VIKSIT BHARAT:
THE ROAD AHEAD

I n this edition of Bureaucracy India, we spotlight the pivotal role of India's civil servants in steering the nation toward its aspirations. Our cover story on Viksit Bharat by 2047 delves into how visionary bureaucrats, innovative administrators, and committed policymakers are transforming long-term national goals into actionable realities. From drafting reforms to ensuring on-ground delivery, it is their tireless efforts that continue to shape India's development journey.

Our exclusive coverage of the Kerala Travel Mart the Wedding & MICE Conclave offers an inside look at how bureaucratic vision and coordination are enabling Kerala to emerge as a premier global destination. This is further reflected in our interview with Ms. Shikha, Director, Kerala Tourism, who shares insights on how administrative foresight is positioning the state at the forefront of experiential and event tourism.

Looking ahead, Bureaucracy India will bring exclusive coverage from ITB India and ITB Asia, where India's growing trade and tourism opportunities will take the global stage—again with bureaucratic leadership playing a central role in shaping narratives and partnerships.

We also capture the spirit and scale of the Wari pilgrimage, a cultural and spiritual journey that succeeds each year because of the seamless planning, discipline, and commitment of administrators working tirelessly behind the scenes.

From governance and diplomacy to tourism and culture, this edition reaffirms our core belief: behind every milestone of progress, there is a bureaucrat driving change.

Deepak Vyas
Editor-in-Chief

*Don't forget to share your views and feedback at info@bureaucracyindia.in
Keep following our social media platforms to get updates regularly.*
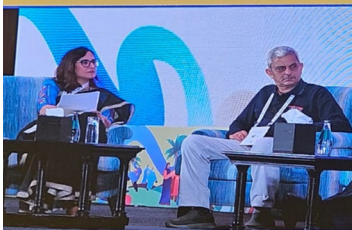
Alka Upadhyaya takes charge at the Minorities Commission

Alka Upadhyaya (IAS: 1990: MP) is appointed as Secretary of the National Commission for Minorities, promising to advance minority welfare and inclusion. Her reputation for policy clarity sets high expectations for the Ministry's future.

Naresh Pal Gangwar leads Animal Husbandry

Seasoned administrator Naresh Pal Gangwar is now appointed as Secretary of Animal Husbandry & Dairying, focusing on sustainable livestock sectors and farmer benefit. His experience in environmental affairs adds a vital edge.

Rajit Punhani heads FSSAI

Rajit Punhani (IAS: 1991: BH) assumes CEO duties at the Food Safety & Standards Authority of India, reinforcing India's food safety regime. His prior work in skill development inspires new initiatives for nutrition and public health.

Debashree Mukherjee to Skill Development Ministry

Debashree Mukherjee (IAS: 1991: AGMUT), known for her success in water resources, is now appointed as Secretary for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship. The Ministry expects innovation and renewed national drive for youth employment.

V.L. Kantha Rao to Water Resources

A new chapter opens at the Water Resources Ministry with V.L. Kantha Rao (IAS: 1992: MP) as Secretary. He vows to tackle river rejuvenation and irrigation with energy and technical expertise.

Atish Chandra joins PMO as Special Secretary

Bringing decades of experience, Atish Chandra (IAS: 1994: BH) takes a pivotal role at the Prime Minister's Office. His appointment aims to streamline governance and support priority programs at the highest level.

Niraj Verma as OSD, Department of Justice

Niraj Verma (IAS: 1994: AM) is posted Officer on Special Duty at the Justice Department, tasked with reforms and enhanced public service delivery. His leadership marks a period of legal innovation. He will be succeeding Raj Kumar Goyal (IAS: 1990: AGMUT) on August 31, 2025.

Lt. General Pushpendra Singh, Vice Chief of Army Staff

Lt. General Pushpendra Singh is named Vice Chief of the Army Staff, succeeding Lt. General NS Raja Subramani. His strategic acumen is set to guide the Army through modernization.

Sudeep Jain leads National Commission for Women

Sudeep Jain (IAS:1994: TN) takes over as Member Secretary at the National Commission for Women, aiming to empower and protect women nationwide. His background in renewable energy brings fresh ideas to the Commission.

Roli Singh, Chairperson of Chemical Weapons Authority

Roli Singh's appointment as Chairperson of the National Authority for Chemical Weapons underscores India's commitment to international conventions and chemical safety.

Manisha Sinha steers Postal Services Finance

Manisha Sinha becomes Member (Financial Services) at Postal Services Board, set to modernize postal finance and improve service reliability for millions.

Sanjay Rastogi at National Archives of India

Sanjay Rastogi (IAS:1991: OR) Additional Secretary & Financial Advisor, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, has been appointed as Director General, National Archives of India, Ministry of Culture. He will curate the nation's heritage after leveraging years in youth affairs to connect the archives with a new generation.

THDCIL Synchronizes Second Unit at Khurja Power Project, Advancing India's Clean Energy Ambitions

THDC India Limited successfully synchronized Unit-2 (660 MW) of the Khurja Super Thermal Power Project with the national grid, pushing forward India's reliable and sustainable energy capacity. This milestone signals renewed momentum toward project commissioning and strengthens THDCIL's role in India's power mix.

Singareni Collieries Ventures into Gold and Copper, Secures Landmark Exploration License in Karnataka

SCCL broke new ground by securing an exploration license for gold and copper blocks in Devadurga, Karnataka. The strategic move, backed by a 37.75% royalty bid, marks the company's entry into critical mineral exploration after over a century in coal mining.

NALCO, Coal India, NTPC Forge Major JV, Announce Multi-Billion Investment Drive

In late August, NALCO announced a joint venture with Coal India and NTPC to invest heavily in aluminium, coal, and energy projects over five years. The alliance is slated to boost domestic capacity and create powerful industrial synergy for India's resource independence. The collaboration will focus on setting up new integrated facilities, improving supply chains, and enhancing production capacity for aluminium, coal, and clean energy projects. Officials expect the joint venture to generate thousands of jobs and support India's push for industrial self-reliance and sustainability.

PM Modi Inaugurates SJVN's Buxar Thermal Plant, Energizes Bihar's Power Future

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated SJVN's first 660 MW unit of the 1,320 MW Buxar Thermal Power Project, marking a new era for Bihar's energy security. The project's supercritical technology will supply 85% of generated electricity to Bihar, fostering local growth and supporting the national low-emission agenda.

Top PSU Leadership Changes Cleared, Key Directors Appointed to Propel Growth

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet approved a series of pivotal leadership changes at major PSUs, aimed at strengthening operational and strategic growth. Romon Sebastian Louis was named Director (Services Business) at Balmer Lawrie, while Dr. Harikrishnan S. takes over as Director (Operations) at Cochin Shipyard.

- Amal Kumar Chakrabarty becomes Director (Finance), Troop Comforts Ltd, moving from his role as CFO at BHEL.
- Manas Kaviraj, formerly Sr. Executive Director at NBCC, takes charge as Director (Human Resources) at Advanced Weapons & Equipment India Ltd (AWEIL).
- Ramesh Chandra Mohapatra, GM of Eastern Coalfields Limited, steps in as Director (Technical) at South Eastern Coalfields Limited.
- Rajesh Gopalakrishnan is appointed Director (Technical), Cochin Shipyard Limited, for a five-year term.

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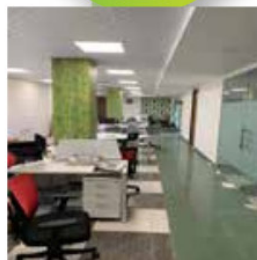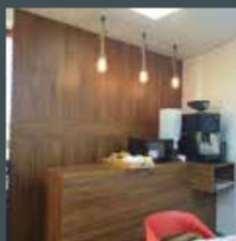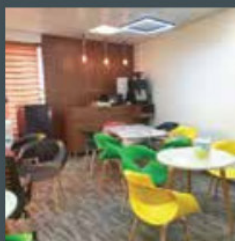
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Where Traditions Meet Business:

Inside Kerala's Wedding & MICE Conclave

by Deepak Vyas

Kerala, long celebrated for its scenic landscapes and rich cultural experiences, is now charting a new course—as India's emerging hub for wedding and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) tourism.

This vision took centre stage at the inaugural Wedding & MICE Conclave, held from August 14–16 in Kochi. Organized by the Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) Society in collaboration with the Kerala Department of Tourism, the three-day event convened key stakeholders from across India and abroad, aiming to explore how Kerala's natural beauty and cultural wealth could be leveraged to drive structured growth in this booming global sector.

As an exclusive Media Partner, we bring you all the insights of the event.

A Call for Policy and Promotion

In her valedictory address, Kerala Tourism Director, **Ms. Sikha Surendran** underscored the importance of a **"comprehensive policy framework"** for wedding and MICE tourism. She highlighted the need for MICE Promotion Bureaus in major cities like Kochi, coupled with a strategic global marketing and communications plan to position Kerala as the country's top choice for high-value events.

 "Kerala's projected growth in the weddings and MICE segment is driven not just by our natural beauty and cultural cosmopolitanism, but also through strong government initiatives and collaboration with the travel and hospitality sectors," Surendran noted.

She affirmed that the government is committed to implementing the conclave's recommendations.

Collaboration and Industry Insights

Recalling the ideation behind the Wedding and MICE Conclave, **Mr. S. Swaminathan, Hon. Secretary & Chairman, Accommodation Committee** said,

"Kerala has always been a market leader, fortunately, in leisure and various ways of life, businesses, health sector, and so on and so thought that we should not lose out on weddings and MICE. It was a very short term, and immediately when we went to the government, they also said; Please go ahead. It all happened in three or four months. That's the reason we came out to get into a segment which is growing, which is niche, which is very special, and everyone is talking about it today. And now, the momentum of the younger generation is also increasing, that they want to get married in style unlike before, so it is going to be a huge sector, that's why we got into it."

Alongwith the one-on-one buyer seller meet that happened on both days, two international seminars, along with numerous buyer-seller interactions, provided a platform for networking and knowledge exchange among global stakeholders. Former KTM Society presidents, including E.M. Najeeb, Abraham George, and Baby Mathew Somatheeram, emphasized the significance of such gatherings in strengthening Kerala's global brand as a premium destination.

Mr. Swaminathan, who has moderated one of the sessions on Weddings, has taken the lessons to prepare Kerala as the ultimate wedding destination. He exclaimed, **"People are coming to Kerala because it's special; we are not getting or inviting people to come here to our weddings. The popularity brings people here. So, firstly we need to develop the brand image of Kerala as a destination for Weddings for which the government is also willing to support us, and then slowly we need to work on infrastructure development as well so that our hotels are prepared to handle big gatherings."**

The closing session, chaired by KTM Society President Jose Pradeep, described the conclave as a benchmark-setting event for the state. The discussions highlighted Kerala's readiness to host over 6,600 business meetings, reflecting the state's potential to cater to the nuanced demands of weddings and MICE tourism.

Mapping the Future

Surendran called on the KTM Society to compile a comprehensive report of the conclave's deliberations, creating a roadmap for sustainable growth in the wedding and MICE sector.

"The conclave has laid a strong foundation for Kerala's leadership in this space," she said, highlighting the state's potential to emerge as a global benchmark.

The event concluded with expressions of gratitude to the organizing team, led by KTM Secretary S. Swaminathan and Treasurer Jibran Asif, with participation from dignitaries including India Tourism (Kochi) Assistant Director M. Narendran, KTM CEO Rajkumar K., Vice-President Hari Kumar C., and Joint Secretary Jobin Akkarakalam.

Kerala's Bold Vision

The Wedding & MICE Conclave was more than just an industry event—it was a declaration of Kerala's ambitions. By combining policy support, international marketing, and stakeholder collaboration, the state is positioning itself as a world-class destination for weddings and corporate events, blending culture, commerce, and celebration.

With the groundwork now laid, the coming years could see Kerala become the epicenter of high-value tourism, where culture, commerce, and celebrations meet in harmony.

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Exclusive Interview with Ms. Sikha Surendran, Director, Kerala Tourism

by Suhani Nagpal

During the first-ever Wedding & MICE Conclave organized under the Kerala Travel Mart, our Executive Editor, Suhani Nagpal, engaged in a thought-provoking conversation with Ms. Sikha Surendran, Director, Kerala Tourism. A dynamic administrator, Ms. Surendran has been instrumental in shaping Kerala's positioning as a sustainable and responsible tourism destination.

With a strong focus on community-driven experiences, luxury blended with nature, and the expansion of wedding and MICE tourism, she outlines Kerala's future vision in this exclusive interview.

Suhani Nagpal: First of all, congratulations on putting up such a wonderful show. I had a word with many hosted buyers, and being one myself, I can say that the event exceeded expectations—far better than other state-level events. My first question: How do you see Kerala evolving as a preferred wedding destination?

Sikha Surendran: Thank you so much. Before I answer, I must congratulate my industry partners, especially the Kerala Travel Mart Society, for their hard work. Together with the government, they have made this event possible.

Kerala is positioning itself as a sustainable and responsible destination for weddings and MICE. We want to attract high-spending groups who will not only host their events here but also experience the culture and community of Kerala. Our natural landscapes—backwaters, beaches, and hills—offer the perfect backdrop for such occasions. Added to that is our rich cultural heritage, with traditional art forms like Kathakali and Mohiniyattam, which bring a unique charm to weddings here. Most importantly, we aim to empower local communities so that guests don't just attend an event, but also carry home lasting memories of Kerala.

Suhani: This is Kerala's first Wedding & MICE Conclave. What was the vision behind organizing it?

Sikha: Weddings and MICE events have always happened in Kerala, but the efforts were scattered—handled individually by hotels, resorts, or event managers. We wanted to bring every stakeholder under one umbrella—caterers, florists, artists, planners, and travel operators—so that Kerala can market itself as a holistic destination.

This conclave also helps us learn global trends, identify gaps, and strategize for the future. It's about collaboration, co-branding, and creating a single platform to strengthen this industry in the state.

Suhani: From a growth perspective, what are Kerala's current numbers in wedding and MICE tourism, and what targets are you looking at over the next 5–10 years?

Sikha: Currently, we don't have consolidated statistics for weddings and MICE. But to give context, India's share in the global MICE market is just about 1–1.8%. We clearly have a long way to go.

Our aim over the next five years is to at least triple Kerala's current scale of activity—but in a sustainable way, with a low carbon footprint. We don't want to compromise the environment. Kerala has always carried the brand value of "God's Own Country" and "Responsible Tourism," and that will remain central.

Suhani: Globally, we see destinations like the Middle East investing heavily in live entertainment as part of MICE growth. Does Kerala plan to enhance its entertainment ecosystem?

Sikha: Entertainment means different things to different people. While some may prefer DJ parties, others might enjoy Carnatic music or flute recitals. Kerala will focus on entertainment aligned with its brand—local art forms, culture, and experiences that bring peace of mind.
Of course, if private industry is interested, especially in tier-two cities, the government can support large-scale entertainment projects. But for niche destinations, we will remain focused on responsible, culture-driven experiences.

Suhani: And what about sports tourism? Countries like Saudi Arabia are making major investments to attract global attention. Do you have any such plans?

Sikha: Sports tourism is indeed a growing area. While I cannot comment on global celebrities, I can say Kerala has made significant progress. We already host adventure sports like cycling routes in Thekkady, the Malabar White Water Kayaking Festival in Kozhikode, the Surfing Festival in Varkala, the Mountain Terrain Cycling Championship in Wayanad, and the International Paragliding Festival in Vagamon—where top pilots from across the world participate.

Our unique terrain makes Kerala perfect for such events, though many of these are not yet widely marketed. That's something we need to strengthen.

Suhani: Are there any incentive programs for planners and investors in MICE and wedding tourism?

Sikha: This conclave is our starting point. The next step is internal discussions with KTM Society and government bodies. We are working on a MICE policy, setting up a city-level MICE bureau, and encouraging private investments in infrastructure by leasing public land.

A single-window clearance system is also in the pipeline, which will simplify permissions for weddings, MICE events, and related activities—including entertainment.

Suhani: There's a lot of talk about building large convention centers. Do you plan to encourage mega venues, or focus on smaller setups across destinations?

Sikha: Both approaches have value. In cities like Kochi, convention centers make sense for large gatherings. But in destinations like Munnar, Thekkady, and Kumarakom, we prefer smaller, nature based venues. The idea is to balance scale with Kerala's brand of sustainable, boutique luxury.

Suhani: Luxury weddings often bring big budgets and expectations. How will Kerala balance luxury with sustainability?

Sikha: Luxury doesn't always mean artificial grandeur. Often, the richest experiences come directly from nature. For example, in our village life experience tours, visitors are delighted by something as simple as touching a "Touch-Me-Not" plant in a paddy field—and they pay for that experience!

Boutique resorts in Kerala already combine luxury with natural settings. In fact, some global icons prefer quiet, nature-driven luxury over extravagance. Sustainable weddings—plastic-free, ecofriendly, yet elegant—are already emerging, and Kerala is well-positioned to lead this trend.

Suhani: What's your closing message for the wedding and MICE industry stakeholders present here?

Sikha: After such a successful conclave, it's tempting to rest—but I believe this is just the beginning. We need more discussions, collaborations, and hard work to take Kerala to the next level in wedding and MICE tourism. For this, I seek the support of both the wedding industry and the travel trade.

Together, we can make Kerala the global benchmark for responsible luxury. **BI**

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Mission Viksit Bharat
Bureaucracy at the Core of India's Growth Story

by Suhani Nagpal

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, he was not merely announcing a government programme; he was articulating a national mission that would define the next 25 years of India's destiny. The idea of Viksit Bharat—a fully developed India by the centenary of Independence—goes beyond economic metrics. It envisions a country where every citizen has access to quality healthcare, modern education, sustainable jobs, safe housing, and efficient governance. It also imagines India as a global leader in innovation, manufacturing, sustainability, and diplomacy. In many ways, it is both a continuation of the reforms of the past and a leap into the aspirations of the future.

But visions, however grand, remain words on paper until they are translated into action. That is where India's bureaucracy—the country's vast administrative machinery—enters the frame. From the corridors of Delhi's North Block to the remotest block development office in rural Odisha, it is the bureaucracy that transforms intent into outcomes. Whether it is ensuring that a welfare transfer reaches a marginal farmer's bank account in Vidarbha, that a metro rail project in Delhi stays on schedule, or that millions of pilgrims in Maharashtra's Pandharpur Wari can travel safely, it is the invisible yet tireless work of bureaucrats that gives life to India's development agenda.

If politics sets the vision, bureaucracy delivers the road. And as India marches towards 2047, civil servants—**the steel frame of India**—are not just enablers but integral architects.

Bureaucracy is frequently criticized for red tape and rigidity. Yet, India's most impactful initiatives — from **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** to **Digital India** and PM Gati Shakti—are testaments to administrative execution

Bureaucracy: Beyond Red Tape

Bureaucracy in India has often been caricatured as slow-moving, tangled in red tape, and resistant to change. Citizens frequently associate it with queues, endless paperwork, and rigid hierarchies. This perception, while rooted in real challenges, tells only half the story. The other half is far more transformative: when India has set its sights on ambitious goals, it has been the bureaucracy that has quietly turned vision into reality.

Take the **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**, launched in 2014. What could have remained a lofty political slogan became the world's largest sanitation movement under the leadership of **Parameswaran Iyer (IAS, 1981 batch, UP cadre), then Secretary, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation**. Through his innovative "jan andolan" approach, over 100 million toilets were built and open defecation reduced drastically, with district collectors across India personally leading awareness campaigns and behaviour change programmes.

Similarly, **Digital India** has transformed how citizens interact with government. Under the stewardship of **Ajay Sawhney (IAS, 1984 batch, AP cadre), former Secretary of the Ministry of Electronics and IT,** the programme scaled up Aadhaar-enabled services, rolled out BharatNet in rural areas, and created digital platforms like DigiLocker and UMANG that today serve millions. His work exemplifies how bureaucratic leadership can turn complex, tech-driven ideas into massscale citizen services.

Or take PM **Gati Shakti**, India's integrated infrastructure master plan. Coordinating across 16 ministries and dozens of state governments might appear impossible, but **Amrit Lal Meena (IAS, 1989 batch, Bihar cadre), Special Secretary (Logistics),** has been instrumental in operationalising the National Logistics Policy and driving GIS-based mapping that ensures highways, railways, ports, and logistics hubs are planned cohesively. His efforts higlight how bureaucrats are cutting through silos to deliver results.

These stories underline a critical truth: while bureaucracy may sometimes appear rigid, its collective capacity for execution—when aligned with political will—has been the decisive factor in driving some of India's most impactful initiatives.

State Spotlights: Exemplifying Bureaucratic Excellence

Delhi – Urban Governance in the National Capital

Delhi, India's power center, doubles as a governance laboratory—covering urbanization, environmental policy, health, and transport.

The Delhi Metro, a global model of efficiency, reflects bureaucratic capability. **E. Sreedharan**, the legendary "Metro Man", transformed Delhi's transport landscape. As the **Managing Director of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC)**, he delivered metro lines on time and within budget, insulating operations from political interference—a rare feat in public infrastructure.

During the pandemic, Delhi's bureaucracy delivered large-scale testing facilities, oxygen logistics, and mass vaccination. With a dense population, limited health infrastructure, and waves of infections peaking dramatically, the administration had to innovate on war footing. What followed was a rare demonstration of bureaucratic urgency and precision. Under the leadership of then **Health Secretary Dr. Padmini Singla (IAS)**, Delhi ramped up RT-PCR and rapid antigen testing facilities across districts. By July 2020, the city had already achieved one of the highest testing rates in the country, setting up walk-in kiosks and mobile testing vans to reach vulnerable clusters.

Parallelly, mass vaccination was treated like a civic movement. District Magistrates, with direct oversight from **Chief Secretary Vijay Dev (IAS),** converted schools, stadiums, and community halls into vaccination hubs. Special drives were organized for senior citizens, frontline workers, and slum clusters, ensuring equitable access. The result: Delhi achieved near-universal adult vaccination by early 2022, with over 36 million doses administered.

Together, these examples underscore how bureaucratic leadership—when granted autonomy, anchored in professionalism—can deliver urban governance that is proactive, responsive, and citizen-centric.

Maharashtra – Where Faith Meets Infrastructure

Maharashtra's administrators juggle the scale and complexity of spiritual traditions like the Pandharpur Wari alongside mega-infrastructure projects like the Mumbai–Nagpur Samruddhi Expressway.

Radheshyam Mopalwar (IAS), Vice-Chairman & MD of the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC), spearheaded the Mumbai–Nagpur Samruddhi Expressway project. His team navigated complex land acquisition involving over 20,000 farmers across 10 districts. Compensation packages were redesigned to include not just money but also skill training and rehabilitation, reducing friction and delays. The expressway is more than a road: it connects rural districts to urban markets, reduces travel time from 16 hours to 8, and is envisioned as a growth corridor with logistics hubs, industrial clusters, and agro-processing zones.

Every year, millions of devotees walk hundreds of kilometres to the temple town of Pandharpur, creating one of the world's largest annual pilgrimages. Managing this human tide requires extraordinary coordination across districts. District Collectors, police officials, and municipal administrators oversee route planning, sanitation, drinking water, medical camps, and crowd management. In recent years, technology such as drone surveillance, GPS-based crowd tracking, and real-time dashboards have been deployed to

DELHI

MAHARASHTRA

GUJARAT

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, bureaucrats like **Vikas Meena (IAS), then Solapur District Collector,** took difficult calls to restrict pilgrim numbers, allowing only a symbolic Wari in 2020 and 2021 while providing virtual darshan facilities. **"Faith cannot be stopped, but it must be made safe,"** he remarked in a press briefing.

This delicate balancing act—respecting centuries-old tradition while safeguarding public health—showcases the bureaucratic role as both facilitator and guardian.

Gujarat – The Ease of Doing Business Pioneer

Gujarat's transformation into one of India's most industrially advanced states is no accident. While political vision provided the headline goals, it was the state's bureaucracy that laid the nuts-and bolts foundation of investor trust. Over the last two decades, Gujarat's administrators have worked to ensure that clearances are streamlined, land acquisition disputes minimized, and industrial clusters developed with plug-and-play infrastructure.

The flagship **Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit**, launched in 2003, is perhaps the best example of bureaucratic orchestration behind political will. What started as a modest investment promotion meet has evolved into one of Asia's largest investor gatherings. Each edition involves months of meticulous coordination by senior IAS officers—from sector-specific investor roadshows to matchmaking between foreign delegations and local entrepreneurs. The result has

been not just MoUs, but actual on-ground projects in ports, power, petrochemicals, and now renewable energy.

As **M.K. Das (IAS), Additional Chief Secretary (Industries & Mines Department)**, has often noted: **"Investors value predictability. Our role is to make the state administration seamless so that business confidence remains high."** This ethos is visible in Gujarat's high rankings in the Ease of Doing Business index, driven by reforms like single-window digital clearance systems, online land allotment, and time-bound approvals.

Beyond industry, Gujarat's bureaucracy has also led India in renewable energy adoption. Senior officials like **Raj Gopal (IAS), Principal Secretary (Energy)**, have overseen the state's massive solar parks at Charanka and Dholera, positioning Gujarat as a leader in the transition to clean energy. Similarly, in ports and logistics, the Gujarat Maritime Board has been held up as a model for efficient, autonomous management.

The Gujarat model demonstrates how bureaucracy can act as a facilitator of private enterprise while simultaneously safeguarding long-term governance priorities. By institutionalizing efficiency, officers have helped embed Gujarat's reputation as a natural destination for investment. Or as one senior officer put it during Vibrant Gujarat 2024: "Our job is not to chase investors, but to make sure they don't want to leave."

Kerala – A Benchmark for Human Development

Kerala—admired for literacy, healthcare, and social equity—demonstrates the power of inclusive governance. Kerala's handling of health emergencies, especially the Nipah virus outbreaks, showcases how effective crisis governance is built on coordination, preparedness, and leadership.

Dr. Rajan Sadanandan (IAS Retired), the former Additional Chief Secretary (Health), led the state's strategy during the 2018 Nipah outbreak. He coordinated with WHO and international partners to secure monoclonal antibodies, while focusing on basic epidemiology, disease surveillance, and hygiene protocols.

Dr. V Jayasree, District Medical Officer of Kozhikode, highlights the intense inter-departmental cooperation: **"We all met every evening at 6:30 pm to review logistics and patient status… as days progressed, our confidence grew that the outbreak could be contained."**

In the words of a senior IAS officer, "Development is not just about GDP numbers. Our focus has been on dignity — education, health, and equality. That is where Kerala's model stands out."

Northeast India – Bridging Frontiers

For years, the Northeast was distant in geography—and governance. But now, dedicated administrators are expanding roads, railways, and digital networks, linking the region more firmly to India's main growth trajectory.

Bureaucrats in states like Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have worked closely with the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways and the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to push through ambitious highway projects under the Bharatmala Pariyojana and PM Gati Shakti.

The completion of the Bogibeel Bridge in Assam, India's longest rail-cum-road bridge, was not just an engineering feat but also a bureaucratic one. Senior IAS officers like **Ashutosh Agnihotri, then Commissioner & Secretary (PWD, Assam)**, coordinated between central agencies, state departments, and local communities to resolve land and rehabilitation hurdles. The bridge has since reduced travel time between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh drastically, reshaping economic possibilities in Upper Assam.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the push for all-weather roads to border villages has been accelerated under officers like **R.K. Sharma (IAS),** who highlighted: **"Connectivity here is not only about growth; it is about security and dignity for remote communities."**

From once being described as "distant" and "disconnected," the Northeast today stands as a story of bureaucratic perseverance in frontier governance. The Northeast's administrators are showing that development is not just about growth metrics but about inclusion, dignity, and belonging.

In the words of Shyamkanu Mahanta, entrepreneur and advisor to Assam's Start-up Policy: "The role of bureaucracy here is not abstract—it is visible on the ground, in the first tarred road to a village, in the first fiber optic line, in the first farmer selling his produce online."

The Tech-Savvy Bureaucrat of Today

Gone are the days when bureaucracy was synonymous with files, stamps, and procedural inertia. Today, a new generation of officers—often called digital natives—has emerged, bringing innovation, agility, and citizen-centric governance to the forefront. These officers combine deep administrative experience with tech-driven solutions, ensuring that governance is responsive, transparent, and measurable.

Several state and central departments now deploy real-time GIS dashboards, predictive analytics, and AI-powered monitoring to manage urban infrastructure, disaster response, and service delivery. In Delhi, **Rajiv Ranjan (IAS)** spearheaded the use of GIS-enabled dashboards to monitor water pipelines, sewage lines, and road repairs. Citizens could now track complaints online, while administrators could prioritize high-impact interventions.

Technology-driven governance is especially critical during crises. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration, led by **P. R. Shekhar (IAS)**, integrated drone mapping, GIS flood alerts, and mobile emergency apps to coordinate disaster relief during cyclones—reducing response times from days to hours.

The modern bureaucrat does not just rely on systems—they innovate, often drawing from private sector tools or citizen-focused platforms. In Rajasthan, **Parul Sharma (IAS)** introduced mobilebased agricultural advisories that provided farmers with real-time weather alerts, crop disease warnings, and market prices—linking rural livelihoods with technology.

As **BVR Subrahmanyam, CEO of NITI Aayog,** has remarked: **"Technology is an amplifier of governance. It doesn't replace judgment; it enables it. Officers who embrace tech effectively become catalysts of change."**

Navigating the Roadblocks Ahead

While India's bureaucracy has demonstrated remarkable capacity in executing ambitious programmes, the path to Viksit Bharat is not without obstacles. Several structural and operational challenges continue to test the administrative machinery:

1. Stretched Administrative Capacity

India has one of the lowest officer-to-citizen ratios in the world. With approximately 1.5 million government officers serving over 1.4 billion citizens, the workload on each officer is enormous. This strain is particularly evident in districts and remote regions, where a single officer may oversee multiple departments or large populations.

2. Bureaucratic Inertia

Despite digital tools and innovative approaches, decision-making can still be slowed by hierarchical procedures, multiple clearances, or risk-averse mindsets. Projects requiring multi-department coordination—such as integrated infrastructure corridors or climate-resilient urban planning—often face delays due to layers of approvals. Reformists argue that empowering

district-level officers with greater discretionary powers could accelerate implementation.

3. Transparency Gaps

Digitization has improved accountability, but gaps remain. Information asymmetry, inconsistent data reporting, and delayed grievance redressal can undermine public trust. For example, during pandemic relief efforts in some districts, discrepancies in ration distribution and health facility reporting revealed that even digital platforms are only as effective as the human systems managing them.

4. Political Interference

Long-term initiatives—such as climate-resilient infrastructure, urban redevelopment, or industrial corridor planning—can be disrupted by frequent changes in political priorities. Officers often face pressure to shift focus to short-term deliverables or symbolic projects, delaying systemic solutions.

5. Skills Mismatch in Emerging Domains

The future of governance increasingly requires expertise in AI, climate policy, renewable energy, trade negotiation, and digital finance. Many officers, while highly competent in traditional administration, need upskilling to meet the demands of a rapidly changing economy. Recognizing this, NITI Aayog and other ministries are promoting lateral entry programmes, specialized training, and international exposure.

Charting Bureaucracy 2.0

To actualize the vision of Viksit Bharat, India's administration must transform to meet new challenges. This emerging "Bureaucracy 2.0" seeks to be agile, tech-savvy, and citizen-centric.

1. AI-Driven Governance

Artificial Intelligence and predictive analytics are increasingly being integrated into governance frameworks. AI allows administrators to anticipate demand, allocate resources efficiently, and monitor the impact of policies in real time.

For instance, the Delhi Traffic Police, under officers like Rajiv Ranjan (IAS), have started using AI-based traffic prediction models to manage congestion dynamically. Similarly, AI-powered dashboards are being piloted in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh for crop advisories, flood risk
mapping, and energy consumption forecasting.

2. Domain Experts Through Lateral Entry

Complex challenges in sectors like climate change, trade policy, digital finance, and health require specialized knowledge. Lateral entry allows professionals from industry, academia, and think tanks to join government at mid- to senior-level positions.

The Department of Economic Affairs has successfully inducted economists and f nancial analysts to improve policy design. In health, lateral-entry officers have brought expertise in epidemiology and bioinformatics to complement traditional administrative skills. This blend of domain expertise with administrative experience enhances decision quality and execution speed.

3. Stronger Local Institutions

Empowering panchayats, municipal corporations, and ward offices ensures that decisions reflect local realities while reducing the load on higher bureaucratic tiers. Kerala's Gram Sabhas and Tamil Nadu's Smart City Ward Committees exemplify how empowered local institutions, guided
by well-trained officers, can deliver targeted welfare, sanitation, and infrastructure projects efficiently. Local empowerment also fosters accountability, as citizens can directly engage with decision-makers closest to them.

4. Global Training Platforms

To compete globally, officers must be exposed to international best practices in governance, trade, diplomacy, and climate action. Programs like the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy fellowships, and specialized UN training courses are
increasingly leveraged for Indian officers. Such exposure equips officers with tools to negotiate trade agreements, manage climate finance, and adopt innovative urban management solutions.

Bureaucracy 2.0 is not about replacing the old system but enhancing it. By combining
technology, specialized skills, local empowerment, and global exposure, India can create a responsive, accountable, and visionary administrative apparatus—capable of executing the multi-dimensional vision of Viksit Bharat.

Conclusion: Building India by 2047

By 2047, when India celebrates 100 years of independence, the story of Viksit Bharat will be written by political visionaries and countless civil servants working in the trenches. Each metro line, expressway, school, and green initiative represents administrative grit and governance excellence.

The bureaucracy may operate in the background but it is the most dependable craftsman in India's transformation. By embracing innovation, citizen-centricity, and accountability, it is the steel frame that will ensure the dream of a developed India is not only imagined but delivered.

As BVR Subrahmanyam, CEO of NITI Aayog, says: "Viksit Bharat is also a dream. But if we work methodically, systematically, with ambition, drive, and consistency, even that dream can be fulfilled." **BI**

From Red Fort to Reality: The Blueprint for India's Next Phase

by Anjali Bhardwaj

On 15 August 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered his longest-ever Independence Day address, a sweeping 103-minute oration from the ramparts of the Red Fort, weaving together themes of self-reliance, national security, economic transformation, and youth empowerment PM India.

He invoked the vibrancy of India's "140 crore resolutions" and reaffirmed the Constitution as the guiding light of the nation PM India.

Anchored in the twin ideologies of Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) and Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047, Modi emphasized the need for indigenous capabilities across sectors—from strategic defence to semiconductors, clean energy to agriculture, and digital sovereignty to youth empowerment PM India.

In a landmark announcement, he pledged that India will launch its first "Made in India" semiconductor chip by the end of 2025, declaring the nation has shifted to "mission mode" in chip manufacturing—a crucial step for technology sovereignty. Complementing this, he unveiled Mission Sudarshan Chakra, a home-grown, multi-layered defence architecture capable of counterstrikes and cyber response—India's equivalent of an "Iron Dome".

Modi hailed Operation Sindoor, the retaliatory mission following the Pahalgam terror attack, though he did not name it directly—praising the armed forces for punishing "masters of terror" and stating India would no longer tolerate "nuclear blackmail".

He also warned that "blood and water cannot flow together," suggesting a post-conflict rethink of the Indus Waters Treaty.

On the economic front, he announced next-generation GST reforms as a Diwali gift—aimed at reducing rates on daily-use items to help MSMEs and inflate affordability.
He also launched the Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana, offering ₹15,000 assistance to individuals securing their first private-sector job.

Addressing the future, Modi appealed to young scientists, engineers, and professionals to take lead in developing jet engines, patented medicines, and home-grown digital platforms, reinforcing technological independence.

Prime Minister Modi's address underscored a vision of India that is simultaneously rooted in its heritage and racing toward the future. Anchored in self-reliance and the goal of Viksit Bharat 2047, the roadmap spans strategic defence, technological sovereignty, economic reforms, and youth empowerment. As initiatives like indigenous semiconductor manufacturing, Mission Sudarshan Chakra, and the Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana take shape, India's administrative machinery and citizens alike are being called to action. Together, they are not just witnessing change—they are building a nation where resilience, innovation, and inclusive growth define the next chapter of India's remarkable journey. **BI**
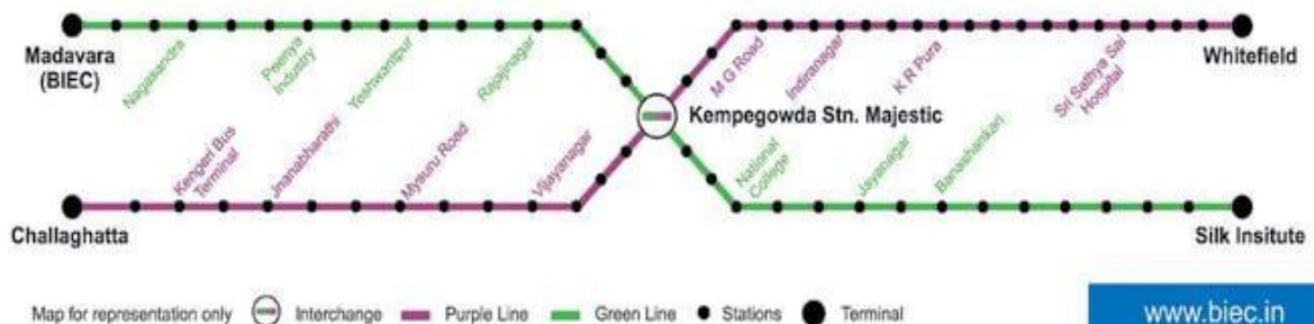
A walk of divinity & humanity Maharashtra's Sacred Wari Pilgrimage

By – DR ATUL PATNE , IAS , Principal Secretary, Department Of Tourism, Government Of Maharashtra

With the arrival of monsoon, "Ashadha" month in the Hindu calendar, a spiritual wave sweeps across Maharashtra. A tradition which has been in practice since the 13th Century, almost 700 years ago, has now become a huge movement which sees millions of devotes from all strata of society, caste, creed, faiths walking together in a divine walk of humanity.

A Journey Rooted in History, Bhakti and breaking the rigid societal barriers

The story of the Pandharpur Wari is deeply intertwined with the Bhakti movement 700 years old—a period when spiritual expression in India was transformed forever. The Bhakti movement was not only about worship; it was a revolution of the heart. It called upon every individual, whether a scholar or a humble farmer, rich or poor, man or a woman , people of all ages to experience a personal connection with the divine, breaking away from rigid rituals and social barriers that had long defined religion. This walk was spiritually & socially empowering. In those times where women were confined to being tied to household duties in a patriarchal mindset – the Pandharpur wari movement in a way gave them a chance to step out for 10 days to join this spiritual march, giving them an opportunity to break free from the social shackles of the society. This was an evolution or liberation of sorts and this walk gained more momentum over the years ,as more and more people started to join this unique procession of humanity!

Wari, is a movement of spiritual democracy and inclusivity. The procession dissolves all barriers. Caste, class, and economic status hold no relevance. A simple farmer walks beside a learned pandit. A child holds hands with an elderly woman. All are equal under Lord Vithoba's gaze- who who was considered as a simple God – Saavla Vitthal – a Lord for the masses !

The pilgrimage also exemplifies a self-sustaining model of community. Volunteers provide food, water, and first-aid. Each village takes in a group of Waarkaris and offers them a simple meal – free of charge. Temporary kitchens are set up in villages.**Villages welcome the warkaris to stay in their homes and over the years the families walking for generations keep staying with the families their ancestors stayed with!**
There is order without enforcement, service without expectations. The spirit of 'seva' (selfless service) is deeply rooted in the Waarkari conscience. In Wari modernity pauses and devotion takes center stage- truly a walk of humanity.

The Wari walk starts from Dehu and Alandi up to Pandharpur, the sacred temple of Lord Vithoba ,an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This walk honors the saints of the Maratha soil-Sant Dnyaneshwar & Sant Tukaram. The sacred 'paduka' (footwear) of the saints are carried lovingly in a "palkhi" (palanquin) from their respective shrines in Dehu & Alandi small towns in Pune district. Barefoot devotees from humble towns like Dehu and Alandi, begins their sacred march around June/ July - singing and humming chants of "Gyanba Tukaram". Drenched in devotion and sometimes rains, they continue barefoot mostly towards Pandharpur, the abode of lord Vithoba. At each town and city where this "Palkhi" reaches, more devotees join, and keep joining.

What then unfolds is the Pandharpur Wari — one of India's oldest and most vibrant religious journeys, where everyone is an equal – in their devotion. where individuals names and caste, creed, sex, religion, status etc is forgotten. All walk with one identity of a "waarkari". Even the four legged animals are included as part of this walk, so you see dogs, sheep, bulls, horses all as part of this walk.

The Wari is a unique confluence of devotion and community coming together. It was during this spiritual bloom in 13th-century Maharashtra when the seeds of the Wari tradition were sown. According to the historians, Vitthalpant—the devoted father of the esteemed Sant Dnyaneshwar, was one of its earliest flagbearers. Through devotion, public singing, and the simple act of walking together, these early pilgrims demonstrated that the true path to God lay in humility, love, and togetherness.

Over the centuries, what began as an informal journey gradually developed order and meaning. In 1685, a pivotal transformation occurred when Narayan Maharaj, the youngest son of Sant Tukaram, introduced the Palakhi tradition. He formalized the annual processions, carrying the symbolic sandals (padukas) of saints Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram, allowing devotees to feel an even deeper connection to their spiritual mentors.

What started centuries ago as a modest expression of collective faith has, by the force of devotion and the inspiration of saint-poets, turned into one of the world's largest and most vibrant pilgrimages.

Thousands of devotees gather for the ceremonial departure known as "Wari Prasthan"—the moment when two sacred journeys begin their convergence toward the holy town of Pandharpur. The sight is nothing short of extraordinary. Two magnificent Palkhis emerge, each one a masterpiece of devotion and craftsmanship. The first, departing from Alandi, carries the sacred padukas of Sant Dnyaneshwar. The simple silver sandals once worn in the feet of the 13th-century saint-poet who revolutionized spiritual thought.

The second Palkhi sets forth from Dehu, bearing the padukas of Sant Tukaram. The beloved 17th century saint whose soul-stirring abhangs continue to echo in the hearts of millions. Each Palkhi is adorned with intricate silver work and is draped in vibrant fabrics.

Dressed in crisp white cotton dhotis, heads crowned with simple Gandhi caps, sacred tulsi beads around their necks and the veenas slung across their shoulders, Waarkaris embody the essence of spiritual democracy. Together, they form what can only be described as an endless human tapestry.

What follows is both a physical and spiritual odyssey that spans nearly 250 kilometers and unfolds over 21 transformative days. The route itself tells a story—winding through the bustling streets of Pune, where urban life pauses to witness this ancient procession. Through the historic town of Saswad, where the Warkaris' voices echo off centuries-old walls. Past the hilltop temple of Jejuri, where devotees pause to seek additional blessings; and finally, through Wakhari, the last milestone before their ultimate destination.

As the sun rises, the collective voice of thousands joins in singing abhangs (soul stirring devotional poems) and chants of Gyanba Tukaram. These aren't performances but outpourings of the heart, each verse carries the weight of personal strug-

gles, hopes, and surrender to the divine.

The monsoon adds its own poetry to this pilgrimage. Sometimes the devotees walk under blazing sun. Other times, they march through gentle drizzles that seem like blessings from above. Occasionally, they break into dance and games and welcome the rains also, their joy undiminished, seeing in every raindrop a sign of divine approval.

This is more than a religious procession— it's a living, breathing meditation in motion, where every step is a prayer, every song a conversation with the divine, and every shared glance between pilgrims a recognition of the sacred spark that connects all souls on their journey home to Pandharpur.

The Wari culminated at Pandharpur ,after three weeks on foot on Ashadhi Ekadashi, the 11th day of the Hindu lunar month of Ashadha, which usually falls in June or July. By the time the Waarkaris reach the sacred town, their feet may be blistered but their spirits soar.

Upon being asked, a waarkari said, "our feet don't hurt because, lord Vitthala himself massages our feet, when we sleep at night!"

The highlight of the arrival is a dip in the Chandrabhaga River, believed to purify the soul, followed by darshan of their beloved Vitthala, a form of Lord Krishna standing with arms akimbo, waiting for his devotees on the banks of the river.

The vibe in Pandharpur is enchanting. Devotees sing, weep, laugh, and collapse in surrender at the deity's feet. It is the culmination not just of a physical journey, but of a deep, internal voyage of faith and surrender. **BI**

NIMA's Journey of Empowering Tomorrow's MICE Professionals

In the dynamic world of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions, a silent revolution is underway—guided by the Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA). This association is not only shaping the future of Indian MICE but empowering the next generation of industry leaders.

A Decade of Vision and Growth

Founded in 2014, NIMA recently celebrated its 10th anniversary with fanfare and vision. At a grand event in February 2025, held in New Delhi, the association unveiled its reinvigorated Executive Team. Dr. Nitin Mittal took the helm as National Coordinator, while the founding leader, Gajesh Girdhar, transitioned to serve as Chairman of the Governing Council. Backed by a mentor and advisory board, this leadership represents India's metro and Tier-III cities—underscoring NIMA's promise of inclusivity and grassroots empowerment.

Enabling Young Minds with Purpose

Beyond leadership, NIMA's passion lies in education and mentorship. The association has forged MOUs with reputed institutions—from Garden City University in Bangalore to Jaipuria School of Business in the NCR and DY Patil University's School of Hospitality and Tourism Studies in Navi Mumbai. These partnerships are already delivering practical training, mentorship, and career pathways for budding MICE professionals.

This initiative builds upon NIMA's flagship "NIMA Connect" platform, designed to bring students and young agents face-to-face with national and international tourism boards, financial and tax experts, and more—turning learning into real-world engagement.

2025: A Year of Celebration—and Global Acclaim

NIMA has proclaimed 2025 as the "Year of Indian MICE Tourism," a nationwide campaign that spans cities from Raipur to Ranchi, Madurai to Mohali, and Agra to Amritsar. June 21 has been designated "World MICE Tourism Day," symbolically aligning with the summer solstice during the global travel peak season.

Making Global Moves

In March 2025, NIMA turned heads on the international stage by becoming the first Indian MICE association to sign an MOU with the Russian Union of Travel Industry (RST). Held at the International Conference on Uniting North and South in New Delhi, this agreement paves the way for cooperative tourism development, bilateral event opportunities, and deeper ties with the Russian tourism ecosystem.

The Takeaway

With its roots firmly planted across aspiring and established MICE agents from metro to Tier-III cities, NIMA is rewriting the playbook: empowering students, fostering cross-border collaboration, and branding India as a global MICE hub. **BI**

The Real Artificial Intellgence

by Arun Arora

India stands at a pivotal juncture in 2025, with over 371 million youth aged 15–29—nearly 27% of its 1.46 billion population—entering a workforce shaped by rapid technological advancements, particularly in AI and automation. Every year, more than 10 million graduates and diploma holders, including 1.5 million engineers, graduate from India's higher education system. This demographic dividend presents immense opportunity, but also a pressing challenge: how to create enough jobs for this vast talent pool, especially as automation threatens traditional employment models.

The Dual-Edged Sword: AI and Automation

AI and automation have the potential to reshape India's labour market in profound ways:

Potential for Job Displacement: Routine and repetitive tasks in sectors such as manufacturing, certain IT services, and even basic roles in hospitality are vulnerable to automation. Concerns persist that, unless managed carefully, India could face significant job losses—an acute risk, considering the millions of people entering the workforce each year.

Job Creation Opportunities: Conversely, AI is also expected to create millions of new roles, particularly in technology, data analysis, AI engineering, machine learning, cyber-security, and related fields. The World Economic Forum (WEF) anticipates AI will generate 12 million more jobs than it displaces by 2025. Estimates suggest that approximately 1 million new AI-related jobs in IT alone will be available by 2025, and nearly 20 million across IT, manufacturing, agriculture, and logistics through digital reskilling and redeployment.

Striking the Right Balance

Given India's unique position—huge youth population, rising formal job creation (over 14.5 million net additions expected in FY 2024–25), and a thriving manufacturing and service sector—the way forward involves a multi-pronged strategy:

Focus on High-Employment Sectors

Manufacturing Drive: India's government is strengthening its manufacturing base through initiatives such as the National Manufacturing Mission and the newly launched Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) Scheme, which aims to create 35 million jobs over two years from August 2025, with a particular focus on the manufacturing sector.

Travel & Hospitality: Sectors such as travel and hospitality, which are expected to contribute roughly 5 million new jobs over 5–7 years, are less susceptible to automation. Here, India's strength in personalised, high-touch services offers a competitive edge that creates sustainable employment.

Policy Incentives Linking Investment to Employment

The government now links incentives for investors—particularly in manufacturing—to the number of jobs created, ensuring that technology adoption does not come at the expense of employment. The ELI scheme, for instance, incentivises both employers (up to ₹3,000/month per new employee) and employees, focusing on direct and indirect job creation.

Reskilling and Industry-Academia Partnerships

With only 10–20% of India's technical and general graduates described as "readily employable," a concerted focus on skilling—especially in emerging domains like AI, robotics, and precision engineering—is critical. Up-skilling existing workers for new digital-era jobs ensure a smooth transition and reduce frictional unemployment.

Intelligent Application of Automation

AI and robotics should be deployed to take over tasks that are hazardous, extremely repetitive, or require superhuman accuracy. At the same time, jobs that demand empathy, creativity, and personalised service—hallmarks of Indian sectors like hospitality—remain people-centric. This division enables India to maintain its service excellence while advancing up the value chain, where automation is necessary.

AI for Job Creation

AI itself can be leveraged to stimulate employment by:
- Powering new industries and startups across domains from agritech to edtech and logistics.
- Optimising supply chains to create indirect jobs in MSMEs and rural regions.
- Assisting policymakers to map employment trends and design dynamic skilling programs targeted at future job requirements.

The Power of Human Creativity: The Indian Advantage

One of the most significant domains where AI and automation cannot replace human creativity is the arts. India's vibrant creative industries—spanning advertising, filmmaking, music, and digital content—underscore how essential the human touch is:

Advertising: Agencies in India continue to produce memorable campaigns rooted in cultural nuance, humour, and emotion (such as Fevicol's iconic ads and Amul's witty billboards). These campaigns resonate because creative teams craft these campaigns, who intimately understand their audience.

Film & Media: India produces more films than any other country, and each successful movie is a product of complex human collaboration—encompassing directors, writers, performers, composers, designers, and technicians. Blockbusters like "Gully Boy" or "RRR" connect because of their authentic stories and emotional impact, not just production value.

Audio-visual and Digital Platforms: Content creation for OTT platforms (such as Netflix, YouTube, and Amazon Prime) is booming, creating jobs in writing, performing, designing, and editing. While AI can assist with editing or translations, it still cannot genuinely replicate the originality and empathy behind compelling content.

Creative Jobs Growth: The expanding landscape of Indian content creators—stand-up comedians, influencers, animators, and storytellers—demonstrates that jobs centred on creativity, originality, and emotional intelligence will remain resilient and even flourish in the AI era.

The way forward

India's challenge is not to resist the incoming AI and automation wave, but to strategically harness it—balancing adoption of cutting-edge technologies with strong job creation, primarily through fostering manufacturing and creative industries, focusing on skill development, and leveraging sectors where human touch is irreplaceable. Proactive government policy, industry skilling efforts, and intelligent deployment of AI can ensure India emerges as both a technology leader and a job creator, turning its demographic dividend into lasting prosperity.

BI

DIRECTOR – CHETAK FOUNDATION

ADVISORY BOARD (CHIEF MINISTER'S ERA)

SUB-EDITOR – BUREAUCRACY INDIA

ABOUT AUTHOR
Author is a communications, development, academic professional, a columnist, an author and a trainer with rich corporate and industry experience.

ITB Asia 2025 Conference Unites Leaders to Redefine Tourism

From AI to sustainability, Asia's leading travel trade show, will unite industry leaders from global players such as Frasers Hospitality, Jack Morton Worldwide, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) and many more in Singapore to shape the next chapter of global travel and tourism. Taking place 15 - 17 October 2025 at the Sands Expo & Convention Centre, the conference will run parallel with ITB Asia, MICE Show Asia and Travel Tech Asia under the theme **"Future Forward: Transforming Travel & Tourism in a Changing World"**.

ITB Asia, Asia's leading travel trade show, is organised by Messe Berlin Asia Pacific and supported by the Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau. The annual B2B trade show and convention will feature hundreds of exhibiting companies from the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East, covering not only the leisure market, but also MICE and corporate travel. Exhibitors from every sector of the industry, including destinations, airlines and airports, hotels and resorts, theme parks and attractions, inbound tour operators, inbound DMCs, cruise lines, spas, venues, other meeting facilities, and travel technology companies are expected to attend.

For more than 50 years the name ITB has stood worldwide for the travel industry knowledge 365 days a year, networking and trendsetting events - in a virtual, in-person, or hybrid format alike. As the travel industry resurges, the ITB brand family is among the first to come back to offering on-site in-person events.

Organised by Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, the ITB Asia 2025 Conference will deliver three days of curated content across three specialised stages - the Knowledge Theatre, MICE Show Asia Theatre, and Travel Tech Asia Theatre - exploring how the travel and tourism industry can build a more agile, inclusive future and equip itself for what lies ahead.

"In times of rapid change, ITB Asia serves as an important platform for the global travel community to exchange ideas, gain fresh perspectives, and develop strategies for the future. "Future Forward" highlights our focus on harnessing technology, advancing sustainability, and reimagining the traveller experience to turn challenges into opportunities," said Darren Seah, Executive Director, Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, the organiser of ITB Asia.

Opening Keynotes from Global Leaders

The event will open with **Michael Shoory, Head of APAC Tourism Analysis at Tourism Economics**, who will present an in-depth outlook on travel to and within the APAC region, highlighting changes in traveller source markets, the future of business and MICE travel, and the economic forces shaping demand. He will be followed by **Nick Lim, CEO (Asia) of The Travel Corporation,** who will share forward-looking perspectives on how travel experiences in Asia are evolving in response to shifting expectations, cultural dynamics, and innovations in the sector.

Conference Highlights by Stage Knowledge Theatre

This stage brings together C-suite executives and senior leaders to address strategic industry issues and share their vision for the future of the travel and tourism sector. **Sarah Wang, Regional Director for Asia at the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)**, will discuss key drivers of growth in the Asia Pacific travel economy, focusing on evolving traveller preferences and opportunities for market expansion. **Todd Handcock, Global Chief Commercial Officer and Asia Pacific Executive Chair at Collinson International, and Katrina Nicholas, Asia Transport Team Leader and Deputy Managing Editor for Global Business, Bloomberg**, will reveal findings from the "2025 Asia Pacific Consumer Happiness Report" and explain how travel can enhance happiness, build brand loyalty, and create lifetime customer value. **Chew Hang Song, Chief Operating Officer at Frasers Hospitality,** will explore how the hospitality sector can respond to growing demands for personalised, seamless, and tech-enabled experiences while balancing technological innovation with human service.

MICE Show Asia Theatre The MICE

Show Asia Theatre will spotlight the latest developments in business events, corporate travel, and meetings innovation. **Vishal Sawant, Chief Experience Officer for India at ATPI, and Sheryn Sethoe, Head of MICE - Asia at ATPI,** will discuss how Asia's business travel sector can integrate smart technology without losing the human touch. **Eugene Ng, Senior Vice President and Executive Creative Director for Asia at Jack Morton Worldwide,** will share strategies for crafting immersive, multisensory event experiences that captivate audiences. **Ilaria Cicero, CEO of IEG Asia, and Errol Lim, COO of Jublia,** will explore how networking in MICE events is evolving from traditional exchanges to purposeful connections that drive ROI and create meaningful experiences for attendees.

Travel Tech Asia Theatre

At the Travel Tech Asia Theatre, industry innovators will discuss the technologies redefining tourism. **Masahiro Yamashita, Senior Director for APAC at KAYAK,** will explain how generative AI is reshaping travel engagement and personalisation. **Scott Krivokopich, Co-Founder and Managing Partner at 1982 Ventures,** will share insights into how venture capital is identifying and investing in the most promising travel tech innovations, from AI trip planning to borderless mobility solutions. **Léa Vernet, Vice President of Partnerships & Connectivity at D-EDGE Hospitality Solutions,** will provide practical examples of how strong partnerships and connectivity can transform hospitality ecosystems, delivering greater agility and enhanced guest experiences.

Partnerships Driving Industry Knowledge

The ITB Asia 2025 Conference is powered by strong collaborations with some of the world's most influential travel and tourism organisations, underlining the event's position as the leading knowledge-exchange platform for the industry. These strategic partners not only lend credibility and expertise, but also actively shape the content, share the latest insights, and spark thought-provoking discussions that will influence the future of global tourism.

Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA): As the leading voice for the adventure travel community, ATTA will deliver dedicated sessions on emerging adventure travel trends, sustainability, and innovation. Attendees can also join the popular AdventureCONNECT networking hour, designed to foster meaningful partnerships among adventure travel stakeholders.

Global MICE Collaborative: With its deep expertise in exhibitions, meetings, and incentive travel, the Collaborative will provide exclusive updates on the MICE sector's evolution. It will once again host the MICE Fundamentals certificate programme, equipping professionals with essential knowledge to thrive in this dynamic field.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC): Championing responsible and sustainable tourism worldwide, GSTC will lead sessions on best practices and frameworks to integrate sustainability into business and MICE operations, offering attendees actionable strategies for long-term impact.

STR: Renowned for its market intelligence, STR will provide a data-driven outlook on hotel performance across Southeast Asia. In addition, STR experts will moderate the high-profile Hotel Leaders' Panel, sparking dialogue among hospitality executives on opportunities and challenges shaping the industry.

Tourism Economics: A key knowledge partner, Tourism Economics will deliver in-depth analysis of APAC travel trends, spotlighting shifts in traveller behaviour, demand drivers, and macroeconomic influences impacting the sector.

Uncommon Conferences: Joining as a new partner in 2025, Uncommon Conferences will lead interactive sessions on event innovation, equipping organisers with creative strategies to design more impactful, engaging experiences.

World Research Travel Organisation (WRTO): Another new partner this year, WRTO will host sessions on the growing educational travel sector, offering insights into how research-driven tourism can shape cultural exchange and learning opportunities worldwide.

For more information on ITB Asia 2025 events and conferences, visit itb-asia.com or view speaker list. Get all-access trade visitor pass at Early Bird rate and attend all conference sessions, visit Trade Visitor Registration. **BI**

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ITB India Conference 2025 to Spotlight Key Trends Shaping the Surging Indian

From 2-3 September, the ITB India Conference 2025 will gather key industry leaders to reveal and discuss the latest key trends, challenges and opportunities transforming the travel markets in India and South Asia – featuring speakers from Google, Make-MyTrip and Tripadvisor, 40+ sessions and a new Experiential Travel track.

ITB **India** is an annual 3-day business-to-business trade show and convention curated to connect you to the Indian Travel Market. ITB India brings together key travel industry leaders and international exhibitors from various segments of MICE, Leisure, Corporate, and Travel Technology. Leverage on ITB India to capture the fast-growing Indian and South Asian Markets, forge new partnerships, and strengthen existing business relations with the most important players in India and South Asia.

The ITB India Conference 2025 is set to take place alongside ITB India from 2-4 September at the Jio World Convention Centre, Mumbai, promising two days of forward-looking insights, strategic dialogues and impactful industry discussions. With a diverse lineup of speakers and an

agenda centred on emerging trends in MICE, Corporate Travel, Travel Technology, Cruise Travel, Film Tourism, Sustainability & Eco Tourism and beyond, the third in-person edition of ITB India Conference is a must-attend for travel and tourism professionals.

Held in alignment with the overarching event theme, "The Business of Experience: Curated Travel for Targeted Growth", the conference reflects a forward-looking outlook on the transformation of the travel industry across India and beyond.

Keynote Highlights: Navigating a Changing Travel Landscape

Keynote addresses will offer compelling insights into the key opportunities and challenges shaping the travel industry,

led by some of its most influential voices. Among them is **Scott Wegener (Head of Asia Pacific, Tripadvisor)** who will inaugurate the conference with his insights and thought leadership.

The Conference 2025 will take place across two main stages: the Knowledge & MICE Theatre and the Tech & Experience Theatre, offering four dedicated conference tracks with more than 40 sessions of curated content, expert talks and actionable strategies.

The Knowledge Theatre track will feature leading voices from **Shaurab Kapadia (Vertical Head - Travel & Food Tech, Google India),** who will share profound insights on the evolving Indian travel landscape, and **Rama Mahendru (Country General Manager - India, Intrepid Travel),** who will discuss the growing impact of responsible tourism in the session "Beyond Sustainability: The Rise of Responsible Tourism in the Global South".

The MICE & Corporate Travel track will delve into the evolving landscape of meetings, events and business travel – with a focus on shifting priorities, smarter budget strategies and the transformative role of new technologies. Highlights include **Judith Huisman (Founder and Chief Product Officer, Meetingselect)** offering an in-depth look at how digital innovations such as smart booking tools, automation, AI-driven personalisation and real-time data are transforming MICE operations.

Deepesh Jethwani (Vice President Trip-

jack**)** will explore how travel management companies (TMCs) and corporations combine technology with human insight to create proactive,
personalised duty-of-care programmes tailored to the specific needs of Indian corporate travellers.

The Travel Technology track puts technology centre stage, focusing on the tools, platforms and AI that are revolutionising the travel industry. **Anurag Jain (Executive Vice President – APMEA, RateGain)** will lead a session that explores how AI and innovation are transforming the booking process and travel experiences. **Rikant Pittie (Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip)** will offer forward looking insights into how emerging technologies are set to transform the travel industry.

Debuting in 2025, the Experiential Travel track spotlights high-value, immersive tourism from film and cruise travel to cultural and sustainable journeys. Speakers include **Romil Pant (Sr. Vice President, Leisure Travel, Thomas Cook India Ltd) and Isha Goyal (Co-founder, India Cruise Forum and Director/CEO, STIC Travel Group).** They will provide key insights into the evolving landscape of cruise travel in India.

The full conference agenda is now available at https://businessmatching.itb-india.com/agenda/.

The speaker lineup can be found at: https://businessmatching.itb-india.com/agenda/speakers/.

Early Bird Rates and All-Access Ticket for Trade Visitors

Trade Visitors can benefit from Early Bird rates until 29 August 2025, with full access to the ITB India Conference and all three co-located shows – ITB India, MICE Show India, and Travel Tech India. Visitor registration and further details: www.itb-india.com/visit-register. **BI**

BE PART OF THE ACTION AT ITB INDIA 2025
WHERE GLOBAL TRAVEL MEETS INDIA

Returning for its **4th edition from 2–4 September 2025 at the Jio World Convention Centre, Mumbai**, ITB India is the premier B2B travel trade show unlocking direct access to India's booming travel market.

Meet top-tier exhibitors showcasing **cutting-edge products, innovative travel solutions, and destination experiences** from around the world. Explore the latest trends across **MICE, Leisure, Corporate, and Travel Tech** segments – all under one roof.

Network with **quality buyers** from Tier I, II, and III cities across India and South Asia, and connect with **leading international brands** looking to expand into the region. Whether you're seeking new business leads, market intelligence, or long-term partnerships, ITB India is your gateway to one of the world's fastest-growing and most dynamic travel economies.

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Celebrating leaders, visionaries, and innovators redefining tourism excellence

On August 25, 2025, the stately halls of ITC Maurya, New Delhi, transformed into a vibrant arena of ideas, inspiration, and recognition as the ICONIC 2025 Tourism Summit & Awards unfolded. Organized by Redhat Communications in collaboration with TV9 Network, the day-long event was more than just a conference, it was a celebration of how tourism continues to evolve as a force of innovation, cultural exchange, and economic growth.

by Anjali Bhardwaj

ICONIC 2025

From the very first session, the summit radiated energy. Policymakers, diplomats, hospitality leaders, entrepreneurs, and cultural icons gathered under one roof, all bound by a shared passion: to envision the future of tourism in India and beyond. The overarching theme, **"Innovation, Transformation, and Impact,"** set the tone for thought-provoking conversations that carried the spirit of possibility throughout the day.

Conversations that Shaped the Morning

The morning conclave was alive with dialogue. Sessions such as **"Influencing Itineraries: The Content Engine for Tourism Today," "Dekho Apna Desh,"** and **"Creating Iconic Tourism Experiences"** drew attention to how storytelling, technology, and local initiatives can elevate the way travelers experience destinations.

Among the distinguished voices were **Niharika Rai, IAS, Secretary & Commissioner Tourism, Government of Delhi,** who highlighted the importance of promoting Delhi as a cultural hub; **Rajesh Magow, Co-Founder & Group CEO, MakeMyTrip,** who emphasized the role of technology in driving accessibility and convenience; and **Mugdha Sinha, MD, ITDC,** who spoke about how tourism must go beyond destinations to deliver journeys that enrich communities and cultures.

Their discussions, joined by senior representatives from Amadeus, Indigo, and VFS Global, underscored a collective vision — to make India not only a preferred destination but also a global benchmark in tourism innovation.

Grandeur and Recognition

As the event moved ahead, the focus shifted from dialogue to celebration. The ICONIC Awards 2025 ceremony unfolded with elegance and pride, honoring individuals and brands that have made remarkable contributions to tourism and hospitality.

The event was graced by **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister of Culture, as the Chief Guest.** Taking the stage, he reminded the audience of tourism's transformative power:

"Tourism is one of the strongest pillars of India's growth story, and forums like ICONIC 2025 are vital in shaping its future. I would like to appreciate Mrs. Jyoti Mayal for her consistent efforts and leadership in taking the tourism industry forward and creating opportunities for its sustainable development."

(L-R) Mrs Jyoti Mayal, Manoj Adlakha, Dr. Sandeep Marwah, Suman Billa, Jyotsna Suri, Raktim Das, Ishika Taneja

Adding to this, **Jyoti Mayal, CEO of Redhat Communications and Chairperson of the Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council,** described the summit as more than an event:

Also lending his vision to the gathering was **Amitabh Kant, Former CEO of NITI Aayog & G20 Sherpa**, who emphasized India's readiness for a new era:

"India stands at the cusp of a tourism revolution driven by sustainability, digitalization, and inclusivity. Platforms like ICONIC 2025 are vital in building a roadmap for a globally competitive tourism sector."

The awards were not merely about recognition; they were about showcasing how diverse contributions from sustainable practices to technological innovations are shaping the global face of Indian tourism.

A Global Stage in the Heart of India

The international character of the summit was reflected in the presence of ambassadors and dignitaries from across the world, including representatives from Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Greece, Serbia, Seychelles, and Malta. Their participation reinforced the idea that India's tourism sector is not operating in isolation but as part of a broader global dialogue.

This cultural and diplomatic presence lent the event an added dimension of exchange and collaboration, reminding everyone that tourism is, at its core, about building bridges across nations and communities.

A Vision for Tomorrow

The spirit of the summit was perhaps best captured in the words of **Suman Billa, Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of Tourism**, who noted:

"India has immense potential to become one of the world's most preferred tourism hubs. Events such as ICONIC 2025 highlight the visionaries who are working tirelessly to strengthen the sector."

"ICONIC 2025 is not just an event, it is a collective movement that brings together industry leaders, innovators, and policymakers to shape the future of tourism and hospitality."
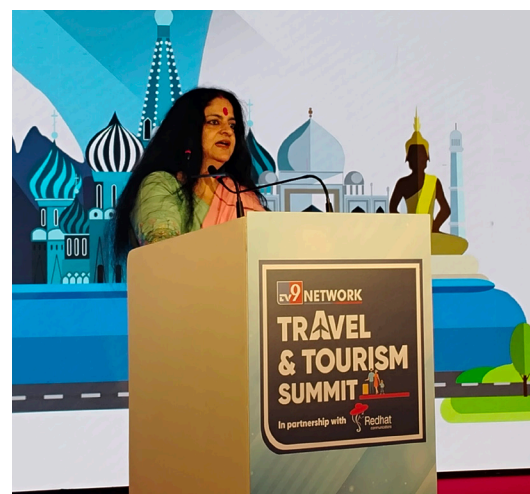
Her words echoed the purpose of the gathering — not simply to recognize what has been achieved, but to inspire what is yet to come.

Where Ideas Meet Opportunities.

The ICONIC 2025 Tourism Summit & Awards succeeded in blending serious

dialogue with grand celebration. Its impact lay not only in the recognition of excellence but also in the conversations that charted a course for the industry's future.

As **Raktim Das, Chief Growth Officer at TV9 Network**, aptly remarked:

> *"We are proud to partner with Redhat Communications for ICONIC 2025. At TV9, we believe in amplifying powerful narratives, and this summit exemplifies the spirit of innovation and collaboration in the tourism sector."*

With its dynamic sessions, global participation, and evening of honors, ICONIC 2025 established itself as one of the most influential platforms in India's tourism landscape — a place where visionaries meet, where excellence is celebrated, and where the future of travel begins to take shape. **BI**

TAX DETOXED

by Sunil Kapoor

In a professional career spanning nearly fifty years, (working since 1975) I have faced many a trial and tribulations and perplexed situations. On one hand, one advises clients who simply can't understand time and again the complicated provisions enunciated under the Income Tax Act, while on the other hand the govt keeps passing hundreds of amendments each year.

The disturbing factor has always been the naive clients who sou-moto take actions on mere hearsay. Some of them have lost huge amounts for want of a clear understanding of the law.

There have been instances where, on reading a mere PRESS RELEASE on a particular issue, they have somehow considered the same as the law of the land and carried out their tax planning accordingly.

These respected and rich clients do not realise that, at times, a Press Release connotes intentions or intended amendments. Many times, such Press Releases do not see the light of the day. Any tax amendment proposed in a Press Release does not become a law until and unless it has been passed by both the houses of the Parliament, approved by the President of India and consequently published in the Official Gazette.

The Press release is merely informing about a proposed amendment. Press Releases are a source of information, but not a law unto themselves.

There is another issue that concerns and continuously pricks a professional's mind. Lending an ear to friends untenable suggestions during the morning walks or while meeting socially . That often leads people to a strenuous path. Simply acting on a rumour or advice given by a friend and believing it to be the gospel truth is a trait that should not be adhered to. It is not right to listen to a person and follow his advice simply because he is influential , successful or famous. He may be wrong in interpreting a particular law.

It so happened that a client submitted certain details for his computation of income to be filed with the return of income. . After going through his documents, I issued a Tax Challan of Rs. 3.24 Crores to him. He had sold a farmhouse and reinvested the proceeds to purchase an immovable property.

He came to me with his knowledgeable Uncle, who was working as a Financial Controller in a multinational company and his over confident broker, who had sold his property for a huge consideration. Neither any Form 26QB was filed nor any tax was deducted by the buyer.

The client was in a state of shock on seeing such a huge amount as Capital Gain Tax. He questioned me regarding the Tax Calculations and the Challan. He asked me as to why should he pay such huge taxes when every tax payer citizen of India knew that in case the sale proceeds of a property are ploughed back in a property no taxes are required to be paid.

I told him that the exemption granted under section 54 of the Act was indeed available in case a property was purchased within the prescribed time, but in this case he had bought commercial properties in a multistoreyed complex at Gurugram and as such had forfeited the exemption under section 54.

One must purchase only and only a residential unit to avail the benefit of Section 54(1).

He stated that the property dealer and the CFO sitting next to him had categorically told him that sale proceeds if invested in a property is exempted from Tax. He had to be shown the provisions and I had to convince him that the interpretation had been done inadvertently in a wrong manner.

Such cases leave a bad taste in the mouth and the Tax payer who had been mislead by self - styled experts.

Moreover he had also not declared his foreign assets in the column FA of the tax return. That was an offence under the new Black Money Act and entailed a ten lakhs penalty for each year.
Please do not lend ears to someone who is not an expert in this field where the govt makes several amendments in each financial year. Please follow the correct laws and get tax detoxed. **BI**

Sunil Kapoor, a Delhi-based tax consultant and SRCC alumnus with a law degree from Delhi University, has advised top national and international clients, from political leaders to Bollywood stars. An awardee for his social contributions, he is also the author of several books, besides being a sportsman, musician, and film writer.

Relationship between Spirituality & Spiritual Tourism

by Vibha Gurtu

Director, Spiritual Tara

So often, we tend to confuse the relationship between Spirituality & Spiritual Tourism. When I got down to thinking about it, I realized that this confusion is essentially because of our lack of understanding of Spirituality. Hence this article today.

The relationship between **spirituality** and **spiritual tourism** is close but also distinct. To understand this statement, let us first understand the meaning of the two terms separately from each other.

Definitions

Spirituality is an **inner journey** of self-discovery, meaning, and connection with something greater than oneself (God, Universe, Higher Self, or Consciousness). It focuses on **personal growth, inner peace, compassion, mindfulness, and healing**. Spirituality is not confined to any one religion - it transcends rituals, practices and dogmas.

Spiritual tourism, on the other hand is when people **travel with the intention of fulfilling spiritual needs** such as peace of mind, inner healing, or experiencing sacred traditions. It transforms spirituality into a **travel experience** - by visiting temples, ashrams, meditation centers, or retreats.

Unlike leisure tourism, its main motive is soul enrichment rather than recreation.

Relationship

Let us now understand the relationship between Spirituality and Spiritual Tourism:

Spirituality is the core essence and Spiritual Tourism is its expression through travel.

Spirituality gives **purpose** to the journey, while spiritual tourism provides the **path** or the medium.

Many people explore spirituality more deeply only after engaging in spiritual tourism, e.g., someone visiting Rishikesh for yoga may return home inspired to adopt meditation as a life-long practice.

Conversely, spirituality often motivates a person to become a spiritual tourist, e.g., a Buddhist devotee traveling to Bodh Gaya to meditate at the place of Buddha's enlightenment.

How the two Interconnect?

- **Personal Transformation:** Spiritual tourism nurtures spirituality by creating space for reflection, rituals, and practices.

- **Community & Culture:** Through spiritual tourism, seekers experience collective spirituality (pilgrimages, satsangs, chanting festivals etc.).

- **Global Exchange:** Spiritual tourism spreads Indian spirituality worldwide, creating cultural bridges.

- **Commercial vs. Experiential Balance:** While spirituality is inner and personal, tourism often adds external elements (hospitality, economy, guided experiences). The challenge is to keep the **authentic spiritual essence alive.**

Conclusion

Spirituality is the inner quest, while spiritual tourism is the **outer journey that supports and enriches this quest**. They are like seed and soil — spirituality is the seed, and spiritual tourism provides the soil, environment, and nourishment for it to grow. **BI**

*V*ibha is an author, a practitioner and facilitator of Shamanism and an intuitive healer. Trained in reiki, pranic healing, hypnotherapy, tarot card reading and others, she founded Aumtara, a spiritual hub, in New Delhi. Vibha is a spiritual guide, talk therapist and an image consultant. She uses her learning and experience to create inner and outer balance. Vibha assists people to break repetitive patterns to achieve life goals through clarity. She provides holistic healing to bring a shift internally in thoughts and externally with behaviour and appearance. She has conducted numerous workshops on image makeover, relationships and empowerment at individual and corporate levels.
To learn more, visit www.vibhagurtu.com

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