

Panel: Regional Economic Corridors in Central and South Asia

This panel aims to discuss key political and economic challenges faced by Central and South Asia in expansion of trade within Central Asia, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) organisation and Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) member countries. The discussion will provide an understanding of the a) challenges and opportunities in commercial trade and transit with neighbouring countries; b) implementation issues with the existing regional and bilateral trade agreements (in the region); c) political issues associated with commercial trade and transit; and d) policy measures needed to improve competitiveness and trade facilitation.

The recent demand from China, Iran and Central Asia for transit facilities and China's willingness to support a major infrastructure programme under the Belt and Road initiative presents an important opportunity for improving trade and transport-related infrastructure. Pakistan and the region's preparedness to quickly implement trade-related interventions under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) will also come under discussion.

Some of the questions which the panel will aim to answer are:

1. Can enhanced regional trade and investment create economic interdependencies and help in strengthening political relations across South Asia?
2. How can trade and transit-related reforms in the region benefit supply chains?
3. What is the role of think tanks and media in policy engagement and highlighting key bottlenecks in trade, and at the same time offering innovative solutions to reducing cost of doing business, rationalise tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade?
4. How are the development partners helping to improve the capacity of trade and transit governance, and competitiveness of the private sector in South Asia?
5. Can South Asia's enhanced market access under GSP Plus and free trade agreements with new partner countries help in improving competitiveness for regional trade?

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