

## INCORPORATING A “MARITIME CORRIDOR” IN TAIWAN’S “NEW SOUTHBOUND POLICY+” (NSP+): RATIONALE AND PROSPECT

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On 20 May 2025, Taiwan’s President, Lai Ching-te, marked his first full year in office. Over the past couple of years, the global political landscape has undergone a whole slew of significant shifts. The year 2024, often referred to as a “super election year,” saw national elections held in 70 countries, including major democracies such as India, Taiwan, and the United States. The emergence of new leaders and governments brought with it renewed diplomatic agendas and radically shifting global dynamics. Geopolitically, these changes that have unfolded over the past eighteen months or so have intensified power rivalries among major powers, prompted greater strategic assertiveness by middle powers, and spurred smaller States to seek pathways to escape structural vulnerability.

One of the most notable trends has been the growing strategic attention to the Indo-Pacific region. To date, at least 14 countries and international organisations have introduced or implemented Indo-Pacific strategies.<sup>1</sup> These initiatives underscore two key points: first, that the Indo-Pacific has emerged as the engine of global economic growth; and second, that it has simultaneously become a focal point of security competition and geopolitical friction. Within this context, the future trajectories of two increasingly important actors—India, a major regional power, and Taiwan, a key player in global supply chains—will be crucial.

Two defining features characterise contemporary Indo-Pacific strategies: a focus on de-risking from systemic vulnerabilities, and a deepening of regional presence and engagement. Although neither Taiwan nor India have formally announced an Indo-Pacific strategy—India’s consistent approach to the Indo-Pacific is that of it being a ‘*strategic geography*’, within which New Delhi pursues numerous strategies— in practice, both countries have actively pursued their respective geostrategies within the Indo-Pacific such framework. Under the leadership of former President Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan launched the New Southbound Policy (NSP) from 2018 to 2024, establishing comprehensive partnerships with 18

countries across the Indo-Pacific.<sup>2</sup> This policy has been widely regarded as the core of Taiwan's *de facto* Indo-Pacific strategy. Among these partners, India has emerged as particularly significant, with notable growth in bilateral economic cooperation and increasing mutual understanding and support.

Since President Lai took office in 2024, his administration has articulated a more open and forward-leaning foreign policy vision. In addition to continuing the NSP, there has been a clear emphasis on expanding cooperation with like-minded countries. President Lai has endorsed the concept of a “New Southbound Policy Plus” (NSP+), which aims to build upon the foundations of the original NSP and gradually evolve into a more comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy. Achieving this vision requires not only consolidating existing partnerships but also creating new and strategic networks of collaboration—which have been termed “*corridors*” that leverage Taiwan's strengths and share its resources.<sup>3</sup>

As per the Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation (TAEF), these corridors include government-led initiatives in digital technology and semiconductors; health corridors; resilience-building programs; and platforms for deepening societal linkages such as think tank-, NGO-, and youth corridors. Beyond these existing mechanisms, this paper argues that a critical, yet underexplored area, is the “*maritime corridor*”. As a maritime power, Taiwan has long operated within the free and open Indo-Pacific maritime system, playing an integral role in regional connectivity and economic flows.

This paper seeks to explore how a Taiwan–India *maritime* corridor could take shape—what areas of cooperation it might include, its feasibility, and its strategic potential. In doing so, it aims to offer a pragmatic roadmap for strengthening Taiwan–India cooperation and contributing to a more stable, secure, and resilient Indo-Pacific maritime order. The paper is structured across five sections: the first section serves as a general introduction; the second addresses the conceptualisation and strategic significance of a maritime corridor; the third section presents the perspective of India on such a *maritime* corridor based on India's Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiatives (IPOI); the fourth prioritises the advocacy and actions for Taiwan–India cooperation in enabling the Indo-Pacific maritime corridor; and the final one wraps-up with conclusions and policy outlook.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CORRIDORS IN THE NSP+ AND THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE MARITIME CORRIDOR

Over the decade since its launch in 2016, Taiwan’s NSP yielded substantial achievements. It has significantly expanded Taiwan’s partnerships with NSP target countries and fostered diverse channels for dialogue and cooperation. President Lai Ching-te, who took office in 2024, has repeatedly affirmed the value of the NSP and expressed his intention to deepen its implementation. He has also endorsed the core vision of the “*New Southbound Policy Plus*” (NSP+), which builds upon the existing NSP framework and adapts it to the evolving regional context. Under President Lai’s leadership, the concept of “corridors” has been introduced as a practical mechanism, institutional infrastructure, and strategic tool to operationalise NSP+ and enhance collaborative networks.

NSP+ is characterised by three dimensions of expansion, or “three pluses”. The first “plus” symbolises the evolution of the NSP into Taiwan’s broader Indo-Pacific strategy, aligning more closely with prevailing international Indo-Pacific frameworks.

The second “plus” denotes Taiwan’s intention to deepen its engagement in key areas of foreign policy through thematic diplomacy—particularly economic and trade diplomacy, semiconductor diplomacy, values-based diplomacy, and NGO diplomacy. These priorities are concretely manifested through six identified NSP+ “*corridors*”. Amongst these corridors, three, which are government-led corridors, focus on strategic sectors: (1) the Digital Technology and Semiconductor Corridor, (2) the Health Corridor, and (3) the Resilience Corridor. Complementing these are three civil society-led corridors: (4) the Think Tank Corridor, (5) the NGO Corridor, and (6) the Youth Corridor. These people-centred corridors are driven by grassroots-engagement and societal actors, with the TAEF playing a pivotal role in facilitating their development and implementation.

The third “plus” of the NSP+ further emphasises the importance of enhanced collaboration between civil society and government, highlighting the need for cross-sectoral and interagency coordination to fully realise and institutionalise the goals of the expanded NSP framework.

Overall, the corridors incorporated within the second “plus” represent not only tangible architectures of cooperation but also institutionalised platforms that

connect policies and programs through sustained, structured partnerships. Taiwan firmly believes that these corridor-based initiatives provide a means to transform strategic intentions into durable cooperative relationships, thereby contributing to a more resilient and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

Among these, certain corridors reflect Taiwan's unique comparative advantages and global relevance. For example, the "*Digital Technology and Semiconductor Corridor*" showcases Taiwan's indispensable role in the global semiconductor industry and its capacity to contribute to digital transformation and energy transition initiatives. The "*Health Corridor*" responds to global concerns over public health and human security, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which Taiwan's effective response drew international recognition. Since 2018, Taiwan has implemented a "*One Country, One Centre*" model for medical collaboration, establishing ten medical centres across seven NSP partner countries—including India—with plans to evolve into a "*One Country, Multiple Centres*" model to expand the scope and depth of cooperation. The "*Resilience Corridor*" focuses particularly on disaster risk reduction and climate resilience. Through cross-sectoral partnerships and regional initiatives, this corridor connects Taiwan's Zhushan base in Nantou County to stakeholders across Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the broader Indo-Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand. Activities include training programs, high-level leadership forums, trade exhibitions, and grassroots exchanges—all aimed at translating Taiwan's domestic resilience experience into actionable regional strategies.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these visible and successful examples, one critical dimension remains underexplored: the *Maritime Corridor*. This paper argues that the maritime domain deserves greater attention, particularly given Taiwan's identity as a maritime power embedded in the free and open Indo-Pacific maritime system. Developing a maritime corridor framework is essential to leverage Taiwan's seafaring strengths and reinforce regional cooperation on maritime security, connectivity, and sustainable development.

## TAIWAN'S MARITIME REALITIES AND THE STRATEGIC NECESSITY OF A MARITIME CORRIDOR

Situated off the coast of the Asian continent, Taiwan is an island country surrounded by the sea. From a socio-economic perspective, the people of Taiwan

have long lived in close connection with the ocean, with a significant portion of the population historically dependent on maritime livelihoods. In economic terms, the Taiwan Strait plays a critical role in global trade: approximately one-fifth of the world’s goods trade—valued at around 2.45 trillion USD—passes through this maritime passage. For Japan in particular, roughly 75 per cent of its seaborne trade volume transits through the Taiwan Strait. Thus, the security of sea lanes near Taiwan is not only vital to Taiwan itself but is also a lynchpin of global commercial stability and prosperity.

This strategic significance has been echoed in recent international policy documents. For instance, Germany’s first-ever “China Strategy”, released in 2023, explicitly highlighted the importance of peace in the Taiwan Strait, referring to it as a “*lifeline of the global economy.*” Furthermore, the maritime space around Taiwan serves as a critical energy artery for Indo-Pacific countries. Taiwan relies on imports for approximately 97 per cent of its energy needs, most of which are shipped through the Taiwan Strait. Similarly, over 95 per cent of Japan’s crude oil—imported primarily from the West Asia—transits this same route *enroute* to Japanese ports.

Beyond economic and energy security, Taiwan’s surrounding waters have increasingly become the stage for non-traditional security threats. In recent years, there has been a surge in incidents involving damage or sabotage of undersea cables—crucial infrastructure for global digital connectivity. These threats pose grave challenges not only to coastal States but also to international cooperation, commercial interests, and the convenience and safety of daily life. What is at stake is a new kind of critical infrastructure: the “*digital lifeline.*”

The nature and origin of these threats are becoming clearer. Attacks on undersea cables in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea have underscored the potential for such incidents to escalate beyond grey-zone tactics into precursors of hybrid warfare. These developments have garnered heightened attention from the European Commission and policymakers across Europe. Moreover, the possibility of collaboration between China—the principal source of maritime threats near Taiwan—and Russia—the main actor in recent European maritime incidents—has become a shared concern among Indo-Pacific and European nations that have adopted Indo-Pacific strategies. Addressing these emerging maritime threats presents an opportunity for joint dialogue, information sharing, and coordinated action among like-minded States.

In this context, the responsibility of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring the protection and stability of critical maritime resources lies not only with Taiwan but with all neighbouring and affected countries. Establishing a “*Maritime Corridor*” aimed at securing the safety, stability, and prosperity of vital sea lanes is, therefore, imperative.

This proposed Maritime Corridor holds three key strategic implications:

1. **Beyond Traditional Security.** The corridor is not only designed to address conventional regional security concerns but also to respond to non-traditional and human security challenges such as digital infrastructure protection, energy security, and climate resilience.
2. **Shared Vital Interests.** A collaborative initiative between Taiwan and India builds on existing economic and technological cooperation—particularly in semiconductors and high-tech industries—and extends their strategic alignment into the maritime domain, where both nations face similar existential interests.
3. **Regional Framework for Cooperative Security.** Bilateral cooperation between Taiwan and India can serve as the foundation for a broader, Indo-Pacific-driven framework. Through the engagement of like-minded countries, this initiative can evolve into a regionally owned and driven *Maritime Corridor Cooperation Framework*, advancing a vision of maritime security based on shared interests, mutual trust, and collective resilience.

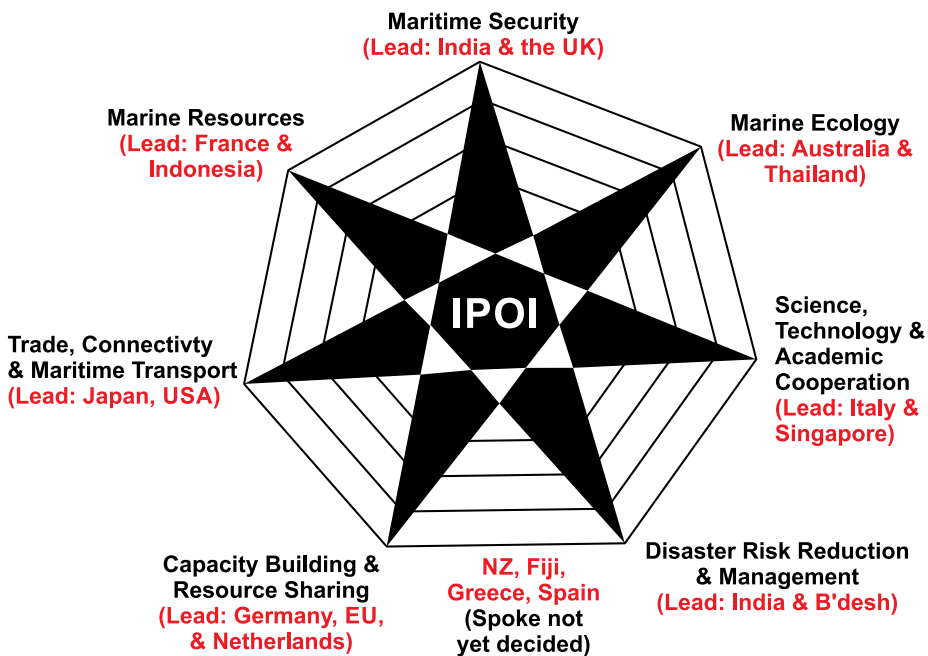
In other words, this paper advocates a “Taiwan-India Maritime Corridor initiative” built on the pillars of security, resilience, prosperity, and trust—fostering a cooperative architecture for safeguarding the lifelines of the Indo-Pacific.

## INDIA’S PERSPECTIVE: THE IPOI FRAMEWORK AND BEYOND

India’s emergence as a leading power has coincided with a pronounced maritime turn in its grand strategy. This has found increasingly explicit manifestation through its maritime policy, which was initially encapsulated in the acronym “SAGAR”, which is the Hindi word for “*sea*” and, more pertinently, the letters of the acronym stood for “*Security and Growth for All in the Region*”. This policy, which had first been articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015,<sup>5</sup> recognised

that India’s security, prosperity, and growth, was inextricably dependent upon the security, prosperity, and growth of other States in the Indo-Pacific region. As India’s relevance-to and leadership-of the Global South increased, and as India’s grand strategy began to increasingly focus not just upon the western segment of the Indo-Pacific (the Indian Ocean) alone but on the region’s eastern segment (the Pacific Ocean) as well, this policy evolved and is, today, defined by a new acronym, “MAHASAGAR”, which is not only the Hindi word for “ocean” but expands to Mutual And Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions.<sup>6</sup>

Providing first-order specificity to India’s maritime policy, is the “Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative” (IPOI), which had been launched by India’s Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, on 04 November 2019 at the 14th East Asia Summit in Bangkok.<sup>7</sup> The seven pillars of the IPOI serve to identify seven specific but intricately and inextricably connected maritime lines-of-thrust. As such, the IPOI is best thought of as a complex, deeply interconnected ‘web’, with each of its seven ‘spokes’ representing a specific maritime ‘line-of-thrust’. Over the years that have elapsed since its initial enunciation, the IPOI has gained considerable international traction, with several countries volunteering to take the lead along one or more of these maritime ‘lines-of-thrust’,<sup>8</sup> as may be seen from the following schematic:



As has already been brought out in the preceding section of this paper, the first “plus” in Taiwan’s NSP+ signals its gradual evolution into an Indo-Pacific strategy, aligning it with other Indo-Pacific frameworks. Both strategic concepts privilege functional, multi-pillar cooperation over alliance structures, using webs of issue-based initiatives privileging ‘function’ over ‘form’. Both are explicitly people-centred and development-oriented, positioning themselves as providers of public goods and resilience, rather than being focused upon *military* maritime security. Both seek to build a resilient, inclusive Indo-Pacific by diversifying economic and strategic dependencies away from a single dominant power. Thus, while both are frameworks for translating strategic intent into specific functional actions whose interdependence is explicitly acknowledged, the seven spokes of the IPOI, taken in aggregate, constitute a maritime-specific counterpart to NSP+’s broader “three pluses”.

As has already been explained, the NSP+’s second “plus” operationalises Taiwan’s Indo-Pacific approach through its six corridors—three government-led (Digital Technology and Semiconductor, Health, Resilience) and three civil-society-led (Think Tank, NGO, Youth), with TAEF as a core facilitator. These can be readily overlaid upon the IPOI’s seven maritime lines-of-thrust. For instance, there is clear congruence between the “Digital Technology & Semiconductor Corridor” of the NSP+ and the “Trade/Connectivity” and the “Science & Technology” spokes/pillars of the IPOI: The “Semiconductor / Digital Corridor” of the NSP+ aims to build resilient, “*democratic*” supply- and value chains,<sup>9</sup> positioning Taiwan as a “*Silicon Island*”<sup>10</sup> and future “*AI island*”<sup>11</sup>, while the IPOI’s trade, connectivity and maritime transport pillar seeks diversified, transparent, and resilient maritime connectivity and logistics, and its science/technology pillar promotes joint R&D and innovation. Together, they are complementary tools for Indo-Pacific techno-economic resilience: Taiwan provides cutting-edge digital and semiconductor capabilities; India provides maritime connectivity frameworks and a large market. Their synergy is most obvious in digital trade, port / logistics digitalisation, and secure subsea and data infrastructures.

Likewise, the NSP+ “Health Corridor”, built around the “*One Country, One Centre*” medical collaboration model (now evolving into “*One Country, Multiple Centres*”), uses Taiwanese medical capacity to strengthen partner health systems across the NSP region, including, of course, India. Congruent with this is the IPOI’s “Disaster Risk Reduction and Management” spoke/ pillar, which emphasises early warning, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), and

resilience, while its capacity-building pillar focuses on institutional strengthening in partner States. Through the establishment of a “maritime corridor”, Taiwanese health-diplomacy can plug into the same coastal communities, institutions, and regional platforms that India engages-with via the IPOI’s disaster risk reduction and capacity-building pillars/ spokes, especially given the Indian Navy’s very considerable experience of health-related disaster response, and medico-logistics during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

The NSP+ Resilience Corridor, anchored in cross-sectoral partnerships and regional training linked to Taiwan’s Zhushan base, focuses explicitly on disaster preparedness and climate resilience across South-East Asia, South Asia, Australia and New Zealand. The IPOI’s spokes relating to “disaster risk reduction” and “maritime ecology”, taken together seek exactly these very outcomes in coastal and oceanic spaces: climate-resilient infrastructure, ecosystem-based adaptation, and structured HADR cooperation. Here the complementarity is direct: the “Resilience Corridor” provides tested social and institutional models of resilience (derived from Taiwan’s domestic experience) that can be seamlessly woven into IPOI’s own resilience programmes involving joint training, scenario-planning exercises, and knowledge exchanges in respect of disaster-resilient port and coastal infrastructure.

The “Think Tank Corridor” of the NSP+ institutionalises regional policy dialogues and research cooperation, with TAEF’s NSP+ Think Tank Summit and Yushan Forum as key platforms. The annual “Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue” (IPRD) series of mega-conferences, which sequentially fleshes out the pillars/ spokes of the IPRD is a perfect fit. Likewise, the IPOI’s “Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation” pillar/ spoke explicitly calls for the establishment and leveraging of knowledge-based networks amongst governments and academia that would be relevant to all seven pillars/ spokes, as also to all corridors of the NSP+.

NSP+ plans to use an NGO Corridor to make Taiwan a training hub for non-government organisations (NGOs), scaling civil-society capacity and project work across Asia. Mirroring this within the IPOI web are its “Capacity-Building” and “Disaster Risk Reduction” spokes. There is clear recognition in both constructs that resilience and sustainable maritime governance cannot rely on governments alone. They are most effective when operated through community-level capabilities and social capital. Top-down approaches are seldom able to develop the degree of synergy that is to be found in bottom-up structures of resilience and governance.

Here, Taiwanese NGOs and training schemes can complement those of India and other lead-partners of the IPOI.

The NSP+ Youth Corridor aims to nurture new Indo-Pacific generations through exchanges, education, and co-creation projects. This is precisely what the IPOI also seeks to do through its “Academic Cooperation” spoke. Indeed, the future of both, the NSP+ and India’s MAHASAGAR depends on trained human capital across in all seven maritime lines-of-thrust of the IPOI, from maritime science to maritime logistics management and marine governance.

The third “plus” of the NSP+ stresses collaboration between government and civil society, highlighting cross-sector and inter-agency coordination as necessary to institutionalise the expanded framework. This is why it is quite so important to see the IPOI not as seven distinct pillars but as deeply interconnected web with seven spokes. Once this model is internalised, it becomes obvious that the deliberate fusion of State-led (Digital/Semiconductor, Health, Resilience) and society-led (Think Tank, NGO, Youth) corridors of the NSP+ mirrors the IPOI’s conviction that governments, universities, research institutes and firms must co-develop projects along each maritime spoke. For the India–Taiwan engagement (involving not just this dyad but also the broader grouping of regional partners, this creates interlocking platforms, with think tanks and NGOs providing the connective tissue.

Thus, the third “plus” of NSP+ is structurally congruent with IPOI’s design logic: both seek to turn webs of governmental and societal initiatives into enduring, institutionalised architectures.

Although a “*Maritime Corridor*” remains underexplored within the NSP+, the substance of such a corridor nevertheless already exists—albeit in embryonic form—within each of the six existing corridors: SLOC-dependent semiconductor supply chains; health logistics along oceanic corridors; resilience of seafaring, fishing, and coastal communities; and think-tank/NGOs that work on maritime governance and security. It may consequently be seen that the seven maritime lines-of-thrust of the IPOI offer a ready-to-use maritime template with which the NSP+ can articulate the *maritime* corridor.

To summate, the *holistic* maritime security and the trade/connectivity lines of thrust provide the NSP+ with a much-needed port-security dimension and one that extends to the security of international shipping lanes, especially around the

South China Sea–Indian Ocean interface, where both India and Taiwan have strong interests. Further, the IPOI’s maritime lines-of-thrust encompassing disaster-risk reduction, ecology, and resource-sharing, all map neatly onto NSP+’s Resilience and Health Corridors, providing sectoral content for the maritime corridor being advocated. In similar vein, the science, technology and academic cooperation line of thrust, coupled with the one relating to capacity-building, align very well with the NSP+’s corridors involving Think Tanks, NGOs, and Youth, anchoring maritime-focused education, research, and training.

Framed in this manner, it may be seen that the IPOI provides a ready-made maritime skeleton that NSP+ can be wrapped upon with its corridor-based musculature of semiconductor, health, resilience, think-tank, NGO and youth initiatives—yielding a genuinely multi-stakeholder Indo-Pacific architecture that is both resilient and inclusive.

## ADVOCACY AND STRATEGIC ACTIONS

Despite the absence of formal diplomatic ties since 1949, Taiwan and India have established a robust and resilient partnership. The mutual establishment of representative offices with *de facto* embassy functions since 1995 has laid a strong foundation for cooperation. Bilateral ties have notably deepened since the introduction of the NSP, leading to diversified collaboration and mutual trust. In 2025, as Taiwan and India celebrate 30 years of partnership, this milestone provides a timely opportunity to elevate cooperation to a new strategic level—especially through high-level strategic dialogues and the co-development of a maritime corridor.

The corridor framework under NSP+ is not only a mechanism for highlighting Taiwan’s comparative advantages or promoting bilateral and regional cooperation but also represents Taiwan’s tangible contribution to institutionalised partnerships with neighbouring countries. While current corridor themes—economic engagement, health, resilience, and civil society—are well-conceived, they lack a framework that explicitly showcases Taiwan’s strategic maritime identity and its geo-political/ geo-economic importance. The proposed “Maritime Corridor” directly reflects Taiwan’s nature as a maritime nation and serves at least three strategic purposes for Taiwan’s survival, prosperity, and relations with India:

1. **Security and Resilience.** A resilient maritime corridor strengthens national defence, enhances preparedness against external threats, and counters both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. These include increasing hybrid threats such as cable sabotage, hostile military activity disrupting maritime order, unlawful enforcement by State vessels in international waters, and civilian ships disguised as maritime militias—all of which undermine a free and open Indo-Pacific. Taiwan, India, and other littoral States can advance maritime corridor governance through enhanced dialogue, inter-agency information sharing, and maritime security cooperation.
2. **Economic Connectivity and Openness.** Given the critical connectivity between maritime domains in the Indo-Pacific—especially from the Indian Ocean through the South China Sea to the Taiwan Strait—a free and open maritime route is essential. Coastal States must collectively safeguard these maritime lanes, protect supply chains and energy routes, and defend rules-based trade and economic interests.
3. **Growth and Inclusivity.** As an island country, Taiwan shares common concerns with other island nations in the Indo-Pacific regarding climate change and environmental threats. Taiwan has built close partnerships with countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Meanwhile, India, as a great maritime power and the leader of the Global South, continues to promote inclusive and people-centred development agendas. The proposed maritime corridor offers a low-sensitivity yet high-impact avenue for Taiwan and India to jointly pursue inclusive growth through development cooperation.

## India's Role

India plays a critical role in advancing the vision of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Its IPOI framework provides a valuable functional structure for integrating Taiwan's maritime corridor into broader regional efforts. Through strategic coordination, Taiwan and India can synergise their respective initiatives to enhance regional maritime governance, infrastructure resilience, and inclusive development.

## CONCLUSION

As we advance through the first half of 2026, we are witnessing a global resurgence of authoritarianism, extremism, and protectionism—forces that threaten to undermine centuries of progress and stability of our world, and that seek to dismantle the rules-based international order. Taiwan’s transformation of the New Southbound Policy into NSP+ and its integration into an Indo-Pacific strategy is not mere rhetoric. It is the result of years of flagship projects led by the government and sustained engagement from civil society and the private sector. The proposal for the addition of a maritime corridor reflects the natural evolution of this policy network into a strategic coalition.

This agenda responds to shared threats and converging interests across the region. We are confident that joint advocacy and cooperation between Taiwan and India on the maritime corridor will benefit the well-being of both societies, contribute to Indo-Pacific stability, and reinforce global peace. Strategically, it will further anchor Taiwan and India as maritime powers committed to openness, partnership, and inclusive growth.

To showcase this corridor, mega annual multi-stakeholder events such as Taiwan’s Yushan Forum and India’s Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) provide global platforms as culminating points of the detailed work undertaken through think-tank collaboration, such as that sustained by the ongoing regular professional interaction between the TAEF and India’s National Maritime Foundation (NMF). Both platforms must be leveraged to the fullest, and this is the immediate task before these two-premier think-tanks.

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