporates and stock exchanges, the hub of India's largest public and private sector banks and insurance companies, and the headquarters of India's financial and market regulators, Mumbai is the undisputed business capital of India. However, for Mumbai to elevate itself as a global financial centre like Shanghai, London or Dubai, it is imperative for business and financial institutions to work in tandem with policymakers. Mumbai needs to be re-envisioned from the perspective of built and social infrastructure to increase its liveability quotient, and one that leverages its abundant natural and built heritage and cultural



diversity to make it a destination of choice for international tourists. Mumbai also urgently needs policy and regulatory interventions to foster a conducive business environment backed by tax regimes that incentivise and encourage investments.

How do the new generation of business and political leadership sees Mumbai on the world stage? What do they expect from the government to assist the city's overall growth?

According to Radhika Gupta, Mumbai lacks a "narrative building" to showcase its own growth as a bustling metropolis and its catalytic role in India's growth story. "We need to have active conversations with global multinationals about how Mumbai is changing. We need to craft a new narrative about Mumbai not just as the financial centre but also the cultural capital of India," she remarked. Reminiscing on her visit to a museum in Shanghai, which traced the city's history since the 1500s and portrayed a stunning vision for its future, she wondered what was stopping Mumbai from adopting such promotional strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic has given Mumbai an opportunity to reshape and re-strategise. "Leveraging Mumbai's port city status will be crucial and improving infrastructure, especially using its locational advantage as a coastal city is one way to do so," Gupta said. But Mumbai must look beyond infrastructure and the development of roads, buildings and other physical indicators, to transform into a technology hub that has embraced the digital revolution.

The real estate sector, market liberalisation and improved regulatory mechanisms, and an increased focus on sustainable development are pivotal to enhancing Mumbai's global profile, Darshan Hiranandani and Jay Kotak agreed. Green spaces must be accommodated in development projects. Citing the redeveloped

mill lands as an example, Hiranandani said that although this created huge land surpluses for the city, bringing down the cost of housing, the areas have become "cesspools of excessive traffic irrespective of the modern housing without open and green spaces and parks". Mumbai must not waste the opportunities presented by the planned development of the waterfront around the Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link and the transformation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. "These projects can create iconic places, but they need to be master planned," he said. He also identified Mumbai's reluctance to recycle wastewater as one of the biggest impediments to sustainable development.

Kotak, on the other hand, deemed rigid laws and regulations as the shortcomings that have not limited Mumbai's potential to attract global talent and capital. While regime liberalisation may not be able to provide major tax affordances to the private sector, the government should announce incentives to global investors to make Mumbai a more attractive global financial hub, he urged. High rents and labour costs as well as less leeway to expand liveable areas are factors costing Mumbai its primacy to other metropolitan cities such as New Delhi, Bangalore and Hyderabad. Mumbai needs "tax regimes on the lines of Singapore or Dubai to make it an easy destination for business," Kotak suggested.

The Maharashtra government has taken several steps to accelerate the sustainable growth of Mumbai's economy by incentivising businesses and promoting public infrastructure. "We have balanced infrastructure and environment by taking some bold but wise decisions in the long-term environmental wellbeing of the city," Priyanka Chaturvedi said, referring to the relocation of the car shed from the Aarey forest area and the declaration of 800 acres of the green belt as a reserved forest area.

Mumbai's urban development plan has already ensured the creation of safe and accessible public and open spaces for women, enabling them to become active participants in the economic growth of the city. "Women are going to be an integral part of Maharashtra's growth story," Chaturvedi asserted. The focus is also on making the city inclusive. "Projects like the coastal road and Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link, along with focus on improving public transport through e-buses and metro lines will provide affordable,

inclusive and faster connectivity to all sections of the society, improving the quality of life," she said. Additionally, the relaxation of license norms to set up hotels will bolster the city's tourism quotient.

Despite the complex challenges, Mumbai has the potential to become a global city. A multistakeholder transformative effort involving the government, private sector and citizens is needed to build and promote the city's legacy, its cultural capital and business potential.

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## DAY 2: PANEL 7

# TOWARDS INCLUSIVE CITIES: RECLAIMING SPACES FOR WOMEN

*Aditi Ratho*

**W**hen one thinks of Mumbai, they picture a cosmopolitan Indian city known to be relatively safer and more work-friendly for women. Women work in various parts of the city at various times, but not as widely as their male counterparts. Working women have been more adversely impacted than working men by the COVID-19 pandemic pushing work into the virtual and domestic space. Women now face the multiple burdens of domestic, childcare and professional work due to the closure of schools and offices, worsening mental and physical strain.

Increasing women's movement and workforce participation in a city requires a confluence of gender-sensitive urban planning, social awareness and capacity building. Systematically implementing existing national policies like having sanitised, well-functioning public toilets and conducting safety audits is crucial for improving workforce participation, said Yashomati Thakur. Safety audits like ensuring dark areas are well lit and gathering data on crime spots in the city and strengthening law enforcement there, are important for women to be able to travel distances to work. While sensitisation and cultural alignment towards equality and women's safety is important, ensuring that all citizens can traverse all spaces of the city regardless of gender requires physically creating inclusive spaces.

One way in which this can be achieved is ensuring working women accommodation through hostels, and providing well-functioning public and housing society toilets and crèches at private and government workspaces. It should be mandatory to have child support throughout the city's working spaces—a citywide linkage of crèches for working mothers to feel comfortable leaving their children there, said Abha Lambah. Toilets and crèches should be a requirement regardless of conditions like number of employees, lest the added cost for having female employees be a detriment to hiring them.

Low female labour force participation is a national economic hindrance. Therefore, it is important to create inclusive spaces where women can work, be it part time, full time or entrepreneurial work. There has been a significant drop in workforce participation over the past eight years, which must be corrected, and it starts with governments prioritising these issues, said Priyanka Chaturvedi.

Policies to ensure women's safety in workspaces, such as providing transport to and from the workspace at night, must be accounted for by responsible employers, said Shaina NC. The 24x7 city policy, which allows certain commercial establishments to remain open 24 hours, should accommodate women as well, and the infrastructure needed to support this must be created.

To protect women in the virtual space, cyber laws against online harassment must be strengthened, the reporting of abuse and harassment must be made hassle free, and information about existing helplines to report online abuse should be widely disseminated.

Together with policies like gender-budgeting and safety audits, gender-responsive decision-making is required to ensure that the different effect of policies and administrative decisions on men and women is accounted for in the creation of them. This means more women in high positions in politics, administration and legislation.



Creating more spaces for women in leadership positions, be in the political or corporate world, ensures that women at the top nurture and guide younger women to rise, as opposed to holding on to positions. While the 33 percent quota for women in legislative roles could help mitigate disparity in positions of power and decision-making, proactively creating leadership positions must be in tandem. Cultural and gender sensitivity

must start from the home, in school, in college, in work, everywhere, said Thakur.

Neither compassion nor sympathy is the need of the hour—equal opportunity is. Therefore, gender sensitive physical and social infrastructure that enables a woman's inherent talent and ability to work must be cultivated.

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## DAY 2: IN CONVERSATION 3

# CHAIRING THE G20: ECONOMIC STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE WORLD

*Kalpiti Mankikar*

The devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to economies across the globe has put the spotlight on the need for a synchronised effort for recovery. This is where a multilateral platform like the G20 can play a key role. The G20 was established in 1999 to deliberate policy matters pertaining to the promotion of global financial stability, and has expanded to include think tanks and civil society groups. Ahead of the 2021 G20 Summit in Rome in October, there is a need to engage with issues related to economic governance, inclusivity and continuity in the G20, the forum's priorities, and how the upcoming G20 chairs—Italy, Indonesia and India—can steer

global economic recovery. How effective is G20 as a multination forum? What lessons can from current and previous G20 presidencies on global economic governance? How can a long-term framework for economic recovery be developed? How can the G20 be made more inclusiveness?

Despite its shortcomings, the G20 is an important forum to address issues related to the world economy. Paolo Magri observed that the bloc is an important economic multilateral platform since there were not many alternatives to represent the world in an inclusive manner. Fahad Alturki recalled that the G20 was created amid a global financial crisis and was more effective at that time. According to Alturki, to overcome deficiencies, the G20 must be agile in the face of changing governments, and there must be proper enforcement of key recommendations made. Akshay Mathur reflected that since the session revolved around G20 being the economic steering committee of the world, should the multilateral stay away from expanding its scope to discuss issues like climate change or trade that were being taken up by the United Nations or World Trade Organization.

While the biggest economies had made joint efforts to combat the global recession in 2009, such synergy was missing in the fight for an economic recovery in 2021 as countries continued to act unilaterally, Magri said. There are limitations

to what a divided bloc can achieve, but the Italian presidency would focus on universal issues like poverty, stimulus and the need to redress misgivings among nations, he said, adding that a focus on these issues must come alongside that on long-term challenges like climate change.

Over the years, experts have sought changes to the G20's structure, especially with respect to engagement groups—independent agencies, such as the T20 (think tank grouping), that represent civil society and work with other organisations from member countries to formally make policy recommendations to G20 leaders. While the G20 is effective at the sovereign level, it was ineffectual at the engagement group level. According to Alturki, the G20 is an exclusive club of the world's largest economies and other nations can only participate in dialogues through the engagement groups, which is why it is necessary to strengthen them. However, Magri cautioned that attempts to make international forums inclusive come at the risk of compromised effectiveness.

The pandemic has greatly impacted peoples' livelihoods, economies and international trade. Now more than ever, multilateralism is key to meet the challenges of tomorrow. The G20—which brings together 60 percent of the world's population and 80 percent of global GDP—must live up to its role.

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## DAY 2: PANEL 8

# DEVELOPING AN ARABIAN SEA CONSENSUS ON GROWTH AND PROSPERITY

*Kashish Parpiani*

India's has traditionally had strong ties with the Gulf; relations with partners across the Arabian Sea go beyond energy security, are underpinned by longstanding socio-cultural linkages and include a key demographic dimension. In catering to the Gulf nations' need for a vast spectrum of workforce—from low-skilled labour in retail and the service industries to high-skilled labour in the region's thriving financial sectors—Indian workers have spurred India's rise as the world's largest recipient of remittances. However, even as India increasingly integrates into the eastward security calculus of the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi must secure



its westward interests. Cultivating a multi-dimensional relationship with partner nations in the Gulf is central to India's interest of ensuring the continued supply of energy, guarding against non-traditional security threats emanating from non-state and state-sponsored actors in West Asia, and catering to the security needs of the large Indian guest-worker base in the region. There is also a need to expand the ambit of Indo-Gulf ties to include the eastern coast of Africa, which is increasingly relevant due to its economic prospects and strategic currency as the extended bookend of the Indo-Pacific expanse.

Discussing regionwide apprehensions over rising tensions between Iran and Israel and the prospect of a military confrontation between Iran and the US, Ebtesam Al Ketbi stressed on the need to graduate the focus of the India-GCC dynamic from "trade and oil" to one that reflects a "multi-dimensional strategic relationship." In calling for an institutionalised structure to India-Gulf strategic ties, he underscored the need for the two sides to play "intermediary roles between strategic rivals in the region," whereby India could also effectively capitalise on emergent opportunities.

Navdeep Suri noted that India has already set a credible precedent of "no longer being a free-rider in the work for global security," referencing the country's recent attention to maritime domain awareness and its aim to emerge as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean. Beyond strategic issues, this presents an opportunity for the two sides to cooperate on guarding critical sea

lanes of communication, and combatting piracy, terrorism and drug trafficking on the high seas.

However, in building such a "grand scheme of partnership," it is imperative for India and the Gulf to adopt an incremental approach, possibly based on para-diplomacy towards Africa. In endorsing that path, Kwame Owino cited India's inherent advantage owing to favourable views among Africans of Indian culture and democracy. Moreover, given the similarities between African societies and India—in terms of their celebration of socio-cultural diversities—there is great scope for India to share its expertise beyond the strategic domain, including on setting up democratic institutions and sharing best practices on the management of dispute-resolution mechanisms in local administrative bodies.

Gains on this front could also fit within the broader aim of countering Chinese influence in the region. Citing African suspicions over Chinese engagement, which mostly tends to be in the commercial realm and hence feeds notions of implied exploitation, Mohamed El Dahshan stressed on the successes of India's "functional and collaborative" approach. In relative comparison to other large countries seeking to gain a foothold in the region, El Dahshan noted India to have "systematically refrained from deploying resource-extractive approaches."

Noting that precedent, Suri argued for continuing the gradual yet effective approach where New Delhi recognises that it is "not desirable for India to emulate China in Africa" and that India "should

play to our strengths there. Use our people-to-people ties to go beyond the government-government paradigm.” In the short-term, this could mean a pooling of resources from South Asia, Sub-Saharan African and the Gulf towards sharing best practices to ensure wide and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. This avenue can also graduate to cooperation beyond government entities, given the Indian

pharmaceutical industry’s capabilities and the Gulf’s expertise in healthcare management.

In the short-term, the contemporary challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic presents an ideal opportunity for India and the Gulf to maximise their outreach to Africa, thereby instituting a renewed Arabian Sea consensus.

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## DAY 2: PANEL 9

# RECOVERY TOWARDS THE INDIAN NEW GREEN DEAL

*Shruti Jain*

Since the mid-twentieth century, anthropogenic activities have been a driving factor in climate change. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fifth Assessment Report, the global average surface temperature has warmed by 0.85°C between 1880 and 2012. As a result, the world is experiencing unprecedented risk of natural disasters in the form of floods, droughts, biodiversity loss and extreme weather conditions. Economic growth has led to improvements in global standards of living and life expectancy, but has also about environmental damage and put immense pressure on natural resources.

Although mega-cities are the centres of financial activity, they are also highly vulnerable to climate change. Marginalised sections of the urban population disproportionately bear the brunt of environmental damage. Against this backdrop, it is important to adopt a multidimensional approach to address climate change.

### **The Green New Deal**

The idea of a Green New Deal (GND) has gained prominence recently through the efforts of US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to bring attention to the urgent need for climate action. The GND emphasises a just transition to a greener economy and the use of 100 percent clean energy. The GND has led to a new “blue-green” alliance between labour and environmentalists. Julie Becker highlighted the importance of finance in countries’ efforts to achieve their green goals. She said, “Without money you can dream, with money you can act. The transition to low carbon economy needs significant money and capital market spending”. Additionally, Geraldine Ang noted the importance of tapping the private sector in leveraging finance to invest in a green economy.

India, on the other hand, has set its own ambitious green goals. At the 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a new target of achieving 450 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030. According to India’s statement at the 25th session of the

Conference of Parties under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, it has already achieved 83 GW of this target. India has also put forth a carbon tax on coal production at a rate of US\$6 per tonne. This was corroborated by Shloka Nath as she underscored the Reserve Bank of India’s welcoming of the new green finance initiative. She also stressed on the need for the finance industry to reorient itself in India by internalising climate risk assessments in its investments and financial products. In this context, Kate Hampton added, “Mumbai joining C40 is significant as it can make its case with the national government for financial investment and share best practices between cities within a knowledge network”.

### **Just Transition Towards a Green New Deal**

Emerging economies face the double whammy of climate change and poverty. India has the potential to lead the emerging economies by setting an example of a just transition. It needs to integrate social concerns into climate response. For instance, in 2020, Coal India Limited pledged to become a ‘net-zero energy company’; although a positive step towards green energy transition, India must be aware of the real implications on the livelihoods of the workers dependent on coal mining. One of the biggest challenges for India in the coming decades will be to create a sustainable balance between economic growth and climate change.

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## SPEAKERS



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## MODERATOR



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## DAY 2: PANEL 10

# THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: FOR MAN OR FOR MACHINE?

*Shashidhar KJ*

The fourth industrial revolution is characterised by an increased interconnectedness between the physical, digital and the biological worlds. As the world continues to grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing protocols have forced people to rely on the Internet for work and to maintain personal connections. The pandemic has accelerated the pace of digitization, and many of the changes seen over the past year look set to become permanent. Will these changes benefit humankind as a whole or will they lead to the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals?

Kate Klonick said that what humans are experiencing right now is broader than just an industrial revolution that sees a massive improvement in productivity through technological means and brings changes in society. In the present context, the internet is an all-pervasive medium holding multiple systems (economic, social, political, communications) together, she added.

“It’s not just about how people work, but of course, the labour aspect of the fourth industrial revolution is a huge aspect of this. But it is also about how people communicate with each other and that people should be aware of the power of their government, private actors, tech companies and pharmaceutical industries have over them,” Klonick said.

Ram Sidis noted that many companies are no longer occupying physical office spaces and most employees are telecommuting for work, and wondered if people would ever go back physical offices en masse. He also noted that the pandemic has forced local authorities to change the way they govern, citing how in some cities police officers can work from home one day a week.

Although the internet did away with many of the frictions of the old systems, it also revealed many weaknesses in the systems that were built based on these frictions, Klonick said. “For example, the Internet has removed the friction of being able to talk to someone in real time for someone sitting in Boston and someone else sitting in Hyderabad,” she said. Older systems relied on a number of intermediaries to make sure that messages and communications were received.

Terri Chapman pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent acceleration of digitisation has led to a rise in inequalities—in the

G-7 countries, over six million people lost their jobs; the unemployment rate is 6.7 percent in the US and 9 percent in India (as of December 2020). What this has led to is a growth in non-standard forms of work on the internet-fueled gig economy targeting the most vulnerable populations. “The gig economy is populated by people of colour, women, low-income workers and immigrants are disproportionately represented,” she added.

While several governments have initiated measures to legitimise gig workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic, there have also been attempts to dismantle labour laws to favour private enterprises, putting workers in a more precarious position. The progress of the fourth industrial revolution has been primarily through private companies, but market and technology driven solutions will not help alleviate the problems of society.

Therefore, is it extremely important for governments to recognise access to the internet as a public good. According to Klonick, “What governments can do is to ensure that there is a baseline of internet access for everyone,” which will allow people to educate and reinvent themselves and take advantage of the jobs in the new market. “Then we need to think about private industry and see how it is controlling public rights like freedom of expression and build some sort of participatory democracy or some sort of public accountability into them,” she added.

Sidis pointed out that it was highly unlikely that formal jobs will come back after the pandemic. “We can see that in rural areas don’t have access to the Internet. It is obvious in cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and adapt better and can do it without government help. But we must take the small ones, and the peripheral ones and embrace them and bring them up to the field.” But even as people deal with the shocks of the pandemic

and reinvent themselves, it is important to delink social protections, like health insurance and unemployment benefits, from employment, making the idea of universal basic income even more pertinent than ever before.

However, solutions like universal basic income and health insurance appear to address the clash of the digital and physical worlds and the consequent economic and social aspects of the fourth industrial revolution. Discussions on the topic should also include aspects of the

biological world. The coronavirus has already started to mutate into different strains and shows signs of vaccine resistance. Experts warn that there will be more pandemics in the future. Pharmaceutical companies will wield more power in the future and there will be further medicalisation of society. All this comes amid the climate crisis, which is rapidly damaging the human biosphere. All the gains of the fourth industrial revolution and previous ones will come to naught if the climate crisis is not addressed first.

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## DAY 2: PANEL 11

# REGULATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE DIGITAL ERA

*Shashidhar KJ*

Over the last two months, Big Tech's role in influencing events in different countries has come under sharp focus. In the US, Big Tech companies were hailed for banning former President Donald Trump for inciting an insurrection against the democratically elected President Joe Biden. Meanwhile in India, the government is considering action against Twitter officials for lifting a state-sanctioned ban on hundreds of accounts that it alleges were fomenting unrest in the country in the backdrop of the farmer protests. In both instances, Big Tech was accused of being in contravention of local laws regarding speech and expression.



How can digital multinational companies (MNCs) reconcile with the laws of the sovereign states in which they operate? How can such firms be held more accountable?

Chris Painter sought clarity on about what conflicting laws in different jurisdictions would mean. In some regimes “accountability means control” also “means control over content and free speech”. This will also translate to information flows over the internet. Thus, there is a need for national governments to understand global regulations, where complying with company regulations set forward would mean the arrest of company executives in another jurisdiction. “That isn’t a problem for democracies like the US and India. But certainly, there are other regimes that want to control content and free flow of information.”

Rohinton Medhora expressed concerns on how technology companies’ interaction with autocracies is viewed differently than with democracies. “Even in democracies, it isn’t a question about citizens exercising their rights versus the government. These MNCs are large enough, and we know through their algorithms and their participation in the political process, they can warp the information we see.” he added.

“National regulation works best when it is backstopped by global co-operation and the most oblivious example that comes to mind is taxation.” Medhora highlighted the efforts of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to harmonise taxation regimes in different countries to ensure that digital MNCs do not use tax loopholes to maximise their profit. “If we took care of the tax havens where MNCs disproportionately declare their income in some jurisdictions and not others, then we have the perfect system. But that is not saying let’s look at things from the point of the firms, we still must

think about countries and think about nation states as sovereign.” He also highlighted the efforts of countries like France and the United Kingdom which brought in separate digital taxation laws jumping the gun on the OECD’s efforts. These laws ran counter to the World Trade Organisation’s moratorium on digital tariffs.

Many governments use sovereignty as a backstop against any regulation or intervention. “We must remember that sovereignty is not state-power. The power of sovereignty derives from the people. And the state having that sovereignty is contingent on the state respecting the rights of the people,” Iverna McGowan said. It is important to refer to the international human rights framework to find a balance for tech companies and governments.

According to Marina Kaljurand, the European Union (EU) must take the lead on data privacy and encourage tech firms to be more accountable. “We were severely criticised when the [General Data Protection Regulation] GDPR was adopted. But now I think we are the global standard.” Painter added that although the adoption of the GDPR caused friction with the US, it highlighted that the US did not have a comprehensive data protection regime and will now have to follow the standards set by the EU.

But the GPDR is not without fault. “We have to consider that small companies who cannot afford an army of compliance lawyers,” Painter said. This would mean that larger technology companies with more resources will be able to comply with the regulations and act as a regulatory barrier for competition and innovation. McGowan said that even though there are barriers to using personal data to prevent altering election outcomes and promoting voter suppression, the enforcement of these laws is lacking and ensuring 100 percent compliance is difficult.

Considering that most technology companies rely on collecting and processing personal data to better their business models or enter new businesses, there is a need for users to have more agency over how their data is used. Could people be paid for the use of their data? McGowan cautioned against such a practice as it could create a system where those who have money can afford to protect their privacy, while others may seek to sell it. “Privacy is a fundamental right and there shouldn’t be an economic link to it.”

Another issue key to Big Tech is the anti-competitive behavior of some companies. Painter said that the solution is not to break up

firms that indulge in anti-competitive behavior but to focus on fixing such practices through existing anti-trust laws. He argued that it is more important to level the playing field for other competitors, while Kaljurand said that it is necessary to identify ‘gatekeepers’ of ecosystems that harm smaller companies in the long run. Technology companies have created large platforms for apps and e-commerce, and often control the rules of engagement for players in this ecosystem, acting as gatekeepers. These platforms collect data of the companies in the ecosystem and launch competing products, giving them an unfair advantage.

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## SPEAKERS



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## CLOSING SESSION

# FROM PARIS TO GLASGOW VIA MUMBAI ON THE COP-26 JOURNEY

*Sayli Mankikar*  
*Berjis Driver*

In December 2020, Mumbai became the sixth Indian city to be chosen as a member of the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, a network of the global megacities committed to addressing climate change. Maharashtra, among India's most industrialised states, has increased its commitment to fight extreme weather events, droughts, severe flooding and annual sea-level rise. The state is adopting collective, quick action on mitigation and adaptation in the run-up to COP-26 summit in November 2021.

The 'Majhi Vasundhara' scheme (roughly meaning 'taking care of my planet') is a major contributor to the state's climate goal. The scheme covers

projects related to mobility, walkability, rainwater harvesting, electric mobility, waste management and creating energy efficient offices. The entire government machinery in Maharashtra—from city collectors, divisional commissioners and municipal commissioners—is establishing initiatives that either deal with climate change mitigation or adaptation, Aditya Thackeray explained.

In recent times, Maharashtra has faced several climate-related challenges, including cyclones and erratic weather events, as well as a high incidence of COVID-19 infections, and has had to provide a substantial amount of compensation to those affected. Despite this, the state has been able to tackle environmental challenges—the state government declared about 800 acres of land in the Aarey Milk Colony area as a reserved forest; electric mobility was given a boost with the introduction of 380 electric buses in one year and a planned 25 percent increase over the next three years; and intensive Miyawaki forestation work in Mumbai, Thane, Pune, Latur and Nagpur.

Thackeray, who regularly participates in beach cleaning exercises, says such activities have a therapeutic calming effect. The cleaning of the Mithi river and water bodies in Dahisar, Poisar and Oshiwara, which have turned into

freshwater nullahs (ravines), is part of the city's river-cleaning policy. Previously, Mumbai saw 3200 million litres of untreated water thrown into the ocean daily, but this is no longer the case. Over the next six years, sewage disposal plants in Mumbai will recycle 2800 million litres of water a day for reuse.

Urban centres are key to tackling climate change, Thackeray said. As a C40 member, Mumbai will be part of deliberations and negotiations on climate change impacts, and learning from the experience of other cities will go a long way to help the state realise its climate goals, he added.

Advocating the need for clean fuel and green mobility, Thackeray remarked that a city cannot be burning coal even as it encourages the use of electric cars. Cities must create an ecosystem for renewable energy. Solar highways and floating solar panels on water bodies are some measures the government is currently considering. Infrastructure development and sustainable development must coexist and work together.

Thackeray also stressed on the need for collective leadership; for cities to achieve quick outcomes in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts, everyone must be a climate champion and encourage sustainable growth.

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