

CUTS CITEE IN ACTION

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2020



WEBINARS

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project *Navigating Myanmar's Ethnic Conundrum*

CUTS International organised a webinar on Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project: Navigating Myanmar's Ethnic Conundrum on October 01, 2020, which witnessed the participation of over 100 people from diverse backgrounds and eminent experts.

The speakers and moderators of the webinar were Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director of CUTS International; Sreeradha Datta, Centre Head, Neighbourhood Studies and Senior Fellow of Vivekananda International Foundation; Maj. Gen. Alok Deb (RETD.), Former Deputy Director General of Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

Other than enhanced connectivity, the Kaladan multi-modal project can potentially result in other benefits including the betterment of internal as well as cross-border security through local economic development. This requires para-diplomacy on the part of India's northeastern states

bordering Myanmar. Local people should be more involved with connectivity initiatives.

"While India's transit to its northeastern region via Bangladesh is getting strengthened, the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project, which is being implemented by India in Myanmar remains even more important", said Chatterjee.

Speaking as a discussant, Deb stated that "the Kaladan project is a key pillar of India's Act East Policy."

Today connectivity is being perceived in a much more positive light and the discourse on the need to ensure security is being tackled by improving border infrastructure.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fYB_630mHM&feature=youtu.be





Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation in the BBIN Sub-region

CUTS International and its partners from Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal organised a webinar titled ‘Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation in the BBIN Sub-region’ on October 30, 2020 to deliberate the findings of the Compendium published under the project on ‘Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation: Evidence from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal’. The webinar was attended by more than 50 participants from diverse backgrounds of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.

The eminent speakers of the webinar were Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director, CUTS International; Selima Ahmad, Member of Parliament, Bangladesh and President, Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Manju Giri, Gender & Social Development Expert, Thimphu Anoush Der Boghossian, Trade and Gender Focal Point, World Trade Organisation; Bibek Ray Choudhuri, Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, Kolkata; Bina Pradhan, Gender Expert & Social Economist, Kathmandu and Ruba Rummana, Associate Professor, Department of Arts and Science, Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, Dhaka.

Chatterjee said that unless we have a positive agenda for women’s economic empowerment through trade, we cannot think about gender dimensions of trade facilitation. It is essential because not only the female labour force participation is low in our part of the world, but their participation in trade is much lower.

According to Ahmad, “In order to enhance women’s participation in trade and other economic activities, it is imperative to regularly collect gender-disaggregated data for different quantitative parameters by government agencies including qualitative information via consultative dialogues between authorities responsible for trade facilitation and women’s business associations and groups.”

The webinar concluded by emphasising on potential benefits in terms of higher trade if gender-responsive trade facilitation measures are implemented.

<https://cuts-citee.org/webinar-on-gender-dimensions-of-trade-facilitation-in-the-bbin-sub-region/>



What Would Happen to a World without the WTO?

CUTS International organised a webinar entitled “Pradeep Mehta in conversation with Pascal Lamy” on November 18, 2020. This was a virtual launch of a Discussion Paper on a “World without the WTO” prepared by CUTS based on a series of webinars organised across the world during April-September 2020.

The paper was supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung’s Geneva office.

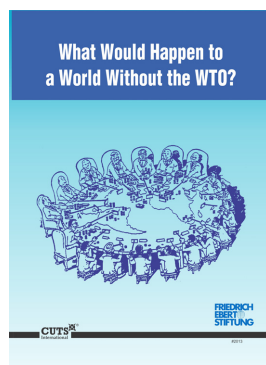
The eminent speakers of the webinar were: Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International; Pascal Lamy, former Director-General, World Trade Organisation

There is no denying the fact that it is a system that underlined peace, security, stability and prosperity in the post-war world, said Mehta. He added that a rules-based multilateral trading system is an absolute necessity for surviving the on-going onslaught against it and also establishing a ‘new normal’ of polyilateralism in a balanced and equitable manner.

Joining him in the conversation, Lamy argued that there is no alternative to the WTO going forward, in organising trade relations between nations in a fair and just manner.

While the former represents the conceptual framework of rules for trading, the latter implies the actual way the WTO works, which requires proper diagnosis of reform agenda of the WTO that is to be pursued.

<https://cuts-citee.org/the-onus-of-reviving-multilateral-trading-system-lies-with-leaders-and-trading-community-del/>





Why Should India ‘Join or Not Join’ the RCEP – Pros and Cons

CUTS International organised a webinar on Why Should India ‘Join or Not Join’ the RCEP – Pros and Cons on December 09, 2020. This webinar witnessed the participation of over 75 people from diverse backgrounds and eminent experts.



The eminent speakers of the webinar were: Pradeep S Mehta; Gopal Krishna Agarwal, National Spokesperson of BJP Economic Affairs; Amita Batra, Professor of Economics, JNU; Rajeev Gowda, Former Congress MP and Professor on Public Policy; Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Former Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission; Ashwani Mahajan, Commission Co-convenor, Swadeshi Jagaran Manch Naushad Forbes, Co-Chairman, Forbes Marshall.

“Whether we like it or not, the global trading order has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the US-China trade war, and we need to take these into account for our economy,” said Mehta.

The discussions were kicked off by Ahluwalia. He was disappointed to see that even after Act East Policy, the decision was taken to opt-out of RCEP. However, the decision to not join RCEP was not bureaucratically driven, he said.

Chatterjee underlined that there is a broad consensus that there should be a convergence between trade and industrial policy and that the whole of government approach should be. He said that the question we need to ask is ‘when’ do we join RCEP and not why.

<https://cuts-citee.org/rcep-calls-for-india-to-converge-its-trade-and-industrial-policy-instruments-cuts-international/>

Transforming Logistics Performance in BBIN Countries

CUTS International organised a webinar based on a Discussion Paper: Transforming Logistics Performance in BBIN Countries: Towards creating lasting legacy on December 16, 2020. It was recently published by CUTS under its project on multi-modal connectivity in the BBIN sub-region, which is supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom with the Asian Development Bank as its knowledge partner. More than 80 participants from think tanks, multilateral development banks, international organisations, business and industry associations, among others, attended the webinar.

The speakers and moderators of the webinar were Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director, CUTS International; Cecile Fruman, Director, Regional Integration and Engagement, South Asia, The World Bank Group; Jan Hoffmann, Chief, Trade Logistics Branch, Division on Technology and Logistics, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; Pritam Banerjee, Independent Trade and Logistics Specialist; Kuancheng Huang, Senior Transport Specialist, Transport Sector Group, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, Asian Development Bank

Delivering his presentation, Banerjee underlined the end-to-end analysis of a corridor using objective data is rare in the BBIN context. He made a case for this concept by arguing that while the current approaches used in the assessment of logistics quality in BBIN countries have added great value in identifying problems and get much better visibility of issues, over-used methodologies have diminishing returns after a point in terms of providing more holistic or newer insights.

Reflecting on the presentation, Fruman said that they are fully behind the concept of corridor-wide assessments by leveraging big data and new technologies. The World Bank is now in the process of developing its Logistics Performance Index 2.0, which will leverage automated and big data to a much greater extent.

<https://cuts-citee.org/cuts-webinar-on-transforming-logistics-performance-in-bbin-countries/>





WEBINARS

Gender Dimensions of Informal Trade

CUTS organised a webinar entitled ‘Gender Dimensions of Informal Trade’ on December 21, 2020. The webinar focussed on informal trade’s economic and social implications while deliberating on women’s engagement in informal trade operations across the border. The webinar also emphasised the need to have a gender-sensitive border environment to reduce poverty among border communities. This further deliberated the findings of the briefing paper compendium produced under this project. The webinar was attended by more than 50 participants from diverse backgrounds of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal.

The speakers and moderators of the webinar were Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director, CUTS International; Hasina Kharbhih, Founder and Managing Director of Impulse Social Enterprises, Meghalaya; Kamala Gurung, Gender and Natural Resource Management Specialist, ICIMOD, Kathmandu, Nepal; Nasreen Begum, Member (Law) of Bangladesh Competition Commission; Damchae Dem, Founder, Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs.

Speaking on the occasion, Gurung said that cross-border informal trade is observed historically in all regions but over time there are changes in its scale and products being traded and women in this sub-region are mostly engaged with informal cross-border trade in small quantities.

Highlighting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on informal traders, Kharbhih said that “Post COVID-19 the government needs to look at how border haats would operate in a bio-secure manner to enhance economic livelihoods of women traders”.

In his concluding remarks, Chatterjee said that trade is not gender-neutral and we need a structural approach for institutionalising border practices for facilitating women’s participation in cross-border trade.

<https://cuts-citee.org/cuts-webinar-on-gender-dimensions-of-informal-trade/>



PUBLICATIONS

REPORTS

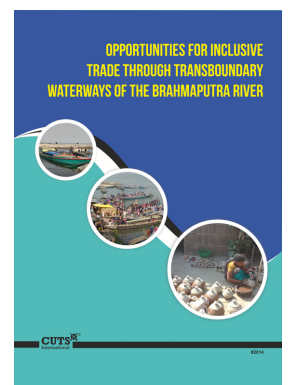
Opportunities for Inclusive Trade through Transboundary Waterways of the Brahmaputra River

Cross-border trade between India and Bangladesh through inland waterways is governed by the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT). It defines selected routes for the movement of goods between the two places in one country and to a third country through the territory of the other.

The recent development of allowing the movement of shallow draft vessels through Protocol Route and the declaration of new routes and Ports of Call, has opened avenues for short haul trade attracting local traders in the sub-region.

In this context, CUTS international with the support from Oxfam under the programme “Transboundary Rivers of South Asia” (TROSA) conducted a study along the stretch Dhubri (Assam, India) and Chilmari (Kurigram, Bangladesh) falling in the Protocol Route 1 and 2 to explore the prospects of inclusive cross-border trade. This report captures various challenges related to infrastructure, regulations and market access faced by local producers, traders and small scale entrepreneurs that are hindering them from participating in cross-border trade and proposes specific recommendations to address those challenges.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/opportunities-for-Inclusive-trade-through-transboundary-waterways-of-the-brahmaputra-river.pdf>





PUBLICATIONS

REPORTS

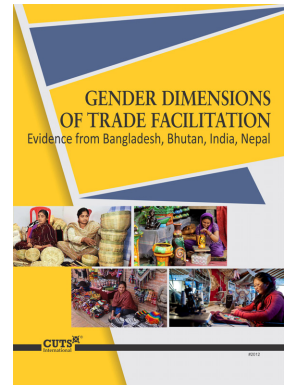
Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation

Evidence from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal

Over the past few years and particularly after the adoption of Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), a renewed emphasis has been paid on how trade may impact gender and how gender inclusive trade policies can be formulated. In the long term, this may help the governments in setting the priorities in negotiating trade agreements, formulating domestic policies or reforming the sectors where women entrepreneurs are represented disproportionately.

Given this backdrop, CUTS International has prepared a compendium, which is a collection of briefing papers by a group of eminent experts from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN), as an output of a project titled Gender Dimension of Trade Facilitation: Evidence from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom under its Asia Regional Trade and Connectivity Programme.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/compendium-on-gender-dimensions-of-trade-facilitation.pdf>



BRIEFS

Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation

Evidence from Bhutan

Bhutan is a country known for its Gross National Happiness (GNH) index and predominantly matriarchal society. However, traditionally the ratio of female entrepreneurs in the export business has remained low. This is primarily attributed to broader socioeconomic inequalities, including lack of knowledge about export standards and procedures, unavailability of financial resources, inadequate training, and capacity building for women among other reasons.

Given this context, CUTS International in partnership with Bhutan Media and Communications Institute did a study on “Gender Dimensions of Trade Facilitation: Evidence from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal” with the support of Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom. In this study, we conducted a survey in the BBIN sub-region to elicit the challenges faced by the women entrepreneurs and suggested policy measures.

In that light, this Policy Brief for Bhutan suggests specific recommendations for the betterment of women entrepreneurs such as incorporating gender-specific components (schemes and incentives) in the trade policies, industrial, finance, and other economic policies, providing focussed training and capacity building programmes in local languages for women entrepreneurs, implementing easy and accessible financial schemes for women including provisions for collateral-free loans and discounted interest rates, building gender-sensitive infrastructure and establishing business linkages.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/policy-brief-gender-dimensions-of-trade-facilitation-evidence-from-bhutan.pdf>





BRIEFS

Aviation Logistics in the BBIN Sub-region Pathways for greater resilience

The airline industry at the global level has grown rapidly over the last two decades as the number of passengers flying to destinations increased from 1.5 billion in 1998 to 4.1 billion in 2017. In a pre-pandemic situation, airplanes used to transport over 10 million passengers and around US\$18bn worth of goods in a day.

Air transport services provide momentum to the overall socio-economic development of a country. They help to create employment, support tourism, and enable local and international businesses to grow. Moreover, the increased connectivity brought by the expansion of air services also helps to boost foreign investment, international trade, and promotes social bonding among communities located at far-flung distances.

In this context, this Briefing Paper in an attempt to galvanise deeper aviation sector linkages in the BBIN sub-region highlights the pathways for a resilient policy response. The pathways will not just help the BBIN countries recover from the economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but also help foster sustainable business and people-to-people contacts in the years to come.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/briefing-paper-aviation-logistics-in-the-BBIN-sub-region.pdf>



Inclusive Cross-border Trade through Trans-boundary Waterways of the Brahmaputra River

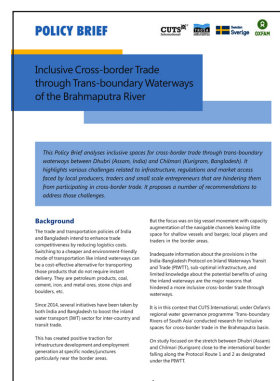
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This Policy Brief captures various challenges related to infrastructure, regulations and market access faced by local producers, traders and small scale entrepreneurs that are hindering them from participating in cross-border trade and proposes specific recommendations to address those challenges.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/policy-briefs-inclusive-cross-border-trade-through-trans-boundary-waterways-of-the-brahmaputra-river.pdf>



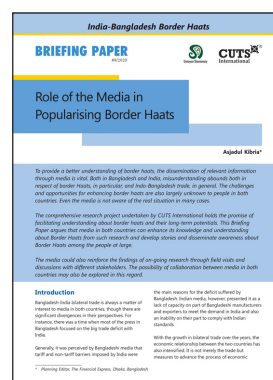
Role of the Media in Popularising Border Haats

Both in Bangladesh and India, misunderstanding abounds in respect of Border Haats, in particular, and Indo-Bangladesh trade, in general. The challenges and opportunities for enhancing Border Haats are also largely unknown to people in both countries. Even the media is not aware of the real situation in many cases.

To provide a better understanding of Border Haats, the dissemination of relevant information through media is vital. The comprehensive research project undertaken by CUTS International holds the promise of facilitating understanding about border haats and their long-term potentials.

This Briefing Paper argues that media in both countries can enhance its knowledge and understanding about Border Haats from such research and develop stories and disseminate awareness about Border Haats among the people at large.

<https://cuts-crc.org/pdf/bp-role-of-the-media-in-popularising-border-haats.pdf>





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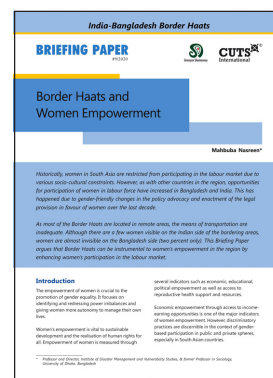
BRIEFS

Border Haats and Women Empowerment

Historically, women in South Asia are restricted from participating in the labour market due to various socio-cultural constraints. However, as with other countries in the region, opportunities for participation of women in labour force have increased in Bangladesh and India. This has happened due to gender-friendly changes in the policy advocacy and enactment of the legal provision in favour of women over the last decade.

As most of the Border Haats are located in remote areas, the means of transportation are inadequate. Although there are a few women visible on the Indian side of the bordering areas, women are almost invisible on the Bangladesh side (two percent only). This Briefing Paper argues that Border Haats can be instrumental to women's empowerment in the region by enhancing women's participation in the labour market.

<https://cuts-crc.org/pdf/bp-border-haats-and-women-empowerment.pdf>



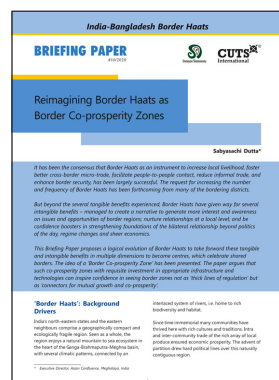
Reimagining Border Haats as Border Co-prosperity Zones

It has been the consensus that Border Haats as an instrument to increase local livelihood, foster better cross-border micro-trade, facilitate people-to-people contact, reduce informal trade, and enhance border security, has been largely successful.

But beyond the several tangible benefits experienced, Border Haats have given way for several intangible benefits – managed to create a narrative to generate more interest and awareness on issues and opportunities of border regions; nurture relationships at a local level; and be confidence boosters in strengthening foundations of the bilateral relationship beyond politics of the day, regime changes and sheer economics.

This Briefing Paper proposes a logical evolution of Border Haats to take forward these tangible and intangible benefits in multiple dimensions to become centres, which celebrate shared borders. The idea of a 'Border Co-prosperity Zone' has been presented. The paper argues that such co-prosperity zones with requisite investment in appropriate infrastructure and technologies can inspire confidence in seeing border zones not as 'thick lines of regulation' but as 'connectors for mutual growth and co-prosperity'.

<https://cuts-crc.org/pdf/bp-reimagining-border-haats-as-border-co-prosperity-zones.pdf>



WORKING NOTE

Multi-Modal Transport Connectivity in Greater Mekong Sub-Region through Railways Network
Lessons for BBIN

This Working Note has been prepared under a project titled "Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region", which is supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom under its Asia Regional Trade and Connectivity Programme.

The objective of this Note is to narrate the current situation regarding regional railways networks used in the transportation of goods and passengers in the GMS. It aims to assess the lessons for the BBIN sub-region to increase cross-border transportation for trading products using existing and potential multi-modal connectivity routes.

Multiple lessons can be learned for the BBIN sub-region. Some of them are: revival of the old railway network including looking into their interoperability, linking existing dormant routes with new routes, crafting regional/sub-regional agreements, aiming for long-term intra-regional connectivity by developing selective routes that are economically viable and by taking into account local and national political challenges while developing a comprehensive multi-modal transport plan in this sub-region.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/working-note-multi-modal-transport-connectivity-in-greater-mekong-sub-region-through-railways-network.pdf>





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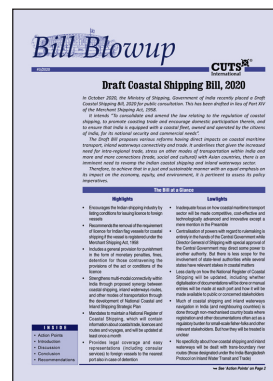
BILL BLOW-UP

Draft Coastal Shipping Bill, 2020

In October 2020, the Ministry of Shipping, Government of India recently placed a Draft Coastal Shipping Bill, 2020 for public consultation. This has been drafted in lieu of Part XIV of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958.

The Draft Bill proposes various reforms having direct impacts on coastal maritime transport, inland waterways connectivity and trade. It underlines that given the increased need for intra-regional trade, stress on other modes of transportation within India and more and more connections (trade, social and cultural) with Asian countries, there is an imminent need to revamp the Indian coastal shipping and inland waterways sector.

Therefore, to achieve that in a just and sustainable manner with an equal emphasis on its impact on the economy, equity, and environment, it is pertinent to assess its policy imperatives.



<https://parfore.in/pdf/bill-blowup-draft-coastal-shipping-bill-2020.pdf>



PARTICIPATION

- Sudip kumar attended a Flagship Seminar on 'International Trade: What Everyone Needs to Know' organised by Centre for Social and Economic Progress on December 17, 2020. The webinar discussed the international trading system has become all the more pertinent with a presidential transition in place and a global pandemic looming.
- Jithin Sabu, Srijata Deb, Kajal Sharda and Deepmala Ghosh attended a webinar entitled 'Launch of the Online Readiness Assessment Guide for Cross-border Paperless Trade' organised by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in collaboration with the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law UNCITRAL and Enhanced Integrated Framework team (EIF) on December 09, 2020. The webinar was to introduce the online platform to facilitate cross-border paperless trade readiness self-assessment developed by the ESCAP in collaboration with the UNCITRAL.
- Jithin Sabu attended a webinar entitled 'What's Next for China-India Relations: A Look Ahead' organised by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on December 09, 2020. The webinar discussed the trajectory of China-India ties and provided recommendations to improve the relationship between Asia's two largest countries.
- Srijata Deb, Kajal Sharda and Jitin Sabu attended a webinar entitled 'India's Northeast: A gateway to wider cooperative architecture in East and Southeast Asia' organised by Observer Research Foundation with IIT Guwahati on December 04, 2020.
- Srijata Deb, Kajal Sharda and Jithin Sabu attended a webinar entitled 'High-Level Meeting on Regional Cooperation on Trade & Transport Connectivity' organised by ESCAP in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank on December 02, 2020. The high-level regional meeting explored how trade and transport facilitation measures can be implemented more effectively during and in the aftermath of the unprecedented crisis of COVID-19, to improve the countries' economic resilience.



PARTICIPATION

- Saurabh Kumar attended a webinar entitled 'G20: The Riyadh Summit, 2020' organised by Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), New Delhi on November 30, 2020. The webinar focused on important milestones in the G20 countries' collective priority to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Saurabh Kumar attended a webinar entitled 'Future Roadmap for Global Economic Recovery: Reflection on G20 Riyadh Summit and Beyond' organised by Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, India on November 26, 2020. The webinar focused on the G20 Riyadh Summit and its clarion call by the grouping for globally coordinated action to mitigate the devastating impacts of COVID-19 and ensure smooth economic recovery.
- Bipul Chatterjee spoke at a Development Talk organised by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency on November 11, 2020. It was focused on women's economic empowerment and trade: *Women's economic empowerment – what actions will accelerate progress and can trade be a game changer?* He spoke about the experience of women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal in doing cross-border trade and relevant trade facilitation challenges therein.
- Kajal Sharda and Srijata Deb attended a webinar titled 'Supply Chain Logistics & E-Commerce Post COVID: The Way Forward' organised by U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai, India on October 29, 2020.
- Jithin Sabu attended a webinar entitled 'The 2020 Lowy Institute Asia Power Index' organised by Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, India on October 28, 2020. The webinar discussed the Asia Power Index of 2020.
- Saurabh Kumar attended a webinar entitled 'WTO@25' organised by Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi on October 22, 2020. The webinar focussed on the need to discuss issues related to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and global economy.
- Srijata Deb and Kajal Sharda attended a webinar titled 'Empowering Women to join Global Value Chains through E-commerce: Experiences in South Asia in COVID-19 Context' organised by UNESCAP in collaboration with Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), WTO, Geneva, on October 20, 2020. The webinar discussed stories of various women entrepreneurs of South Asia.
- Jithin Sabu attended a webinar entitled 'Can India-Japan Partnership be the crucial pillar for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific?' organised by Ananta Aspen Centre, New Delhi on October 22, 2020. The webinar was organised to discuss the future prospects of Japan-India relationship in the changing global political context.
- Kajal Sharda and Srijata Deb attended a webinar entitled 'Supply Chain Resiliency and the Need for Stress-Tests' organised by Centre for Research in Emerging Economies as part of the #JGBS Inspirational Lecture Series 2020 on October 15, 2020.
- Jithin Sabu attended a webinar entitled 'An X-ray of the 2020 UN General Assembly debates' organised by Diplo Foundation, Malta on October 08, 2020.
- Jithin Sabu attended a webinar titled 'India's China Challenge' organised by Centre for Social and Economic Progress, New Delhi on October 05, 2020. The webinar was organised to launch a book titled *India's China Challenge* written by Ananth Krishnan and discussed the question of China on India.



Accelerate India-Myanmar economic ties with people at the centre stage

Economic Times, October 17, 2020
Bipul Chatterjee and Prashant Sharma

A recent visit to Myanmar by the Foreign Secretary of India, Harsh Vardhan Shringla and the Chief of the Army Staff of the Indian Army, General Manoj Mukund Naravane should be backed by people-centric initiatives for fostering future economic ties. Advantageously, consensus towards an early operationalisation of the Sittwe Port and India's offer of US\$6bn for establishing an oil refinery and for joint vaccine production, among others, are some promising steps. Likewise, with bilateral trade worth US\$1.5bn in 2019-20, the decision to import 150,000 tonnes of Urad dal from Myanmar is a win-win proposition for both countries.

<https://cuts-citee.org/accelerate-india-myanmar-economic-ties-with-people-at-the-centre-stage/>

South Asia's prospects of achieving the SDGs in view of the COVID-19 pandemic

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Trade Insight
Jithin Sabu

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 comprehensive goals adopted in 2015 for sustainable global peace and prosperity to be achieved by 2030, is facing a major blow from the COVID-19 pandemic. The incredibly ambitious goals include, *inter alia*, poverty elimination, reduction of inequalities, good health and well-being, quality education, clean water, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth. While the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed a major roadblock in the progress along with the achievement of the goals, the progress of the world with regard to SDGs was already under criticism. For instance, the SDG Summit in 2019 did not find the progress made in the first four years satisfactory.

<https://cuts-citee.org/pdf/south-asias-prospects-of-achieving-the-sdgs-in-view-of-the-covid-19-pandemic.pdf>

India's neighbourhood first in practice

Economic Times, December 31, 2020
Bipul Chatterjee and Prashant Sharma

Major change is afoot in India's Eastern Region that will improve the wellbeing of millions in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India. This is centred on people-to-people connectivity and welfare. It includes the transformation of border haats (local markets in border areas), improvement of border infrastructure development, and new transport links with our neighbouring countries, fostering greater economic and security. These are building blocks for greater economic and commercial exchanges that help a combined population of around 1.65 billion, including around 45 million in India's Northeast. It also helps in a resilient comeback from the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://cuts-citee.org/indias-neighbourhood-first-in-practice/>