

**CHANAKYA**
UNIVERSITY**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International
Relations, Chanakya University****VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

Navigating Big-Power Politics *US–China Rivalry, China’s Internal Faultlines, and the Responses of India and Taiwan*

In collaboration with
Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre (TECC), New Delhi

DATE	TIME	MODE
21 July 2026	1000–1300 hrs IST	Hybrid

Background and Rationale

Donald Trump’s state visit to Beijing in mid-May 2026 and his dialogue with Xi Jinping was the most theatrically elaborate encounter between the two leaders in recent memory, and was consequential less for what it resolved than for what it confirmed. The nine hours Trump and Xi spent together produced few binding commitments; what the summit did produce was the visible confirmation of a shift in the bilateral balance that had been accumulating since the tariff confrontation of 2025 — a shift that favours China, and whose implications extend well beyond the two principals. The unfolding recalibration in Sino-US ties signifies that the period of US primacy in setting the terms of the bilateral relationship is over. The more useful question, however, is whether this reconfiguration has stabilised into a durable equilibrium or whether it is a managed, and inherently fragile, pause.

What China secured was substantial. For the first time, a US administration validated a Chinese-designed conceptual framework — a “constructive China–US relationship of strategic stability” — as the agreed basis for the relationship, an architecture Beijing had sought for over a decade and that earlier presidents had declined. Equally telling was the absence of the hard issues. The enduring

structural irritants — Chinese industrial overcapacity and mercantilist practice — stayed off the table; the October 2025 trade truce was left to run, preserving China's industrial-policy space while its rare-earth and critical-mineral export controls, the decisive retaliatory lever of 2025, remained in place as continuing leverage; and Trump did not push back on Taiwan even as Xi warned that mishandling the island could lead to "conflict." Later, he described the pending arms package to Taiwan as a very good negotiating chip, acknowledged he had made no commitment either way on approving it, and, when reminded of Reagan's Six Assurances — the explicit undertaking that no president would consult China on the size or nature of arms sales to Taiwan — dismissed the commitment as ancient history. The upshot on contentious issues was less an equilibrium than a deferral of confrontation to maintain stability in the relationship.

This sits within a wider narrative of American self-limitation. The selective weakening of the rules-based order, the costs of the Iran war, and the demonstration that military pre-eminence alone no longer converts into strategic outcomes have all dented US standing. Power has migrated into trade routes, supply chains, energy corridors and technology nodes, and it is in these arenas — not on the battlefield alone — that the contest is now being fought. The tariff war illustrated the point: Trump's leverage could not withstand China's counter-leverage in rare-earth and critical-mineral export controls, which forced a partial rollback and advertised the maturation of China's economic statecraft.

But a weakened United States does not automatically translate into a strong China, and this is where the assessment must be disaggregated. The trade war was not a head-on contest of equals; China managed escalation precisely because it judged it could not yet sustain one. China regards the US as a declining but dangerous superpower. China can deny and disrupt; it cannot yet lead and legitimise on the scale the US still does. Beneath the surface of headline parity lie persistent faultlines, and limits to what China is willing or able to do.

The internal faultlines are real and accumulating. China still trails the United States by a significant margin in military and frontier-technology terms, and the past year has seen unprecedented churn in the top echelons of the People's Liberation Army. The economy carries the weight of tepid domestic demand, a protracted real-estate crisis, and mounting local-government debt, which together force a continued reliance on exports as the principal driver of growth — in turn provoking pushback from trading partners across the developed and

developing world against a renewed “China shock.” Sharp regional inequalities, demographic decline and an ageing workforce, and recurring stress in Xinjiang and Tibet compound the picture. Most consequentially, China carries a deficit of the normative and institutional weight that genuine superpower status requires: it can shape outcomes through coercion and dependency, but it has yet to generate the ideational pull, the alliance architecture, or the global public goods that sustain durable leadership.

Equally telling are the limits to China’s leadership. Beijing is neither willing nor presently able to act as a net security provider in regions where the US has long underwritten order. Its response to the Iran war was a study in deliberate calibration: it called for a ceasefire, invoked international law, endorsed Pakistan’s mediatory role, and continued to draw on Iranian oil — while pointedly avoiding military entanglement or any commitment to enforce the outcome. In the Gulf and West Asia, where its energy and commercial stakes are immense, China has shown the reach of its diplomatic influence but no appetite for the coercive responsibilities of providing security guarantees or policing crises. It prefers a division of labour in which the United States bears the costs and political exposure of crisis management while China expands its economic and technological footprint — patient power that builds structural dependencies without assuming the burdens of order. This is a deliberate strategy, but it is also a ceiling: a power that will not provide security cannot fully displace one that does.

Besides, strategic rivalry is baked into the system on both sides and is merely muted. The conciliatory surface of the summit should not be misread as evidence that China has revised downward its threat assessment of the US. China’s first National Security White Paper, released in May 2025, reiterated that Western anti-China forces continue to try every means to contain, suppress, and encircle China. Arguably, what we have is a truce and a pause as both sides buy time in their contestation.

Where India and Taiwan Stand

It is against this backdrop that India and Taiwan must each calibrate their relations with the two big powers. For both, the bilateral relationship with Washington and with Beijing is refracted through the prism of US–China rivalry, and for both the central predicament is similar in shape even where it differs in degree. The United States, pursuing an unpredictable and

transactional course, has become a less reliable partner; China remains simultaneously a security threat and an economic fact that cannot be wished away. This dual reality — derisking from China without decoupling, and deepening ties with Washington without becoming hostage to its volatility — demands a careful and differentiated balancing act.

Yet the asymmetries are instructive. Taiwan sits at the very centre of the rivalry, its security existentially tied to American credibility and its economy anchored in the semiconductor chokepoint that gives it leverage but also makes it a prize. India is a continental power with a contested land border, strategic autonomy as a settled doctrine, and the latitude to pursue dual and differentiated derisking from both Washington and Beijing. Read together, their experiences are distinct but complementary: each offers the other a lesson in managing exposure to great-power competition from a very different structural position.

About the Roundtable Discussion

The roundtable examines the US–China rivalry and its consequences for India and Taiwan. The central premise is that the Beijing summit was consequential less for what it resolved than for what it confirmed: that the period of US primacy in setting the terms of the bilateral relationship is over, that power has migrated from the battlefield into trade routes, supply chains, energy corridors and technology nodes, and that the contest between the two great powers is now waged primarily through economic statecraft and the management of dependencies. At the same time, a weakened US has not produced a strong China in the full-spectrum sense; Beijing’s internal faultlines and its reluctance to shoulder the burdens of order set real limits on its reach.

For India and Taiwan alike, this combination — a less reliable Washington, a more confident but constrained Beijing, and a narrowing space for third parties under a de facto G-2 overlay — defines the strategic environment. The roundtable asks how the two democracies have navigated, are navigating, and ought to navigate their foreign policies amid this flux, and brings their contrasting experiences into direct conversation to surface the constraints, risks, and opportunities each faces.

The Subhas Chandra Bose Chair on International Relations, Chanakya University, in collaboration with the Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre, brings together distinguished Indian and Taiwanese scholars and diplomats to discuss these themes. The one-day, hybrid roundtable comprises thematic

sessions and interactive discussion, and aims at a nuanced understanding of how India and Taiwan can safeguard their interests in an era of geopolitical flux.

The Sessions in Focus

Reading the New US–China Equilibrium

Session I takes stock of where the rivalry now stands after the 2025 tariff confrontation and the Beijing summit. It probes whether the relationship has settled into a durable equilibrium or a fragile, deferred stability resting on mutual vulnerability — Chinese leverage over critical minerals against American leverage over advanced technology and capital. It weighs the structural faultlines — the military and technological gap with the United States, churn within the PLA, an economy reliant on exports amid weak domestic demand and a protracted property crisis, demographic decline, and recurring internal stress — against China’s formidable and growing capabilities. It also examines the limits of Chinese ambition: its deficit of normative and institutional weight, and its unwillingness and inability to act as a net security provider in the Gulf and West Asia, where it seeks influence without assuming the coercive responsibilities of order. It considers the significance of Washington’s validation of a Chinese-designed conceptual framework, the move from a strategic-threat to a transactional framing of China in US strategy, and the “G-2 overlay” effect that narrows the space available to other powers. The aim is to establish a shared reading of the strategic environment that the rest of the day builds upon.

India and Taiwan: Responses and Convergence

Session II turns to responses. Both India and Taiwan must manage a less reliable Washington and a coercive Beijing while reducing dangerous dependencies — in critical minerals, semiconductors, and advanced technology — without simply trading one form of dependence for another. The session compares their positions: Taiwan at the centre of the rivalry, its security tied to American credibility and its leverage resting on the semiconductor chokepoint; India a continental power with strategic autonomy as settled doctrine and the latitude for dual and differentiated derisking. It explores where their interests converge, where they diverge, and what each can learn from the other about building resilience and credible deterrence in a narrowing strategic space.

Programme

The roundtable comprises four sessions — an inaugural session, two thematic panels, and a concluding session. Each substantive panel features one speaker and one discussant from each side, with the chair alternating between India and Taiwan. Each panel is followed by 20 minutes of discussion.

TIME (IST)	SESSION & SPEAKERS
1000–1020	Inaugural Session Welcome Opening Remarks Ashok K Kantha—Chair Professor, SCB-IR Amb Mumin Chen—TECC
1020–1100	Session I The State of US–China Rivalry: New Equilibrium or Deferred Stability? FRAMING QUESTIONS 1. <i>How do India and Taiwan assess the nature of recalibration taking place in the US–China relationship and its likely trajectory? Is the present calm a new equilibrium or a deferral of confrontation with both the US and China buying time even while pursuing strategic rivalry in a muted form? Is a G2 construct a real possibility?</i> 2. <i>How do China’s internal faultlines constrain its leadership aspirations? How do they impact China’s emergence as a full-spectrum superpower, even amid perceptions of a weakened United States?</i> 3. <i>Should New Delhi treat the post-summit calm, and the stabilisation of the border since Kazan, as a usable window to press ahead with gradual improvement of relations along with derisking vis-à-vis China, or guard against a Beijing that reads improved ties as a sign of India’s reduced options and extracts harder terms?</i> 4. <i>Does Washington’s validation of “constructive strategic stability,” and its softer signalling on Taiwan at the summit, mark a genuine erosion of US commitment, or a tactical pause Taipei can still shape?</i> Remarks by Chair Ashok K. Kantha — <i>Chair Professor, SCB Chair of IR, Chanakya University (India)</i>

TIME (IST)	SESSION & SPEAKERS
	INDIA Speaker Manoj Kewalramani — Takshashila, Bengaluru TAIWAN Speaker Dr Roger Chi-Feng Liu — <i>Director, Integrated Diplomacy Programme, DIMEs Centre, Taiwan Think Tank</i>
1100–1120	Discussion / Q&A (20 mins)
1120–1200	Session II India and Taiwan Navigating the US–China Rivalry FRAMING QUESTIONS 1. How does New Delhi sustain strategic autonomy and differentiated derisking — reducing dependence on China without substituting a new dependence on the US — even as it deepens ties with Washington? 2. How does Taipei build resilience and credible deterrence, and diversify beyond the “silicon shield,” when its security rests heavily on an external guarantor whose reliability is now in question? 3. Where do India’s and Taiwan’s interests converge, and what scope exists for like-minded partners to coordinate rather than face the US–China rivalry alone?
	Remarks by Chair Dr Nishit Kumar — <i>Assistant Professor, SCB-IR</i> INDIA Speaker Santosh Pai — ICS TAIWAN Speaker Dr Naina Singh — <i>Assistant Professor, NCHU</i>
1200–1220	Discussion / Q&A (20 mins)
1220–1230	Concluding Remarks

About the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations, Chanakya University, Bengaluru

The Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations was created to study global affairs from an Indian vantage point. Rooted in the country's strategic culture, its purpose is to inform India's growing international profile and constructive role through original thinking and careful inquiry. The Chair works to advance interdisciplinary scholarship, to deepen the expertise of advanced students and researchers across the core fields of international relations, to articulate an Indian conceptual vocabulary for the discipline, and to cultivate partnerships and a wider community of scholars committed to sound analysis and considered policy. Established within the School of Law, Governance and Public Policy at Chanakya University, the Chair has a primary focus on Asia, with particular attention to India's neighbourhood.

Ashok K. Kantha is the inaugural Chair holding the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professorship of International Relations since December 2025. A career diplomat for more than thirty-eight years, he served as Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs and as Ambassador and High Commissioner to China, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia. Over the past decade, he has been closely involved with think-tanks as Honorary Fellow and former Director (2017-22) of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Distinguished Fellow with Vivekananda International Foundation and Distinguished Fellow with Council for Defence and Strategic Research.

Chanakya University was founded in 2022 and has grown quickly as a notable multidisciplinary institution. Supported by major technology companies, the University already runs six Schools, eight Centres of Excellence, and two Chairs, and has established itself as a serious centre for teaching, research, and engagement with public policy. Dr. S. Somanath, former Chairman of ISRO, is its Chancellor.

About TECC, New Delhi

Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in India (TECC) is responsible for promoting Taiwan and India's bilateral relations in the areas of the economy, trade, investment, media, tourism, culture, education and science and technology.

TECC has several divisions including Consular Division, Economic Division, Education Division, and Science and Technology Division. Each division is responsible for managing related aspects of the bilateral relationship and

advancing mutual interests between Taiwan and South Asian countries including India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal.

The Consular Division is responsible for the issuance of visas to foreigners who wish to travel to Taiwan and provides documents authentication services. The Division is also responsible for the issuance of passports and consular services in India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.

The Economic Division aims to promote economic and trade collaboration, as well as industrial cooperation and investment facilitation with South Asian nations. The division achieves this by actively engaging with government authorities and private sectors to facilitate partnerships in areas such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), startups, and other economic and trade affairs.

The Education Division promotes educational cooperation and communication with South Asian nations. Taiwan has constantly provided scholarships for students from South Asia and promoted higher education exchanges including MoU, Taiwan Scholarship, Huayu Enrichment Scholarship in the region through educational institutes and Taiwan Education Centers.

The Science and Technology Division aims to boost bilateral and multilateral scientific exchanges and activities. This Division is also actively promoting and bridging the cooperation amongst scientists, academics and universities of Taiwan and those in South Asian nations.