

EVENT REPORT

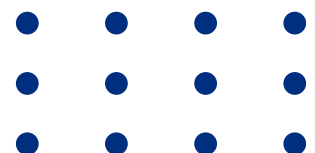
National Conference on Priorities and Challenges in the Indian Coastal Region: Environmental, Economic and Geopolitical Perspectives

**21-22 August, 2025
Kochi, Kerala**

Organised by
Centre for Public Policy Research | Kochi

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01

About the Conference

National Conference on Priorities and Challenges in the Indian Coastal Region: Environment, Economic and Geopolitical Perspectives

The first Indian Coastal Alliance, National Conference on “Addressing Priorities and Challenges in the Indian Coastal Region: Environmental, Economic, and Geopolitical Perspectives” organised by the Centre for Public Policy Research in collaboration with The Asia Foundation-India, was held on 21st and 22nd August 2025 at Holiday Inn, Cochin.

The Indian Coastal Alliance (ICA), coordinated by the Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR) is a network of think tanks, academic institutions such as universities and colleges, and individuals focusing on India’s coastal region from geopolitical, geoeconomic, geospatial, and environmental perspectives to observe, discuss, and study various challenges along India’s coastal region to educate the decision-makers and stakeholders to have a holistic and informed decision-making approach. The Alliance seeks to address the pressing priorities and challenges facing India’s 11,000 km-long coastline, encompassing environmental resilience, economic development, and geopolitical security. The Secretariat of ICA functions at CPPR.

Objectives of the Indian Coastal Alliance

1. Broaden the ocean-led economy by integrating research from India’s coastal think tanks and institutions.
2. Establish an institutional framework to guide coastal research priorities and collaboration.
3. Identify and address emerging opportunities and challenges across coastal regions.
4. Support government agencies, communities, and organisations through shared data, expertise, and research outputs.
5. Conduct evidence-based studies and promote regional dialogue platforms for maritime cooperation and socio-economic development.

02

02

Inaugural Session

Date: 20 August 2025

Venue: Holiday Inn Cochin by IHG



The Welcome Address was delivered by **Dr D Dhanuraj, Founder and Chairman of the Centre for Public Policy Research (CCPR)**. Dr. Dhanuraj highlighted that from the very beginning the Indian Coastal Alliance (ICA) initiative chose to focus on coastal rather than maritime issues, bringing attention to the challenges faced by communities along India's 11,000 km coastline. He recalled that the idea was first mooted in 2019 and gradually grew from mapping 62 institutions into what is now the India Coastal Alliance (ICA). Unlike the abundant maritime literature, coastal scholarship remains limited, and ICA seeks to bridge this gap by engaging think tanks, universities, and research institutions. He underlined that this conference marks an important milestone in launching ICA as a dynamic platform, while also stressing that future dialogues will be taken to different coastal towns to ensure continued engagement, collaboration, and policy action.

The Opening Address was delivered by **Ms. Nandita Baruah, the Country Head at The Asia Foundation-India**, an international development agency with offices in 18 Asian countries. She leads the Foundation's work in India focusing on trade and economic growth, environmental resilience, international development, education and leadership, and women's empowerment.

Ms. Baruah highlighted that coasts must be understood as living landscapes shaped by civilizational, cultural, and ecological links rather than only through trade, tourism, or maritime security. She stressed that fisheries, for instance, are not just about livelihoods but also ecosystems, trade flows, and community security. Tracing the journey from early conversations to the present, she noted how fast-changing geopolitical realities make such dialogues vital. She emphasised that the India Coastal Alliance seeks to position India as a thought leader in coastal resilience while ensuring that local voices, especially those of women and marginalised communities, are central to decision-making.

03

Keynote & Special Remarks

Inaugural Keynote Address

Guest of Honour

- **Mr Dodda Venkata Swamy IAS**, Chairman, Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA)



The Guest of Honour and the Keynote Address was delivered by Mr Dodda Venkata Swamy I.A.S, Chairman of Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA). He belongs to the 2001 batch of the Indian Administrative Service. Currently, he holds the additional charge of Chairperson of the Coastal Aquaculture Authority from February of this year.

Mr. Swamy reflected on the complexity of policymaking and administration in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, emphasising the challenges of balancing diverse roles and stakeholder interests. Using case studies such as seaweed policy gaps and the Antarctic Act, he illustrated how fragmented policymaking often overlooks multidimensional needs.

Mr Swamy highlighted the importance of resource management, citing MPEDA's NETFISH programme, which trains 60,000 fishermen annually, resulting in a 15% increase in incomes. He also shared positive examples, including climate resilience projects in Odisha, harbor management societies, and community-led hatchery initiatives. Innovation and R&D, he noted, were crucial, with local entrepreneurs developing value-added products such as collagen and shrimp oil from processing waste. Stressing the need for India to focus on sustainable, value-added exports rather than raw products, he urged adopting locally relevant models instead of imitating foreign practices. The session concluded with his openness to collaboration, including MoUs, to develop actionable recommendations for sustainable fisheries and coastal development.

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..we need to create locally relevant models instead of imitating foreign practices.

Special Remarks

Special Guest

- **Ms Anitha Nandhini Ravintheranath, IFS**
(Regional Passport Officer, Kochi)



The Special Remarks was delivered by Anitha Nandhini Ravintheranath (IFS) who currently serves as the Regional Passport Officer, Cochin. She has previously served as Director, International Cooperation, Department of Space, Bengaluru, where she played a key role in fostering international collaborations in the space sector. She has also served as the Deputy Chief of Mission to Israel.

Ms. Nandhini highlighted that this initiative is a unique effort to foster collaborative research among Indian think tanks for data-driven policy on coastal security, ocean governance, and the new economy. She noted that the agenda aligns with the Prime Minister's maritime vision for Amrit Kaal 2047, which seeks to harness India's 11,000 km coastline and strengthen its role as a leading global maritime player. She emphasized India's dependence on maritime trade, with 95% of trade by volume and 70–75% by value handled through its coasts, making it a linchpin for commerce and connectivity. Referring to recent legislative reforms, including the Coastal Shipping Act and Merchant Shipping Bill, she underlined the need for robust maritime policies. She further noted that the Indian Ocean region, which accounts for 50% of global maritime trade and 70% of energy trade, is a nerve center of economic activity. Citing the "Maha Sagar" vision as an extension of the SAGAR doctrine, she stressed India's role as a first responder and net security provider, supported by platforms like IFC-IOR that connect partner nations and organisations for real-time maritime security cooperation.



...the Maha Sagar doctrine of India stresses India's role as a first responder and net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region..

Special Remarks

Special Guest

- **Prof. (Dr.) G. B. Reddy**, Vice Chancellor of the National University of Advanced Legal Studies (NUALS), Kochi.



The Special Remarks were delivered by Prof. (Dr.) G. B. Reddy, Vice Chancellor of the National University of Advanced Legal Studies (NUALS), Kochi. Prof. (Dr.) G. B. Reddy, highlighted the coastal region's significance for development, security, trade, and ecology, while noting gaps in coordination among laws and stakeholders. He recalled the Jagannath vs Union of India (1996) judgment and stressed the continued relevance of CRZ rules. Emphasising the need for a comprehensive national coastal and inland shipping strategy, he pointed to documenting indigenous knowledge and leveraging IPR as key to strengthening the blue economy. He concluded by encouraging collaboration with institutions like CPPR to advance research and policy innovation.

Special Remarks

Special Guest

- **Dr Shine Kumar C S**, Director, National Institute of Fisheries Post Harvest Technology and Training (NIFPHATT)



The Special Remarks were delivered by Dr Shine Kumar C S, Director, NIFPHATT (National Institute of Fisheries Post Harvest Technology and Training), obtained his graduation in Fisheries Science from College of Fisheries (under Kerala Agricultural University) Panangad. Dr. Shine Kumar C. S., drew on his personal background in a fishermen's family and professional expertise to stress that fisherfolk's concerns remain overlooked in policy. He welcomed the creation of the Fisheries Ministry but noted the imbalance between export focus and the neglect of a robust domestic market, which leaves fishermen vulnerable. He also warned against unsustainable practices like sea wall construction and urged India to adopt global best practices that integrate sustainability, innovation, and community welfare.

04

Conference Sessions

Panel 1: Securing the Coastline: Fisheries, Tourism, Climate, and the Future of Coastal Economies



The Panel

- **Mr Mihir Bhatt**, Director, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), Ahmedabad
- **Dr P Krishnan**, Director, Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP-IGO), Chennai
- **Dr Dhanasree Jayaram**, Assistant Professor - Department of Geopolitics & International Relations, MAHE, Manipal
- **Dr Shriji Kurup**, Programme Director, Centre for Environment Education (CEE) & National Operator, Blue Flag India, Ahmedabad
- **Ms Nayana Udayashankar**, Senior Programme Officer - Communities and Resource Governance, Dakshin Foundation, Bengaluru

Moderator

- **Ms Nandita Baruah**, Country Representative - India, The Asia Foundation

The session on Securing the Coastline: Fisheries, Tourism, Climate, and the Future of Coastal Economies highlighted the interlinked challenges of gender, climate change, tourism, and coastal livelihoods. Panellists emphasised that despite women's critical roles in fisheries, tourism, and ecological practices, policies remain largely gender-blind. Case studies like the Karen Crafts Cooperative in the Andamans illustrated how community-led tourism can revive traditional knowledge, generate women's income, and strengthen ecological practices.

Discussions highlighted the urgency of integrating traditional wisdom with modern science, addressing cascading risks from climate change, and creating inclusive, gender-sensitive policies that recognise fisherfolk as ecological champions.

Speakers called for stronger collaboration between communities, governments, and the Indian Coastal Alliance (ICA) to address coastal injustices, strengthen resilience, and link evidence with policy. Key recommendations included showcasing success stories, fostering inter-state learning, and building a virtual ICA secretariat to unify voices, scale local initiatives, and sustain collaboration.

Emphasis was placed on the need for nature-based solutions, recognition of coastal commons, financial support for community-led and women-led initiatives, and accessible translation of scientific knowledge for local stakeholders. The panel concluded that inclusive participation, federative learning, and versatile advocacy are vital for building a resilient, just, and sustainable coastal economy.

Key Takeaways

- Gender-sensitive policies are needed to recognise women's roles and leadership in fisheries and climate resilience.
- Bridging science, traditional knowledge, and community voices is key to effective coastal governance.
- Cascading climate and disaster risks require nature-based, regenerative solutions.
- Community-led models, like the Karen Crafts Cooperative, show pathways for sustainable livelihoods and should be scaled across states.
- The Indian Coastal Alliance can unify evidence, foster inter-state learning, and strengthen co-management, technology adoption, and funding for local initiatives.
- Investment in youth-compatible technology and skills is vital to sustain future engagement in fisheries and coastal livelihoods.
- Funding mechanisms must support women-led and community-driven initiatives to ensure equitable climate action.
- Federative learning between coastal states, like Kerala's preparedness for floods, can strengthen collective resilience nationwide.

Expert Talk : Insights from the Mangrove Man

Guest

- Mr T P Murukesan

Host

- Dr D Dhanuraj, Chairman, CPPR

Session 2, Insights from the Mangrove Man, featured Mr. T.P. Murukesan of Vypin, who has planted over one lakh mangroves with the support of his family. Starting with his grandmother's encouragement, his initiative grew despite early ridicule and financial challenges. Today, his work spans across six to seven panchayats, creating nurseries and employing a few people. Supported by organizations like the M.S. Swaminathan Foundation, he has expanded his efforts to restore mangroves as natural protectors against flooding and erosion. His story highlights resilience, family involvement, and the transformative potential of community-driven ecological restoration.

Murukesan stressed the urgent need for mangrove plantations across Kerala's coastline as a proactive solution to flooding, sea-level rise, and environmental degradation. Despite identifying suitable sites scientifically, he has received little government support, highlighting the need for policy approvals, funding, and wider institutional engagement.

He called for nurseries in every panchayat and schools, alongside awareness campaigns to prevent uprooting of saplings. Sharing his livelihood as a fisherman and stonemason, he reinvests personal funds into the initiative, subsidising saplings for others. The discussion concluded that collective action, scientific guidance, and community participation are critical to sustaining mangrove restoration at scale.

Key Takeaways

- Grassroots leadership can drive large-scale ecological restoration, as shown by Mr. Murukesan's plantation of over 1,00,000 mangroves across several panchayats in Ernakulam district.
- Mangroves are a critical nature-based solution for addressing flooding, sea-level rise, and livelihood disruptions, offering a sustainable alternative to stone-based riverbank protection.
- Key challenges include the high cost of planting, labor-intensive nursery work, sapling transportation, and lack of widespread public awareness, with around 20% sapling mortality depending on soil and salinity.
- Community engagement-through schools, panchayats, and awareness drives, re essential to scale mangrove restoration and ensure long-term protection against climate risks.
- Murukesan's model of reinvesting community contributions and involving his family highlights the role of local champions in sustaining low-cost, high-impact environmental initiatives.

Panel 2: An Overview of India's Coastal Challenges



The Panel

- **Ms Manjeet Kripalani**, Executive Director, Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations, Mumbai
- **Dr Dattesh D. Parulekar**, Assistant Professor at the School of International and Area Studies (SIAS), Goa University, Goa
- **Dr Ramu C M**, Senior Advisor - Strategic Risk, APAC Assistance, Singapore

Moderator

- **Dr Vijay Sakhuja**, Former Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi, Professor and Head, Center of Excellence for Geopolitics and, International Studies, REVA University, Bengaluru, Hon. Distinguished Fellow, CPPR

The session "An Overview of India's Coastal Challenges" highlighted India's shift from "maritime blindness" to a growing maritime awakening, stressing the need to integrate security, economy, and ecology into a cohesive framework. Discussions focused on India's maritime ambitions, including Vizhinjam Port, SAGAR vision, and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, while underlining gaps in port rankings, shipbuilding capacity, and communication technology for fishermen. Panellists called for a transition from reactive to proactive governance, with marine spatial planning, stronger domestic shipbuilding, and improved data-driven policymaking.

The session emphasised that maritime awareness must go beyond naval concerns to encompass trade, environment, and community resilience. Speakers addressed the geopolitical competition in the Indian Ocean, particularly China's maritime dominance, but cautioned that India must focus on its own strengths, viewing oceans as global commons rather than rivalry spaces. They noted fragmented governance across ministries and inadequate frameworks for satellite phone distribution to fishermen, which hampers security and endangers lives.

The panel stressed the need for collaborative networks, federated learning with like-minded states, and leveraging India's historic maritime knowledge. A comprehensive national maritime atlas, think-tank-led research, and greater public awareness were identified as critical to bridging gaps in maritime governance, boosting resilience, and realising India's blue economy potential.

Key Takeaways

- India has moved from “maritime blindness” to a maritime awakening, recognizing that security, infrastructure, economy, and environment are interlinked in the coastal and ocean domain.
- Geopolitical risks and external actors in the Indian Ocean highlight the need for India to build capacity, strengthen SAGAR and Indo-Pacific frameworks, and reduce overdependence on China-centric narratives.
- Fragmented governance across multiple ministries and layers has led to reactive responses to disasters; India must adopt proactive and integrated maritime risk governance.
- Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) can help balance security, ecological priorities, and economic activities, drawing lessons from countries like Australia and Japan.
- Technology gaps, such as delays in approving satellite phones for fishermen and lack of uniform frameworks undermine both livelihoods and security intelligence gathering.
- Data-driven policymaking is essential, India needs a national maritime atlas, better domain awareness, and stronger research support from think tanks to inform long-term strategy.
- Emerging opportunities like blue economy ventures, maritime parks, and Hyperloop technologies call for multidisciplinary approaches and investments in education, innovation, and global maritime exchanges.

Panel 3: Advancing Maritime Domain Awareness, Port Infrastructure, Blue Economy, Energy, and Coastal Security



Panellists:

1. Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia, Former Ambassador to Myanmar and Mexico and Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House, Mumbai
2. Dr A Subramanyam Raju, Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, Coordinator for UGC Centre for Maritime Studies, Pondicherry University, Puducherry
3. Dr Arnab Das, Founder & Director of the Maritime Research Centre (MRC), Pune
4. Dr R P Pradhan, Professor at the Dept. of Humanities & Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, Goa Campus
5. Dr Monish Tourangbam, Senior Research Consultant, Chintan Research Foundation, New Delhi

Moderator: Ms Atiya Gopinath, Research Consultant, The Asia Foundation-India

The session on advancing maritime domain awareness, port infrastructure, blue economy, energy, and coastal security highlighted the need to integrate global, national, provincial, and coastal priorities within India's maritime vision. It emphasised the creation of a coherent governance framework, stronger institutional mechanisms, and more consistent "blue diplomacy."

The session on advancing maritime domain awareness, port infrastructure, blue economy, energy, and coastal security highlighted the need to integrate global, national, provincial, and coastal priorities within India's maritime vision. It emphasised the creation of a coherent governance framework, stronger institutional mechanisms, and more consistent "blue diplomacy." Energy transitions emerged as a key focus, with attention to India's ambitious renewable energy targets and the vast potential of offshore wind. At the same time, concerns were raised about competing spatial demands, particularly between energy projects, fisheries, and coastal livelihoods. Marine Spatial Planning was identified as a crucial tool to manage these competing interests.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of technology-driven solutions and indigenous capacity-building to strengthen underwater domain awareness, environmental protection, and data sovereignty. Concerns over declining fish stocks, habitat degradation, and reliance on external technologies highlighted the urgency of inclusive digital transformation involving local communities. The session pointed to disruptions in global trade routes, the push for smart ports, and the growing importance of fossil fuel security in an era of shifting geopolitics. Participants concluded that integrating data, strengthening knowledge systems, and fostering international collaboration will be vital to building a sustainable and secure blue economy for India.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- The blue economy needs integration across four levels-global, national, provincial, and coastal with stronger links between top-down policy and ground-level realities.
- India must establish a National Knowledge Commission on Blue Economy and a strategy for Blue Diplomacy to coordinate ministries, experts, and civil society.
- Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) is essential for sustainability, fisheries management, and security. Acoustic habitat degradation, sonar performance, and declining fish stocks call for indigenous technology, AI-driven data analytics, and community integration.
- Coastal communities should be meaningfully included and incentivized in digital transformation, energy projects, and maritime security initiatives, ensuring they are beneficiaries, not victims, of development.

Coastline Chat: Navigating India's Coastal Priorities



Speakers: Vice Admiral Ashok Kumar AVSM, PVSM, VSM (Retd)
Former Vice Chief of Naval Staff and Former National Maritime Security Coordinator, India

Moderator: Dr D Dhanuraj, Chairman, CPPR

The session on India's coastal priorities emphasised the urgent need to strengthen maritime security through effective multi-agency coordination. The establishment of the Multi-Agency Maritime Security Group (MAMSG) was highlighted as a key step in aligning ministries, departments, security forces, and coastal states. Central issues included the creation of a national maritime database, improved communication systems for fishermen through transponders and satellite support, and the importance of indigenous innovation by startups for security solutions. Participants also discussed the balance between port-led development and ecological protection, noting India's long-term maritime visions and the role of Environmental Impact Assessments in inland connectivity projects.

The discussions pointed to persistent challenges in India's coastal security architecture, including operational gaps in marine policing, risks of technology misuse, and limited trained manpower. Suggestions included greater recruitment of maritime-friendly communities, integrating coastal populations into police and naval systems, and expanding training initiatives.

International and regional dimensions were also noted, such as Exclusive Economic Zone patrols for partner nations, concerns over China's maritime expansion, and the importance of cooperative mechanisms like BIMSTEC data sharing. The session concluded with calls to enhance policy design for coastal communities, strengthen data-sharing systems, and embed maritime awareness into education and public policy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- The Multi-Agency Maritime Security Group (MAMSG) was created to address fragmented governance and ensure coordination across ministries, agencies, and coastal states/UTs.
- A national maritime database and data-sharing framework is urgently needed to reduce duplication, strengthen marine domain awareness, and enable better policymaking.
- Technology and innovation are central transponders on fishing boats (linked with the NavMitra app), satellite-enabled communication, and startups under the NIIO are enhancing security and safety.
- Maritime India Vision 2030 and Vision 2047 aim to balance port-led growth with ecological safeguards through EIAs, Marine Spatial Planning, and sustainable infrastructure.
- Capacity gaps in Marine Police remain a major challenge; short workshops, recruitment from coastal communities, and training programs are helping integrate locals as first responders.
- India's Navy and Coast Guard play a proactive role in EEZ patrols, BIMSTEC data-sharing, and naval exercises, reinforcing SAGAR as a guiding vision for cooperative security.
- Maritime awareness and education need mainstreaming through school and university curricula, civil service syllabi, and coastal universities to build a maritime-conscious society.
- China's strategic presence (ports, pipelines, and naval assets) continues to shape India's maritime security outlook, requiring stronger domestic capacity and regional partnerships.

Panel 4: Existing Policies and Institutional Mechanisms in Coastal Governance



Panellists:

1. Professor Mahendra Lama, Senior Professor, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, New Delhi
2. Dr Shreya Upadhyay, Assistant Professor, Christ University, Bangalore

Moderator: Vice Adm. M P Muralidharan AVSM & BAR, NM (Retd.) Former Director General, Indian Coast Guard, Hon. Distinguished Fellow (Maritime & Defence Studies), CPPR

The panel on existing policies and institutional mechanisms in coastal governance highlighted India's vast maritime domain, with over 11,000 km of coastline and a 2.2 million sq. km exclusive economic zone. While policies such as the Coastal Regulation Zone, Integrated Coastal Zone Management, and fisheries frameworks provide a foundation, significant challenges remain. Climate change, erosion, and marine pollution threaten ecosystems, while rapid port-led growth risks undermining resilience. Fragmented governance across ministries and weak coordination between central and state levels hinder effective implementation. Participants emphasised that stronger integration of security, trade, environment, and community priorities is critical for coastal sustainability.

Discussions also explored parallels between coastal and land borders, noting shared issues of connectivity, security, commerce, and community inclusion. Excessive securitisation limits trade potential, while disasters such as cyclones, floods, and glacial lake bursts expose institutional and scientific gaps. Despite progress in disaster preparedness, frameworks remain fragmented and insufficiently linked to broader development planning. Examples from Bangladesh, Maldives, and Mexico highlighted the value of ecological restoration, climate finance, and public-private partnerships. The session concluded with calls for interstate cooperation, regional platforms, community-based governance, and an integrated maritime policy that aligns security, ecological resilience, and economic growth.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- India's coastline (11,098 km) and EEZ (2.2 million sq. km) handle 90% of trade and 70% of energy flows.
- CRZ, ICZM, and other frameworks exist, but inter-ministry, state, and community coordination is weak.
- Coastal populations are frontline stakeholders yet are largely excluded from planning and decision-making.
- Port-led projects like Sagarmala risk environmental degradation and displacement of fishing communities.
- Bangladesh (mangrove restoration), Maldives (climate finance), and China (coastal growth strategy) offer insights; unchecked growth can harm ecosystems.
- Integrated governance, cross-ministry coordination, sub-regional platforms, innovation, and stronger community and academic engagement are needed.

Panel 5: Voices from the Coast



Panellists:

1. Father Churchill, General Secretary, South Asian Fisherman Fraternity (SAFF), Kanniyakumari
2. Mr K A Shaji, Senior Assistant Editor, Outlook India, Trivandrum
3. Mr Pradip Chatterjee, President of the National Federation of Small-scale Fishworkers, Kolkata
4. Ms Usha Sadasivan, Pallipuram CDS Chairperson, Kudumbashree, Kochi

Moderator: Dr Harisankar K Sathyapalan, Associate Professor, National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore

The session on Voices from the Coast highlighted the everyday realities of fishing communities and their limited presence in policy processes. Concerns were raised about deep-sea mining, industrial ports, and coastal infrastructure projects that threaten traditional fishing grounds and livelihoods. Small-scale fishers, despite being the true custodians of marine ecosystems, face insecurity at sea, inadequate safety measures, and poor insurance or compensation systems. Migrant fishermen abroad continue to suffer detentions and exploitation without adequate state support. Panellists stressed that blue economy initiatives must prioritise fisher livelihoods, safety at sea, and access to fair compensation, rather than only serving industrial growth.

Discussions further highlighted systemic neglect of coastal communities, gender inequality, and the invisibility of women's labour. Women bear disproportionate burdens in times of crisis, managing households amidst uncertain incomes and wage discrimination. Media was recognised as a bridge, with empathetic reporting during events like the Kerala floods helping amplify fisher voices to policymakers. Concerns about IUU fishing, plastic pollution, and weakening regulatory frameworks were also raised. The panel concluded that inclusive governance must recognise small-scale fishers and women as central stakeholders, ensuring that coastal communities are active beneficiaries of blue economy projects, climate resilience efforts, and sustainable development policies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Coastal communities, especially small-scale fishers, are vital custodians of marine ecosystems, food security, and traditional knowledge but remain marginalised in policy and legal frameworks.
- Industrial projects, deep-sea mining, and port expansions threaten fish habitats, livelihoods, and local culture, showing a gap between top-down policies and ground realities.
- Women in coastal areas face disproportionate burdens from climate change, unemployment, and unpaid labor, highlighting persistent gender inequality.
- Fishermen confront unsafe working conditions, lack of insurance, and inadequate government support, both domestically and abroad, requiring participatory and welfare-focused policies.
- Sustainable coastal governance demands integrating local communities into development initiatives like the Blue Economy, ensuring they benefit alongside national economic objectives.

Expert Talk with Prof (Dr) Prabhakaran Paleri - “Whose Responsibility? Accountability in Shipping Disasters”



Speaker:

Prof (Dr) Prabhakaran Paleri, Head, RRU Centre for Indian Ocean Legal Studies, School of Integrated Coastal and Maritime Security Studies (SICMSS)

Moderator: Dr Dhanasree Jayaram, Assistant Professor - Department of Geopolitics & International Relations, MAHE, Manipal

The expert talk on responsibility and accountability in shipping disasters examined the complexity of maritime governance and the overlapping roles of port authorities, regulators, insurers, and governments. It was emphasised that disasters occur not from natural events alone but when there is loss of life, property, or ecological damage. Case studies such as the MV Kairali, known as the Titanic of Kerala, the 1964 Rameswaram cyclone, major drug seizures near Barren Island, offshore oil platform accidents, and the Italian Marines incident highlighted the recurring challenges of accountability. The discussion stressed that safety, security, and sustainability must be treated as integrated aspects of national security and maritime governance.

The session also explored the role of international frameworks, particularly the International Maritime Organization, alongside national laws such as the Merchant Shipping Act and the new Coastal Shipping Bill 2025.

Key themes included interagency coordination, international versus domestic law, and the need to treat the marine environment as a critical stakeholder. National security was presented as a multidimensional concept spanning land, ocean, air, space, cyberspace, and even genomic domains. The importance of authority, responsibility, and accountability was highlighted, along with the necessity of community participation, adaptive laws, and global cooperation to address evolving maritime and coastal challenges.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Accountability in maritime disasters requires clear delegation of authority among port authorities, regulators, shipping companies, insurers, and governments; responsibility alone is insufficient without delegated authority.
- Disasters are defined by loss of life or property, not by natural events themselves; ecological processes like cyclones are essential but can become disasters when human vulnerabilities intersect.
- The marine environment is a global commons with cross-border impacts; effective governance demands integrating environmental protection, national security, and human well-being across multiple domains, land, sea, air, space, genome, and cyberspace.
- International law, particularly through the IMO, plays a crucial role in regulating shipping and environmental safety, but domestic law remains primary on land; interagency and international coordination are essential yet often complex.
- Emerging policies like India's Coastal Shipping Bill 2025 and Blue Economy initiatives must adapt dynamically to demographic, environmental, and technological changes, ensuring protection of communities, ecosystems, and national interests.

Panel 6: Policy Recommendations and Way Forward



Speakers:

1. Ms. Nandita Baruah (Country Representative - India, The Asia Foundation)
2. Dr. D. Dhanuraj (Chairman, CPPR)

The concluding session reflected on the launch of the Indian Coastal Alliance and the need for a dedicated platform to address India's coastal challenges. Discussions emphasised the absence of integrated coastal-focused frameworks and the importance of inclusivity, community participation, and interstate collaboration. Core themes highlighted livelihoods, trade, ecological sustainability, and maritime security as interlinked pillars requiring balanced attention. The session also underlined gaps in gender data, mapping of common resources, and documentation of local knowledge systems. Calls were made for fellowships, scholarships, and grassroots research to strengthen governance, improve representation, and build long-term capacity in coastal scholarship.

The way forward focused on anchoring the alliance through structured partnerships, citizen engagement, and evidence-based policy contributions. Proposals included citizen science initiatives, academic courses on Indian knowledge systems, and ground-level policy reviews in fishing communities.

Concerns were raised about the industrial bias of the Blue Economy, with participants urging stronger focus on resilience, equity, and local innovation. The importance of political and economic contexts in shaping coastal governance was recognised, with emphasis on actionable solutions rather than diagnosis alone. The session concluded with a commitment to pursue collaborative, inclusive, and sustainable approaches, setting a clear agenda for the alliance's next phase.

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05

Key Discussion Outcomes

- **The Underutilisation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge:** The formal governance systems fail to recognise indigenous knowledge about sustainable resource management which results in using costly engineering solutions that prove less effective than community-based mangrove restoration practices. The integration of traditional knowledge into official environmental management and climate adaptation plans requires a national framework and official recognition with financial support for community conservation initiatives.
- **The Problem of Fragmented Governance:** Coastal governance is critically fragmented across multiple ministries and between central state and community levels. This fragmented approach prevents the integration of security, trade, ecology, and community priorities, leading to conflicting policies and ineffective implementation of frameworks like the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ). To address this, a comprehensive National Maritime Policy is required to unify disparate legal frameworks and mandate inter-agency coordination. Institutionally, multi-agency bodies like the Multi-Agency Maritime Security Group (MAMSG) should be empowered as central coordinating platforms, while actively fostering interstate forums to share best practices.
- **The Exclusion of Coastal Communities from Policy:** Small-scale fishers, women, and other coastal communities, the primary custodians of marine ecosystems are systematically excluded from policy-making processes, resulting in schemes and infrastructure projects that often threaten their livelihoods, security, and access to resources. Policy must therefore mandate the inclusion of representatives from these communities in all relevant committees, and Blue Economy frameworks must be legally revised to prioritise and protect traditional livelihood rights. This requires establishing grassroots-level policy review mechanisms where communities can provide direct feedback and championing citizen science initiatives to ensure local data informs national decision-making.

- **Pervasive Gender-Blindness in Coastal Frameworks:** The current policies fail to acknowledge or provide backing for women's essential economic and environmental work. This is reflected in fisheries together, tourism and conservation activities. The lack of recognition for women's work in these sectors perpetuates inequality while blocking the path to sustainable community growth. All coastal projects need to adopt gender-sensitive budgeting and policy design as a mandatory requirement through dedicated financial programs that support women-run businesses. The process of institutional documentation about women's coastal economic contributions must start immediately to reveal their work and establish their leadership positions within community governance bodies.
- **Imbalance Between Port-Led Growth and Ecological Resilience:** The drive for development together with large coastal infrastructure construction happens without sufficient environmental protection measures and prioritises immediate financial benefits over sustainable long-term stability. The government needs to enhance Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) standards through transparent enforcement and establish Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) as a legal requirement for proper coastal and marine area distribution between different uses. The institutions need to direct their resources toward nature-based solutions starting with mangrove restoration instead of depending only on hard infrastructure while establishing legal protection for coastal commons to maintain ecological health and community access.
- **Persistent Gaps in the Coastal Security Architecture:** The maritime sector receives increasing attention yet operational weaknesses in coastal security remain. This can be attributed to fishermen lacking standardised communication tools, marine police forces having insufficient trained personnel and security agencies failing to share data effectively. The government should enforce mandatory transponder and satellite communication system deployment for all fishing boats while providing financial support and create a single national maritime database system to enable complete information exchange. The initiative requires government support through specific recruitment programs for coastal residents to join marine police forces and funding programs that encourage indigenous startup development of affordable maritime security technologies.

- **Towards a Proactive and Integrated Coastal Governance:** The current coastal governance system operates mainly through crisis management because it waits for disasters to happen instead of creating sustainable plans which would help prevent climate change and geopolitical risks. The current regulatory system needs to evolve from individual project authorisation to a unified framework which follows the National Coastal and Inland Shipping Strategy and develops a Comprehensive National Maritime Atlas for strategic planning. The ICA and other think tanks need empowerment to perform future-oriented research, scenario planning and to create federated learning networks with maritime states for implementing global best practices in proactive governance.
- **Insufficient Domestic Capacity and Over-Reliance on Imports:** India remains dependent on foreign technology for critical needs like underwater domain awareness and has an underdeveloped domestic capacity in shipbuilding and creating value-added marine products. The maritime sector requires strong "Make in India" policies which offer specific benefits to build ships domestically while developing native technologies. The export policy needs revision to place processed goods above unprocessed materials in its priority list. The achievement of this goal requires innovation clusters that link research and development institutions with local business owners and financial support for digital transformation programs which will train all community members for blue economy success.
- **The Need for a Sustained, Collaborative Platform:** Historically, the absence of a dedicated platform has led to fragmented efforts among researchers and civil society, resulting in weak and fragmented voices on coastal issues in national policy debates. The establishment of the Indian Coastal Alliance marks an important step toward collective action in coastal governance. It provides a platform to unify voices from local communities, state governments, research institutions, and civil society, creating a stronger and more coordinated framework for coastal development. To be effective, the ICA can be institutionalised to serve as a secretariat for coastal collaboration, with a core mission to unify diverse voices, scale local innovations through inter-state learning, and consistently bridge the gap between community realities and national policy.

06

About CPPR & TAF

ABOUT CPPR

The Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR) is an independent, not-for-profit, public policy think-tank dedicated to in-depth research and scientific analysis with the objective of delivering actionable ideas that could transform society. Based out of Kochi, in Kerala, our engagement in public policy that began in 2004 has initiated open dialogue, policy changes, and institutional transformation in the areas of Urban Reforms, Development Studies, Economy, Ease of Doing Business, Governance & Law, and International Relations & Foreign Policy.

Over the years, CPPR has worked with different Ministries and Departments of the Government of India, Different State Governments in India, City Corporations, Universities, Academia, and Civil Society Organisations on various projects and themes. We have also worked with Embassies and High Commissions of different nations in India, international foundations, and multi-lateral organisations. Please find more details about the people, work, and impact of CPPR at www.cppr.in

ABOUT TAF

The Asia Foundation (TAF) is an international nonprofit organization working to solve the toughest social and economic challenges in Asia and the Pacific. Informed by more than 70 years of experience and deep local knowledge, we work with partners across more than 20 countries through 17 offices to improve lives and expand opportunities. TAF is an experienced leader in delivering cost-effective programs in some of the most dynamic and complex settings across Asia and the Pacific.

The Asia Foundation works with bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals to design and implement tailored, innovative, and adaptable programs. These programs improve local, national, and regional governance and economies, upskill workers, promote peace and stability, counter human trafficking, and strengthen resource management.

07

Conference Agenda

Thursday, August 21, 2025

11:00 a.m.

Registration opens

12:00 p.m. - 01:00 p.m.

Inaugural Ceremony

- **Welcome Remarks:** Dr D Dhanuraj, Chairman
Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR)
- **Opening Remarks:** Ms Nandita Baruah
Country Representative, India, The Asia Foundation
- **Inauguration & Keynote address:** Shri D.V. Swamy, IAS - Chairman, Marine
Products Export Development Authority, (MPEDA) Kochi
- **Special Remarks:** Ms. R. Anitha Nandhini, IFS
Regional Passport Officer, Cochin
- **Special Remarks:** Professor (Dr) G.B Reddy, Vice Chancellor National
University of Advanced Legal studies, Kochi
- **Special Remarks:** Dr Shine Kumar C.S, Director, National Institute of
Fisheries Post Harvest Technology and Training (NIFPHATT)
- **Unveiling of the Indian Coastal Alliance Logo & Launch of Research
Compendium and the Policy Brief**
- **Vote of Thanks:** Dr Dhritishree Bordalai, Senior Associate, CPPR

01:00 p.m. - 01:45 p.m

Lunch

01:45 p.m. - 02:00 p.m

Presentation by Dr Dhritishree Bordalai, Senior Associate, CPPR

02:00 p.m. - 02:45 p.m.

**Session 1: Meet the Authors - Securing the Coastline: Fisheries, Tourism,
Climate and the future of Coastal Economies**

Moderator:

Ms. Nandita Baruah, Country Representative - India, The Asia Foundation

Panellists:

- **Mr Mihir Bhatt**, Director, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI),
Ahmedabad
- **Dr P Krishnan**, Director, Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP-IGO), Chennai
- **Dr Dhanasree Jayaram**, Assistant Professor - Department of Geopolitics &
International Relations, MAHE, Manipal
- **Dr Shriji Kurup**, Programme Director, Centre for Environment Education
(CEE) & National Operator, Blue Flag India, Ahmedabad
- **Ms Nayana Udayashankar**, Senior Programme Officer - Communities and
Resource Governance, Dakshin Foundation, Bengaluru

02:45 p.m. - 03:15 p.m.

**Session 2: Insights from the Mangrove Man -
Mr T P Murukesan, Vypin**

03:15 p.m. - 03:30 p.m.

Tea Break

03:30 p.m. - 04:15 p.m.

Session 3: Panel Discussion: An Overview of India's Coastal Challenges

Moderator:

Dr Vijay Sakhuja, Former Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi, Professor and Head, Center of Excellence for Geopolitics and International Studies, REVA University, Bengaluru, Hon. Distinguished Fellow, CPPR

Panellists:

Ms Manjeet Kripalani, Executive Director, Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations, Mumbai

Dr Dattesh D. Parulekar, Assistant Professor at the School of International and Area Studies (SIAS), Goa University, Goa

Dr Ramu C M, Senior Advisor - Strategic Risk, APAC Assistance, Singapore

04:15 p.m. - 04:30 p.m

Presentation by Adithyan P V, Research Consultant, CPPR

05:15 p.m. - 05:45 p.m

Session 5: Coastline Chat: Navigating India's Coastal Priorities with Vice Admiral Ashok Kumar AVSM, PVSM, VSM (Retd)

Friday, August 22, 2025

09:30 a.m.

Registration opens

10:00 a.m. - 10:45 a.m

Session 6: Panel Discussion: Existing Policies and Institutional Mechanisms in Coastal Governance

Moderator:

Vice Adm. M P Muralidharan AVSM & BAR, NM (Retd.), Former Director General, Indian Coast Guard, Hon. Distinguished Fellow (Maritime & Defence Studies), CPPR

Panellists:

Professor Mahendra Lama, Senior Professor, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, New Delhi

Dr Shreya Upadhyay, Assistant Professor, Christ University, Bangalore

10:45 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

Coffee break

11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Session 7: Panel Discussion: Voices from the Coast

Moderator:

Dr Harisankar K Sathyapalan, Associate Professor, National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore

Panellists:

Father Churchill, General Secretary, South Asian Fisherman Fraternity (SAFF), Kanniyakumari

Mr K A Shaji, Senior Assistant Editor, Outlook India, Trivandrum

Mr Pradip Chatterjee, President of the National Federation of Small-scale Fishworkers, Kolkata

Ms Usha Sadasivan, Pallipuram CDS Chairperson, Kudumbashree, Kochi

12:00 p.m. - 12:45 p.m.

Session 8: Expert Talk with Prof (Dr) Prabhakaran Paleri - "Whose Responsibility? Accountability in Shipping Disasters"

Speaker:

Prof (Dr) Prabhakaran Paleri, Head, RRU Centre for Indian Ocean Legal Studies, School of Integrated Coastal and Maritime Security Studies (SICMSS)

Moderator:

Dr Dhanasree Jayaram, Assistant Professor - Department of Geopolitics & International Relations, MAHE, Manipal

12:45 p.m. - 01:30 p.m.

Lunch

02:50 p.m. - 03:15 p.m.

Session 9: Policy Recommendations and Way Forward

Speakers:

Ms.Nandita Baruah, Country Representative - India, The Asia Foundation

Dr. D. Dhanuraj, Chairman, CPPR

03:15 p.m - 03:30 pm

Sessions Round Up - Ms Manvi Tripathi

Programme Officer, The Asia Foundation-India

Vote of Thanks - Kalyani S K, Research Associate, CPPR

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Photogallery







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