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A decade on, China alters ground realities in South China Sea



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A Decade On, China Alters Ground Realities of Control over the South China Sea

Amb Anil Wadhwa, Distinguished Fellow, VIF

July 17, 2026 Views: 642 Comments: 0

Ten years after the landmark arbitral award delivered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague, the South China Sea presents one of the most striking paradoxes in contemporary geopolitics. Legally, China's expansive claims have been rejected by an international tribunal constituted under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In reality, China today exercises a far greater degree of operational control over the contested waters than it did in July 2016. The anniversary of the ruling has therefore become less a celebration of international law than a reminder of the widening gap between legal

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Context

10 years after after 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling invalidated China's expensive claims in the South China Sea, Beijing has consolidated de facto control, challenging the rules-based maritime order.

Facts

- Nearly 50% of India's external trade passes through the South China Sea.
- 2016 PCA award rules that China's Nine dash line has no legal basis under UNCLOS.
- China has converted Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross Reef into major military hubs with runways, missiles and surveillance facilities.

Analytical Crux

China has successfully employed grey-zone tactics, maritime militia, coast guards and artificial islands to alter the status quo without triggering conventional war. This weakens UNCLOS-based maritime governance and sets a dangerous precedent for future territorial disputes. For India, whose trade and energy security are closely linked to these sea lanes, the lesson is clear: diplomatic support for global law must be complemented by stronger maritime capabilities enhanced Andaman & Nicobar Command, maritime domain awareness and deeper Quad cooperation.

Verbatim Quotes

“China's achievement has not been to win the legal argument. Rather, it has resorted to operational control to gradually eclipse legal legitimacy.”

— Amb. Anil Wadhwa

A trade deal that tests India's competitive confidence



Context The India - UK CETA, effective from July 2026, provides duty-free access to most Indian exports while gradually opening India's market to selected British products.

Facts

■ The Double Contribution Convention will benefit 75,000+ Indian professionals and about 900 companies, saving nearly \$ 600 million annually.

■ 90% of India's exports by value will enter the UK duty free.

Analytical Crux

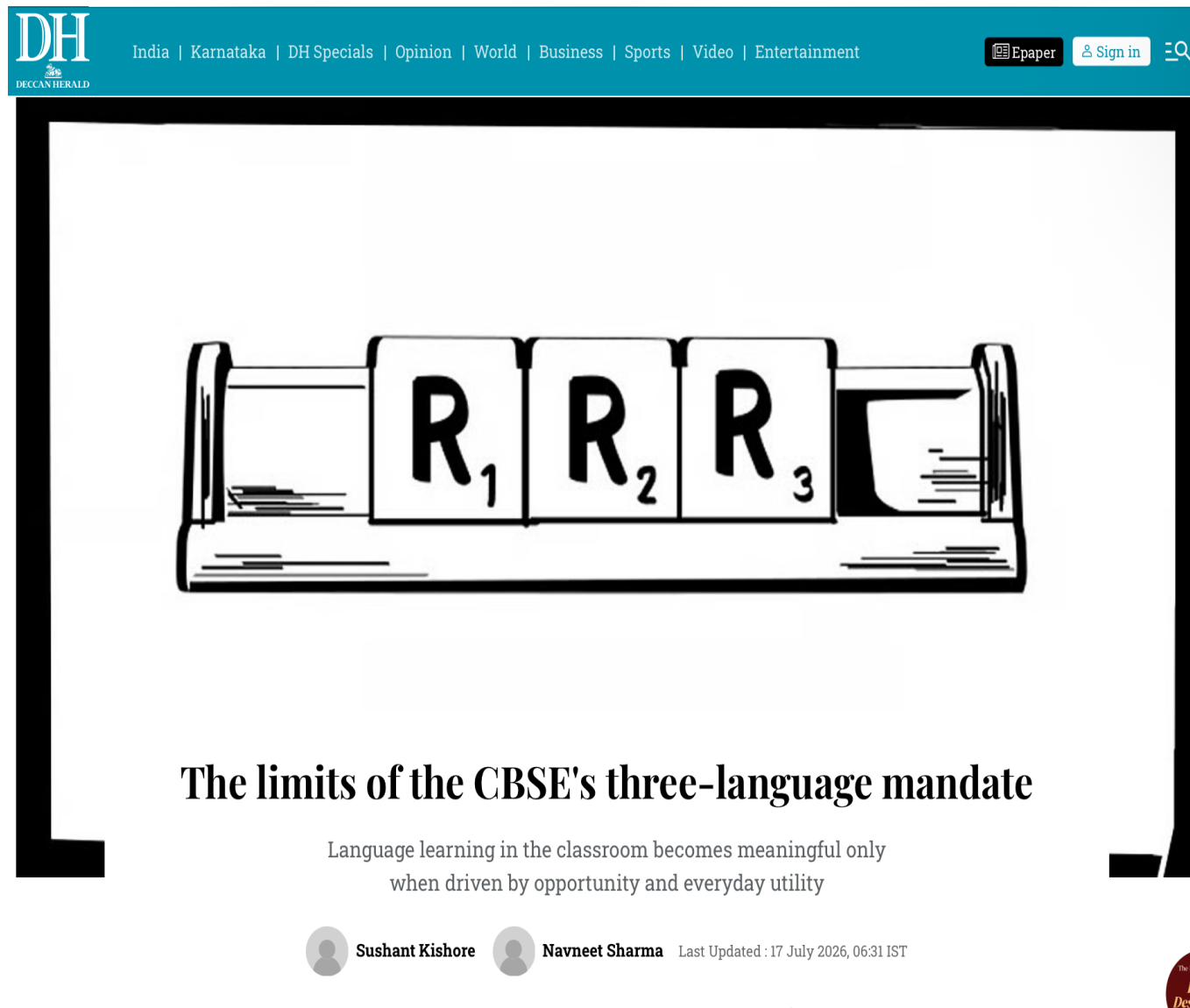
The India-UK trade agreement signifies a shift from protectionism towards competitive integration with global markets. While duty-free access is expected to boost labour-intensive exports & employment, phased tariff reductions on imports are intended to improve domestic productivity rather than threaten Indian industry. The agreement highlights that long-term economic gains depend not merely on market access but on competitiveness, innovation and higher productivity. Effective implementation, greater FTA utilisation by MSMEs & continued domestic reforms will determine whether the agreement translates into sustained export growth & economic resilience.

Verbatim Quotes

“Exposure to competition is not a concession to a trading partner. It is a favour we Indians do ourselves.”

— V. Anantha Nageswaran

The limits of the three language mandate



Context CBSE's implementation of 3 language formula is being opposed on the argument that compulsory language learning without practical utility imposes additional academic burdens.

Facts

English is an official or additional official language in 14 States / UTs, including Nagaland & Arunachal Pradesh.

Students in classes VII - IX have been granted a one-time relaxation, with the third language assessed only through internal school evaluation.

Analytical Crux

The debate over the 3 language formula reflects the broader challenge of balancing national integration, linguistic diversity & educational flexibility. While promoting Indian languages is a legitimate constitutional objective, language acquisition is most effective when supported by social interaction, economic incentives & learner motivation rather than institutional compulsion. A more balanced approach would combine flexible implementation, adequate institutional preparedness and greater emphasis on voluntary language learning while safeguarding students' global competitiveness & educational choices.



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