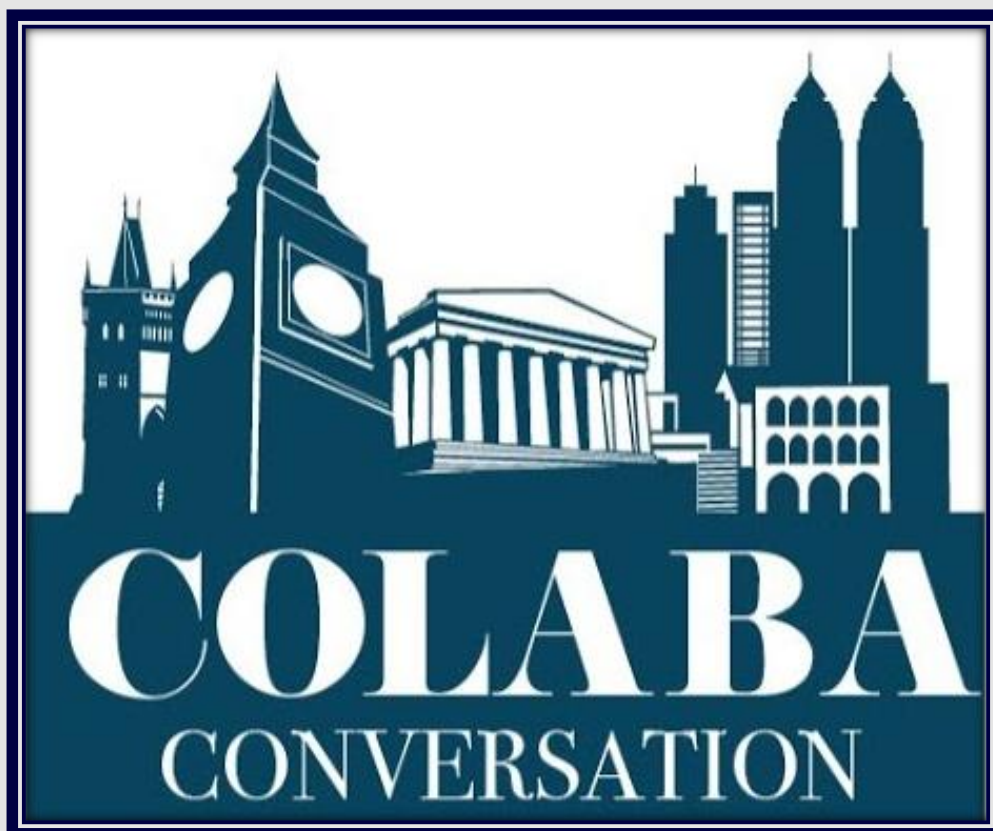




महाराष्ट्र शासन



RESET, RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

COLABA CONVERSATION 2021

MUMBAI, 2nd & 3rd FEBRUARY

Draft Report

 **CHILDREN'S
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COLABA CONVERSATION 2021

RESET | RESILIENCE | RECOVERY

MUMBAI, 2nd & 3rd February, 2021

INTRODUCTION:

The Observer Research Foundation and the Government of Maharashtra hosted Colaba Conversation—Mumbai's signature forum for discussing international policy issues affecting the city, the nation, and the world on 2nd and 3rd February 2021. The two-day online conference saw participation of over 70 speakers from 20 countries who deliberated on issues of global cooperation in a deeply critical and contested world.


The pandemic has radically transformed the way we live, work, and interact; a 'new normal' is crystallising. This transition has called for an equal reengineering of the global economy, policy-making institutions, and governance processes. Rethinking a new global governance architecture therefore needs room for short-term responses guided by the evolving nature of the pandemic and long-term responses guided by the fundamental shifts in global affairs.

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. The rise of state-led capitalism evangelised by China and the diminished influence of the post-war security arrangements is forcing nations to cement new defence and economic alliances.

Within national boundaries, a new contract between markets, states and society is apparent. Sub-national governments and leaders are collaborating with their peers globally to respond to climate change, pandemics, and inequality, and to the needs of globalised youth. A new governance paradigm is emerging as technological advances are being leveraged to improve governance and economic opportunity.

Mumbai's thriving international business centre, creative ecosystem and diverse communities made it an ideal place to discuss emerging governance issues afflicting the world.

Named after 'Kulaba', one of the seven islands that created the archipelago of Mumbai, the inaugural Colaba Conversation served as a medium for multi-stakeholder consultations and dialogue on the emerging role of commerce, community, and creativity in the Indo-Pacific. In order to interrogate the changing global dynamics with purpose and foresight, the forum deliberated on the evolving aspects of 'Para-diplomacy', 'Globalised cities', 'Digital Futures', and the 'New Green Deal'.

The inaugural edition of Colaba Conversation brought together a global network of leaders from government, industry, media, the youth and civil society to deconstruct, debate, and shape the politics, perceptions and policies which will be vital to the emergence of a new global order. In keeping with ORF's 'gender-first' policy, the panels had 34 women experts versus 31 male speakers from across the world. 

INAUGURAL PANEL

The City, The State and The New World Order



Inaugural address:

- Uddhav Thackeray, Chief Minister, Government of Maharashtra, India

Panelists:

- Almut Möller, State Councillor, Hamburg, Germany
- Eleni Kounalakis, Lieutenant Governor, California, United States
- Theresa Schopper, Minister of State, Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, Germany
- Lianne Dalziel, Mayor, Christchurch, New Zealand
- Margaret Beazley, Governor, New South Wales, Australia

The coronavirus pandemic prompted the belated acknowledgment of the significance of cities in comprehensive disaster response strategies. Under the ‘new normal’ of increased social mobilisation towards sustaining community tracing and social distancing guidelines, the oft-overlooked agency of local authorities has returned to the fore. Although other disasters in the past, like terror attacks and climate change-related eventualities underscored the relevance of local mobilisation, their temporospatial characteristic would subsequently spur a return of deferring to federal mandates. Whereas, the prolonged search for an effective vaccine has rendered social mobilisation efforts to be the only credible path to stemming the virus’ spread. This has meant that, for the foreseeable future, even as the vaccination effort now gathers steam, cities and their local administrative bodies would remain at the forefront of the protracted fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

In recognising this imperative of cities and subregions, the inaugural session of the **Colaba Conversation 2021**, had august representation from local leaders from around the world. This included, Uddhav Thackeray, Chief Minister, Government of Maharashtra, India; Almut Möller, State Councillor, Hamburg, Germany; Eleni Kounalakis Lieutenant Governor, California, US; Theresa Schopper, Minister of State, Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, Germany; Lianne Dalziel, Mayor, Christchurch, New Zealand, and Margaret Beazley, Governor, New South Wales, Australia.

In noting the criticality of local mobilisation towards “disciplined and determined” contact-tracing efforts, Chief Minister Thackeray cited the global recognition received by Dharavi—a densely-populated favela in Mumbai known for its constricted by-lanes, use of community toilets, and small-scale production units of utility goods. Similarly, in noting Christchurch’s work on expediting equitable post-pandemic recovery, Mayor 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 sub-regions in broader foreign policy linkages. Citing Hamburg’s outsized share in Germany’s total maritime transport to India (74 percent in 2019), State Councillor Möller said, “While we follow our national government’s pointed direction, the city of Hamburg itself is a driving force of India-Hamburg relations with

its independent agenda and activities.” Similarly, Lt. Governor Kounalakis noted the centrality of California in the broader trajectory of US-India bilateral ties. Noting the doubling of California’s exports to India between 2009 and 2019, Kounalakis underscored the two-way trade between the two to have exceeded US\$ 10 billion.

Beyond commerce, Minister Schopper noted Baden-Württemberg’s sub-national partnership with Maharashtra to have honed a shared focus on issues like digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and new mobility. Furthermore, Schopper noted that the formal partnership, which has been in place since 2015, originated more than 50 years ago at the municipal level with institutional linkages between Stuttgart and Mumbai. Similarly, Governor Beazley underscored the Australian government’s recognition of sub-regional partnerships in its ‘An India Economic Strategy to 2035’. Wherein, New South Wales’ sister-state relationship with Maharashtra and Gujarat form the basis of the strategy towards 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, some have transcended borders to forge sub-regional linkages.

On the former, Chief Minister Thackeray alluded to his government’s efforts in elevating the agency of Maharashtra’s Forest Department, designating the 800-acre Aarey Colony as a reserved forest area, and according an impetus to environment-friendly mass transportation services. On the latter instance of cross-border sub-regional cooperation, Minister Schopper noted joint efforts with Lt. Governor Kounalakis, in drawing attention to the role and responsibilities of sub-national governments in climate protection. Baden-Württemberg and California are founding jurisdictions of the Under2 Coalition—a group of sub-national 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 same has already led to more than 220 sub-national regions coming onboard as signatories, to represent more than 1 billion people and around 43 percent of the global economy.

Hence, 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 sub-regions to build their own international relationships. 

PANEL 1:

Towards Resilient Cities: Lessons from the Pandemic



Panelists:

- Ashwini Bhide, Additional Municipal Commissioner, Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, India
- Nicholas Brooke, Chairman, Urban Land Institute Asia Pacific, Hong Kong
- Regina Ramos, Deputy Director, Pilots and Innovation, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, United States
- Shruti Narayan, Regional Director, South and West Asia Regions, C40 Cities, India

Moderator:

- Aditi Ratho, Associate Fellow, Observer Research Foundation Mumbai, India

Strengthening 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 post-pandemic recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic has unearthed several fissures in the administration and planning of urban areas that must be fixed to manage future shocks. The pandemic affected cities more than rural and peri-urban areas due to proximity 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, Additional Municipal Commissioner, Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, 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. Mumbai has a ready resource pool of technology, business, and enthusiastic citizen communities that can come together for pandemic management. What caused Mumbai to avoid the second wave of the pandemic that hit other cities 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 ensuring regularity and transparency in data gathering, which helped equitable disseminate services to the vulnerable citizens.

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

Decentralisation of field organisation was another element that worked to stem the incessant tide of the pandemic in Mumbai, according to Ashwini Bhide. City-wide ward-level war rooms were directly connected to citizens 24x7, in order to get feedback and plan swift and calibrated response. Similarly, as described by Regina Ramos, Boston's inter-jurisdictional communication proved to be incredibly useful—with a 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, Regional Director, South and West Asia Regions, C40 Cities, compounded this message and suggested to bringing back the concept of ‘20 minute cities’—where citizens have all their essential services within a 20 minute radius, to help in quick and efficient dissemination of services during crises as well.

According to Nicholas Brooke, Chairman of the Urban Land Institute in Hong Kong, the pandemic has been a wakeup call to look at risk from a much wider lens—along with pandemics, risk assessment should now include climate change, natural disasters, financial crises, as well as the failure of city systems and governments. Shruti Narayan also claimed that ecological destruction is increasing pandemics—therefore, climate change is an important lens through which we should look at urban development.

The panelists urged for the adoption of a collaborative resilient agenda to mitigate adverse effects of such future events that transcended beyond the neighborhood, district, and city government levels. The involvement of both public and private sector is crucial during pandemic management. 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 example, having broad walkways to ensure people are not too close to each other and also encourage people to walk more, said Narayan.

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

PANEL 2:

Sustainable Entrepôts: Designing and Financing Coastal Cities



Panelists:

- Claudia Warning, Director General Asia, Middle East, Latin America, Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany
- Rafiq Dossani, Director, RAND Center for Asia Pacific Policy, United States
- Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor, Environment and Energy, Greater London Authority, United Kingdom
- Ted Baillieu, Enterprise Professor, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne and Former Premier, Victoria, Australia

Moderator:

- Mitali Mukherjee, Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India

Coastal cities have historically been the hubs of economic activities. They have also been the centre of geopolitical interests. However, they have moved on from the traditional idea of an ‘entrepôt’ and started to efficiently deliver on logistical, managerial and global trade services. Besides having to deal with ever-growing infrastructure needs, they also face heightened climate challenges and rapid population growth. Coastal cities therefore need to be viewed differently from other cities of that scale and size. What do they need in terms of infrastructure requirements? What kind of social and economic imperatives confront these entrepôts? How do we build them to be more sustainable and scalable? How can global coastal cities think in terms of sharing knowhow to find the delicate balance in terms of not just tourism, trade and infrastructure but also its environmental responsibilities?

Moderated by ORF’s Mitali Mukherjee, the panel saw Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor, Environment and Energy, Greater London Authority, United Kingdom; Claudia Warning, Director General Asia, Middle East, Latin America, Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany; Ted Baillieu, Enterprise Professor, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne and Former Premier, Victoria, Australia; and Rafiq Dossani, Director, RAND Center for Asia Pacific Policy, United States, deliberating critical issues confronting global coastal cities and explored design and finance solutions for their sustainable growth.

Shirley Rodrigues singled out climate mitigation and adaptation as the most critical challenge for cities in general—and coastal cities in particular—in their quest 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 emergency related issues on top priority. The Mayor of London’s New Green Deal mission aims to double the size of London’s green economy by 2030. London has thus sought to accelerate job creation while firmly tackling 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,” she stressed.


Claudia Warning, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of finance to address larger socioeconomic challenges. The developmental agenda of bilateral ties between Germany and India have put cities at the forefront in response to the needs of the urban poor, mitigating and adapting to climate change and achieving 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 Euros 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 Euros 500 million for coastal urban resilience, coastal security and coastal infrastructure in the coastal cities of Chennai and Kochi.

She also urged that big coastal cities such as Mumbai, Jakarta or Hong Kong have a "great responsibility" while exploiting their blue resources. "Large coastal cities are facing 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 concluded.

Ted Baillieu highlighted the urgency of city planning in Africa and Asia to cater to the enormous global population growth, which, as per several estimates, is expected to increase by 2 to 3 billion over the next 30 years. This growth will be uneven and will mainly be witnessed in the large urban agglomerations of Africa and South Asia. "This is a huge challenge for the entire world and the cost of not meeting this challenge is too high for the world to pay," he 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. India under the current government has embarked on a number of collaborative reforms in banking, taxation, roads, rail, utilities and farming. It has also embarked on 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 therefore 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," he remarked. This would need an overarching national strategy and one that varies as per the unique objective that is delineated for a coastal city. Countries like India must therefore look beyond their traditional coastal cities for developing green field entrepôts under a national strategy that sets aside public expenditure while encouraging private investments. Nations such as India has to find out key locations for such green field entrepôts and make them work for not only maritime trade, but for backward integration for the development of the hinterland.

Rafiq Dossani illustrated the example of the Silicon Valley and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to question the exclusive focus on the development of coastal cities. Coastal cities made sense about three decades ago when there was a preponderance of maritime trade. But in a world which is now steered by service-led digital economy, coastal cities have clearly lost their primacy. For example, 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 the BRI's development is focused on improving infrastructure in coastal areas which are necessarily neither large coastal cities nor mega ports—for example, Gwadar rather than Karachi in Pakistan and Kyaukpyu rather than Yangon in Myanmar. "Any coastal area which has potential in terms of connectivity to the outside world through port development and within the country through rail and road links, can make a good case for an entrepot," he explained. 

PANEL 3:

Relocating Mumbai in the Politics and Economics of the Indo-Pacific



Panelists:

- Kurihara Toshihiko, New Delhi Representative, Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Japan
- Peter N. Varghese, Chancellor, University of Queensland, and Former Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
- Zhiwu Chen, Director, Asia Global Institute, Hong Kong
- Rajeswari Pillai Rajgopalan, Distinguished Fellow and Head of Nuclear and Space Policy Initiative, Observer Research Foundation, India

Moderator:

- Akshay Mathur, Director, Observer Research Foundation Mumbai, and Head of ORF Geoeconomics Programme, India

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. Mumbai makes an important contribution to investment, supply-chains and incubating talent as India's financial powerhouse, business bastion and city of reel dreams. In this context, the panel discussed the ways to position Mumbai in the emerging geopolitics and geoeconomics of the Indo-Pacific, how economic diplomacy is projected via Mumbai, and challenges in the endeavour. The pandemic's impact has been largely disruptive in terms of economic activity and human life. Nearly all the sectors have been adversely affected as domestic demand and industrial production were hit sharply.

The panellists were buoyed about the economic prospects of Mumbai, and pitched for better policy frameworks for the metropolis to lead the post-pandemic revival. Peter Varghese observed that Mumbai has a key role to play in the generation of ideas on economic reforms, which would boost the Indian economy. The city, he added is also adept at contributing to the dialogue when it comes to restructuring the financial services system or promoting land and labour reform.

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 in the island 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 gave Mumbai a great opportunity. He noted that Mumbai has an edge over other cities eager to create Hong Kong's success as it has an open mindset, and that efforts should be made to tap into Indian diaspora to shift back to India.


During the last few years plans have been drawn up 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. The panel proposed building capacities for Mumbai to reposition it. Toshihiko Kurihara proposed that investment in transport and logistical infrastructure to cater financial-sector professionals will make Mumbai an attractive destination. He cited the example of Singapore, which has a good transportation system. Akshay Mathur made a pitch for capitalising on Mumbai's traditional advantages in the financial sector, and taking it to the next level. Despite the headquarters of several large business houses located in Mumbai, Singapore remains the preferred destination for arbitration. Mathur pitched for more investment in terms of creating regulatory frameworks for the arbitration centre in the city. Creating such a facility in Mumbai would change the direction of adjudication towards the city, he said.

With attempts being made to dismantle China-centric supply chains, some experts said this has created an unhealthy race among states to usher in industry. Varghese pointed to competitive federalism being the key to India's economic success, and Maharashtra with its large economy and industrial base leads the push for making states an attractive place to invest in by constantly improving the infrastructure.

While the outlook for Mumbai remains buoyant, the panelists pointed to making improvements in areas like cutting down on transaction costs, and improving governance. Zhiwu posited that the city could try out appointing foreign nationals as judges to improve business confidence. He cited the example of Hong Kong where the final court of appeals have 18 jurists of foreign nationality, elaborating that their presence created a degree of confidence for foreign businesses as they feel that their commercial disputes can be redressed better under such "impartial conditions". He cautioned that such a move could cause a degree of backlash from nationalist elements, but said that judges from common-law nations could play a key role.

Institutional efforts to wean away global supply chain from China gained momentum in the aftermath of the pandemic, but some experts say that the opportunity cost of moving out from there could be huge for some companies. Raji 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.

On the bright side, the optimistic outlook of panelists mirrored projections that an economic recovery is in the pipeline. The central government's Economic Survey promises that India's GDP would record a growth of 11 percent during this financial year. 

PANEL 4:

Digital Transformation: A Community Led Data Economy



Panelists:

- Julia Pomares, Executive Director at Centre for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth – T20 Co-Chair 2018, Argentina
- Amandeep S. Gill, CEO and Project Director, The International Digital Health and AI Research Collaborative (I-DAIR), Switzerland
- Ephraim Percy Kenyanito, Senior Programme Officer, Article 19, Kenya
- Oluwatosin Durotoye, Founder, The Bloom Africa and CEO, Conselia Advisory Practice, Nigeria

Moderator:

- Mitali Mukherjee, Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India

The United Nations Secretary General's 2019 roadmap for digital co-operation places the creation of digital public goods (DPG) front and center to bridge the digital divide. But what exactly are they? Mitali Mukherjee, Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, who moderated the session, proposed a workable definition for the discussion. DPGs are essentially interconnected systems which have the power to enhance people's lives. These DPGs will have to meet the criteria of first-mile necessity and create more equity for whoever it reaches. Would the Internet, thus qualify as a DPG?

Ephraim Percy Kenyanito, Senior Programme Officer at Article 19, believed so. "Just like we have and need highways, access to water, clean air, etc., in the digital age, certain things like the Internet are very essential." However, he added that for DPGs, they will have to be a collaboration between private companies and state-controlled public systems. Unlike the offline public goods which are maintained by the states, DPGs are more privately or individually-driven. Many technical engineers come together to build a part of the ecosystem, he added.


Indeed, the Internet was possibly the first DPG where the United States' Department of Defense created ARPANET a precursor of interconnected computer systems in the 1970s and then subsequently opened to the private sector to develop commercial extensions. The governance of the Internet is now carried by private entities like the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) which manage the various protocols and systems like the Internet Protocol addresses and the Domain Name System (DNS).

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. Therefore, any DPG needs to be open source. Amandeep Gill, CEO and Project Director at The International Digital Health and AI Research Collaborative, said that a local solution built has the potential to expand rapidly to a global scale in the digital sphere and this necessitates all future DPGs to be open source. "In every space, you can have global collaboration. And especially 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 globally useful good," he explained.

Gill also took a longer view of what DPGs are. He said that following the World War II, ports, roads and other infrastructure projects were funded by public money, but the reflection on digital goods is a recent phenomenon. “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? This goes beyond just extending the notion of roads and ports to digital infrastructure,” he remarked.

Gill elaborated that there are three layers to the Internet—the infrastructure layer, the logic layer and the application layer. In the last decade has witnessed misuse in the application layer which houses most of the modern Internet including social media services. And thus, there is a need for enacting “laws for data privacy and protection by building digital guard rails to protect people from harms”. The need to build common rails has become important as there have been many missed opportunities to make people’s lives better because of disparate networks not connected to each other. “So, we need to come to sophisticated and updated understanding of digital public goods, where the understanding goes beyond infrastructure and connectivity to agency over use.” he added.

Oluwatosin Durotoye, CEO of Conselia Advisory Practice, offered a contrarian view. She sought to bring in perspectives from the Global South where getting Internet connectivity is still a problem. There are 4.9 billion Internet users globally, and about 50 percent of the population is still excluded from digital technologies. Usage gaps thus exist even in the connected world. There are 3.3 billion people who have mobile broadband and use mobile Internet services. About 25 percent of the least connected countries in the world are in Africa. She thus questioned the understanding of DPGs as a public good, since it is still inaccessible to billions across the world.

Juila Pomares, Executive Director at Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), agreed that the world will have to come together to address the problem of digital inequality and treating the Internet access as a public good. “We have to not only talk about how we can reduce these inequalities in the world but also within countries and within communities itself,” she said, highlighting the need for the world to bridge the digital divide. She urged politicians and rule makers to embrace digital means. “Latin America has seen massive use of digital devices, but 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,” she remarked. The digital gap will only widen if political parties and leaders do not embrace this kind of transformation. 

IN CONVERSATION 1:

The America's Vision for the Indo-Pacific



- Nadia Schadlow, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute and Former US Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategy, United States
- Dhruva Jaishankar, Executive Director, ORF America, United States

Back in 2016, Donald Trump’s ascent to the US presidency sparked consternations over his ‘America First’ worldview. In validating fears of liberal internationalists, his administration did indeed upend some long-standing tenets of post-Cold War US foreign policy. This was mostly at the hands of the Trump administration infusing a national security dimension to transnational commerce, coaxing partner nations to burden-share in US efforts for collective security, and jettisoning US stewardship on addressing transnational 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 the same were evident early in the Trump administration’s national security literature. The administration’s maiden National Security Strategy (NSS 2017) primarily defined the contours of US priorities in the Indo-Pacific. At the inaugural edition of the Colaba Conversation, Dhruva Jaishankar, Executive Director, ORF America, discussed Trump’s record and prospects of continuity under Joe Biden, with Nadia Schadlow. Before her role as the US Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategy in the Trump administration, Schadlow was the principal author of the NSS 2017.

With respect to underscoring US foreign policy priorities, the NSS 2017 was crucial from the standpoint of its “clear articulation”—as Jaishankar put it in the discussion, of US adversaries like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Moreover, in announcing the return of an era of “great power competition”, the NSS 2017 focused on the broad-spectrum threats to US primacy posed by Russia and China. In doing so, the Trump administration challenged post-Cold War assumptions over 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’ 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 18-month long trade war between China and the US, wherein the Trump administration sought to leverage the US’ trade deficit with Beijing in order to coax market reforms or at the very least exact Chinese compliance on balancing bilateral trade. This policy was coupled with sustained confrontation in other domains, like the US’ global 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 to have “an excellent opportunity” to build on the Trump administration’s policy—across military, economic, and political domains.

After all, through its emphasis on increased burden-sharing, the Trump administration encouraged regional actors like Australia and ASEAN to become increasingly vocal with their respective apprehensions either towards Beijing’s transgressions in the South China Sea or its handling of the coronavirus outbreak. On America’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 currently seems to be in its nascent stage, adding credence to the hope for continuity is the narrowing partisan divide between Republicans and Democrats on matters pertaining to China. Hence, going forward, an emergent US bipartisanship on the need for the United States to devise a comprehensive response to the threats posed by China, will only further the Trump administration’s record in the Indo-Pacific. 

IN CONVERSATION 2:

Reformulating the Narratives on Trade and Globalisation



- David Rasquinha, Managing Director, EXIM Bank, India
- Akshay Mathur, Director, Observer Research Foundation Mumbai, and Head of ORF Geoeconomics Programme, India

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 (GATT) in 1948; however, due to its not binding nature, it failed to have any substantial impact on the outcomes of the multilateral trade negotiations. Later, with the establishment of the World Trade Organisation in 1995, a new era of global economic cooperation began.

The WTO deals with regulation of trade between participating countries under an umbrella of trade agreements and a dispute resolution process. However, amidst growing protectionism, maintaining its mandate is becoming increasingly difficult for the WTO. In view of this situation, the in-conversation highlighted the importance of trade for the domestic, public and economic diplomacy. It also explored India's role in building a new narrative on trade and globalisation.

Free Trade and Globalisation

As mercantilism faded by the late 18th 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 the good over which they have a comparative advantage, in this way all participating countries can benefit from international trade.


At present, however, the disagreements over intellectual properties, agricultural subsidies and e-commerce are increasing. With the rise of China's share of exports in the global economy, 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 a long series of 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", Ha Joon Chang, a South-Korean economist

highlighted the paradox of high income countries kicking away the economic ladder for the developing countries. According to Chang, while climbing the economic ladder of success, high income countries implemented high tariffs, sectoral industrial policies, disregarded intellectual property rights and did not have independent central banks. The common argument is that developed nations would be hypocritical in denying the same rights to developing countries.

However, while it is important to consider economic history during policy-making decisions, 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 Gross National Income per capita increased from US\$ 67 in early 1950s to US\$ 30,000 in 2018. South Korea is a text-book example of how international trade can improve the country’s economic growth prospects.

For several years, the multilateral system of trade agreements and settlement of trade disputes has been under scrutiny and criticism. In this context, David Rasquinha emphasised on the need for India to lead the emerging economies in revitalising the WTO and safeguarding the interests of other developing nations. With the global increase in protectionist measures and trade disputes, the role of the WTO in preserving the liberalised economic system is becoming more crucial than ever. 

PANEL 5:

Cities 20: Establishing a Global Policymaking Forum for Cities



Panel Introduction by:

- Peter Rimmele, Resident-Representative to India, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Germany

Panelists:

- Joachim von Amsberg, Vice President, Policy and Strategy, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
- Ian Klaus, Senior Fellow, Global Cities, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, United States
- Maitreyi Bordia Das, Manager, Urban, Disaster Risk Management, Resilience and Land Global Practice, The World Bank, United States
- Anil Sooklal
- Deputy Director-General Asia and Middle East, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa

Moderator:

- Sayli Mankikar, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation Mumbai, India

The 21st-century belongs to cities. It is a departure from the traditional global governance design which tends to focus on nation-states. Cities are emerging as their own centres of economic growth and political clout. For cities participating in global cooperation, issues of urban infrastructure finance, creating a blue print for social and inclusive planning, and setting common goals to meet climate and sustainability goals have gained primacy. With several existing institutionalised city global forums in the fray, the panel sought to look into this question holistically.

In his introduction, Peter Rimmele very aptly set the tone for the discussion. Cities are far more powerful alliances to improve security, prosperity, often across international borders. Intercity alliances are the new currency of urban foreign relations, he said, adding that “cities are no longer just norm takers; they are norm makers.” In this context, the panel focused on the needs and characteristics of city-states and discussed important facets of a global policy design for a renewed pan-city conglomeration:

Urban catalytic finance

Financing infrastructure and supporting sustainable city growth is complex. It needs just interventions that lead to eventual independence. Joachim von Amsberg from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank pointed out that one cannot really think about financing infrastructure in Asia without thinking about its cities. Infrastructure investment sees its way not only into megacities, but also medium- and small-sized cities. It is in spaces the vast majority of people live, majority wealth is generated, but also where the vast majority of problems, social, environmental and urbanisation problems exist.

Inclusivity and rise of megacities

While global city arrangements provide opportunities, they could create urban dystopias. Ambassador Sooklal highlighted that Africa, which currently has a population of about 1.2 billion, will have 2.4 billion people by

2050. A majority of this population will move to megacities for a better life, but it will lead to a rise in slums. If allowed to grow in an unplanned way, the impending urbanization boom will make triple challenges of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment more pronounced. Bringing out the issue of 'youth bulge' (60 percent of Africa's population is under 25 years of age, and half of Africa's population i.e. 51 percent are women), he expressed fear of their marginalisation of this section. Cities need to ensure that as they develop, these sections do not become outliers, he said.

Heterogenous cities

Why should a city get into such global arrangements? Pan city forums can sometimes be biased, and the heterogeneity of participating cities often gets obfuscated. So what is in it for a city to have a global outlook? This depends of several factors including the level of devolution of powers, decentralisation and even the economic clout that a city holds not just nationally but internationally.


Maitreyi Bordia Das pointed out that despite having knowledge sharing capacities and learning capabilities, it still remains a question if cities make the cut. The crux of city capacity really is about its economic clout and whether finances would be made available to cities if they were not tied to certain defined programmes. The larger question is what do the forums do for cities or is it only a good political thing to do?

A city can still exercise clout in international forums if it showcases its good practices and expresses a demonstration effect. These are all ways in which cities can acquire global credibility.

The glocal approach to city networks

A recent research at the University of Melbourne pointed out that there are city networks, over half of which are transnational in nature. Historically, these have facilitated exchange of policy, oftentimes between cities that naturally have been paired together. Ian Klaus argued that it has put pressure or increased the voice of city leaders at international organisations and multilateral fora. Some networks are advocating for more reform in terms of power sharing in the national setting. And this includes access to finance, and reforms in multilateral regional development banks. The larger question is that how do these international networks to lobby for domestic political change.

With these principles on the forefront, the panelists laid out a possible pathway to remodeling the existing networking frameworks. The panel was broadly in agreement that there has to be a 360-degree view to this which cannot be fulfilled by single organizing actor or a regulator. There is a larger role that financial institutions, and multilateral groupings such as the G20 and the BRICS could play at different levels in the international, national, provincial and municipal region, to ensure impact at scale.

Cities are laboratories that can provide important policy guidelines and best practices that the national states can learn from and emulate as well. Emphasis was laid on the huge role of civil society groups and academia that are ensconced in cities in the networking that then has a cascading effect on good outcomes for cities in general. A collective thinking is needed to inspire policymakers at national and international levels by the solutions that city policymakers find. It is time to make those vertical connections more effective. 

PANEL 6:

A New Vision from Business for Positioning Mumbai in the World



Panelists:

- Jay Kotak, Associate Vice President, Kotak Mahindra Bank, India
- Radhika Gupta, Managing Director and CEO, Edelweiss Asset Management Limited, India
- Darshan Hiranandani, Managing Director and CEO, Hiranandani Group
- Priyanka Chaturvedi, Member of Parliament, India

Moderator:

- Rajesh Shah, Co-Chairman and Managing Director, Mukand Limited and Member, Board of Trustees, Observer Research Foundation, India

As 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 such as 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 also one that leverages its abundant natural and built heritage and cultural diversity to make it a destination of choice for international tourists. Such a re-envisioned Mumbai also urgently needs an equal measure of policy and regulatory interventions to foster a conducive business environment backed by tax regimes that incentivise and encourage investments. To explore some of the impending challenges and new opportunities for Mumbai to chart its growth story post the COVID-19 pandemic, ORF hosted leading minds in business and finance at Colaba Conversations 2021.

The panel 'A New Vision from Business for Positioning Mumbai in the World' was moderated by Mr. Rajesh Shah, Co-Chairman and Managing Director, Mukand Limited and Member, Board of Trustees, Observer Research Foundation, India. The panelists, Ms. Priyanka Chaturvedi, Shiv Sena Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha; Ms. Radhika Gupta, Managing Director and CEO, Edelweiss Asset Management Limited; Mr. Darshan Hiranandani, Managing Director and CEO, Hiranandani Group and Jay Kotak, Associate Vice President, Kotak Mahindra Bank, sought to unravel how the next generation of business and political leadership sees Mumbai on the world stage and what they expect from the government to assist the city's overall growth.

Ms. Radhika Gupta asserted that Mumbai lacked "narrative building" to showcase its own growth as a bustling metropolis and indeed 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 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 is stopping Mumbai from building such promotion strategies. The lessons from the pandemic has given Mumbai an opportunity to reshape and re-strategise. "For this, 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," she said. But rather than solely considering infrastructure progress through better roads,

buildings, and other physical indicators, Mumbai must transform itself as a technology hub that has embraced the digital revolution.


Mr. Darshan Hiranandani and Jay Kotak both emphasised on the contribution of real estate and the importance of market liberalisation and improved regulatory mechanisms along with increased focus on sustainable development as pivotal to enhancing Mumbai's global profile. Mr. Hiranandani highlighted the importance of accommodating green spaces in development projects. The redevelopment of mill lands through the 1990s and 2000s, created huge surpluses for the city to bring down cost, he remarked. This worked from the perspective of economics of cost of housing, but the redeveloped mill lands in Central Mumbai have become “cesspools of excessive traffic irrespective of the modern housing without open and green spaces and parks”. He warned that the city cannot afford to waste future opportunities presented by the plans for the development of the waterfront around the Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link (MTHL) and the transformation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. “These projects can create iconic places, but they need to be master planned,” he argued. He also identified Mumbai's reluctance to recycle waste water as one of the biggest impediments to sustainable development.

Mr. Rajesh Kotak, on the other hand, deemed rigid laws and regulations as the shortcomings that have not made Mumbai attract global talent and capital. While he accepted that regime liberalisation by itself may not be able to provide major tax affordances to private sector companies, he urged the government to announce incentives to global investors to make Mumbai a more attractive global financial hub. He highlighted high rent and labour costs coupled with less leeway to expand liveable areas as the reasons why Mumbai is losing its primacy to other metropolitan cities such as New Delhi, Bangalore and Hyderabad. “We need tax regimes on the lines of Singapore or Dubai to make Mumbai an easy destination for business,” he urged.

Ms. Priyanka Chaturvedi highlighted a number of steps taken by the Government of Maharashtra to accelerate sustainable growth of the city'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,” she said, referring to the relocation of the car shed for the metro line 3 from the Aarey forest area and declaration of 800 acres of the green belt as a reserved forest area.

Highlighting the gender sensitive approach of the government, Ms. Chaturvedi said that the urban development plan of Mumbai has already ensured creation of safe and accessible public and open spaces for women, further 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,” she asserted.

She enumerated the government's sensitive approach to the needs of the millions of migrant workers. The government, she said, has cut down on its revenues during the pandemic to incentivise affordable housing for migrant workers with world-class transport links. “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 pointed out. Ms Chaturvedi also said that the government's decision to relax license norms for setting up hotels will bolster the city's tourism quotient.

Despite deliberating upon the complex challenges, the panel was optimistic about Mumbai's future as a global city. To translate optimism into tangible gains, the panelists concurred on the need for a multistakeholder transformative effort involving the government, private sector as well as citizens as imperative to building and promoting the narrative of Mumbai's legacy, its cultural capital and business potential. 

PANEL 7:

Towards Inclusive Cities: Reclaiming Spaces for Women



Panelists:

Priyanka Chaturvedi, Member of Parliament, India

Yashomati Thakur, Minister, Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra, India

Shaina NC, National Spokesperson, Bharatiya Janata Party, India

Abha Lambah, Conservation Architect, India

Moderator:

Aditi Ratho, Associate Fellow, Observer Research Foundation Mumbai, India

When we think of Mumbai, we picture a cosmopolitan Indian city that is known to be relatively safer and more work-friendly for women. We see women working in various parts of the city, at various times. However, this number is still far lower than the male counterpart. The pandemic's effect of pushing work into the virtual and domestic space has also affected working women more adversely than working men. Women now face the multiple burdens of domestic, childcare, and professional work, due to the closure of schools and offices, increasing mental and physical strain.

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

One of the ways in which this can be achieved is ensuring accommodation for working women in the form of hostels, well-functioning public and housing society toilets, and crèches at both private and government workspaces. It should be mandatory to have child support throughout the city's working spaces: A citywide linkage of crèches where working mothers feel comfortable bringing children to work and leaving them there, says Abha Lambah, conservation architect. 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 work, full time work, or work that is entrepreneurial in nature. There has been a significant drop in workforce participation over the past eight years, which must be corrected, and it starts with governments prioritizing these issues, said Priyanka Chaturvedi, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha.

Policies to ensure women's safety in workspaces, such as providing transport to and from the workspace in the night, must be accounted for by responsible employers, says Shaina NC, National spokesperson of the Bharatiya Janata Party. 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.

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

Together with policies such as 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 while creating 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 legislation could help mitigate disparity in positions of power and decision-making, proactively creating leadership positions must be in tandem. Cultural and gender sensitivity has to start from the home, in school, in college, in work, everywhere, said Yashomati Thakur.

The panelists concurred that 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. 

IN CONVERSATION 3:

Chairing the G20 — Economic Steering Committee for the World




- Paolo Magri, Executive Vice-President and Director, Italian Institute for International Political Studies, T20 Chair 2021, Italy
- Fahad Al-Turki, Vice-President, King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Centre, T20 Chair 2020, Saudi Arabia
- Akshay Mathur, Director, Observer Research Foundation Mumbai, and Head of ORF Geoeconomics Programme, India

The Group of Twenty (G20) is an important multilateral platform, and the devastation caused by the pandemic to economies across the globe has once again put the spotlight on the need for a synchronised effort for recovery. Established in 1999 to deliberate policy matters pertaining to the promotion of global financial stability, the G20 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.

Akshay Mathur set the discussion rolling by posing whether G20 still remained an important multi-nation fora. Both the panelists were in agreement that the grouping is a key medium to address issues related to the world economy, despite its shortcomings. Magri observed that the bloc is an important economic multilateral platform since there were not many alternatives to represent the world in an inclusive way and give it a voice. Al-Turki advised that in order to overcome deficiencies in the G20, it must be agile in the face of changing governments, and ensure continuity of agenda from one Presidency to another.

The G20 does not have a permanent secretariat, and its agenda and activities are facilitated by rotating presidencies, in cooperation with its members. A "troika", comprises the country that has the Presidency, its predecessor and its successor to ensure continuity within the grouping. Saudi Arabia held the G20 Presidency for 2020, and Italy has currently assumed this position. The latter's priorities rests upon three primary pillars: 'People', 'Planet', and 'Prosperity'. It makes a case for a robust and sustainable economic recovery. Magri said that the troika system can put the spotlight on a wide range of topics like universal access to vaccines, better coordination of economic recovery packages and debt relief.

Over the years, experts have sought changes to the G20's structure, especially with respect to engagement groups including independent agencies, and represent civil society, and work with other organisations from G20 countries to develop policy recommendations formally submitted to G20 leaders for consideration. Al-Turki observed that while the G20 was effective at the sovereign level, it was not effective at the engagement group level. According to him, the G20 was 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 strengthened 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. According to Magri, amid such expectations, the G20's priorities should be poverty alleviation, addressing suspicion among nations about unfair competition, climate action and digital transformation. 

PANEL 8:

Developing an Arabian Sea Consensus on Growth and Prosperity



Panelists:

- Navdeep Suri, Distinguished Fellow and Director of the Centre for New Economic Diplomacy, Observer Research Foundation, India
- Mohamed El Dahshan, Managing Director, OXCON Frontier Markets and Fragile States and Associate Fellow, Chatham House, United Kingdom
- Ebtasam Al Ketbi, President, Emirates Policy Center and Member, Consultative Commission of the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), UAE
- Kwame Owino, CEO, Institute of Economic Affairs, Kenya

Moderator:

- Maya Mirchandani, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India

Underpinned with long-standing socio-cultural linkages, India's ties with the Gulf have traditionally been strong. Beyond the apparent realm of energy security, India's relations with partners across the Arabian Sea hone a demographic dimension. In catering to the Gulf nations' need for a broad spectrum of workforce—from low-skilled labour in retail and service industries to high-skilled labour in the Gulf capitals' thriving financial sectors, Indian guest workers in the region have spurred its rise as the world's largest recipient of remittances. However, as India increasingly integrates itself into the eastward security calculus of the Indo-Pacific, there is a need for New Delhi to secure its westward interests. Towards that effort, cultivating a multi-dimensional relationship with partner nations in the Gulf would be 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 India-Gulf ties to include the eastern coast of Africa, which is not only increasingly relevant owing its economic providence, but also its strategic currency as the extended book-end of the Indo-Pacific expanse.

Given this scope for expansion and the imperative for a renewed framework for India's ties with partners across the Arabian Sea, the Colaba Conversation hosted by the Observer Research Foundation, hosted a distinctive panel of stakeholders. This included, Navdeep Suri, Distinguished Fellow and Director of the Centre for New Economic Diplomacy, ORF; Mohamed El Dahshan, Managing Director, OXCON Frontier Markets and Fragile States and Associate Fellow, Chatham House; Ebtasam Al Ketbi, President, Emirates Policy Center and Member, Consultative Commission of the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC); and Kwame Owino, CEO, Institute of Economic Affairs. The session was moderated by Maya Mirchandani, Senior Fellow, ORF.


With respect to region-wide apprehensions over rising tensions between Iran and Israel and the prospect of a military confrontation between Iran and the US, Dr. Al Ketbi stressed on the need to graduate the India-GCC dynamic's focus on "trade and oil" to one that reflects a "multi-dimensional strategic relationship." In calling for an institutionalised structure to India-Gulf strategic ties, Dr. Al Ketbi 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. Furthermore, as Amb. Suri noted, India has already set a credible precedent of it “no longer being a free-rider in the work for global security”, in view of its 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 even 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, Mr. Owino cited India’s inherent advantage owing to Africans’ favourable views towards India’s culture and its experiment with democracy. Moreover, in view of African societies being similar to that of India’s—in terms of their common celebration of socio-cultural diversities, there is scope for India to share its expertise beyond the strategic domain. This could include, Indian best practises with respect to setting up institutions and management of administrative issues.

Gains on such domestic, local avenues could also fit squarely with the broader aim to counter 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, Mr. 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, Mr. El Dahshan noted India to have “systematically refrained from deploying resource-extractive approaches.”

Noting that precedent, Amb. Suri argued for continuing that gradual yet effective approach, wherein New Delhi recognises that it is not desirable for India to emulate China in Africa. “We 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 encompass a pooling of resources from South Asia, Sub-Saharan African, and the Gulf towards sharing best practices with respect to ensuring wide and equitable distribution of coronavirus vaccines. This avenue can also graduate to cooperation beyond government entities, in view of the Indian pharmaceutical industry’s experience with ramping-up vaccine production and the Gulf’s expertise in healthcare management.

Hence, in the short-term, the contemporary challenge posed by the coronavirus pandemic presents an ideal opportunity for India and the Gulf to maximise their outreach to Africa, and thereby institute a renewed Arabian Sea consensus. 

PANEL 9:

Recovery towards the Indian New Green Deal



Panelists:

- Kate Hampton, CEO, Children's Investment Fund Foundation, United Kingdom
- Julie Becker, Deputy CEO, LuxSE and Founder, Luxembourg Green Exchange, Luxembourg
- Geraldine Ang, Senior Analyst, Green Finance and Investment, OECD, France
- Shloka Nath, Acting-Director, India Climate Collaborative and Head of Sustainability and Special Projects, Tata Trusts, India

Moderator:

- Mihir Sharma, Senior Fellow and Head, Economy and Growth Programme, Observer Research Foundation, India

From the mid-20th century, anthropogenic activities have been a major cause of concern for climate change. According to the IPCC 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 an unprecedented risk of natural disasters in the form of floods, droughts, biodiversity loss and extreme weather conditions. Economic growth has led to rise in standards of living and life expectancy; however, it has also brought about environmental damage and put immense pressure on natural resources.

Mega-cities are the centres of financial activity, but they are also highly vulnerable to climate change. Marginalised sections of urban population disproportionately bear the brunt of environmental damage. Against this backdrop, the panel discussed the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach to address climate change. The panelists explored the ways in which mega-cities such as Mumbai can transition towards a new green deal.


The Green New Deal

The idea of Green New Deal (GND) surfaced when Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a US representative-elect took up the cause in 2018. It brought the urgency of climate action to the forefront. The GND puts emphasis on 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 as a part of the solution for nations to achieve their global green goals. She noted, “Without money you can dream, with money you can act. The transition to low carbon economy needs significant money and capital market spending”. 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. Moreover, according to India’s statement at the 25th session of the Conference of Parties under the UN FCCC, it has already achieved 83 GW. India has also put forth a carbon tax on coal production at a rate of \$6 per tonne. This was further corroborated by Shloka Nath as she underscored the Reserve Bank

of India's 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'; albeit a positive step towards green energy transition, India needs to keep in mind the real implication on the livelihood 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. 

PANEL 10:

The Fourth Industrial Revolution: For Human or For Machine?



Panelists:

Ram Sidis, Deputy Director-General, Federation of Local Authorities, Israel

Kate Klonick, Assistant Professor of Law, St. John's University Law School, United States

Terri Chapman, Urban Analyst, The World Bank, United States

Moderator:

Mitali Mukherjee, Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is characterised by the increased interconnectedness of the physical, digital and the biological worlds. The panel deliberated the issue in the context of the pandemic and the ongoing efforts for global recovery. More than a year after the COVID-19 scourge halted the world, countries are still dealing and recovering from the shocks of the pandemic. Social distancing protocols have forced humans to rely on the Internet for work and maintaining personal connections. Thus, the larger trends of digitisation have only accelerated with the pandemic. Many of the changes seem to be becoming permanent. The panel discussed whether these changes are for the benefit of humanity as a whole or would they lead to the concentration of power to a few individuals.

Prof. Kate Klonick, Assistant Professor of Law at St. John's University of Law School, said what humans are experiencing right now is more impactful than just an industrial revolution that bring massive improvement of productivity through technological means. The paradigm shift in the way the world has worked and communicated during the pandemic has led to irreversible societal changes. She elaborated that the in the present context, the Internet had become an all-pervasive medium holding multiple systems including economic, social, political, communications etc. together. "It's not just about how people work. But it's 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," she remarked.


Ram Sidis, Deputy CEO of the Federation of Local Authorities in Israel, noted the trend that companies are not occupying physical offices and most employees are telecommuting for work. He wondered if all those people who had switched to telecommuting will ever go back to regular physical offices. He also noted that the pandemic has forced local authorities to change how it conducts governance, citing the example of even local police in Israel, who were given the choice to work from home one day a week.

Prof. Klonick stressed that the Internet removed many of the frictions of the old systems. But in doing so, it also revealed a lot of weaknesses in the systems that we've built based on the frictions.

Terri Chapman, urban analyst at The World Bank, pointed that the COVID-19 pandemic and the acceleration of digitisation has increased inequalities. In the G7 countries alone, more than 6 million people lost their jobs. The US unemployment rate was at 6.7 percent, while in India, the number in December 2020 stood at a 9 percent. This has led to growth in non-standard forms of work on the Internet-fueled gig economy, but further disadvantaged the most vulnerable populations.

While there are steps taken by different governments to legitimise gig-economy workers in India and California, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen a systemic dismantling of labour laws in India in order to aid private enterprises to grow. This has put workers in a more precarious position. The progress of the 4IR has been primarily through private companies, and technology driven solutions will not help alleviate the problems of society.

Thus, it has become inevitable for governments to recognise that the Internet is a public good and need to be accessed by all. “What government can do is to ensure that there is a baseline of Internet access for everyone,” Prof. Klonick suggested, which will allow people to get educated and re-invent themselves and take advantage of the jobs the new market is creating. “And 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.”

Ram Sidis pointed out that it was highly unlikely that many of the formal jobs would be returning after the pandemic. It’s obvious that cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem have adapted better, even without government help. However, in rural areas, people have had to struggle to access the Internet. As people deal with the shocks of the pandemic and re-invent themselves, it is important to de-link social protections from employment like health insurance and unemployment benefits. The idea of Universal Basic Income (UBI) has become more pertinent than ever, he said. 

PANEL 11:

Regulations and Responsibilities in the Digital Era



Panelists:

Marina Kaljurand, Member, European Parliament, Estonia

Rohinton Medhora, President, Centre for International Governance Innovation, Canada

Chris Painter, President, Global Forum Cyber Expertise Foundation Board, United States

Iverna McGowan, Europe Director, Centre for Democracy and Technology, Belgium

Moderator:

Trisha Ray, Associate Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India

Over the last two months, big tech's role in influencing events in different countries has come under sharp focus. In the United States, 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 which the government alleges was fomenting unrest in the country in the backdrop of the massive protest of the new farming laws. In both instances, big tech was accused of being in contravention of local laws regarding speech and expression.

So, the question comes to how digital multinational companies (MNCs) can reconcile with the laws of all sovereign states where they operate. And how can they be held more accountable to them.

The panel discussion brought forward different notions of accountability for big tech where it has to comply with local laws. Chris Painter, President, Global Forum Cyber Expertise, worried about conflicting laws in a jurisdiction that creates an in alignment that is divisive. "I worry about some regimes where accountability means control and that means control over content and free speech," he said. And that would translate over information flow over the Internet as well. He therefore called for national governments to understand global regulations.

Dr. Rohinton Medhora, President, Centre for International Governance Innovation expressed concern on how technology companies that interact with autocracies are viewed differently than 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 said.


"National regulation works best when it is backstopped by global co-operation and the most oblivious example that comes to mind is taxation," Dr. Medhora pointed out. He highlighted the efforts of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 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's 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 efforts by nations like France and

the United Kingdom which tried to bring separate taxation laws in conflict with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) protocols and pushed for a more multilateral approach.

Iverna McGowan, Europe Director, Centre for Democracy and Technology, pointed out that 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.” She added it becomes important to refer to the international human rights laws and find a balance for both tech companies and governments.

Marina Kaljurand, Estonian Member of European Parliament, mentioned that it was important for the European Union (EU) to assume leadership role with respect to data privacy to bring more accountability for the actions of technology companies. “We were severely criticised when the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was adopted. But now I think we are the global standard.” Chris Painter added that though this caused friction between long-term allies of the US, it underscored the fact that the US did not adopt a comprehensive data protection regime and now they will have to follow the standards set by the EU in future regulations. He also pointed out that the GPDR was not without fault. “We have to consider that small companies who cannot afford an army of compliance lawyers.” This would mean the larger technology companies with more resources would be able to comply with the regulations and act as a regulatory barrier for competition and innovation. Iverna McGowan elaborated more on GDPR’s limitations and said that even though there are now barriers for using personal data which can be used to alter election outcomes and promote voter suppression, the enforcement of these laws is lacking and ensuring 100 percent compliance is difficult. This was typically the problem when considering that most technology companies rely on collection and processing personal data to better their business models or enter new businesses.

The discussion moved towards building more agency for users on how their data is used and if it was possible for users to be paid for the use of their data. Iverna McGowan cautioned against such a practice and said that it could create a system where only those who could afford privacy would get it. “Privacy is a fundamental right and there shouldn’t be an economic link to it.”

The discussion moved looking at the anti-competitive behavior of tech companies. Chirs Painter said that there are companies which have anti-competitive behavior, he was skeptical whether breaking them up would help and would rather focus on fixing these anti-competitive behaviour through existing anti-trust laws focusing on specific issues. He argued that it’s more important to figure out more ways to bring in a level playing field for more competitors. Marina Kaljurand argued that it’s important to figure out gatekeepers of ecosystems which will harm smaller companies in the long run. 

CLOSING SESSION:

From Paris to Glasgow via Mumbai on the COP 26 Journey



In Conversation:

- Aditya Thackeray, Minister, Environment and Climate Change, Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, India
- Mitali Mukherjee, Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India

In the concluding session of the Colaba Conversation 2021, Minister Aaditya Thackeray spelt out his vision for sustainable cities, for a greener Mumbai and called for collective leadership for dealing with climate challenge. In his conversation with Mitali Mukherjee, Fellow, ORF, Thackeray explained the nuances behind the ‘Majhi Vasundhara’ (which roughly means taking care of my planet) scheme, which has been rolled out in the state of Maharashtra. The entire government machinery from city collectors, divisional commissioners, and municipal commissioners, in urban and rural are laying down initiatives that either deal with climate change mitigation or adaptation. The scheme covers projects related to mobility, walkability, rainwater harvesting, electric mobility, waste and creating energy efficient offices.

Listing out the challenges that the state of Maharashtra has faced, starting with the COVID-19 pandemic, two cyclones, erratic weather events, the state has had to dole out large sums of relief money and compensations to the affected populations. Despite this, the state has been able to tackle environmental challenges, he asserted. In this regard, he highlighted the decision to declare 329 hectares of the Aarey Forest within the Mumbai city limits, as a reserved forest. To ensure a reduction in transport emissions, the government had cleared the procurement of 380 electric buses for the public transport agency in Mumbai, which will increase by 25 percent over the next three years. Advocating the need for clean fuel and green mobility, Thackeray remarked that a city cannot be burning coal on one end and fueling electric cars. There is a need for creating an ecosystem of wind energy or offshore wind or fuelling solar energy. Solar highways, floating solar panels on water bodies are experiments that are on the anvil and would soon become a reality in the state, he stated.

Thackeray, an avid environmental activist in his pre-politics days, who personally participates in beach cleaning exercises said it has a therapeutic effect, like cleaning one’s room. Cleaning of the Mithi river of Mumbai along with that of Dahisar, Poisar and Oshiwara rivers which have turned into drains is part of the river cleaning policy that the city has taken up. Mumbai will also see a slew of sewage disposal plants that will recycle 2,800 million litres of waste water to be put back into the system for non-potable purposes.

Mumbai’s membership to the C40 grouping will give the city a chance to learn from international best practices. The city will now be part of global deliberations and negotiations on climate and the sharings and learnings from other cities will help Mumbai become a city that focuses not only on mitigation, but also on climate adaptation.

Thackeray concluded by stating that both infrastructure development and sustainable development need to co-exist. He stressed on the need for collective leadership, where each individual became a champion in her own right and worked towards the commitment in tackling the climate challenge along with sustainable growth of the cities. 