

**Seminar:**

**The Launch of the Trade Sentinel:**

**An early monitoring mechanism for trade policy and related changes**

Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) CSEP Research Foundation

6, Dr Jose P Rizal Marg, Chanakyapuri,

New Delhi 110021, India

Ph: 011 2415 7600

**CSEP Research Foundation**

Regd. Off: Second floor, 6, Dr Jose P Rizal Marg  
Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110 021 India  
T: +91 11 2415 7600 E: [info@csep.org](mailto:info@csep.org) W: [www.csep.org](http://www.csep.org)

## **Speaker(s):**

### **Prerna Prabhakar**

Associate Fellow, CSEP

### **Christian Echle**

Head, Asia and Pacific Department, KAS, Germany

### **Selim Raihan**

Executive Director, SANEM, Bangladesh and Professor, Dhaka University

### **Paras Kharel**

Executive Director, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment, Nepal

### **Prabir De**

Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)

### **Nikita Singla**

International Trade, Logistics and Inclusion Specialist

### **Rameshore Khanal**

Distinguished Fellow, Institute for Integrated Development Studies, Nepal

### **Vaqar Ahmed**

Joint Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Pakistan

### **Anushka Wijesinha**

Co-Founder/Director, Centre for a Smart Future, Sri Lanka

### **Mustafizur Rahman**

Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka, Bangladesh

### **Subhashini Abeysinghe**

Research Director, Verité Research, Sri Lanka

### **T.G. Srinivasan**

Visiting Senior Fellow, CSEP

## **Moderator(s)**

### **Sanjay Kathuria**

Visiting Senior Fellow

Know more details: <https://csep.org/event/launch-of-trade-sentinel-an-early-monitoring-mechanism-for-trade-policy-and-related-changes-in-south-asia/>

Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3hrVbPtIN8&t=6s>

*The following is an edited and revised transcript of the event. It has been generated by human transcribers and may contain errors. Please check the corresponding video for the original version.*

**Prerna Prabhakar:**

Good morning to everyone. Welcome to the launch of Trade Sentinel: an early monitoring mechanism for trade policy and related changes in south Asia. The Trade Sentinel has been co-founded by Dr Sanjay Kathuria and Dr TG Srinivasan. I will briefly introduce them to you. Dr Kathuria is a visiting senior fellow in the growth, finance and development vertical at CSEP. He is also a visiting expert with the United States institute of peace. He teaches in both US and India as an adjunct professor, Georgetown university and visiting faculty Ashoka university. He is also a nonresident senior fellow at the institute of south Asian studies at the national university of Singapore. And a global fellow at the Wilson center in Washington DC. Dr TG Srinivasan is a visiting senior fellow in the growth, finance and development vertical at CSEP. Before joining the center, he made significant contributions to the World Bank as a senior economist. He worked in the ministry of finance in Oman where he was involved in the development and implementation of the medium term economic framework. CSEP's association with the Trade Sentinel holds immense potential and importance for our trade and competitiveness work. And we cannot agree more to the need for such an initiative that is, the one stop shop for all... we cannot agree more to the need for such an initiative that is a one stop shop for all recent trade policies in the south Asian countries. I would also like to mention that Trade Sentinel has been made possible through generous support of KAS via its regional economic progress program Asia and today we are joined by Christian Echle from KAS. I will introduce him to you. Christian Echle is the head of the Asia pacific department of KAS. He was the director of the foundation's political dialogue, Asia program, based in Singapore from June 2017 to February 2022. He joined the foundation in 2007 as an online editor. His work focuses on the influence of social media, on social and political opinion making, digital transformation and cooperation with political parties. I will welcome Christian for his opening remarks. And look forward to an interesting discussion. I would also want to request all the online panelists to keep their cameras on throughout this discussion. Thank you. Welcome Christian.

**Christian Echle:**

Thank you so much, Dr Sanjay Kathuria, Dr TG Srinivasan, esteemed speakers, ladies and gentlemen. It is my pleasure to welcome you here for the launch of the Trade Sentinel on behalf of the Konrad Adenauer foundation. We are a German political foundation based in Berlin with over 100 offices around the world. 21 of them are here in the Asia pacific region. And the economical regional program which is supporting this Trade Sentinel is based in Japan. So, why did we decide to support the Trade Sentinel. There is no early monitoring mechanism for trade policy changes of south Asian countries. If we look at what is out there, we have the WTO trade reviews which are infrequent. We have the global trade database, global trade alerts database maintained by St Gallen endowment for prosperity through trade. And it covers all countries and measures but it is in a summary way. And we have the temporary trade barriers database maintained by the World Bank. But it covers only temporary measures and is for a small set of countries. And it stops in 2019. So, such early monitoring mechanisms as is now created with a Trade Sentinel is essential for encouraging south Asian countries to tap into intra-regional trade and to dial down their increasingly protectionist policies. The

Trade Sentinel is an effort to fill important gaps in monitoring trade policy actions of south Asian countries. The program seeks to provide real time alerts, trends and analysis of trade and investment policy changes in south Asian countries. This tool and this topic have become more and more important for the Konrad Adenauer foundation in the recent years with our regional economic program in Asia. We are essentially trying to help us to achieve our goals to contribute to the discussion shaping important developments in international trade. The information that the Trade Sentinel houses and corresponding analysis highlights benefits of integration and multilateralism. And they also serve as warnings alerting us on the risks of policy-driven geo- economic fragmentation. We hope that this public good available for the use all stakeholders which include policy makers, researchers, the private sector and civil society, will be essential in preventing unfettered fragmentation and will be a catalyst in helping the rules-based multilateral system to adjust to increasingly complicated and rapidly changing world. It is a team effort I would say, we are on the supporting side, but we have some very important and integral personalities here in the room who are the founders of the Trade Sentinel. Dr Sanjay Kathuria and Dr TG Srinivasan. I understand I wasn't part of the early beginnings of the Trade Sentinel. But I understand that it started during covid. I surely don't want to glorify the covid times. We all sat at home and we all thought about what we could do with our lives, whether we should learn a new instrument or become more fit or learn a new language, maybe. And I am afraid that most of these plans have not taken place. But I am happy to see that there is something good that came out of this very dire covid situation. And that today we are now able to launch the Trade Sentinel. So, I would like to thank both of you very much for all the effort that you have brought into this project which as I said is very valuable from our point of view. I would of course, also like to thank CSEP, Dr Laveesh Bhandari is not with us today I believe. But as a president of the center, he is a very esteemed partner and we are happy that we have a memorandum of understanding with CSEP to continue the cooperation and the work on the trade questions in south Asia. Of course, I would like to thank everybody else who was involved in setting up the Trade Sentinel, the whole research analysis, the research analysis, the research analysts, the web developers and the organizers behind the launch today from the Trade Sentinel team, the CSEP team, but also the KAS team. So, thank you all very much and I am looking forward to the launch the official launch and a very good discussion. Thank you.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much, Christian for those very warm remarks and its great to see that we are actually running ahead of time. Rare event. So, I want to start by also introducing my colleague Prerna to you who welcomed all of you. She is an associate fellow here at CSEP and an integral part of our trade and as well as our Sentinel team. This event, though you can't see them, this is actually a south Asia wide event. We have people logging in from all over the world. So, welcome to all of you. Those of you who are all over south Asia and also in Japan, in east Asia, in Europe, I think we have people logging in from everywhere including some of our panelists. I would like to reiterate what Prerna said. I want to thank very much our sponsors KAS who... it's not just financial support but much more than that. Its moral support, intellectual support, all of that. So, Christian, \_ Hassan and Rabia and \_, thank you very much for all your support which has helped us to bring us to this point. I want to reiterate the very generous support we

have received from the CSEP where many of us are working on trade work. So, there are lot of synergies in this Trade Sentinel work with CSEP's work and with the foreign policy team in CSEP. Thank you, to Rakesh who kind of introduced us to all of this and to Laveesh for this very generous support in many, many ways including the entire event today. So, thank you very much. And to all our panelists Prabir, Nikita and everybody else, I will introduce them in turn. All of who are all online in south Asia and other countries. So, let me start now in terms of just giving a few thoughts on the Sentinel before I hand over to my co-founder Dr TG Srinivasan, popularly known as TG to everybody. I will give little bit of the context before I handover to TG. We will talk about why is this important. Why Trade Sentinel and then Prakhar our colleague will walk you through the website. So, I want to acknowledge Prakhar Chaudhary who was an integral part of our trade team and Karma who is here and Santhosh, they are part of our IT support, very important members, all of that you see is thanks to them. All right, we can start the presentation. So, some people it takes a bit of a lag to see it, but you will see it soon. Anyway, you can listen to me in the meantime. The south Asian context for trade, we all know and we have been struggling with south Asia trying to make trade as a more of a development tool. So, south Asia is compared to the rest of the world is still at a very early stage of globalization, applied tariffs are still higher than anywhere else in the world, it terms of regions. Its more than double that or close to double of east Asia and the pacific where south Asia traditionally tries to compare itself against. Because they have been kind of leaders and inspiration for south Asia. So, in south Asia we are at a very early stage, therefore the gains from trade are very far from being fully realized. We all know this story about not only does south Asia not integrate with the rest of the world, it even less integrates with its own neighborhood. That's much more than integration with the rest of the world. So, it actually discriminates against its neighbors in terms of trade cooperation. While the rest of the world is getting into more sophisticated forms of how to cut trade costs and integrate better with the neighbors, in south Asia we are still struggling with first generation and basic trade reforms. One indicator of that is this chart on trade costs. Overall if you look at an average, this chart is about Asia and the pacific, tariff rates are very small part of overall trade costs in Asia. But not so for south Asia. South Asia tariffs and other trade costs competing head to head as to which is more important compared to in the rest of the world it would be less than 10% of the overall trade costs. Especially in the Asia and the pacific. But that's not the case in south Asia and that's why one reason why tariffs or one of the focuses of our Trade Sentinel will be still on the first generation issue of tariffs. So, here you see before you, non-agriculture tariffs in 2022, out of the countries presented India is in excess of 14%. This is the highest out of the seven countries being compared. Again, Bangladesh is close. Nepal, Pakistan, everybody is high. Sri Lanka is relatively low, but this is also a bit of a misnomer if you look at our website, you will see high para tariffs there which are sort of disguised tariffs. So, compared to let's say China, non-agricultural tariffs, its less than 2% and even Vietnam which is the export, the new generation export powerhouse of the world, again much lower than south Asia. Another indicator is tariff lines, so, the extreme tariff lines. So, the world considers tariff lines in excess of 15% as being outliers and in an age of low tariffs notwithstanding some tariff increases because of the US China trade war, but overall, notwithstanding that, tariff lines in excess of 15% are considered to be excessive. Again, if you look at that, south Asia is kind of very, very high. I think I don't need to belabor the point. On the next slide what I am

going to show you is restrictive interventions versus liberalizing ones. Now, I should say in all fairness that this idea of the Trade Sentinel, it is TG's inspired idea, and in turn we have been inspired by the global trade alert which we want to be complementary to the global trade alert in Geneva and of course, WTO's own monitoring of trade restrictions. So, this particular chart is from the global trade alert which basically is telling you the number, the count of the number of trade restrictions, they are notified in different websites and portals. So, the restricting... in every single year since 2008, the number of restrictive measures has exceeded the number of liberalizing measures. If you look at another venture, by the IMF which they look at MATR, the aggregate trade restrictiveness. So, they are clubbing... this is a broader measure which includes exchange rate restrictions in addition to trade restrictions. So, capital account issues and all of that. If you look at that again the picture is not very different. So, again south Asian countries have high trade restrictiveness overall compared to the countries that we most often compare ourselves with. IE, China and Vietnam. Now, let me get down to the nub of today which is why do we have... why Trade Sentinel. And I think Christian gave some very good reasons why we need something like this. Let me elaborate and reiterate. The motivation is to create independent monitoring, it's a research organization catering to trade and related issues. We are starting with trade, hope to get to other issues resources permitting. Our key constituencies we think... but this is something that we would like to hear from all of you and our panelists. They include of course, trade policy experts. Policy makers in all countries including the host country but also in neighboring countries. Meaning, as a Nepalese policy maker I would be interested in what India is doing and vice versa. And this makes it easy to do that. The private sector and civil society more broadly. So, what are our motivations. So, one is of course, putting trade back at the center of the development discussion. Its not there. We have had in south Asia for example we had last a meeting of trade or commerce ministers or trade secretaries as far back as 2015. So, we want to bring trade back into the limelight with the vision of it being a development tool. it is not merely an instrument of revenue raising or protection. It is a development tool. There has been a lot of macroeconomic instability, there has been restrictive and liberalizing trade actions, intensifying since covid, the Russia Ukraine war, and so on. It continues. So, trade in general has become more volatile, policy making globally. And not to mention the geopolitical aspects of trade which are also intensifying the US China trade wars, trade and technology restrictions and so on. The official reviews of trade policy which are done by the WTO, are few... they are far between, they happen once every four years or so depending on the country. So, there is a... and they quickly, because of so many trade actions being taken including in south Asia as you saw in the chart earlier, these kinds of reviews become outdated. In south Asia it's a kind of a practice that there is a bundling of tariff decisions in the budgets and then after that you continue to have decisions both on tariffs and non-tariff issues over the course of the year. So, we hope to kind of put those together in a cumulative way and make it easy for the community to look at. So, we will put the updates, the restrictions or the liberalizing interventions, put the analysis of that and put the data out. So, we also want it to be... again in the spirit of bringing trade back into the limelight, we want the Trade Sentinel in time to provide an important resource for trade conversations in and about south Asia. Not just within south Asia but about the countries because obviously trade is not restricted to south Asian

countries. Although that is a very important constituency. So, I am going to now hand over to T G.

**T G Srinivasan:**

Thank you, Sanjay. I am going to turn to the natural question. Are we just talking to people who are already in the echo chamber when you are discussing trade policy like tariff and discussion such? Now the natural question is when you have a start-up what's the addressable market. Who is your audience? Who is going to come to this? If you look at the trade information portals which have been created in all our countries because of a WTO initiative, its like a single portal where they put all the dump, all the information related to international trade in one place. Now, if its possible to count the number of unique visitors going into this information portals... that's what we have here. It's basically what we find is that if you aggregate over all of our five countries which is in our current focus, 80000 unique visitors go to this trade information portals now. If we have a very good product and ours will be a more efficient way of gathering some of the information which the governments are providing in that. Now India of course, because of its size there is a large number of visitors in India's trade information portal, then you have lesser visits in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. How do people go this website? Now how do you take things to public? Are people going to sit down in front of computers and search for things or are they going to use the mobile phones to get to what the information they want. Its also available to do web analytics on how people get to the trade information portals and what we find is that about 30 to 40% of the visits are coming through the mobile platforms. So, if we want to reach out more people, we need to go beyond providing a website for the desktop. We need to go to the mobile way of providing services because most policy makers probably never sit in front of a computer, they usually use a mobile phone to access the information. What is the value that we bring in apart from the larger context issues, the bigger trade discussions? What are the specific things we are able to provide through the Trade Sentinel website? Now, we have a list of seven things here. But some of it are aspirational. Not everything is operational right now. For example, if you want to look at the tariff schedules of our governments, the five governments we have, they are usually delivered in very bulky PDF documents. They run into 800 or 1000 pages. And it's a great pain for any trade analyst to take these things out and convert them into excel and then analyze them. Obviously, there is a lot of lags in analyzing. If an announcement is made today, it takes a while to figure out what is the actual trade policy intent of these tariff schedules. Now, for example Sri Lanka follows a calendar or cycle, it has already announced the tariff schedule for the year 2024 a couple of weeks ago. And its going to take quite a while to convert this into excel and make it widely available. Now, one of the important services that we provide is that we take the tariff schedules of all the five countries that we have, we have painstakingly converted that into excel files and as a public good its freely available. Anybody can download, enter some basic information about his interest and it can be downloaded. This service is already available in the richer countries like US or EU, you can download the entire tariff files in excel format. Now we are extending that benefit also for the south Asian countries. The second thing is we also came up, since our last brainstorming we had in November, we have come up with a tariff search or comparison tool where you basically enter... if you know the product name or parts of the product name or if you happen to be a

trade policy guy or trade researcher, you will note the so called HS codes and you can enter them and then you can get a comparison of how the current tariff rates look across the south Asian countries and they can be ad valorem or specific and also we provide a visual representation of that. In case there is a... as Sanjay was mentioning the budget cycle usually gives the changes to the tariff schedule and after the budget, they keep tweaking the tariff and non-tariff restrictions. So, this tariff compare tool also, if you pick a product if there are any relevant notifications related to this product it will also pop them up for you. That is the other useful thing. We have so far focused mostly on the database creation and dissemination, we are moving into the analysis phase as well. The trade notifications of the government are very difficult to read. They are probably lawyer friendly and not user friendly. For example, your paragraph from one of the countries we have, it has 262 words with daisy chaining of so many phrases that we don't know what is the actual action verb in this. So, its quite obfuscating. So, what we do is that we try to decipher that and say what is it actually saying. And then most often this notification simply saying such and such a product the value change or the tariff rate changed to this. But they never say what was there before. So, we need to dig up a little bit to see what is the direction of change. And also, we add a little bit of analysis, what is the trade significance of this. Then, we look at the changes which... the cumulative changes happen since the budget cycle and we can detect the possible policy direction coming through all the micro notifications which the governments are making. And this is another important value add we bring. In the long term, Sanjay and me, we have been working on trade topics for a while. We have compiled together all the south Asia relevant research pieces we have done and we are featuring them also on this website. So, this can actually serve as a resource for trade policy conversations as Sanjay was saying before. See, eventually we will be able to provide tariff profiles which are much more recent than the WTO tariff profiles so that you can get a very good idea of where a particular country stands in trade policy. And aspirationally we want to extend this service to other areas of trade policy and foreign direct investment policy. Right now, we are focused only on foreign trade barriers set up by these countries. Meaning in the goods area we want to extend it to the services and the non-tariff barriers and para tariffs we are already beginning to make some waves. These are aspirational at this point and subject to resource availability we will be able to extend. Now, I would like to invite Prakhar who is our one man army who has been working very hard on content creation. He will provide a walk through of the website that we have put together with the help of Karma's team and Santosh's hard work is behind all what you see. Thank you.

**Prakhar Chaudhury:**

Thank you, TG. So, in the next 10 to 12 minutes I am going to give a run through of the website. I will be talking about how the website is structured, what is it that we have in each of the pages in this website and how is it that the content that we put up here offers the value or the additional value that T G and Dr Kathuria have talked about. So, starting with the landing page, this is where the user comes first when he or she goes to the website. The landing page is divided into four sections primarily. The first section is of the most recent notifications. Here as Dr Kathuria and T G both talked about how we analyze the usually legally obfuscated notifications and put our analysis up and talk about what has happened before and other things, the HS codes affected import volume and the value affected. We talk about all of that



here and this section is divided into four country tabs. This section is divided into five country tabs. Each one tab for each south Asian country. And each country tab shows the three most recent notifications and their analysis. If I as a user I am interested in more than these just three notifications I can click on the more tab here and I will be guided to this page wherein an entire compilation of all the import related notifications in the last one year, their analysis, the HS code affected, the volume of imports and the value of imports affected and all of that is presented here in this section. Now moving on to the second section of the landing page, this is where we do the policy trends. As T G just said, we analyze all the micro notifications and other data that is available to us and give a fuller picture of what has happened in the international trade policy landscape. So, this one example is for Bangladesh where we are talking about how the final consumer goods tend to attract highest para tariffs in Bangladesh. Similarly, we have graphs and visuals for India. For instance, this one visual for India is a flowchart which talks about all the tariff policy interventions. Mostly the import tariff policy interventions and how they are structured between tariff and non-tariff and how many of them are liberalizing, how many of them are restricting and the products affected etc. This again goes on for the other countries as well. Moving on to the next section in the landing page, we have the section for tariff compare. I am going to talk about it more in detail in the next few minutes. I am just going to skip through it right now. The last section here is for the latest analysis where in we present the blogs that both Dr T G and Dr Kathuria have written and other people also are going to put up here. So, this section is then a snippet of all the blogs that we have written. We present the three most recent blogs here and if a person wants to read more about those blogs, they can click on the more link here and they will be guided to this full length of the blog page. The most recent one is Dr Kathuria's blog about the Pakistan's missing markets. And we have other blogs written by both T G and Dr Kathuria over the last three or four years. So, this is about the landing page. I will now move on to the country pages. Each country has one page wherein all the information about that country is uploaded. Again, as the landing page where in each section is divided into country tabs here, each country page is divided into four tabs. Import, export, services and FDI. Right now, we are focusing on only import and export and also in import and export we are focusing on a lot of other things. We are focusing on tariff and the export rates specifically. A lot of other links are there, but they are not functional, we are going to put in and populate the content there. So, in the country pages, if you see, the first two links here are for tariff and here we have for para tariff policies a note and an analysis of what the para tariff policies exactly are and how they are covered for each of the countries. Just a brief analysis of what they are and what is it that these countries do about para tariffs in that one country. And we also have the tariff schedule in a downloadable excel format as T G talked about which is something that we have been trying to do here. Since its not available on the government portals in this easy to use format. Again, in the exports section we have links for the export duty rates, export tariffs, cess and other such rates that the government releases. Now on the right hand side of this page you can see we have a few more links which cover the blogs that are country specific. A person can click on these links and will be guided to again the blog page and read these country specific blogs. The idea is that if a person comes to a country page, they should be greeted with all the information that we have about that one country from this one page. And we also have the same notification summary compilation that I showed to you in the beginning of the

presentation when we were talking about the most recent notifications. The same is repeated for all the other countries and everybody who is interested in anything about that one country can go to that country page and look into that. Now I am going to talk about the tariff compare tool which is something that the team has taken a lot of pain in developing. I am going to spend the next three minutes to talk about what exactly does it do and how is it that we tend to use it and how the users use it. This tariff compare tool has been developed with an idea of making the international import tariff policies and the import tariff rates more accessible to the researchers. We want this tool to be a place where in people can compare the import tariff rates of the south Asian countries amongst themselves. And we also want this to be a place where a person who is interested in a particular HS code can get all the latest policy updates, the changes in the import tariff or the changes in the import policy that have been made ever since the tariff schedule was released. I am going to take an example just to give you a quick glance of what exactly does it do. For instance... there are three ways in which a person can look for the HS code or the product that he or she is interested in. The first way is when a person knows the HS code that they want to search for. In which case I can just type in the HS code. For instance, I know the HS code for plastics is 391910 and I just type in that HS code, click on it. I am greeted with two visuals. The first is the tabular representation of the MFN tariff rates and the import control policies of all of these countries and also there is graphical representation of what is going on with the tariff rates. Here since there were tweaks in the import tariff rates and the import policies since the tariff schedule was released which is also reflected here. The tweaks that have been done by those countries is also reflected here. The other way is when we do not know the HS code. For instance, I do not know the HS code for plastics and I just type in the word plastics. I am again given this bunch of suggestions and I can just choose whichever HS code that I want to choose and then look at that. The third way which is something that we have developed using the product tree of the HS 2022 nomenclature the product tree. For instance, I am not aware of what keyword I want to look for or what HS code I want to look for, I can go through this HS 2022 nomenclature list and just look at whichever product I want to look for from this list and select it. For instance, I want to look for shorts, which I know is under apparel and here is 6105 the code for shorts and I can just click on that and I am guided to this particular section and I can again see the results for that one HS code. So, this is about the tariff compare page. I will now move on to the blog page which is the final page of our website which I have already shown to you. This is where all the blogs and all the analysis that we do is reflected. There is a table of contents and all these blogs are then categorized by country on each of the country pages as well. Then we have the regular pages of team about us and contact us. That's about the website. And I want to note that this is still a work in progress. We are still working on creating and developing a lot more functionalities that is going to make the website more and more user friendly and useful for researchers. That's it and I am looking forward to your feedbacks and suggestions. We also have a YouTube video which in detail talks about how to use the tariff compare tool because it can be slightly tricky to understand. So, that's uploaded on the YouTube channel. And that's the link of that as well on the website. Thank you.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much, Prakhar. As a user I am very excited about the tariff compare tool I know it's a great job to bring all of these together and have it at the click of a button. Before I handover, the questions to the panelists. We want to help you to help us prioritize. I will go through the specific questions that we have asked. This is the big picture questions that all of you and those of you who are online start sending us your questions, we will try to address as many as possible. As we stated, all of us, that the intention is to have a big picture comparison. Annual or if possible, even on a half yearly basis. How country trade profiles have developed, the liberalization or the restrictions. We will also try to do a comparison across south Asian countries for the year in question. And we will also try to do occasional in-depth policy change comparisons either regionally or between countries. We will also look at one very important constituency, Christian noted about, south Asian intra-trade in the south Asian region. So how do we... what kind of policy actions are affecting intra south Asian trade. That's another important set of issues that we might look at. You have already seen the searchable tool, but we will try to make it more ambitious, is there any way to aggregate it, there are questions that you can ask in the tool. So, how can we get broader big picture comparisons of tariffs. In time, if resources are available as TG mentioned, we do plan to add services, FDI, logistics is yet another kettle of fish. That's a massive endeavor in itself. But, if we get people excited about it, then that could be part of our future ambitions. Of course, the big, the open ended question is what else can bring value. So, I am going to now ask specific... to our nine panelists from all over south Asia... we have asked specific questions. One is what is your country perspective on our presentation on the Trade Sentinel what you have seen. They had access to the website a few days earlier. Hopefully they have had some chance to browse through it. Who is our audience? What value in your view do we bring? So, these three questions at least in the time that you have if you can cover. In addition, if you have more time then you can also cover other questions like what is the high priority for the coming year, how can we improve the user experience and how do we do better outreach to our current audience and potential audience. With that I am going to turn to our panellists. First in Helsinki because they are attending another meeting. So, its really early in the morning for Selim and Paras. So, I am going to invite both of you first before you have to leave for your meeting. Why don't we start with Selim who is... all of the panellists are fortunately they are very good friends, esteemed colleagues from south Asia and those of you who work on south Asia don't need any introductions to them. But, Selim, a very old friend since my Dhaka days. Professor at Dhaka university and director of SANEM. Selim, five to six minutes. And then I will do the same for Paras.

**Selim Raihan:**

Thank you very much. I think it is still good morning in New Delhi. And Sanjay, congratulation to you and your team. I think it's an excellent job and as a researcher I think I really feel kind of proud of you and I am quite sure other panellists too will also agree with me that how useful this Trade Sentinel website would be. I think I remember few months back we had an earlier meeting too and I am glad that some of the discussions what we had that time been reflected in your presentation and at the website. No doubt, this is going to be an extremely useful site with a lot of useful information and also, I must congratulate you and your team to put this discussion on the importance of south Asian integration on track because that has been lost

for a long time. I think, many of us, we were kind of in a frustration that probably, this is not an issue now. And we are probably need to think something beyond south Asia or south Asian integration is not something which can be a reality. I think this work, your work, would be very helpful in getting the discussion on track. And especially as you rightly pointed out that when it comes to tariff and several non-tariff issues, we are kind of very unique compared to many other regions. We actually impose tariff and non-tariff mostly to our neighbouring countries. Close neighbouring countries where as probably in other regions we will not find that kind of situation. They are more so called friendly to their neighbouring countries in terms of imposing tariffs and non-tariff. But we are not. Since you asked about Bangladesh's perspective, I am quite sure Professor Mustafizur Rahman is here too. He will elaborate quite a lot on that too. Bangladesh has introduced a new tariff policy. This is something very interesting. This new tariff policy has kind of tried to address some of the challenges what Bangladesh has been facing and some of the challenges what we actually raised over the years in terms of tariff policy, various anomalies in the tariff and tariff policy. They have tried to introduce those kinds of issues in the new tariff policy. In your discussion, in your analysis, which would be very important to figure out and make it more prominent in the discussion that its not only what is there on the paper, but actual implementation of it and the ground reality, which is extremely important. It is very important to show the kind of difference between what is on the paper and what is actually being practiced. And here I wanted to introduce the kind of term which has been widely used by UN-ITC, they call it procedural obstacles and I know Sanjay and your team you have also worked quite a lot on these issues. So, procedural obstacles, how do you actually address those procedural obstacles in your analysis? Because some of these numbers can be very misleading in the sense... I am not really saying that they are truly misleading but they may not reflect the true picture of the real protection in that particular country. So, this is one thing. Second thing is that I think in one of your graphs when you were showing the Bangladesh data, the role of the para-tariffs, these are extremely restrictive and probative. Especially they are imposed on a very ad hoc manner through SROs or in budget and then when you add those para-tariffs to the custom duties, the actual protection becomes very high. So, I think this is something where probably a separate discussion on the para-tariffs would be very helpful in addition to the kind of MFN applied tariffs. So, if I am not wrong, I think when you mentioned MFN applied tariff, is it the kind of the tariff, average applied tariff. Its not the simple MFN rate. Because we know that MFN rate and the applied tariff have some important differences about many of the south Asian countries. In terms of notifications both the tariffs and non-tariffs would be as you rightly said, would be very important. You remember Sanjay, I actually worked with my south Asian co-researchers for Asian development bank, we developed NTM database at the six digit HS code level. It was few years back, but it needs to be updated too. But if you need those information, need those data, we will be very happy to share with you. And probably we can get you in touch with the relevant people from the Asian development bank. Because those papers, out of those six country papers, five have already been published. So, this is public information and public document. You can definitely use those information. I think this will be very, very helpful. My final point would be that as you pointed out in your presentation that engagement with the policy makers and important stakeholders is extremely important. Because there is a kind of, I would say lack of understanding among the business community about these various forms of non-

tariff issues and even some of the tariffs which are imposed, not in a very predictable way. My country is also kind of they do it. When you talk about or when you think about this imposition of tariffs and many various importers or exporters, they have complained that things are not really very predictable. Because as I mentioned earlier through SROs you can see that new para-tariffs are being imposed. So, I think engagement with the important stakeholders would be very extremely important because that really would connect to your earlier or the very first point that what I really wanted to mention that getting the discussion on track on south Asian integration and south Asian trade, that is important. Only my point, my final point is that, only this website and the blog would not be sufficient. I think because you need to take this information straight to the policy makers, straight to the other stakeholders, get them engaged, bring them to the table on a regular kind of discussion. And show them that this is something what the analysis can be done using this data and these are the differences. Because some of the graphs are really striking what you created. That kind of differences by HS codes differences, the countries, I think that will be very helpful in getting the right kind of discussion on south Asia on track. I thank you once again, this is an excellent effort and thank you for giving me the first opportunity to talk because you were right that I have to leave for a meeting in Helsinki and Paras too. Over to you.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much, Selim and we are very gratified at your welcoming our initiative. And also, at your offer of cooperation. We will certainly take you up on that issue which also we had a side discussion recently on that. So, let me also now welcome Dr Paras Kharel, another old friend from Kathmandu, who is the executive director of SAWTEE, the premier think tank in Nepal. So, without taking too much time, because I know you also have to go for the same meeting as Selim. Paras, over to you.

**Paras Kharel:**

Thank you, Sanjay. I hope I am audible. Let me congratulate you Sanjay, TG, CSEP and the team there for coming up with this initiative. I think this is a long overdue initiative. And its only fitting that it comes from the leadership of two economists that have championed the cause of regional integration, cooperation in south Asia for decades. Let me bring a Nepali perspective first. So, 2/3rds of Nepal's trade are with the region. And 2/3rds are almost entirely with India. And 2/3rds are relevant to both exports and imports. What are the changes in the trade policies of your biggest trade partner who accounts for two-thirds of your trade is extremely important for policy makers, private sector and the research community? And withing our inter-regional trade we are also trying to diversify and find new markets. For example, Nepal has been negotiating a preferential trade agreement with Bangladesh for a while. And naturally issues of tariffs, non-tariff barriers and para-tariffs do come up. But the availability of data on the public domain is extremely thin. Especially with regard to para-tariffs. So, this kind of data that addresses not just tariffs but also non-tariffs and para-tariffs will be very important from the policy perspective too. Similarly, Nepal has introduced a national trade integration strategy, 2023. This is for five years and it has listed a set of priority products and some of the south Asian markets for these products are within the region. For example, India, Bangladesh and how trade policies there could impact these identified

products would also be of interest to the policy makers. This website has tried to do this thing in terms of highlighting some policies on the export front also. And this is also important for a country like Nepal which is highly dependent on imports including import of say, rice, paddy, corn, sugar, onions. Policies that restrict or facilitate exports by south Asian trade partners are as important as policies that are related to their imports. So, this is also potentially useful for Nepal. From the regional perspective this could be a forum for a continuous real-time monitoring of factors or policies that are keeping intra-regional trade low. Intra-regional rate is very low and Sanjay Kathuria and T G have done a lot of research documenting this. But this will be a real-time sort of monitoring of what policies are contributing to that pathetically low level of inter-regional trade. And who are the potential stakeholders, investors are also potential set of stakeholders who want to invest in our country including Nepal. Policy makers as I said, policy makers including those that are negotiating preferential trade agreements within the region. Stakeholders would be exporters and importers, researchers and importantly the media too. And going forward if it's possible I think it would be a worthwhile effort to orient the media in a perhaps a separate... even a program on what this website is all about. So, even in the case of Nepal, when the media reports on India's trade policies it is usually on the basis of what the Indian media for example has reported. Now, by accessing this website they can potentially go to the original source or as T G pointed out since that original source is usually full of languages that are more amenable to lawyers than to economists or media persons, your website with this initiative could be helpful for them. And after all you want to influence policy positively and media is a powerful vehicle to influence policy. And this is also of interest to development agencies interested in regional integration in south Asia. Plus, this would also be useful to SAARC. Because SAARC had taken an initiative to create a non-tariff measure database. And it had set up a series of non-tariff measures NTM desks across south Asia. but as far as my knowledge goes that has not really taken off. This could be something complementary effort in that regard. If you strengthen the non-tariff measure, para-tariff measure aspect of this database further in the days ahead. And finally, regarding its value, first it brings efficiency in research for example, the way we can compare tariffs and the download facility that you have and are planning to provide. Second, it could potentially provide and it has made that initiative already to provide updated data, even on tariffs, but at the tariff line level, national tariff line level, which is available at the WTO but the data comes with a lag. That's an advantage you potentially have. And also provide new data, new data I mean data on para-tariffs which is very important but it's rare, it's a rare commodity. Para-tariffs and data on non-tariff measures that you are attempting to cover. Finally, regarding priority areas, I think, now one should be of course, realistic too. You have your resource constraints and there are lots of things cover. But in the short run, focusing diligently on tariffs and para-tariffs would be of high importance. And also giving emphasis to export related measures. As I said, quite a few south Asian countries are dependent on their trade partners for imports of crucial commodities including agricultural commodities, food commodities. So, tracking the policies that impact exports, whether it is export duties or export bans will be important. And as I see on the website you have made an attempt to provide data on export duties for example. And going forward, blanket bans or even nuanced restrictions, covering them would also be important. And again, going forward maybe in the medium term looking at non-tariff measures would also be important. I know this is

challenging because SAARC did make an effort to create a database, but it has not really taken off. You could complement it. And perhaps in the long run, investment policy changes would be relevant. And also trade facilitation and transit related measures would also be important. Because in the south Asian countries, there are three countries that are land locked. And trade facilitation measures not only by themselves but also by their existing or potential transit partners would be of importance to them. And I will pause here and thank you for allowing me to speak first in view of my time constraint because I have to attend another meeting. Thank you.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much, Paras and appreciate yours and Selim's doing this despite you have to rush for meetings. So, I am going to keep going back and forth between randomly between different panelists just to keep things interesting. Since we have in a couple of cases two panelists from a country, I will keep going back and forth. So, I don't know... let me start with Sri Lanka and Subhashini would you like to give us some thoughts on what you have seen. Subhashini is I should say again a very old friend we worked when I was in the World Bank. Worked a lot with her. She is a senior member of a very important think tank Verité' research which does actually... she is a director of research there and does really credible work, detailed and I think exact and they take a lot of pains to make sure about the credibility of their work. So, Subhashini, over to you.

**Subhashini Abeysinghe:**

First of all, thank you, for inviting and I would like to offer congratulations for taking an initiative in my view is rather daunting exercise to do in south Asia. Because south Asians we are not quite good at sharing data and when we share data, we are not good at being very up to date and also in presenting data in a user friendly manner. I can see what you have done is like 10% of what you want to do. So, you had many things in that website that you want to do. So, it's a very ambitious effort. But knowing you, Sanjay, you have always been extremely keen on promoting south Asian integration and being very optimistic about south Asia's potential despite us making such little progress in really trade reforms or trade integration. So, congratulations. And I wish you all the best, because I can see this is a very resource intensive and a challenging task. And we all know the validity of websites depend quite a lot on how updated information is and given the difficulties in accessing information and disclosure of information in general in south Asia. Since that of course, makes it even more valuable. So, what I like, like everybody said, the comparison between countries, it was one of the things that the presentations that I missed, is the free trade agreements, right? So, when we go to, for example, if you take tariffs imposed by India on Sri Lanka apparel or to Bangladesh apparel, is very different. Because Bangladesh or from Pakistan to India versus Sri Lanka to India versus Bangladesh to India, right? So, that comparison I feel will be very useful because for some of the countries under the trade agreement we may get preferential access to another market. Since we are also keen to show trade integration and south Asian integration, to see what extent are we open to reduce these tariff barriers for our neighbors will be an interesting thing. So, I wonder whether you will think about it because as a researcher I would find that very, very useful. Also, when we talk about integration, I am

again... we have these databases that I find very useful to see is the access my competitor gets to a particular market. In this sense I feel like maybe India is becoming... with more trade agreements, India signed... all of us signed with non-south Asian countries and given that SAARC and everything else is making very little progress and it seems like maybe we are being more generous to non-south Asian countries than south Asian countries. So, through all these trade agreements we maybe actually giving access to south Asian markets to non-south Asian countries than south Asian countries. So, that comparison to me is very interesting and would be very useful to see, to bring to the forefront as a policy discussion. So, are we really moving towards integration or are we just giving up on integration even at government level? Because we are more open to negotiate with others. On the user side, Sanjay as you know, as a think tank that has been running lot of the message platforms, also you showed statistics about trade information portals and the number of visitors and I could see that Sri Lanka has low number of visitors. So, one of the maybe key elements that we miss is the need to push out this information, the availability of this information. How do you really let people know and that is a challenge many websites which are great feel struggle to overcome. So, I would like to know at Verité we have public finance. \_\_\_ we have about six different web based platforms. So, we have realized really people do not necessarily just on their own find the platform. We need to constantly popularize. So, we extensively use social media, we have dedicated social media handles. For example, we have a platform called publicfinance.lk. but we also have twitter or Facebook pages on say publicfinance.lk. So, that we can constantly share and would just maybe this be a suggestion. Maybe this is something you have already thought about, how can you... when you have information, WhatsApp is good. I realize that I don't know when you say WhatsApp whether you meant that actually this data can for example will get alerts when new data is available or anything like that. So, it is good to think of really... because this is lot of effort and lot of hard work that goes into it, at the end of the day I think the joy of everyone who created this is a greater number of people using it. So, really pushing that information out so that it is even more easy to access and getting the traffic into the portal through maybe social media or WhatsApp. Just would love to hear your thoughts on it. And lastly, Sanjay, again about various... this can be again a very good platform. I don't know whether we do have a platform like that where we showcase all sort of trade policy related research done by south Asians in this portal. So, if you can really populate that, that will be a very valuable resource as well. We encourage people to share that research on the portal and provide that information. I was thinking of some of the work we did together with Para tariffs and others with the World Bank and that never really got published. So, I don't know whether there are ways we can really get that to the public domain. So, thank you. That's all my comments for now. And congratulations.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much, Subhashini, for the encouragement indeed and we will touch base separately on some of the suggestions you have made. I would like to call on another old friend Vaqar Ahmed from sustainable development. He is the joint executive director of SDPI, Islamabad. And he is a former civil servant, but a very well-known researcher of south Asia. Vaqar, I know you may be having... I am told you have some difficulties on the camera, but I hope you can at least speak to us. Over to you, Vaqar.



**Vaqar Ahmed:**

Thank you, Sanjay. Apologies for this technical glitch. IT has been trying to sort it out. But sorry about the camera. Congratulations to you and the entire team for this effort and thank you for making us part of this effort as well. Yes, you were right. We had access to this resource for some time and we benefitted from it. So, thank you very much. I think, I would start from your original question which was about the audience. I think this is very important to keep in mind that while of course, we focus our efforts on this portal, the way things are sequenced on exporters, importers, the governments, an important part of this effort is the consumer in south Asia. And the fact that such effort which is a one stop shop basically brings the consumer closer to better information, if not perfect information. I think that is a goal that such an online effort could achieve. Consumers currently as I see despite of all the restrictions in south Asia, which the presentations have pointed out, consumers have found their way to access the products and services if they are sound enough. I think such an openness to information bringing it online, can enhance the information on products, standards, what sort of consumer protection goes, measures for consumer protection for example, in trade based arrangements. The other point that I want to bring here is and I could see that people were also putting it in chat, is around governmental... inter-governmental coordination. So, yes, south Asia has been slow to engage. There are sporadic instances where governments come together, there is a big push effort some times and then of course, we would sort of lay back or give it some time. But whenever that moment comes when governments start to engage, the inter-governmental coordination becomes easier if such a portal has the trade policies, regulations, SROs, harmonized standards at one place. And then tracking what we had done in the past becomes easier given that such a portal would have archived the knowledge as we also saw in the presentation. I think the data analytics part is important given that we live in a world of AI. So, the fact that most of the traders are those who invest taking lead from trades for example, may not have the luxury to hire sophisticated firms. Particularly the potential traders or SMEs for example and if for example, already I could see that some of the data analytics is part of this effort and which can be deepened. So, we are actually intending to provide a low cost solution here where the data analytics arising from the underlying data is there at your doorsteps and reduces the cost of information which probably is a key barrier to trade in the Asia pacific as highlighted by the World Bank in their recent studies. So, this reduction in the cost of information networking is something which should bring the audience closer to these efforts. One of the things which in some of our countries would be important is the aid which is going in trade promotion activities. While of course, some of the data is available at DAC in OECD, but still at least I do not readily find the kind of... for example aid inflows that go into trade promotion and improvements to trade facilitation, improvements to border \_ trade infrastructure and its important to really see as a researcher that what does that aid constitute. Is it materializing into something, have the outcomes been significant and maybe we could bring the discussion around those aid flows or data around those aid flows on this portal as well? I think one of the speakers rightly pointed out, Subhashini probably, that its important to also focus on the stories of success, the focus on economic benefits that could arise given the normalization of trade between neighbors, something which south Asia needs to do much more. And then of course, we also need to highlight here through specific

case studies, cases of trade in services where despite of all the barriers of high cost, there are several sub sectors in the services trade which through their own customized arrangement continue to move forward. We have MNCs on across the border for example, who continue to work and continue to trade between their subsidiaries and we really need to document how does that happen so that the potential exporting firms or importing firms in the region can also benefit from their experiences and their contacts going forward. So, all in all, as I see it, this effort Sanjay is going to be a significant move forward in promoting the knowledge and learning around regional integration, something that we are all here to promote. So, once again, thank you very much for having me

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much, Vaqar for your appreciation and your valuable suggestions. And like with everybody else we would like to... you are part of... this all of you are part of this endeavor in so many ways. Because we are building on you and your intellectual capital and on your goodwill towards this exercise. Because there are network effects in this. The more we get onto it the more useful it becomes. So, let me now sort of get back to pull the discussion back a little bit here physically. And let me request my good friend Dr Prabir De, who is a professor at RIS and he has been working in this space for a very long time. Doesn't need any introduction. So, Prabir, over to you as well.

**Prabir De:**

Thank you very much, Sanjay Da. I call him Dada all the time. Good afternoon to all the participants, speakers, those who are there online. I was there in the discussion when this Trade Sentinel was in the initial stages. And what I have seen today, the presentation by Prakhar and the presentation by T G and Dr Kathuria, and something like I need to praise it. And it is an excellent piece of work. First in its kind. Multiple users and Dr Raihan said that as well. Because he is better practitioner than me. Now, I am going to give some suggestions. What we can do. This is just the beginning, work in progress. But before I come to the technical part of it, I was listening to their presentations and what I was looking at, visualizing in my mind, is just like Sunil Gavaskar straight dive in the Eden Garden. So, it scored four. In that way... so, excellent work done by them. It is the beginning. And it will encourage many of the guys and organizations in south Asia, I am sure CSEP will adopt, nurture and grow here. Look at what's happening in south Asia. It is two types. One, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, their contribution to inter regional south Asia trade compared to other least landlock countries, LLDC, less. We don't need to talk about it. So, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal they depend on average 80% plus for their global trade with south Asia. So, this portal is going to add lots of things to them, to their trade. That is how I look at it. If you go to the Nepal, Bhutan or Afghanistan, if you look out at the current stage, the data collection, data crunching, analyzing, tools for those are really not in that good shape compared to the big large economy and the great our team in south block and big ones, what they are thinking about. So, this is a great venture. I fully commit and support CSEP and those who are in the driving seat. Now, Bhutan, Nepal and Afghanistan, they do trade with the border. So, border statistics, border trade with Nikita, Riya Sinha and many others, here who have been working at it. That information needs to be plugged into here. It's difficult I know because in trade data which government is

disseminating, they don't share so easily, the trade by mode wise. Now HS codes data will give trade in value. Converting value into volume and then coming to mode wise, border wise, a very cumbersome task. I see that there is no end in cleaning that mess. So, borders, barriers to trade at the borders, that information we need to get it here. Now the private sector who is going to use it? I see think tanks, research scholars, policy makers, they have plenty of such kind of portals are available. I use for example very often, WITS. What is the advantage of WITS and the Trade Sentinel is that, you get to know the data for all the Trade partners. But the advantage of Trade Sentinel which I think over WITS is, in the WITS you don't get all south Asian countries data. If you just put in Bangladesh as the trade partner and is a reporter and partner countries data, most of the time it is not reported there. But here we get five countries to start with. So, this is the advantage. Second in the WITS it doesn't come ad valorem calculation of NTMs. Like SPS TBT, what is the ad valorem percentage in terms of import. You are providing it here. Those kinds of things. So, these are certainly will be very useful. I know, the people in Vanijya Bhawan of our country will have a lot of tough time to take this data with them. But gradually this will spread the message to those who are working very seriously and those who look at the data like the private sector. Now the private guys, they need the tariff data, non-tariff data, this is available here. Two things... we all certainly need it. Those who are small and tiny companies. Like the payment system. In south Asia I think gradually India, Nepal, Bhutan, if you leave them, trade is basically in the local currency. India Bangladesh has agreed to do the trade in local currency. And it is gradually spreading. So, that information, the payment system, some data on the dispute settlement, like many of the countries are small exporters and importers, their LCs when they open accounts in the bank for the transfer of payment, lots of disputes. So, if you give them some kind of a micro level feedback that in the name of alerts, that will really add value. So, one suggestion is that can we have the data later on on the trade by mode wise, because Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan, they have a lot of transit traffic coming from that. Plus, we need to know trade by mode-wise that over time if the economy gets more maturity, you will be producing more lighter products than your bulky one. T G has many works earlier, then Professor David \_ as well. So, trade in mode-wise if we can get the data, over time, if you can provide. Second suggestion is why only the five countries or six countries. You have added Vietnam and China, why not all other countries. For example, in the comparisons. So, this is one suggestion. This is a good tool because we have the value chain, we have the duty structure, there is lots of anomalies in different parts. So, here we get an ad valorem rate, at the component level, at the middle level, at the final level. We can compare where is it exactly happening. This would be tremendous good information. I am sure the people at the Vanijya Bhavan are going to take them very seriously. And other things like trade simulation and the trade policy, those are certainly will be of very good use. To conclude, where we provide the trade alerts on the barrier... last time I discussed that... these alerts should be on the real time basis. To ease the barriers of the border, we have been developing the border infrastructure, the land port authority of India and etc. all the agencies both sides are working day and night. Nikita knows all about it. So also, Riya. When the West Bengal government introduces in the name of ease of barrier at the border, E-Suvidha came. It's a World Bank project. To ease the barriers, the truckers and all those. That has created a huge trouble for the Bhutan because state government has imposed 5000 rupees for the parking charges etc. which Bhutan said that we

are a sovereign republic, how come a subnational identity state can introduce kind of a duty or taxes. So, those are things if we can get from your portal that would be very good. Like port restrictions, are we going to get a port restriction data between India and Bangladesh at the border area? Is it going to give it to us? So, these are some suggestions and services data... its not there. Investment data... certainly those ones, the full house will be in order. This should be an excellent piece. I thank Dr Kathuria and the team and if I may be allowed to conclude in this way, is that, I go little deeper and get emotional when I work with this gentleman... is that, 1893, the year, swami Vivekananda delivered his great address in Chicago. And he came back and he said I don't have much time. I need to do good work. Please give me some support. So, lots of people came and agreed to extend that. Here is the fund, here is this. You take from us and do whatever you would like to. But he said I don't need that, the money part. I need a young mind, who are slim and trim, so that I can build and fulfill my mission. So, Ramakrishna mission was set up by him. And who are with them? The 12 guys who are very slim and very young mind. I can see this is going to happen with a mission objective. Thank you very much.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much Prabir. Very old and dear friend and you can see that in his remarks as well. Yeah, I think as I said earlier, we do need collective goodwill to make this happen and make it a... it is a collective endeavor and you know, we are setting it out as a public good from day one. So, thank you again for all the suggestions. Now we are going into in a sense round two. What we are doing is we are going to repeat panelists from different countries. So, let me start with Nepal. Again, an old friend, Mr. Rameshore Khanal who is a distinguished fellow at the institute for integrated development studies in Kathmandu. He has a very distinguished civil service career. I used to interact with him when he was finance secretary of Nepal and now, he is also the lead author of Nepal's integrated trade strategy. So, over to Rameshore ji.

**Rameshore Khanal:**

Thank you, Sanjay. Thank you Trade Sentinel team and T G Srinivasan for inviting me to this forum. I begin with my experience. Two years ago, Nepal government asked me to prepare the Nepal trade integration strategy for the next five years. And during the course of the analytical works that we had to do for over six or seven months, we had to collect several information on trade and it was very difficult to find particularly relating to south Asia. We visited World Bank websites and a lot of other websites. WTO. Still, data on non-tariff measures, data on quality requirements, data on SPS requirements, the facilities available, the procedures, those are very important elements for Nepali exporters to expand export in the global market. And also in regional market, so that Nepali manufacturing industries can also connect to south Asian supply chain and the value chain. Somehow, we prepared the strategy, it's been now approved by the government. It is operational. So, when Sanjay called me to explain about this Trade Sentinel, I was really happy that this platform will provide the kind of information that Nepali exporters particularly would like to know. Because our biggest market for export is India. And Indian non-tariff measures, Indian procedures, Indian SPS requirements, quality standards, they affect the exporters. Ginger, tea, cardamom, all those things. I had also the opportunity to visit the pre-release version of the website. And also go through the YouTube presentation of Prakhar Chaudhury and was really happy to note that

there is the tariff compare tool. I now go to the content part to be specific on the tariff compare you list down the MFN tariffs. But in south Asia as you know there are lots of preferential tariffs due to bilateral agreements, the regional agreements, charter, and lots of exemptions. So, the tariff list alone will not explain much. So, if we do not have the information on preferential tariffs, exemptions and other distortions, so, that should also be possibly be available in the website. Non-tariff measures, the colleagues who spoke previously have highlighted everything. So, I would not repeat them. But the information on the standards, I do not know whether in south Asia there are private standards. I was surprised to learn about the private standards in European union when we were trying to do the analysis for the access to GSP plus facility under it while we were preparing the strategy. So, there also in some Indian companies also have private standards, I guess. So, information on government standards and private standards will also be very useful for particularly exporters of primary goods, agriculture goods, herbs, forestry products and all those things that will add value. Somebody previously said that currently you have only five countries, three countries are excluded. Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives. We will definitely add them in future. That will definitely be good. On the content, the discussion on the presentation of the trade alerts, the timing, I think that should be on the real time basis. Because although many of the countries in south Asia make major trade policy change every year through the budget. The budget is the instrument through which tariff measures are changed. Non-tariff measures are introduced and also the trade liberalization also takes place through the reform measures which are announced through the budget document. Aside from that there are instances where governments often times introduce new arbitrary ad hoc measures. So, along with the trade alert I think another better option would also be to have an analytical segment to show the impact of the ad hoc non-tariff measures that the governments introduce, so as to protect the economy. Normally these measures are introduced to protect the economy. It often happens with the concern for domestic supply. For example, onion in India, rice in India, so is the case with some other product in Nepal...so, we are all very sensitive to our domestic demand and we introduce them. But the effect is exactly opposite and governments don't know why it happened because in the first place they did not do proper analysis when they introduced the measures. So, the specific study on the impact of ad hoc non-tariff measures would also be very beneficial for policy makers particularly. You also talked about putting up data and information on the investment, FDI. I see from your site. But intra-regional investments in south Asia is probably the poorest. Except for investment by India to Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Nepal investment to India or intra-regional investment. So, to promote intra-regional investments, I think the information availability through the website would add value. One missing point on the services which you might call as service or even a commodity is energy. Energy trade is emerging. It is going to grow in future. So, information on energy. The point that was not raised by earlier speakers was about the market information. Market information would be very important for most of the exporters anywhere. The volume of demand in particular region or state or province in India, volume of supply from supplying countries and the prices how they are changing. We cannot be doing for all the products. I think the major products if we cover them in the next few years and that will add value. We can have larger audience because if we engage the business people through our website then we will have larger audience. So that would be on the content. On the audience of course, the business

people, policy makers, the academicians, researchers, all of them will be interested. Currently the number of visitors is low because the information access also is very low. Because people don't always have access to World Bank websites and other things. So, things are complicated. So, if we make them easier and publicize them through the trade associations like FNCI in Nepal, CII or CNI in India and Nepal. We will have a larger audience. Finally on the point of sustainability. Nobody made any comments. So, I am making a brief comment. SAARC also had several initiatives on the information collection and dissemination on meteorology, on trade, on tariff and all those things. On non-tariff measures as well, somebody said. But all of those were stalled after sometime. So, this initiative we should plan in such a way that this continues for ever. And continuation of any initiative is through stable and robust financing. Currently it is coming from a foreign source so, we can't rely on a foreign source for all the time in the future. We will have to build a domestic source. By domestic I mean the regional source. The south Asia region itself. How do you do it? So, lets engage the trade associations. Get their contributions. Let us also develop some premium material and put up those materials through payment of fees. So, those ideas I think Sanjay, you know better because you have been working with for profit institutions for a long time. I was with the not-for-profit government for a long time. So, I do not know much, how the commerce works. But we will have to make it sustainable so that people like us who are often times invited by government to work on policy matters can readily get information that is suitable for our work. Thank you, Sanjay very much.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much, Rameshore ji for those comments and those valuable suggestions. Again, we will engage with you, continue to engage with you as with other colleagues. Let me now turn back to another very old friend from my time in Dhaka. Professor Mustafizur Rahman. Mustafiz was earlier the director, he is now distinguished fellow at the center for policy dialogue. And a very well known analyst and policy maker or policy influencer in Bangladesh and the rest of south Asia. So, over to you Mustafiz.

**Mustafizur Rahman:**

Thank you and good afternoon. Thank you, Sanjay and Dr Srinivasan, for taking up this initiative. I think it is very timely and CSEP and colleagues at the Trade Sentinel must be congratulated as also the Konrad Adenauer foundation for supporting this very timely initiative. I said that its very timely because I think south Asian trade landscape is changing very fast. Three of the south Asian as the south countries are graduating. Bhutan has already graduated in December 2023. Bangladesh and Nepal will be graduating in 2026. So, for us trade issues are becoming very I would say challenging as well as we shift from preferential market access type of trade scenario to the status of a developing country where preferences will no longer be available in most of the cases. So, I think this type of initiative which will enable us to learn about the changing landscape is very important. And the portal and the information over there and the tariff compare tool, all these are very important. And Sanjay you have written extensively on south Asian cooperation and your book – a glass half full, the promise of regional trade in south Asia is very well known. Now you have taken the next step to make it full from a glass half full to a glass full. So, I think you have taken the next step and

with colleagues and Dr T G. So, congratulations. Bangladesh trade scenario as I was mentioning we are undergoing a lot of changes and Selim mentioned about the new policies that we are introducing. I think that is what will add value and that's what you are trying to do as well which distinguishes Trade Sentinel website from maybe comtrade, WITS and others is that we are hoping and we can see it that it will be an ongoing exercise. Budget policies are important. And the reforms and trade reforms and taxes and duties which are mentioned... but then it changes as someone was mentioning. In Bangladesh for example customs duties we have advanced income tax, we have import vat, we have regulatory duties. So, everything... so the total tax incidence is nowhere near the customs duties. So, if we can have that type of information that will be very useful not only for the analyst, I would say that it will be useful for those who are on the ground and that also brings me to the audience. I think that it was mentioned by our friends from Nepal perhaps that the chambers, they could be one of the major beneficiaries of this type of portal. If we can have a good ongoing type of where the changes are mentioned. The chambers for example in Bangladesh, all the chambers they bring out their monthly reports on trade and commerce. And there I think this type of information will be very important. A major trade partner of Bangladesh obviously the most significant is India 14 billion dollar of imports and 2 billion dollars of exports, but most of this trade is done through land customs stations. I think trade facilitation related information becomes very important for them. Sanjay you have written, exporting from Bangladesh to Nepal is 1.5 times more costly then exporting from Bangladesh to Sao Paulo. So, I think that trade facilitation and the land customs and the procedures, it was mentioned is very important. And also, the services trade is tricky. But I think that now whether its competitiveness in even in the goods, goods and services are becoming entwined. The payments procedures, Bangladesh has now signed bilateral agreement with India with regards to Dhaka Rupee trade. So, if we can have blogs on this type of arrangement whether it is working or not working, why not working, that will also be very important for the practitioners on the ground. I think that one community which would be interested in this type is the students who are studying trade. They are a big audience, they could be potentially because we would also like to develop the analytical capacities of the young generation who can make good use of this type of website. So, this is very important. Ongoing information is important also because I will give you one example. With regard to Indo-Bangladesh trade we have various types of non-tariff measures and barriers and information on those on an ongoing basis is very important. If there is a ban on export of onions from India, immediate impact on Bangladesh onion market. Any information about withdrawal of the ban has tremendous impact on the Bangladesh market. So, I think that... or anti-dumping countervailing duties etc.... so, I think that this type of portal from a policy making perspective will also be helpful in order to show that we should make trade smoother. That removing the barriers will in the end will bring us benefits in terms of macroeconomic, various positive implications. So, I think that coming out of narrow just trade based calculations and considerations to broader macroeconomic perspective, that can also be very helpful and the blogs that you are also have already put some and can do, will also be very helpful in terms of taking enlightened interest by the trade policy makers in our countries. So, from that perspective also it can have very important policy implications. Just not... generally I see that many of the trade portals and these are used mainly by analysts for publication purposes etc. but I see Trade Sentinel's distinctive departure in the sense that it

could be very helpful in terms of policy making and in terms of commerce and business. That is also very important. And it will promote south Asian cooperation which we all want. So, once again congratulations Sanjay, T G, colleagues and we will be there Sanjay, as you know, our roots go back many years and we will continue to collaborate and cooperate. Thank you.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much Mustafiz for your warm remarks and certainly we will be counting on you and your constructive suggestions or where else we might go into. Given what you said, may I also just invite all the panelists who are here to already... it would be great if you can contribute a blog to begin with on any aspect of the trade, timely issues, stuff that you are working on... doesn't necessarily... the good thing about blogs as Mustafiz pointed out doesn't have to be restricted because we are restricted to trade right now. Because of its as you know a huge task to even just do trade. Trade and trade policy issues. But we also want to broaden the discussion into a broader macroeconomic issue into trade facilitation issues or services FDI. So, may I invite all the panelists as and when time permits to contribute an 800 or 1000 words piece which we can put on our blog space. Let me now turn to... we have two more panelists. My friend Anushka, I do not see him, but I assume he will show up. There he is. I used to again, known him for many years, an old friend, but he is much younger than me and I can tell you he is a very dynamic young man and lots of good ideas. He runs now a center for a smart future. But he has also worked with government and with IPS in the past. I am looking forward very much to Anushka's thoughts. He is in Sri Lanka. So, the second panelist from Sri Lanka. Over to you, Anushka.

**Anushka Wijesinha:**

Thank you very much, Sanjay. I hope everyone can hear me. Sanjay could you give me a thumbs up if you can hear me. I think I join my fellow panelists in congratulating both you and as well as the other experts who collaborated to put this together. And also, nice to have a new way to engage with something that KAS has supported... I think you remember the publication that some of us were part of also. I think there is no doubt that this is a very important initiative and timely for many reasons including what Professor Mustafizur also mentioned around the graduation of several of our countries in south Asia. But also, the number of trade policy changes that happen in our countries and even though we have because of WTO, TFA commitments, many of our countries do have trade information portals, they have varying degrees of information, varying levels of update and varying degrees of searchability or user friendliness of those databases. So, having it in one place with one consistent way of searching for information becomes very useful. Also, even though countries have their own databases, I have found that additionally having some of this in an independent third party database adds that additional layer of validation or checking which extra regional parties would find useful. Sanjay, in the guidance to our panelists we were asked to think about the potential audience and stakeholders. So, rather than thinking of it, in abstraction, I actually asked two former colleagues and a friend who might give a sense of what the audience might find useful. So, a former colleague at the ministry of development strategies and international trade, where I spent some time, a former colleague in the private sector at the chamber of commerce and a friend who is a journalist. I asked each of them the question,



what is the most useful feature. And I am only relaying the answers to you for the person in government, it was the policy trends section. Sri Lanka vis-à-vis the other south Asian countries, some of the very sharp insights that along with graphs that you have presented, easily citable for them, easily understood insights that are new to them and they don't have time to produce on their own. For the person in the private sector, it was the information of course, on the south Asian trading partners, but they did say that they tend to typically refer to the individual country customs or commerce websites or government websites to get the information they need. But instead, the country pages from that top drop down menu where you can select the country and you get all aspects, whether its trade or in the future, all the way up to FTI, they found that to be a useful feature. For the journalists interestingly it was the simplicity of the website. And they said that typically they struggled with databases that maybe some of us are more familiar and comfortable with WITS databases, other WTO database, ITC trade map and so on. So, the navigability and simplicity without over engineering the website was a key feature. So, I am just replaying some of this to you because I think it's important to understand who the most useful audiences could be for a portal like this which does come on the back of other available portals that exist. And to be honest, I am not sure if you can make everyone happy. Every type of stakeholder may not find this their go to. So, it might be useful to try and identify who are those types of stakeholders for whom the most value is created and really make this their go to. Having been on the policy side of things and in government, I could really see some of the data and insights being very useful and digestible for policy makers to cite or refer to. And I think right now in Sri Lanka there is actually an immediate use case. Because Sri Lanka is in the process of formulating a new national tariff policy. It is one of the prior actions under an ongoing World Bank lending program. So, actually some of the insights that are already there in this would be useful in helping stakeholders think through questions around Sri Lanka's own status with regard to tariff and in comparison, to other south Asian countries. And in fact, I plan to share once you are ok to share this publicly share this website with some of those folks in government who are part of that tariff policy committee. Moving on to kind of the country section, I think the latest notifications page is very useful. Especially as a country where... Subhashini can attest to... there is frequent changes on some aspects of trade policy. Someone prior to me also mentioned something along these lines, I think it will be crucial to have some kind of subscription service with emails to receive email notifications at a frequency that the user can choose. Either immediately real time, weekly, monthly or yearly, that falls into their inbox. I know that many of the panelists before me talked about the usefulness of some parts of the website. I must say for me and I feel for others in Sri Lanka the policy trend section. I know this is more work, but the policy trend section would probably be one of the most referred sections. And within this it might be useful to kind of double down on and have more aspects built in, more aspects and questions that are interesting for someone to look at. For instance, for Sri Lanka we have a tax called the special commodity levy which faces frequent changes on a product basis and being able to track changes to this special commodity levy or SCL by time of year or by type of product. And for a user to be able to run queries like which products are the most often subject to SCL changes in Sri Lanka. Or how often have SCL on beats been imposed for the last three years. And it is not just out of curiosity. These are real trade implications. Because these are some of the commodities that Sri Lanka tends to have the most trading relationships with in

south Asia. Onions and Pakistan for example is a big one for Sri Lanka. Eggs and India, more recently. Overall, on the country specific section, perhaps there could be a function to download an automatically generated kind of country report that just pulls from the existing information from all the different tabs. And just downloads it as a one country report so that any one time someone downloading this gets a quick snapshot in one document. But I must say, having heard a lot of the suggestions by other panelists also about what more could be put in here. I might take a contrarian view that we should guard against content creep because we had an experience at the Ceylon chamber where we launched a platform which partners with trade watch during covid to update businesses on all the different changes that were happening during covid, with relate to trade restrictions, border restrictions, tariffs and so on. When I look at it that portal has simply become a news update portal. It has become an everything portal. So, I think it will be useful to really think about while having a wish to include all the different new sections, would there be also a risk of content creep and for example honing in on one or two of the most compelling features of the website like the tariff comparison tool and really popularizing that which then draws the audience into the overall Trade Sentinel website. I want to just conclude with a couple of broader suggestions. I looked up the definition of Sentinel to really understand what that means. And the definition I got was a soldier or guard whose job it is to stand and keep watch. So, in this spirit might I suggest that a new area that Trade Sentinel goes into is to what extent countries trade policy changes are in line with good practices, the country's multilateral commitments or how a unilateral change might affect the country's commitments under a bilateral agreement. So, could for example the section analysis section be enhanced to include this. I think the reason why these hits close to home for Sri Lanka is that during covid and for several years after that we introduced certain trade policy measures that were quite problematic. There was little information to indicate how these changes stood against good practice. For instance, whether some of these were even notified to the WTO. And so on. Within this also, given that this is very south Asia focused and it's the spirit of greater integration and cooperation in the region could there also be a built in component on how a country's unilateral trade policy changes sit alongside south Asian integration goals. I mean, this may not need to be real time. But from time to time Trade Sentinel would take stock of how are we opening up to each other or not. How by unilateral policy change or individual countries change has been more or less beneficial to extra regional countries or our intra-region. The final point I would make is I think around information and maybe this is not a common point for all countries. But it sometimes is a comment for Sri Lanka on the veracity of information. I think on things like tariffs and sometimes even para-tariffs, the information is a little more credible and can be checked against what's put up at customs. But some of the other areas that were being suggested around other trade policy shifts, investment policy changes... it can be difficult to discern between announcements and an actual change. One that is formally enacted and in force versus something that is announced by a minister but has a long way to go to be enacted or enforced. Because we have seen on some other portals these get picked up and get reported as if it is in force when in fact its not. And frankly reading the Sri Lankan news sometimes might give the impression that Sri Lankan policy makers and public officials are prolific at bringing in new reforms because we have so much out in the media. So, maybe through partnerships with organizations in the country, you could provide some informal sense checking that something

that we do on a voluntary basis, whenever there is a query about the veracity or the accuracy of information. So, I will stop here again. Once again congratulating the team. Thank you for making this contribution for all of us. But do guard against trying to appeal to all stakeholders and also trying to include all the possible bells and whistles because sometimes there is value in simplicity and value in one or two features being the most compelling, most visited reasons on the website. Thank you very much and thanks Sanjay for having me part of this conversation.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much Anushka, you can see why I think highly of Anushka. Yes, Anushka you can actually share the website is now open to the public. Am I right? Yeah. Trade Sentinel is open and anybody can access it. We keep adding stuff to it. But whatever is useful there in the Sentinel may be picked up by colleagues in the policy making circles. And thank you for sort of taking that extra effort and canvassing friends in different circles to get some valuable feedback. And also, for all the very practical suggestions that you made and the contrarian view you took which is in a sense is a good sort of benchmark to hold ourselves against, when there is of course, a huge temptation to expand into other areas. There are obviously arguments to be made on both sides. Now, let me turn to last but certainly not the least panelist for today. And by the way I would like your permission to extend the session by maybe about 10 minutes. 1:15 to 1:25 in view of the panelists have had very valuable suggestions. And I didn't have the heart to interrupt and because I think its all in service of this how to make this more useful to all of you. May I turn to another young person, panelist, perhaps the youngest of all. Nikita Singla, who has worked despite her age she has had so much of experience in different places. And currently she is also an expert on logistics, trade facilitation and recently appointed as a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie endowment for international peace in Washington. So, Nikita whom I have known for over 10 years now, over to you.

**Nikita Singla:**

Thank you, Sanjay. Good afternoon to everyone. I think everyone before me spoke about Sanjay's passion for south Asia and for regional cooperation and it's not just his work, I think I am a live example. I am live outcome of his passion. 12 years back when I started working and I was a fresh engineer out of college and Sanjay introduced me to the whole concept of south Asia, to the whole concept of trade and since then I've never looked back and continued working in this exciting domain. Likewise for T G, I remember all our weekly Wednesday lunch in Washington when discussions on trade and regional cooperation never sort of finished. Congratulations to the entire team. When we talk about India, in India right now the pace of trade facilitation is more than ever before. And the good part of India taking a lead in trade facilitation is that all the countries in south Asia can follow. Then they actually have a benchmark that if India can do it the other countries can also take similar measures. When I was looking at Trade Sentinel website and looking at the tariff comparison tool, I was getting reminded of all the field trips on the ground, I am working with the finance ministry for last five years and in compliance with the trade facilitation agreement we are doing the time release study at 15 ports in India. We were actually seeing that when we go to the ground the biggest challenge that you come across is there is this whole ambiguity around HS code

classification. There is this whole ambiguity around what tariff line would it fall under. And as a result of that it also adds to the delays in customs clearance and overall release time at India's ports. Just to give you a number from the latest time release study that we did in 2023 to set the context. If you talk about non-facilitated goods which are red, which is red channel cargo, about 18% of cargo is subject to queries by customs. This could be because of several factors. I am not saying this is the only reason. It could be because of submission of documents that should have been done in E-sanction at the first stage in the self-assessment itself. But its also... what are some of these additional documentations or additional rules or additional policies that you need to adhere at the port level which people may not necessarily be aware of. An example is for import of second hand goods you need an additional report from a chartered engineer regarding the valuation of goods. So, that is a huge challenge at a lot of land ports in India these days. CBIC, Sanjay is doing a detailed analysis through the use of ADVAIT tool which is advanced analytics for indirect taxation. And I think this could be good for Trade Sentinel to keep a watch on because it analyses all the queries that are raised by customs, in the clearance of cargo which will give us a good estimate in terms of what are some of the top issues that we face at the port level. And how can Trade Sentinel and its data address those issues. The other factor that we come across on the ground is the dual use items. It could be dual use items or it could be nutraceuticals as we call them. So, it could be a food item that's imported, but it is actually used for medicinal purpose. So, you classify it under food and it needs FSSAI clearance or do you classify it under medicinal product and it needs a C drug licensing. So, I think that's another challenge that is holding India and neighbors in south Asia. It is a big challenge at the borders that how do you do correct classification and designate the correct licensing agency for that product. I was glad Vaqar spoke about SROs. I also did the time release study last year for the government of Bangladesh and we found that at the India-Bangladesh ports one of the biggest challenges is and I think it's a low hanging fruit which Sentinel can address, is all the SROs are issued by NBR in Bangladesh are in Bangla. And when you talk to traders on the Indian side, they can't access the translated version and they don't know when the new SROs are coming and what do they even mean. I think this is a very low hanging fruit where in the countries where we have language differences how can we have all the SROs in a common language and that could be made available at Sentinel. Then there are many other non-tariff barriers. This includes quality control testing. There is data available at DPIIT. Again, if you look at specific trade concerns at the WTO, over a third of them relate to quality control. So, this is a big challenge on the ground, how do you actually address these, what are the new policies that are coming in, what are the new rules that are coming in, what is the legislation or what is the policy with respect to the mutual recognition on testing of these products. Because there is this lot of discussions around that, all the manufactured good that are coming in. They need to be certified by BIS accredited labs. And now foreign laboratories are asking how do they get this BIS accreditation. So, I think these are some of the challenges that we see on the ground and I think Selim also spoke about it and Prabir as well that one discussion is about trade and one discussion is about actual procedural obstacles that ports are facing on the ground. And in terms of non-tariff barriers and another point I want to add is some recognition in terms of differences in sanitary and phytosanitary measures. And maybe that is a database that Sentinel can also address. In one of my recent trips to India Nepal border, there was a lot of discussion how differences in SPS

actually create hurdles for cross border trade. An example was frozen meat of swine where India's limits of those different melamine and aldrin, they are different compared to the Nepalese standards. So, that also creates a challenge. So, one is actually going a step further and working at the policy level on harmonization of this SPS, but I would say taking a step back and actually identifying and making a database of the differences in these SPS TBT measures as well as QCOs where they are needed. Lastly, before I close, I want to... Sanjay, you also introduced me among other things to the concept of gender tagging that the World Bank had introduced and I think this World Bank research which says there is a gender related tariff differential between products. So, maybe this could be a part of ambitious expansion in the future. But also, to look at how are some of these gender related tariff differentials are factoring in in terms of advancing women's inclusion in trade. So, let me stop here. Thank you so much.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you very much, Nikita. And you can see the wealth of experience that Nikita has garnered in these few years that she's been working and since we first interacted 12 years ago in brief. Let me now open the floor to some very distinguished colleagues who are present with us. And also, those who are online. But taking the advantage of proximity let me first open it to the floor here. Any thoughts, comments, questions. Yes, Riya.

**Audience (Riya Sinha):**

Congratulations Dr Kathuria, Dr Srinivasan and Prakhar on this excellent portal. It does fill a significant knowledge gap in regional economic integration in south Asia and its importance is exemplified through the growing wish list of how much more this portal can do so far. I have one question and adding to the list of suggestions that you have already received. What is the periodicity of update of this portal and are you also looking at ports specific notifications when you are updating them on the portal? Because some of them are central level and they are port specific notifications which are different. A recent example from \_\_, for fruits and vegetables have been stopped from going into Bangladesh and that is a very port specific thing in \_\_. So, are you looking at those kinds of notifications as well? And one suggestion is that several panelists spoke about the LDC Nepal and Bangladesh graduating from LDC and what is going to happen is they are going to lose several trades related international support measures. Is it possible to on the portal to also have these ISMs listed? Especially from WTO from the regional trade agreements that they are set to lose. The graduating countries know what they are losing. But the other countries who want to trade with them it might be a good exercise into knowledge building on how they can support Nepal and Bangladesh further in this endeavor. Thank you.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you, Riya. So, TG, you want to answer?

**T G Srinivasan:**

Let me just quickly react to Riya's specific question. The aspiration is to update our notifications database within two working days of whenever the notification is released. The

notification itself can be immediately spotted and released, but the analysis on that will take some time. Therefore, we needed two or three business days to do that. At present we do not have any port specific notifications. I don't even know where to harvest them yet. So, most of the focus so far in the initial stage has been MFN. What are the barriers, which countries put up both on the imports and exports to everyone, not specific? I take the opportunity also to address the preferential tariffs which our countries have, some of our countries are very, very good in putting out all the preferential tariffs and the tariff schedules. For example, Sri Lanka does. So does Nepal. Particularly the Devanagari version of the Nepali tariff schedule, they have a much larger coverage of the preferential tariffs. So, for the Tibet autonomous region, what is the tariff rate is noted only in the Devanagari version, not in the English version. So, what we have now if you download the tariff files in their entirety the excel file, they will have all the preferential tariffs for these two countries. So, to the extent the countries provide this information in the tariff schedule its already available. We have not made it searchable or to run any kind of data analytics on it. Its one of the things which we have reserved for the future. And can I react to other things as well? Or you want to go back?

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Let's see if we have any comments from the audience. Veena first and then you can identify yourself. Dr Veena Jha

**Audience (Dr Veena Jha):**

I want to bring your attention to a database and a portal that the government of India, Vanijya Bhavan is developing with MOCI. It is a two year project. And it is very sophisticated. In fact, it's so sophisticated that they had to get additional server capacity to monitor it. To put it in. And everything you have covered is covered only 10 times more. So, I think you ought to have a look at the MOCI, it called the trade dashboard. And it's a two year project of the MOCI which you should have a look at. Developing things in parallel and also a link with that portal or your link with that would be very, very useful. So, that's all.

**Audience (Harshit Sharma):**

Thank you. I am Harshit. I am a research analyst at NatStrat India. At the outset I would first of all like to congratulate everybody in the team for coming out with this fantastic portal. I am from a foreign policy background. So, my question is related to that. While I am hearing here that there is a very crucial need to establish better trade networks in south Asia as well as in the world. What I am getting to hear from people from the government as well as from the think tanks is that the covid pandemic revealed that the resilient supply chains are not very resilient. That's why India needs to focus on building at least the critical products within India. I think one implication of that can be that while we are trying to establish or create products within India, we also tend to keep away the foreign competition or the foreign trade. So how do you see to tackle this challenge of while the movement is going to only focus in making products within India and also strengthening the trade networks. Thank you.

**Audience (Harshvardhan Singh):**

Thank you. I want to congratulate both Sanjay and T G and the entire team for a tremendous product and all the effort. I heard all the comments from the panelists. And I think they've covered most of the issues. However, I just want to suggest something. The structure of your presentation of the comparison, tariff comparison etc. that is at the HS level. It was pointed out. Even with FTAs sometimes you may have diverse kind of tariffs duty free quota free tariffs etc. The HS level itself say for India, veena and I are working on some details of electronics, mobile phones. Same HS category for electronics may have three different tariffs depending on which product it is. That is not in the schedule. You have to go deeper than that. So, it all depends on whether you want to do that in aggregate over all. Or the content creep is a very valid point. I think Sanjay you said that there is benefit in both. How to balance that? One is you should continue with the way you are doing it. Plus, you may take some special issues to highlight. Not in a blog but larger than a blog. And also, when you are doing that its very useful to interact with the industry because, you are interacting with the government is at one level. Industry because they are the ones at the receiving end. What are their interests. Where do they see some concerns? You will have to also prioritize on which of the issues you would like to look at. Maybe some of the policies which are sector specific, but can be horizontalized. So, take specific issues. Go beyond blogs also. And then present them. Second, instead of reinventing the wheel, if somebody has done a lot work, link the websites which are there and I thought it was very good comment that please build on your strengths. It will take a long time to go into NTMs. That is a very deep and murky world. Its very important, but a lot of work has been done and is being done. So, you could maybe take insights from there, links there. There are other databases which exist on SPS, TBT and I don't mean the World Bank. There are people in India who have that. The other thing is, which was pointed out for example, the panelists from Sri Lanka talked about onions and eggs. I mean, that's really specific. So, you cannot really have a historical tariff comparison of that. But I saw in your presentation you talked about certain specific products, 12.5% tariff, etc. That was like onions and eggs. So, changes in the policy could be presented there. So, there is a distinction between historical perspective and what is actually happening in a particular area. One of the things, I think you should just not focus on FDI right now. FDI is a very detailed aspect. But you can focus on tariff policy which impacts FDI. And in FDI if you want to actually achieve high level of scale, you need predictability and stability. These were words also some of the panelists used. One of the statements were that in south Asia you have annual tariff changes. Who will plan a huge investment level which requires two three years when there is lack of predictability of that type? There are southeast Asian countries like in Malaysia when they give tariffs its given for five years. So, maybe one of the things which you could do and this is very much possible with tariffs at six digit levels and there is data on that. What is the stability of or the change of tariffs in certain sectors across competitive countries? We did a comparison of India, China, Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia and Mexico of course. Mexico for a good reason that FDI does go there. If you can have those kinds of special studies planned you will actually find a balance. Those studies which are there, but you could add to that. Please try and see on NTMs something like this when you are interacting with the industry whether you could start a track two interaction. I have noted many points. But your time is limited.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Yes, Arpita. Thank you Harsh.

**Audience (Arpita Mukherjee):**

Thank you very much for this database. I know how mammoth this work is. And we are kind of extending it to do this and do that. But just to give you a ground reality, we have been trying to work with the commerce ministry and RBI to do the bilateral trading services data which is now not presented. So, barrier is a... if you are able to get the barrier it is still there. Because OECD and others are trying to collect the barrier data. But even if you are trying to get the trade flow data, the systems of collecting the trade flow data in the region are not in place. Because it includes the three systems to be in place. One is the data flow by the central bank, the data flow by the regulators and data collating it with the surveys wherever the data gaps. The processes are not in place. So, I think your services will be a long way. I am kind of little bit disagree with \_ to say that investment is easier to put in. Because investment every country has a negative list. They had to put down their barriers, they had to in their trade agreement. So, it's a much cleaner thing that you will get in one place. You have to update and you have to update the notification as and when it comes. Like for example in case of India you will get 50 notifications and then a consolidated policy. So, your updates will be faster than policy. So, maybe more viewership. Regarding the tariff line, if you look at a product like organic which is now becoming a global product like in most of these countries in the region, they don't have a 10 digit classification which the western world has adopted. Like they have broken the other category into bigger subsets. What happens in organic, you get organic trade data, but you don't get category for it and tariff data in your sheet. For a country like India what used to happen previously was that there was a commitment by the commerce ministry that Mr. Arun Goyal, he used to come out with a book and that used to be the yearly update of trade and tariff after the... and even the government did not have it because the book never had an online copy. Now, if you go to and grab the book and somehow be able to without violating IP, if we convert it into an online category, that would be a massive gain for everybody who is trying to work on India. That is the big issue, getting authority to convert it online. So, even if commerce is doing the work, they will still face a hurdle because they have not cracked that part of the story. I think, this is a very good exercise, it is a needed exercise and these kinds of work will be a work in progress. But on the whole it is definitely in the right direction. Thank you very much for taking the initiative.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you. I think we are way out of time. So, do anybody else have any questions. Online do we have any? I think we had a large audience but they were mostly in listening mode. We do have to have closing remarks. If you don't mind, we will do it offline? Explanation of FDI. Let me turn it over to my colleagues first. T G, very quickly if you want to have a couple of things to respond to. We have been listening and absorbing. And there are always two sides to the argument. So, as Harsh and Anushka have said.

**T G Srinivasan:**



I think, I don't want to take your time right now. All the people here your time. I don't want to take your time now to reflect point by point. But I think some of the suggestions you made are fantastic and one way to think about is crowdsourcing, we cannot do everything. The ground truthing of what we see on the policies is very difficult for us sitting in any one place to collect that. People like Nikita can probably establish a network for ground truthing. They can post those things. And we can serve as a portal where these things are displayed to the public. I just want to give it back to Sanjay to conclude it.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Christian, would you like to close?

**Christian Echle:**

Of course, and it will only take me about an hour to collect all the great ideas that have been shared with us in the last two hours. But jokes aside, I liked one point very much. We talked a lot about the regional integration of south Asia and I like the point that Mustafizur made that you took a glass half full on south Asia and you made it full. But I have another idea or another picture came to my mind. And this is maybe the Sentinel created the bottle. And everybody who is involved in this process can take this process and decide how full they want to fill the glass. So, it's a valuable tool. And it is not only maybe a bottle of water. But its obviously also a discussion starter. I mean we had so many ideas now in the room. And to me its absolutely exciting to see where this will take Sentinel in the coming year. But I think this idea of discussion starter of getting involved with different target groups, with students, with media, with policy makers of course, this is also a dimension, which is very important for Konrad Adenauer foundation and I think that this is the area we can also give added value with our regional media program, with our regional policy dialogue. So, there is I think some areas where we can also contribute to making the Sentinel bigger, more visible and to carry on the idea of regional integration in the region. So, thank you very much.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

It's impossible to try to summarize everything and I will not try. Because you have all been here, you have heard all the suggestions and there is always going to be a tension between as Anushka very beautifully put it, the temptation of adding stuff versus focusing and doubling down on things that we know and in time I think one crucial thing will be adding... human resources as you can see are very minimal, skimpy in terms of how many warm bodies we have. And that's the core part of adding additional things. If we can add warm bodies and I am looking here not just at KAS, but also, I know there are others potential people or folks who have been listening and that we have been talking to. If this is... we have heard, we welcome the welcome that you have given the Trade Sentinel and I think apart from the financially supported human resources that the Sentinel itself will have, it will be very important to have this wider audience, the wider goodwill, the community in south Asia drawing on what Prabir said. If we can get the 12 slim men or women actually, that would be a fantastic thing. So, it will rely on your good will to correct us, to say this is right, this is wrong, here is some additional information on what you have already put out. So, all of you in this trading community that cares about the issue of trade and related issues, because the most important thing is that we

do believe that it has been on the backburner in trade. There were a couple of very specific questions. Let me just respond to one on why this important because Harshit has posed the opposite view that is getting popular in many capitals not just in new Delhi is the issue of building internal capacity and therefore perhaps staving off even competition in those areas. Sacrificing some efficiency in the name of resilience. And it is a valid kind of you might say a foreign policy or a resilience objective. I think, our job I see it as we are economists, our job is to provide the information. And provide honest critical and independent information and the costs and benefits in time... right now it is just more on the analytical side. Providing information which friends can use and absorb and put out pieces with that... in time as we hopefully have developed more human capacity. Then we can get into providing the analytical part as well including through the blogs that we have started. So, our job is to provide the information to the costs and benefits and it's up to the policy makers then to make what they will off it. And take a view on whether to what extent you need to have such capacities in house or whether you can actually take a broader view of so called in house. There is this concept that has been developed called friend shoring. This you are no doubt familiar with. And I am taking it not in a negative way. But in a positive way that who are the people that lets say especially in our south Asian neighborhood there are strengths within each country. So, can you develop a resilient supply chain within south Asia, within Asia more broadly, within those you think you can rely on. So that, that improves the chances of making efficient decisions within a much broader canvas. So, because not even India, not even China, no country can produce everything that it needs efficiently, right? So, you will be willing to sacrifice some efficiency gains but you should do that knowingly and perhaps we can help you expand the canvas of what can be efficient through this broader analysis of... there is a supply chain CRI led by Japan, Australia and India is involved and all of that. So, again I want to thank very much the Konrad Adenauer foundation, Christian for coming all the way from Germany for our event. And thanks to all of you who have spent actually a long time with us during this last almost three hours now. And to our online audience all over the world. And thanks again to the center for social and economic progress for providing such a warm and gracious parking spot for the Trade Sentinel. And now the pleasant duty is to thank individuals who have actually made this. It's been a pretty Herculean effort to get this together. So, in particular Gurmeet, I would like to really thank Gurmeet for all her hard work for this. Prerna who is also become a part of our team and she has been doing a lot of heavy lifting on this. The foreign policy team, who helped us get together a lot of the invites and all of that. Then Trishna, I don't know if she is here. But our external communications team who really put together. So, lot of the people you don't see here. But who are all being in communication very much interested in all that we are doing. Manmeet again who is the office manager. Thank you very much to you. To Jayanth and the IT team. Thank you very much. It's been very, very good. And to Narendar and the office team for providing the hospitality for all of us. And thank you Karma for coming from Bhutan for this and to Santhosh for coming from Chennai. Lunch will be just outside. All of you are cordially invited to join us and continue to have an animated discussions on what we have done.

**Mustafizur Rahman:**

Thank you, Sanjay. Can't join you.

**Sanjay Kathuria:**

Thank you so much and you can't join us for lunch. But we will make that happen in the near future. Thank you to the panelists all the panelists from south Asia. Thank you indeed very much.