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Free Trade Agreements and the New Trade Landscape: A session not to be missed at CTL-BHP 2026

Exim News Service

MUMBAI, March 11

As global trade continues to evolve rapidly, Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have emerged as one of the most powerful tools shaping international commerce. For Indian businesses engaged in export and import,



Mr Mihir Ajit Shah

understanding FTAs is no longer optional—it has become essential. With India actively pursuing

deeper economic partnerships and signing new trade agreements with major economies, **Turn to page 6**

17th - 18th March 2026

Pavilion I & II, 50 World Convention Centre, Bandra Kurla Complex, Mumbai, India

Container ship order book hits record high despite unpredictable scenario

Exim News Service

LONDON, March 11

DESPITE increasing trade policy uncertainty and falling freight rates, the container ship order book has continued to

expand. It now totals more than 1,350 ships with a combined capacity of 11.8 m TEU.

In 2025, global average container freight rates fell

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businesses today have unprecedented opportunities to expand globally, reduce costs and access new markets.

Against this backdrop, an insightful seminar titled **“Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and Advantage for Indian Business in Export & Import”** will be conducted during **CTL-BHP 2026 on March 18, 2026**. The session will be delivered by **Mr Mihir Ajit Shah, Advisor, Consultant & Trainer in International Business**, who is widely recognised for guiding exporters and importers across India on practical aspects of international trade and compliance.

The seminar will provide a comprehensive yet practical overview of FTAs and their increasing relevance for Indian businesses. Participants will gain clarity on how FTAs are structured, how tariff concessions work, and how companies can strategically leverage these agreements to improve their competitiveness in international markets.

CTL-BHP 2026

New FTAs and benefits

A special focus of the session will be on **India’s latest FTAs and emerging trade partnerships**, and how these agreements are opening new avenues for exporters across sectors such as chemicals, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, textiles, and gems & jewellery. As global supply chains continue to shift, businesses that understand and use FTAs effectively can significantly reduce duty costs, improve pricing advantages and enhance market access.

The session will also present **live practical examples of FTA benefits**, illustrating how exporters and importers are already leveraging preferential tariff benefits, rules of origin provisions and market access commitments. These examples will help attendees understand how theoretical trade agreements translate into real commercial advantage.

In addition, the seminar will

cover **procedural aspects for exporters**, including documentation, certificate of origin requirements and the process of claiming FTA benefits. Equally important, the session will **guide importers on key compliance requirements**, ensuring that businesses remain aligned with regulatory frameworks while availing benefits.

For businesses looking to expand globally or optimise their existing trade operations, understanding FTAs can be a game changer. The seminar promises to equip participants with practical insights that can directly influence their international trade strategies.

Industry professionals, exporters, importers and trade enthusiasts attending **CTL-BHP 2026** will find this session particularly valuable as it bridges policy understanding with real-world application.

With global trade entering a new phase of strategic partnerships, sessions like these offer businesses the knowledge needed to stay competitive and future-ready.

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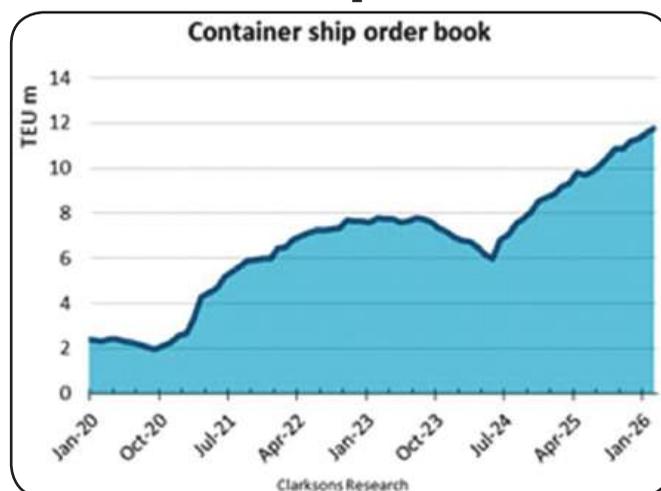
an estimated 13% year-on-year while US import tariff increases raised concerns about increasing trade protectionism. Despite this, global container volumes grew 4.7% year-on-year, according to Container Trade Statistics, and shipowners ordered a record high 4.8 m TEU of new ship capacity.

During the first two months of 2026, shipowners have ordered another 102 ships with a combined capacity of 665k TEU, bringing the total order book to 11.8 m at the end of February, an increase of 28% year-on-year, highlights Mr Niels Rasmussen, Chief Shipping Analyst at BIMCO.

“The very largest ships dominating the order book point to a development where larger ships will replace smaller ones throughout the global network of services. 436 ships with capacity of 12k TEU or more are on order and make up 65% of the TEU on order,” says Mr Rasmussen.

However, it is the order book for the smaller ships that has grown the fastest during the past year. The order books for the 0-3k TEU,

Container ship order book



3-6k TEU and 6-8k TEU size segments have all more than doubled during the past year, whereas the rest of the order book has grown by only 17%.

The combined order book of the three smaller segments only makes up 16% of these segments’ current fleet capacity, however. As 29% of the capacity in the three segments is currently provided by ships 20 years old or older, recycling of older ships could thereby match, or even exceed, the number of new ships being delivered from the order book in the coming years.

The increasing number of very large ships on order is also driving a significant change in the container fleet’s ownership structure.

At the beginning of the

2020s, non-operating owners controlled 43% of the capacity in the fleet. That

has since fallen to 36% and will continue to fall as the non-operating owners only account for 24% of the capacity on order, as per the BIMCO analysis.

“During 2025-2029, a total of 11.8 m TEU is scheduled to be delivered. Even if all ships currently 22 years old or older are recycled before the end of 2030, the fleet would continue to grow on average 6.1% per year as it has done so far this decade. This could potentially create a rather challenging supply/demand environment for liner operators to manage,” says Mr Rasmussen.

With Hormuz at a standstill, Panama Canal ready for surge

Exim News Service

PANAMA City, March 11

DR Ricuarte Vásquez Morales, Administrator of the Panama Canal Authority, has signalled that the waterway is positioned to absorb rerouted global shipping as the Strait of Hormuz — the world’s busiest commercial maritime corridor — grinds to a near standstill following US-Israeli strikes on Iran. Since last Friday, only four cargo ships have reportedly successfully transited the Strait, which normally facilitates 20-21 million barrels of oil per day and carries a quarter of the world’s total seaborne oil trade. Mr Morales projected Panama Canal transits could rise to one or two additional sailings per day, against the historical average of three, with the Canal currently handling approximately 2.3 million barrels daily. He flagged rising LNG cargo valuations and surging fuel prices as immediate freight cost concerns. The Canal has sufficient water reserves and maximum draft capacity to accommodate increased traffic, he added. Tariff front-loading had boosted Panama Canal volumes over the past 12 months, as per a report.