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# BUREAUCRACY INDIA

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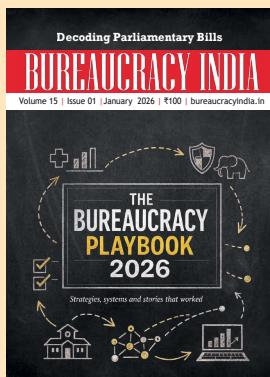
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# BUREAUCRACY INDIA

Volume 15 | Issue 01 | January 2026



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**A**s India steps into 2026, governance is entering a decisive phase, one where outcomes matter more than intent, systems more than symbolism. This January issue of Bureaucracy India is anchored by our cover story, **The Bureaucracy Playbook 2026**, an exploration of how administrators across the country are quietly rewriting the rules of public service delivery.

From districts achieving zero maternal deaths and schools using AI to improve learning outcomes, to officers leveraging data, technology and convergence to solve deeply entrenched problems, the stories we present this month share a common thread: execution.

Beyond the cover, this issue captures the broader governance landscape shaping the year ahead. We track key **Parliamentary bills** and policy debates, examining how legislative intent translates into administrative responsibility. As India looks to position **MSMEs** as engines of global trade, we assess how the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises is translating policy into execution—simplifying compliance, enabling exports and opening new international market pathways.

We also bring you an overview of significant **bureaucratic appointments and retirements**, marking leadership transitions that will influence policy execution in critical ministries and states. In our current affairs section, we unpack the **IndiGo Airlines crisis**, looking beyond the headlines to understand regulatory oversight, institutional response and lessons for aviation governance.

At a time when public trust hinges on delivery, not declarations, this issue underscores a simple truth: good governance is built through systems that endure beyond individuals. As you read through these pages, we hope this edition serves not just as a record of what worked in 2025, but as a playbook for what must be scaled, sustained and strengthened in the years ahead.

This is the India we report and the India we believe in.

Deepak Vyas  
Editor-in-Chief



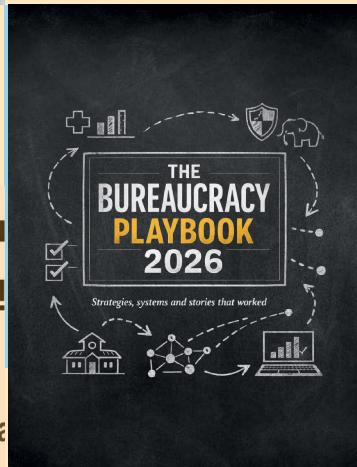
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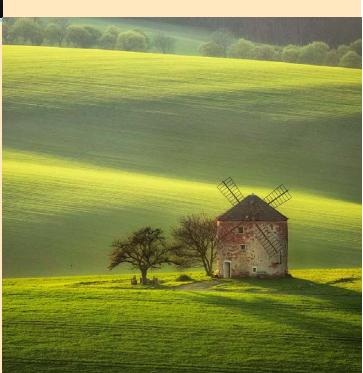
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**ACC Appoints Dilip Kumar as Director General (Training), MSDE at Additional Secretary Rank**

In an order dated 30 December 2025, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) appointed Dilip Kumar, IAS (Punjab cadre: 1995) as Director General (Training) in the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship. The posting is in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary to the Government of India. The order also notes the post was temporarily upgraded for this appointment.

**Lav Aggarwal Appointed as Director General of Foreign Trade by ACC**

In the same 30 December 2025 order, the ACC appointed Lav Aggarwal, IAS (Andhra Pradesh cadre: 1996) as Director General, Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry. He moved from his role as Additional Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development. The order specifies he will serve in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary.

**Shyamal Misra Takes Charge as Administrator, Digital Bharat Nidhi under DoT**

The ACC appointed Shyamal Misra, IAS (Haryana cadre: 1996) as Administrator (Digital Bharat Nidhi) in the Department of Telecommunications. The assignment is in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary. The order places him in a key role overseeing the Digital Bharat Nidhi framework within DoT.

**Aneeta C. Meshram shifted to President's Secretariat as Additional Secretary**

Aneeta C. Meshram, IAS (Uttar Pradesh cadre: 1996) has been appointed as the Additional Secretary of President's Secretariat. She was serving as Additional Secretary, Department of Fertilizers prior to this move. The posting is recorded as a transfer against a vacancy arising due to another officer's movement.

**Caralyn Khongwar Deshmukh Joins Ministry of Women & Child Development as Additional Secretary**

Appointments Committee of the Cabinet posted Caralyn Khongwar Deshmukh, IAS (Madhya Pradesh cadre: 1996) as Additional Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development. She was serving as Additional Secretary, Department of Social Justice & Empowerment. The move is listed as a direct reassignment at the Additional Secretary level.



## Rakesh Gupta Shifted to Health & Family Welfare Ministry as Additional Secretary

On 30 December 2025, the ACC appointed Rakesh Gupta, IAS (Haryana cadre: 1997) as Additional Secretary, Department of Health & Family Welfare. He was serving in the President's Secretariat as Additional Secretary before this posting. The order frames this as part of a linked set of transfers.



## Rabindra Kumar Agarwal Appointed as the new CMD, Food Corporation of India

As per the ACC order, Rabindra Kumar Agarwal, IAS (Kerala cadre: 1997) has been appointed as the Chairman & Managing Director (CMD) of Food Corporation of India (FCI). He moved from Additional Secretary, Ministry of Cooperation. The posting is explicitly at the rank and pay of Additional Secretary.



## Anandrao Vishnu Patil Posted as Additional Secretary, Higher Education Department

Anandrao Vishnu Patil, IAS (Tamil Nadu cadre: 1998) has been appointed as Additional Secretary of the Department of Higher Education (Ministry of Education). He was serving as Additional Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy. The move is a straight intra-ministry shift at Additional Secretary level.



## Sonal Mishra appointed as Chief Labour Commissioner (Central), Ministry of Labour

The ACC appointed Sonal Mishra, IAS (Gujarat cadre: 1997) as Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) in the Ministry of Labour & Employment. She moved from being Additional Secretary, MSDE. The order also notes the appointment was made by keeping the Recruitment Rules in abeyance for the post.



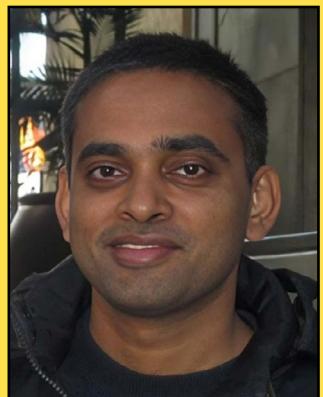
## Srikant Nagulapalli Takes Over as Director General, Directorate General of Hydrocarbons

Srikant Nagulapalli, IAS (Andhra Pradesh cadre: 1998) has been appointed as the Director General of Directorate General of Hydrocarbons under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas. He moved from Additional Secretary, Ministry of Power. The order records the role in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary.



## Ajoy Sharma Promoted as Additional Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Employment

Ajoy Sharma, IAS (Punjab cadre: 1999) has been appointed as Additional Secretary of Ministry of Labour & Employment. He was earlier Joint Secretary in the same ministry. The order notes the appointment involved restoring the post to Additional Secretary level.



# Historic Milestone: Nandini Chakraborty Becomes West Bengal's First Woman Chief Secretary



In a landmark administrative decision, the Government of West Bengal appointed Nandini Chakraborty, a 1994-batch IAS officer of the West Bengal cadre, as the Chief Secretary of the state, effective 31 December 2025.

She succeeds Manoj Pant upon his superannuation, becoming the first woman to hold the top bureaucratic post in the state's history.

Chakraborty has previously served in several key roles, including Principal Secretary to the Governor and Home Secretary, and is widely regarded for her administrative experience and crisis-management capabilities.

Her appointment is being seen as both a symbolic and strategic move, signalling greater representation of women at the highest levels of state administration. With West Bengal entering a politically sensitive phase ahead of upcoming electoral cycles, the elevation of a seasoned officer to the Chief Secretary's post is expected to ensure continuity, administrative stability, and tighter coordination between departments.

The decision also aligns with a broader trend seen across states and at the Centre in December 2025, where multiple senior-level bureaucratic reshuffles were carried out to strengthen governance and institutional leadership.

## Ashutosh Agnihotri Appointed Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change

The ACC appointed Ashutosh Agnihotri, IAS (Assam cadre: 1999) as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change. He moved from being CMD, FCI. This is listed as a senior shift from a PSU leadership role to a central ministry posting.



## Solomon Arokiaraj Posted as Additional Secretary in Cabinet Secretariat



Solomon Arokiaraj, IAS (Andhra Pradesh cadre: 2000) has been appointed as the Additional Secretary of Cabinet Secretariat. He was serving as Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs (Ministry of Finance). The order mentions temporary upgradation of a vacant post to enable this appointment.

## Niranjan Kumar Sudhansu Appointed Additional Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship

Niranjan Kumar Sudhansu, IAS (Maharashtra cadre: 2000) was appointed Additional Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship. The order shows he filled the vacancy created by Sonal Mishra's move to Chief Labour Commissioner (Central). It also records the continuation of temporary upgradation of the post.





## Anu Garg Appointed as Chief Secretary of Odisha, Becomes State's First Woman CS

In a decision taken on 24 December 2025, the Odisha government appointed Anu Garg, a 1991-batch IAS officer of the Odisha cadre, as the state's Chief Secretary. She was serving as Development Commissioner-cum-Additional Chief Secretary before being selected for the top administrative post, and was set to assume charge following the superannuation of the incumbent Chief Secretary at the end of December.

Anu Garg's appointment marks a historic milestone, as she becomes the first woman Chief Secretary of Odisha. Known for her long administrative experience and handling of key development portfolios, her elevation is seen as a move towards continuity, administrative stability, and strengthened governance.

The decision also places Odisha alongside a growing list of states that, in December 2025, elevated senior women IAS officers to the highest bureaucratic positions, reflecting a visible shift in leadership representation within the Indian administrative system.

### Anju Sharma Posted as Additional Chief Secretary, General Administration Department, Gujarat

In the late-December 2025 Gujarat shake-up, Anju Sharma, IAS (Gujarat cadre) was moved as Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) in the General Administration Department (GAD). The ACS-GAD slot is a high-leverage position for statewide personnel, rules, and administrative coordination. Reports place this posting among the top-tier moves in the reshuffle.



### Gujarat Undertakes Major CMO and Administrative Reshuffle in Year-End Bureaucratic Reset

In a late-December 2025 administrative reshuffle, the Gujarat government reassigned senior IAS officers across the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) and key institutions. Sanjeev Kumar, a 1998-batch Gujarat-cadre IAS officer, was appointed Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister and given additional charge of the Home Department, placing him at the centre of political coordination and internal security.

As part of the same exercise, Dr. Vikrant Pandey, 2005-batch IAS, was redesignated as Additional Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, strengthening the CMO's internal coordination framework. The reshuffle also saw Avantika Singh Aulakh posted as Managing Director, Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation (GSPC), a key PSU appointment. Together, the moves signalled a year-end administrative reset aimed at tighter governance and sectoral focus.



सत्यमेव जयते  
ગुજરात सरकार  
Government of Gujarat

# Bureaucrats that retired in December 2025

## **IAS Shantamanu (AGMUT Cadre)**

A 1991-batch IAS officer, Shantamanu retired from senior central deputation roles after serving in Union Territory administration and key policy positions. He held Secretary-level responsibilities and was known for his experience in governance and institutional administration.

## **IAS Dr. Pawan Kotwal (AGMUT Cadre)**

Dr. Kotwal, a 1991-batch officer, retired while serving in a senior advisory role in the Union Government. He earlier served as Chief Secretary of Puducherry and handled multiple administrative and reform-oriented assignments.

## **IAS Prashant Kumar Panda (AGMUT Cadre)**

A senior AGMUT cadre officer of the 1991 batch, Panda served in key secretariat and field roles across Union Territories, contributing to urban governance, land administration, and institutional coordination.

## **IAS Krishan Kumar (AGMUT Cadre)**

Krishan Kumar, a 1991-batch IAS officer, concluded his career after holding senior administrative posts in UT governance, focusing on service delivery, regulatory administration, and coordination between Centre and UTs.

## **IAS Pankaj Jain (Assam–Meghalaya Cadre)**

A 1991-batch officer, Jain retired after decades of service in Assam and Meghalaya, holding senior positions in state administration and contributing to development planning and governance in the North-East.

## **IAS Renette C. Sohkhlet (Assam–Meghalaya Cadre)**

Renette Sohkhlet, a senior woman IAS officer of the 1991 batch, served in important departmental roles in Meghalaya, focusing on social sector administration and state-level governance before retirement.

## **IAS Debajyoti Dutta (Assam–Meghalaya Cadre)**

A 1991-batch officer, Dutta retired after serving in key administrative roles in Assam, including departmental leadership and coordination roles within the state secretariat.

## **IAS Sayed Jawaid Haider (Gujarat Cadre)**

A senior Gujarat cadre officer of the 1991 batch, Haider served in district administration and senior state-level roles, contributing to governance, land administration, and public service delivery.

## **IAS V. J. Rajput (Gujarat Cadre)**

Rajput, a 1991-batch IAS officer, retired after holding several senior field and secretariat postings in Gujarat, with experience in district governance and administrative coordination.

## **IAS D. J. Jadeja (Gujarat Cadre)**

A seasoned Gujarat cadre officer of the 1991 batch, Jadeja served in senior administrative capacities at the state level, focusing on departmental governance and inter-agency coordination.

### **IAS Ramesh Chander Bidhan (Haryana Cadre)**

Bidhan, a 1991-batch IAS officer, retired after a long career in Haryana's state administration, serving in senior departmental and field roles across governance and development sectors.

### **IAS Anjani Kumar Mishra (Jharkhand Cadre)**

A senior Jharkhand cadre officer of the 1991 batch, Mishra served in key departmental positions and played an important role in state-level administrative leadership.

### **IAS Pawan Kumar (Jharkhand Cadre)**

Pawan Kumar, 1991 batch, concluded his service after holding senior administrative roles in Jharkhand, contributing to governance, planning, and institutional management.

### **IAS Kishor Sadashiv Tawade (Maharashtra Cadre)**

A 1991-batch Maharashtra cadre officer, Tawade served in senior state government roles, including secretariat and departmental leadership assignments before retirement.

### **IAS Dr. Subodh Agarwal (Rajasthan Cadre)**

Dr. Agarwal, a prominent 1988-batch IAS officer, retired after serving as Chief Secretary of Rajasthan, playing a key role in state administration, policy formulation, and crisis management.

### **IAS Vikram Kapur (Tamil Nadu Cadre)**

A 1991-batch officer, Kapur retired after serving in senior departmental roles in Tamil Nadu, including key positions in state-level governance and administration.

### **IAS Dr. Atulya Mishra (Tamil Nadu Cadre)**

Dr. Mishra, a 1991-batch IAS officer, served in multiple leadership roles across Tamil Nadu, including departmental and institutional governance positions, before superannuation.

### **IAS Anil Verma (West Bengal Cadre)**

A senior West Bengal cadre officer of the 1991 batch, Verma retired after holding important administrative and departmental roles within the state government.

### **IAS Hirdyesh Mohan (West Bengal Cadre)**

Mohan, a 1991-batch officer, concluded his career after serving in senior administrative positions in West Bengal, with experience in field and secretariat postings.

### **IAS Subhra Chakrabarti (West Bengal Cadre)**

A senior woman IAS officer of the 1991 batch, Chakrabarti retired after a distinguished career in West Bengal's administration, contributing across multiple departments and governance roles.

*The retirement of these senior officers marks a significant generational transition within the Indian Administrative Service, opening leadership space for the next cohort of policymakers and administrators.* 



### **Vishwanath Suresh Appointed CMD of MOIL Limited**

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has appointed Vishwanath Suresh as Chairman-cum-Managing Director of MOIL Limited, India's foremost manganese ore producer, effective 7 January 2026. Suresh, previously Director (Commercial) at NMDC, will serve until superannuation or further orders, bringing extensive mining and steel sector expertise to the PSU's strategic growth agenda.



### **Anil Kumar Singh Takes Charge as Director (Commercial) at NALCO**

National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) has appointed Anil Kumar Singh as Director (Commercial), strengthening its top leadership from early January 2026. Singh's mandate includes reinforcing strategic and commercial operations across India's aluminium value chain, supporting NALCO's competitive positioning and growth initiatives in domestic and export markets.

### **Hardeep Singh Ahluwalia Assumes Additional Charge as MD & CEO of Canara Bank**

Effective 1 January 2026, Shri Hardeep Singh Ahluwalia has taken over additional charge as Managing Director & CEO of Canara Bank. The leadership transition aims to ensure continuity in strategic banking operations and bolster performance metrics as the PSU bank navigates evolving financial sector dynamics.



### **B. Sairam Named Chairman-cum-Managing Director of Coal India Ltd**

B. Sairam, formerly CMD of Northern Coalfields Limited, has been appointed Chairman-cum-Managing Director of Coal India Limited with effect from mid-December 2025. His tenure runs until superannuation on 31 March 2028, as he takes the helm of the world's largest coal producer to drive operational efficiencies and production targets.



## Ravi Ranjan Appointed Managing Director of SBI

The Government has appointed Ravi Ranjan as Managing Director of State Bank of India, effective 15 December 2025. Ranjan's elevation from Deputy Managing Director reflects SBI's focus on leadership continuity and strengthening governance in India's flagship public sector bank during an era of digital transformation and credit growth.



## Saleem Ahmad Takes Charge as CMD of RVNL

Saleem Ahmad has assumed office as Chairman-and-Managing Director of Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) following leadership transition in late December 2025. Ahmad will oversee major infrastructure and rail network expansion projects, reinforcing RVNL's role in national connectivity and public infrastructure development.



## Rajiva Kumar Singh Appointed Executive Director (Exploration) at Coal India



Rajiva Kumar Singh has been appointed Executive Director (Exploration) of Coal India Limited effective 30 December 2025. Singh's role involves steering exploration strategies and unlocking mineral assets, bolstering Coal India's resource base for long-term energy security and mining productivity.

## Priya Ranjan Named Director-in-Charge of Bokaro Steel Plant (SAIL)

SAIL has appointed Priya Ranjan as Director-in-Charge of Bokaro Steel Plant, effective 26 December 2025. The leadership change aims to enhance operational performance and deliver on production targets at one of India's key steelmaking hubs under the Steel Authority of India's umbrella.



## MMTC Appoints AKM Kashyap as Government Nominee Director

MMTC Limited has appointed Mr. AKM Kashyap as Government Nominee Director on its Board, effective 16 December 2025. This strategic board-level addition strengthens governance and enhances stakeholder representation at one of India's leading public sector trading companies.





## NBCC India Bags Major Orders Worth ₹345 Crore

Navratna PSU NBCC (India) Ltd has secured two major contracts totalling ₹345 crore from IIT Mandi and Kandla SEZ, strengthening its project pipeline in infrastructure development. These strategic wins are expected to enhance NBCC's execution capacity and market confidence as it ramps up consultancy and construction services nationwide.



## RailTel Wins ₹35.44 Crore Disaster Communication Project

Public sector enterprise RailTel Corporation of India Ltd has received a ₹35.44 crore contract from the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai to build an advanced disaster management communication system. The project will deliver a comprehensive, redundant emergency network to improve response coordination in India's financial capital.

## Bharat Coking Coal Ltd IPO Draws Strong Anchor Investment

State-run Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL) has raised ₹273 crore from anchor investors including LIC and Société Générale just ahead of its IPO launch. The robust anchor round reflects strong institutional confidence and sets a positive tone for the PSU's first major public market debut in 2026.



भारत कोकिंग कोल लिमिटेड  
Bharat Coking Coal Limited



## NPCIL Reports Major Progress at Rajasthan Atomic Power Project

Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) has announced significant construction and commissioning milestones at the Rajasthan Atomic Power Project (RAPP) in early January 2026. Unit-7 has achieved 90 % power level, while RAPP-8 has successfully completed Primary Heat Transport (PHT) system hot conditioning — key pre-commissioning milestones that bring the reactors closer to grid connection and operational readiness. These advances underscore India's continued investment in clean, baseload nuclear capacity as part of diversified energy infrastructure, supporting both energy security and decarbonisation objectives.



# India Set to Fast-Track IPOs of PSU Green Energy Arms in 2026

The Government of India, through the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), has announced plans to fast-track the public listing of green energy subsidiaries of major public sector undertakings, marking a decisive push in PSU-led energy transition and capital mobilisation. Two key entities — NLC Green Energy Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of NLC India Limited, and SJVN Green Energy Ltd, under SJVN Limited — are proposed to be listed in 2026.

According to official disclosures made in late December 2025, NLC Green is expected to tap the capital markets in the first half of 2026, while SJVN Green's listing is planned for the second half of the year. The IPOs are aimed at unlocking value from renewable assets, raising growth capital for solar, wind and hybrid energy projects, and reducing funding pressure on parent PSUs. The move also aligns with the government's broader disinvestment and asset-monetisation roadmap without diluting strategic control.

The proposed listings are expected to attract strong investor interest, given India's expanding renewable energy targets and policy stability in the sector. By carving out green subsidiaries, the government is also seeking to create focused, scalable clean-energy platforms while enhancing transparency and market-based valuation. The initiative is being viewed as one of the most consequential PSU reforms ahead of Budget 2026, reinforcing India's commitment to sustainable growth and climate-aligned public sector restructuring.



## NTPC Green, NHPC & SJVN Forge Joint Ventures for Solar Growth

Public sector energy arms NTPC Green Energy Ltd (NGEL), NHPC, and SJVN are forming joint ventures with several state governments to overcome land acquisition hurdles for large-scale solar parks. Under this model, states take equity stakes (26–49 %) to fast-track project development and boost renewable capacity nationwide.



## SECI (RECI) Invites Bids for 2000 MW Interstate Solar Projects



Solar Energy Corporation of India Ltd (SECI), a central PSU under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, has issued bids to set up 2000 MW grid-connected solar power projects aimed at strengthening India's solar generation pipeline and supporting national renewable targets under the National Solar Mission framework.

## NLC India Wins 110 MW Captive Solar Project in UP

NLC India Ltd has secured a Letter of Award (LoA) to build 110 MW captive solar PV power projects for the National Capital Region Transport Corporation in Uttar Pradesh. The 25-year power purchase agreement is expected to expand NLC's clean energy footprint and enhance long-term revenue streams.





# Accelerating Global Trade

## Unlocking India's MSME Power house Fostering Partnerships, Connectivity, and Resilience in a New World Order



**by Ravi Nandan Sinha**

Director – Strategic Investments & Economic Partnerships, MSME Business Forum India

**I**n the evolving matrix of global trade, India's Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are no longer peripheral—they are central to economic transformation. As the world reshapes supply chains and prioritizes resilience, Indian MSMEs are uniquely positioned at the crossroads of opportunity and challenge.

With nearly **63 million MSMEs**, the sector contributes around **30% to India's GDP** and employs over **110 million people**. Remarkably, MSMEs account for over **45% of India's exports**, highlighting both their existing impact and untapped global potential.

### The Momentum Is Real

Recent figures underscore this growth:

- Exports surged from ₹3.95 lakh crore in FY21 to ₹12.39 lakh crore in FY25.
- Exporting MSMEs increased from 52,849 to 1,73,350 in just four years.

Yet, while these gains are encouraging, MSMEs' share in total exports slipped to 43.6% in FY23 before rebounding to 45.7% in FY24. The government's target of 60% MSME export share by 2025 remains ambitious and calls for systemic support.

### 1. Partnerships: MSMEs Can't Go Global Alone

In international trade, collaboration is key. MSMEs need public-private linkages, cluster collaborations, and cross-border alliances to access global value chains (GVCs). Government programs like Districts as Export Hubs and Trade Connect are helping, but scale and awareness remain limited.

Real success stories are emerging:

- Textile MSMEs in Surat are partnering directly with fashion brands in Italy and Turkey.
- Agri-tech MSMEs in Telangana are exporting irrigation tech to Africa.

These aren't isolated achievements—they're proof points for a broader strategic shift.

## 2. Connectivity: The Infrastructure of Access

Without efficient logistics and digital integration, MSMEs cannot thrive in global markets.

- India's logistics cost remains high at 13–14% of GDP, versus 8–9% in developed economies.
- Initiatives like PM Gati Shakti, logistics parks, and port modernization aim to address physical bottlenecks.

Digitally, the gap is starker: only 15–20% of MSMEs are engaged in ecommerce or global platforms. Expanding this footprint could be transformative. Digital trade platforms, AI-enabled logistics, and crossborder payment solutions can help MSMEs scale globally.

However, rural and Tier 2/3 MSMEs often lack both digital access and literacy. Bridging this divide is critical to inclusion.

## 3. Resilience: A Must-Have, Not a Luxury

Post-pandemic disruptions have made one thing clear—resilience is survival. For MSMEs, this means:

- Financial flexibility through access to trade finance and risk hedging.
- Adaptability to policy shifts, tariffs, or demand changes.
- Diversified supply chains to avoid dependency on single markets.
- ESG compliance, increasingly required in global procurement.

Schemes like CGTMSE have extended ₹9+ lakh crore in collateral-free loans, but micro enterprises remain under-informed and under-covered.

## 4. Strategic Priorities for Global Growth

To fast-track global integration, India must adopt a focused five-point agenda:

### i. Expand Export Facilitation

Establish more Export Facilitation Centers (EFCs), especially in underserved districts, to assist MSMEs with compliance, certifications, and buyer linkages.

### ii. Strengthen Digital Export Ecosystems

Develop localized digital export platforms offering product listings, documentation, payments, and market intelligence.

### iii. Build Global MSME Alliances

Leverage embassies, trade delegations, and industry bodies (like FICCI, CII) to foster international MSME partnerships and market access.

### iv. Incentivize Sustainability

Introduce incentives for ESG alignment—such as tax rebates or certification support—to access high-value markets in the EU and US.

### v. Promote Sector-Specific Clusters

Support clusters like leather in Kanpur, gems in Surat, auto parts in Pune with common infrastructure, testing labs, and design centers to boost productivity and exports.

## Case in Point: Policy into Practice

A recent initiative in Aurangabad, Maharashtra saw engineering MSMEs, supported by SIDBI and a Japanese trade delegation, secure a \$12 million export deal for precision components. This outcome began with a regional trade fair and scaled through targeted support. Replicate this across 100 districts, and India's MSME export engine could exceed expectations.

## Conclusion: The Time Is Now

Geopolitical shifts, "China+1" sourcing strategies, and the push for diversified supply chains have made the global trade environment more accessible for Indian businesses than ever before.

India's MSMEs—nimble, innovative, and resilient—are poised to lead. But scaling this opportunity requires:

- Partnerships to unlock new markets
- Connectivity to reduce friction
- Resilience to navigate global shocks

With coordinated policy, infrastructure upgrades, and digital inclusion, India's MSMEs won't just participate—they'll help shape the next chapter of global trade. **BI**



# Parliament in 2025: The Laws We Made, the Laws We Didn't, and the Story They Tell

by Dhwani Vyas

Every January issue demands more than reflection; it demands assessment. It is a moment to examine not just what was done, but what was chosen. Each bill introduced, passed, or left pending reflects a hierarchy of priorities that shapes governance long after parliamentary sessions adjourn.

In 2025, Parliament functioned with visible urgency. The legislative calendar was crowded, debates were compressed, and decisions often came quickly. A steady stream of bills moved through the Houses, some cleared the full law-making process, others stalled in committees or procedural uncertainty.

The pattern of legislation across the year points to a deliberate policy direction. Economic and administrative frameworks were rewritten with speed and confidence, signalling a preference for clarity, centralisation, and rule-based governance. At the same time, bills involving constitutional change, labour rights, and institutional autonomy encountered slower movement, reflecting political caution rather than legislative inertia.

This story reads 2025 not as a simple legislative count, but as a map of intent. The bills that advanced, those that stalled, and those still under debate together indicate how the Indian state is calibrating power, pace, and priority and what that calibration may mean for governance in the years ahead.

# Parliamentary Bills in India –

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## 2025 Overview



### Bills Introduced in 2025

- 18 New Bills Proposed
- 7 Amendment Bills
- 5 Finance Bills

### Bills Passed & Became Law (2025)

- 20 Bills Enacted into Law
- Key Reforms Approved
- Policy Overhauls Completed

### Bills Not Enacted / Pending

- 8 Bills Awaiting Decision
- 4 Bills Deferred

### Bills Under Debate / Discussion

- 6 Bills in Committee Review
- Ongoing Parliamentary Debates

### Bills That Were Passed and Became Law in 2025

1. Income-tax Act, 2025 (through Income-tax (No.2) Bill) — modernised the core direct tax law and received presidential assent.
2. Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 — amendment to the Waqf law to reform governance and administration of Waqf properties.
3. Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025 — regulating online gaming and banning real-money gambling.
4. National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Act, 2025 — reforming India's anti-doping framework and aligning with international codes.
5. Monsoon Session Bills like Manipur GST Amendment, Central Excise Amendment, Health Security Cess Bill, became law in late 2025.
6. VB-G RAM G Bill (Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission) — passed Lok Sabha as a rural employment policy shift (status suggests passage, though final assent may be pending reporting).
7. Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Act, 2025 — increased FDI cap to 100% in insurance sector.
8. SHANTI Bill (Nuclear Energy Bill, 2025) — passed by Lok Sabha; final enactment steps reported.

***Important: The Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 and Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 2025 while reported passed by both houses of Parliament are not yet listed with final presidential assent dates.***



## A Year of Rewriting the Framework

If one word defines Parliament in 2025, it is structural.

Rather than incremental tweaks, the government pushed for reforms that rewired long-standing frameworks. Nowhere was this more visible than in taxation. The Income-tax overhaul was not just about rates or slabs; it was about replacing a legal structure that had accumulated decades of amendments, explanations, and litigation. The new law sought clarity, predictability, and digital compatibility, reflecting an administration keen on making governance faster and cleaner, even if that meant reopening foundational statutes.

This willingness to replace, rather than repair, was seen across sectors. Shipping laws rooted in colonial-era thinking were rewritten. Sports governance long criticised for opacity was pulled under a more formal regulatory umbrella. Even niche-looking amendments, like GST changes for specific regions, were part of a larger attempt to standardise and streamline administration.

What stands out is not just the number of bills, but their intent: to make governance less interpretive and more rule-based. Whether one agrees with the approach or not, the legislative message was clear: complexity was no longer being tolerated as a necessary evil.

## The Digital State Tightens Its Grip

Perhaps the most socially visible legislative move of 2025 came in the digital space.

Online gaming regulation turned into a defining moment for how India sees emerging digital industries. For years, gaming existed in a grey zone growing rapidly, largely unregulated, and often controversial. When Parliament finally stepped in, it did so decisively: drawing a clear line between skill-based gaming and real-money gambling, promoting one while prohibiting the other.

This was not just about gaming. It was about the Indian state asserting its role as a regulator in fast-moving digital ecosystems. The law made it clear that innovation would be welcomed, but not at the cost of social risk or regulatory ambiguity.

For startups and platforms, the impact was immediate. For policymakers, it set a precedent. If gaming could be regulated so firmly, other digital sectors from fintech to AI-driven services may not be far behind. 2025 may well be remembered as the year India decided that “wait and watch” was no longer a viable digital policy.

## Opening Doors, Guarding Control

Another striking pattern of 2025 was selective liberalisation.

The insurance sector reform, which allowed full foreign ownership, was framed as a growth move one aimed at capital infusion, technological upgrade, and deeper market penetration. It signalled confidence in India's regulatory capacity: the belief that the system is strong enough to absorb global capital without losing control.

A similar logic appeared in strategic infrastructure. The nuclear energy bill, despite intense opposition protest, reflected a willingness to rethink long-standing state monopolies. Allowing private participation in such a sensitive sector is not a small political decision. It suggests that the government sees public-private partnerships not as compromises, but as tools for acceleration.

Yet, these reforms were not presented as blind deregulation. Safeguards, oversight mechanisms, and state authority remained central. The message was nuanced: India is open, but not hands-off.

## Where the Law Slowed Down

For all its momentum, Parliament in 2025 also revealed its limits.

Some bills especially those touching daily work life, education, and constitutional change struggled to move forward. The Right to Disconnect proposal, for instance, captured public imagination precisely because it addressed a lived reality: constant connectivity, blurred boundaries, and workplace burnout. Yet, like most private member bills, it remained more of a conversation starter than a legislative outcome.

Education reform proposals faced their own hurdles. Structural changes in education often invite broader ideological debates about access, autonomy, and centralisation and 2025 was no exception. While discussions continued, consensus proved elusive.

Constitutional and governance-related amendments also moved slowly. These bills require not just parliamentary numbers but political alignment, and often careful navigation through committee scrutiny. Their pending status is not necessarily failure — but it does indicate that some changes demand more than legislative speed.

## What Passed Easily and Why That Matters

An interesting reading of 2025 is not just what passed, but what passed without prolonged resistance.

Economic and administrative reforms moved relatively smoothly. Tax, insurance, sector-specific amendments — these enjoyed a clearer legislative runway. In contrast, bills dealing with social rights, labour boundaries, and institutional autonomy faced longer debates or delays.

This contrast offers insight into the current policy hierarchy. Economic efficiency and administrative clarity appear to command quicker consensus, while social restructuring still demands negotiation. It does not mean these issues are ignored — only that they move on a different clock.

## A Parliament That Chose Direction Over Delay

Critics often argue that Parliament is rushing legislation. Supporters argue that decisiveness is overdue. 2025 provided ammunition to both sides.

Multiple bills were introduced and passed within tight session windows, sometimes amid opposition protests and walkouts. At the same time, committee processes, pending bills, and prolonged discussions showed that Parliament was not uniformly bulldozing every proposal.

What emerges is a Parliament that is choosing its battles. On issues it sees as essential to economic direction or strategic positioning, it moved fast. On others, it allowed time intentionally or otherwise.

## Reading 2025 as a Political Signal

Taken together, the legislative record of 2025 points toward a state that is:

- Confident in regulatory authority
- Comfortable rewriting legacy systems
- Willing to open sectors to private and foreign participation
- Cautious, even hesitant, on deeply social or rights-based transformations

This does not make 2025 a year of extremes. Instead, it marks a year of prioritisation.

## What 2026 Is Likely to Bring

As 2026 begins, the unfinished business of 2025 will matter as much as its achievements.

Implementation will test the credibility of major reforms. Pending bills may return with revisions. Debates around work culture, education, and institutional reform are unlikely to fade. If anything, the groundwork laid in 2025 suggests that Parliament in 2026 will be less about introduction and more about consolidation.

The laws of 2025 tell us where India wants to go. The debates that remain will decide how balanced that journey is.

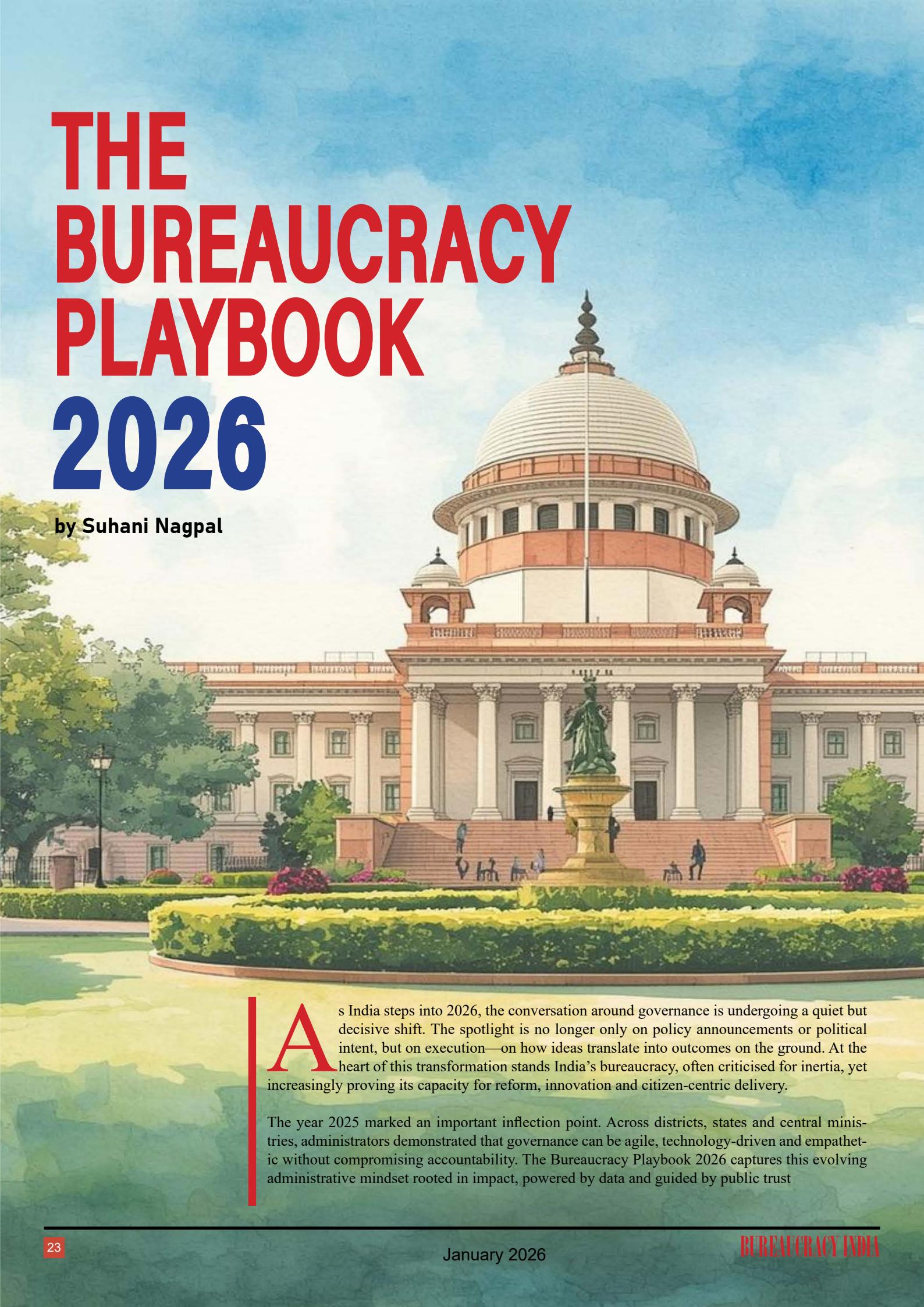
And perhaps that is the real takeaway for a January issue: law is not just about passage — it is about pace, priorities, and patience. 

# THE BUREAUCRACY PLAYBOOK 2026

*From files to frameworks: governance that delivers*

# THE BUREAUCRACY PLAYBOOK 2026

by Suhani Nagpal



**A**s India steps into 2026, the conversation around governance is undergoing a quiet but decisive shift. The spotlight is no longer only on policy announcements or political intent, but on execution—on how ideas translate into outcomes on the ground. At the heart of this transformation stands India's bureaucracy, often criticised for inertia, yet increasingly proving its capacity for reform, innovation and citizen-centric delivery.

The year 2025 marked an important inflection point. Across districts, states and central ministries, administrators demonstrated that governance can be agile, technology-driven and empathetic without compromising accountability. The Bureaucracy Playbook 2026 captures this evolving administrative mindset rooted in impact, powered by data and guided by public trust

# Top Bureaucratic Wins of 2025



Outcome-led governance that delivered measurable impact

## ✓ Education Leap through AI (Tonk, Rajasthan)

- Personalised learning tools lifted Class 10 maths outcomes and classroom engagement.

## ✓ Flood Response with Speed & Transparency (Amritsar, Punjab)

- Multi-agency coordination enabled rapid rescues and relief.

## ✓ Legacy Waste to Zero (Tinsukia, Assam)

- Bio-mining cleared decades-old dumps, creating a replicable sanitation model.

## ✓ Zero Maternal Deaths Model (Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh)

- Proactive tracking of high-risk pregnancies saved lives.

## ✓ Aspirational Block Breakthrough (Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh)

- Converged action across health, education and governance.

## ✓ Child Protection through Prevention (Sepahijala, Tripura)

- Early-warning systems curbed child marriage and teen pregnancy risks.

## ✓ Playgrounds as Public Policy (Pathanamthitta, Kerala)

- Revived play spaces improved attendance, wellbeing and community engagement.

## ✓ AI for Human–Wildlife Coexistence (Chhattisgarh)

- Predictive alerts reduced human–elephant conflict and casualties.

## Case Profiles: Officers & Teams Who Delivered

### Saumya Jha, IAS — District Magistrate, Tonk (Rajasthan)

*Education reform through technology*



Facing weak foundational numeracy, the district introduced an AI-enabled personalised learning platform for government schools. The system analysed individual learning gaps and delivered adaptive content, allowing students to progress at their own pace. Teachers were trained to use the platform as a classroom aid, not a substitute helping them identify struggling students and modify instruction accordingly. What distinguished the initiative was its administrative design. Real-time dashboards tracked student progress, attendance and topic-wise performance, enabling school principals and district officials to intervene early. Regular reviews ensured that digital adoption translated into learning outcomes rather than superficial compliance.

**Impact:** Significant improvement in Class 10 mathematics results within weeks; higher attendance and engagement.

### Sakshi Sawhney, IAS — Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar (Punjab)

*Hands-on crisis leadership*



When severe flooding threatened large parts of Amritsar district, Deputy Commissioner Sakshi Sawhney, IAS demonstrated how crisis management succeeds when administrative leadership is visible, decisive and coordinated. Faced with rising water levels and rapidly evolving ground conditions, the district administration moved swiftly from preparedness to execution. Sawhney led multi-agency coordination involving the Army, NDRF, SDRF, police, health services and local volunteers. Rescue operations were prioritised in high-risk zones, with boats and emergency equipment deployed in real time. Temporary shelters were set up in schools and community buildings, providing food, clean water, medical aid and sanitation facilities for displaced families. What distinguished the response was its end-to-end management approach. Alongside rescue and relief, the administration focused on post-flood safety—inspecting buildings, restoring essential services and preventing secondary health risks such as water-borne diseases. Medical teams were mobilised early, and relief distribution was monitored to ensure fairness and coverage.

**Impact:** Hundreds rescued swiftly; reduced casualties and faster recovery.

### Swapneel Paul, IAS — District Commissioner, Tinsukia (Assam) Sanitation and sustainability



When Swapneel Paul took charge as District Commissioner of Tinsukia, the district was grappling with decades of accumulated legacy waste — open dumpsites that posed serious environmental and public health risks. Rather than opting for cosmetic clean-ups, the administration chose a scientific, long-term solution rooted in sustainability. Paul led the implementation of a bio-mining strategy to systematically clear legacy dumps. Waste was scientifically segregated into biodegradable, recyclable and non-recyclable streams. Organic waste was processed into compost, recyclable material channelled to authorised handlers, and non-recyclable waste converted into refuse-derived fuel (RDF) reducing landfill dependency while creating usable energy resources.

**Impact:** First legacy-waste-free district in the Northeast; scalable waste-management template.

### Aditi Garg, IAS - District Collector, Mandsaur (Madhya Pradesh) Maternal health turnaround



As District Collector, she led the implementation of the Mandsaur Holistic Health Model, integrating real-time pregnancy tracking, strengthened antenatal care and rapid referral mechanisms for high-risk cases. By aligning frontline health workers, digital dashboards and hospital preparedness, her leadership helped Mandsaur achieve zero maternal deaths in government facilities during the reporting period, setting a replicable benchmark for district-level maternal healthcare governance.

**Impact:** Zero maternal deaths in government facilities over the reporting period.

### Shashank Tripathi, IAS - District Magistrate, Barabanki (Uttar Pradesh) Wins at the Block Level: Governance That Reached the Last Mile

Puredalai block in Barabanki emerged as a nationally recognised Aspirational Block by demonstrating how convergence rather than new schemes can dramatically improve outcomes. Under the leadership of District Magistrate Shashank Tripathi, IAS, the district administration positioned the block as a pilot for integrated governance, focusing on health, education and basic service delivery. The administrative strategy was clear: tight monitoring, decentralised execution and community



participation. Health indicators were prioritised through institutional deliveries, immunisation coverage and nutrition tracking. Education outcomes improved with better teacher deployment, attendance monitoring and coordination between schools and block officials. What distinguished Puredalai was the weekly review mechanism at the block level, where health, education, ICDS and rural development officials reviewed data together instead of operating in silos. Digital dashboards were complemented by field visits, ensuring that numbers reflected ground reality. The results were tangible. Puredalai earned national recognition under NITI Aayog's Aspirational Blocks Programme, not for isolated success stories but for consistent, sustained improvement across indicators. More importantly, service delivery stabilised—benefits reached households on time, leakages reduced and trust in local administration improved. This case reinforced a critical governance lesson: blocks are the fulcrum of India's development, and when empowered with leadership, data and coordination, they can outperform expectations without additional resources.

**Impact:** National recognition for aspirational block performance and sustained service delivery.

### **Siddharth Jaiswal, IAS - District Magistrate and Collector, Sepahijala (Tripura) Curbing Child Marriage and Teen Pregnancy: Preventive Governance at the Community Level**



Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy remain among the most complex social challenges confronting district administrations deeply rooted in poverty, social norms and lack of awareness. IAS Siddharth Jaiswal, addressed this challenge not through sporadic enforcement alone, but by building a preventive, multi-departmental governance model that focused on early intervention and community ownership. Under his leadership, the district administration strengthened real-time surveillance mechanisms to identify vulnerable households and high-risk cases. Coordination between education, health, women & child development, police and panchayat institutions ensured that early warning signals such as school dropouts, early engagement announcements or migration stress were flagged before they escalated into child

marriages.

**Impact:** A significant reduction in reported child marriage attempts, improved adolescent health outreach and stronger institutional coordination to address teen pregnancy risks.

### **Prem Krishnan S, IAS - District Collector, Pathanamthitta (Kerala) Reclaiming Childhood Through Governance**



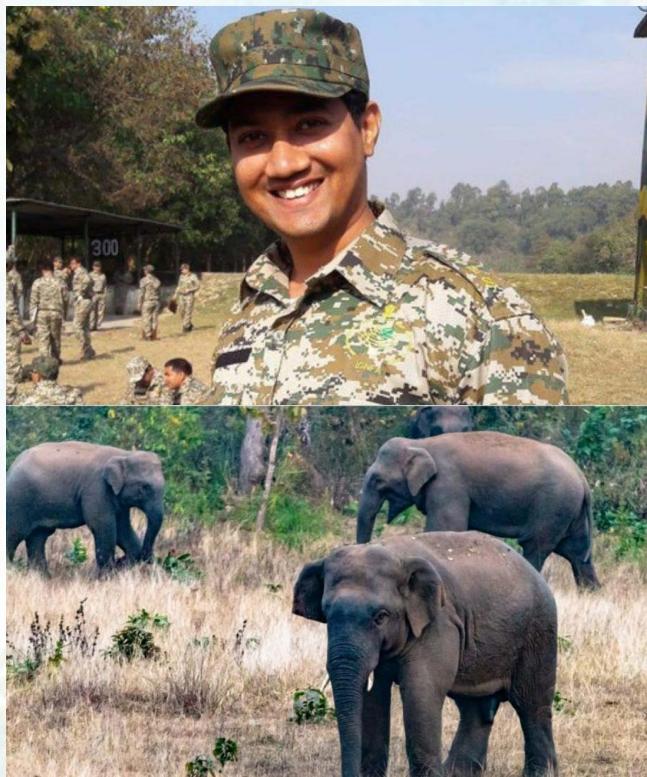
In an era dominated by screens, academic pressure and shrinking public spaces, IAS Prem Krishnan S, identified a less visible but deeply consequential governance gap—the disappearance of play from children's lives. Recognising that physical activity is directly linked to mental health, learning outcomes and social development, the district administration initiated a systemic effort to bring children back to playgrounds. Under his leadership, the administration mapped unused and encroached public lands, school grounds and community spaces that could be restored as safe play areas. Coordination between education, urban local bodies, rural development and sports departments ensured that playground revival was not treated as a one-off beautification exercise but as a sustained public service. The initiative focused on access, safety and inclusion. School playgrounds were opened beyond class hours, community play zones were revived in neighbourhoods, and basic sports equipment was made available through local bodies and CSR partnerships. Teachers, parents and local volunteers were engaged to encourage participation, especially among girls and younger children who often face social barriers to outdoor play.

**Impact:** Extended beyond physical fitness as schools reported improved attendance, better classroom behaviour and stronger peer interaction.

### **Varun Jain, IFS Using AI to Prevent Human–Elephant Conflict: Technology for Conservation and Coexistence**

Human–elephant conflict has long been one of the most challenging governance issues in forested districts causing loss

of human life, crop damage and retaliatory harm to wildlife. IFS Varun Jain, approached this sensitive issue with a blend of technology, conservation ethics and community safety, using artificial intelligence not as a novelty but as a life-saving administrative tool. Under his leadership, the administration deployed an AI-enabled early warning system to track elephant movement patterns in forest corridors and human habitation zones. Using a combination of camera traps, thermal sensors and data analytics, the system identified elephant presence and movement in real time. Alerts were automatically sent to forest officials, village volunteers and local residents through mobile notifications and public alert mechanisms. The governance design focused on prevention rather than reaction. Instead of responding after incidents occurred, the system enabled pre-emptive actions; temporary road diversions, controlled movement of people, rapid forest staff deployment and timely warnings to farmers and villagers. Community volunteers were trained to interpret alerts and assist in local-level coordination.



**Impact:** A marked reduction in human–elephant encounters, fewer injuries and fatalities, and lower crop loss during peak migration periods

## Digital Governance in Action: From Portals to People

Digital governance in India has matured beyond the creation of portals. In 2025, the focus shifted decisively to **usability, integration and last-mile reach**.

Administrators leveraged real-time dashboards, data analytics and AI-driven tools to monitor schemes, flag delays and correct leakages. Grievance redressal systems became more responsive, with time-bound resolutions and feedback loops that restored citizen confidence. Single-window platforms reduced discretion, minimised physical interfaces and cut approval timelines across sectors.

Importantly, successful digital initiatives were those that remained **human-centred**. Officers ensured that technology acted as an enabler, not a barrier—through assisted service centres, vernacular interfaces and on-ground facilitation. The lesson from 2025 was clear: digital governance succeeds not when systems are sophisticated, but when they are accessible.

## Districts as Laboratories of Change

India's real governance innovations continue to emerge from its districts. In 2025, districts functioned as **living laboratories**, testing solutions that were locally relevant yet nationally replicable.

Several districts demonstrated how data-led micro-planning could improve outcomes in education, healthcare and livelihoods. Aspirational district strategies evolved into sustainable models, driven by local leadership and community participation. Officers forged partnerships with civil society, startups and the private sector to address gaps in service delivery.

What set successful districts apart was not funding alone, but **administrative imagination**—the ability to adapt central schemes to local realities while maintaining accountability. These district-level successes form the backbone of India's governance story for 2026.

## Citizen-First Administration: Rebuilding Trust

A defining theme of 2025 was the renewed emphasis on the citizen as a stakeholder, not a beneficiary. Administrators increasingly recognised that trust is the most valuable currency of governance. Time-bound service guarantees, transparent processes and open communication became core administrative priorities. Public hearings, grievance camps and participatory forums helped bridge the distance between the state and citizens. Technology amplified these efforts, but empathy remained the driving force.

Citizen-first administration in 2025 also meant **accountability from within**—clear performance metrics, internal reviews and ethical leadership. The result was a gradual but visible improvement in public perception of governance institutions.

## The Bureaucrat of the Future

As India advances into 2026, the role of the bureaucrat is being redefined.

The administrator of the future must combine policy understanding with technological fluency, leadership with collaboration, and authority with accessibility.

Training and capacity-building are evolving to reflect these demands. Exposure to global best practices, data literacy, behavioural insights and crisis leadership are becoming integral to administrative development. Equally important is the emphasis on integrity and ethical decision-making in an era of speed, scrutiny and social media.

The future bureaucrat is not merely a rule-keeper, but a problem-solver; someone who listens, adapts and delivers.

## The Road Ahead: Governance That Delivers

*The Bureaucracy Playbook 2026* is ultimately a story of transition from intent to impact, from hierarchy to collaboration, and from opacity to openness. The achievements of 2025 prove that reform within the system is not only possible, but already underway.

As India navigates economic ambitions, urban pressures, climate challenges and global responsibilities, the quality of its governance will be decisive. And at the centre of that governance stands a bureaucracy that is learning to move faster, think smarter and serve better.

In 2026, the mandate is clear: **deliver, scale and sustain.** 





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# Beyond Tariffs: Inside the India – New Zealand Free Trade Agreement

by Anjali Bhardwaj

In a significant step for India's global trade diplomacy, India and New Zealand concluded negotiations on a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in December 2025, setting the stage for a deeper economic partnership between two like-minded democracies. While the agreement awaits formal signing and ratification, it is already being viewed as one of India's most forward-looking trade pacts in the Oceania region.

The FTA reflects India's broader strategy of diversifying trade partners and strengthening ties beyond traditional markets. For New Zealand, the deal opens access to one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, with a consumer base exceeding 1.4 billion people.

## Expanding Trade Horizons

At the core of the agreement lies a clear ambition: to significantly expand bilateral trade over the coming decade. Under the concluded terms, New Zealand will provide zero-duty market access to 100 percent of Indian exports, benefiting sectors such as textiles, leather goods, engineering products, pharmaceuticals, gems and jewellery, and marine exports. This move is expected to give Indian manufacturers and MSMEs a strong competitive edge in the New Zealand market.

India, on its part, has agreed to reduce or eliminate tariffs on a large share of New Zealand's exports, covering roughly 70 percent of tariff lines and around 95 percent of trade value. Sensitive sectors, particularly dairy, have been handled cautiously through phased reductions and safeguard mechanisms, reflecting domestic concerns while keeping the agreement commercially meaningful.

## Services, Skills and Mobility

Unlike many traditional trade agreements, the India–New Zealand FTA places strong emphasis on services and people-to-people mobility. The pact includes provisions aimed at easing the movement of skilled professionals in sectors such as IT, healthcare, engineering and education. Indian students stand to benefit from improved post-study work opportuni-



ties, while young professionals may access expanded working-holiday visa routes.

These measures underline the growing recognition that modern trade agreements are no longer limited to goods alone but must also facilitate talent exchange and knowledge partnerships.

## Investment and Long-Term Cooperation

Another key pillar of the agreement is investment. New Zealand has indicated a long-term commitment to invest significantly in India across infrastructure, renewable energy, education and agri-technology. For India, this aligns well with national priorities such as manufacturing expansion, green growth and skill development.

Beyond economics, the FTA reinforces strategic trust between the two nations. It strengthens cooperation in areas such as supply-chain resilience, innovation, and sustainable development — themes that are increasingly central to global trade governance.

## Strategic Significance

The India–New Zealand FTA comes at a time when global trade is marked by uncertainty, protectionism and shifting alliances. Against this backdrop, the agreement signals India's willingness to engage through balanced, mutually beneficial trade frameworks that protect domestic interests while embracing global integration.

Once formally signed and implemented, the pact is expected to reshape India's engagement with the Oceania region, offering exporters, professionals and investors new opportunities. For New Zealand, it represents a gateway into South Asia's economic growth story.

As both countries prepare for the next steps in 2026, the India–New Zealand FTA stands as a reminder that strategic trade partnerships are as much about shared values and long-term vision as they are about tariffs and market access. BI



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# Too Big to Falter? The IndiGo Crisis and the Cost of Rapid Aviation Growth

by Anjali Bhardwaj

In early December 2025, India's aviation sector was shaken by an unprecedented operational crisis at IndiGo, the country's largest airline. What began as scattered delays quickly escalated into mass flight cancellations, nationwide disruption, and regulatory intervention. Airports across Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata witnessed chaos as passengers faced uncertainty, long queues, missed connections, and sudden itinerary changes.

For an airline that prides itself on reliability and scale, the crisis marked a rare but consequential breakdown. Over several days, hundreds of flights were cancelled daily, with peak disruption seeing nearly a thousand cancellations in a single day. The impact was immediate and far-reaching. Business travellers missed meetings, families were stranded during the peak winter travel season, and airfares on alternative carriers surged overnight due to sudden demand.

IndiGo attributed the disruption to a convergence of factors rather than a single failure. Updated pilot duty and rest norms, crew roster misalignments, winter scheduling pressures, and minor technical constraints combined to strain operations. While none of these issues were new in isolation, their cumulative effect exposed how thin the margin for error can be in a tightly run aviation system.

The crisis drew swift attention from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The regulator ordered IndiGo to reduce its flight operations by five percent to stabilise schedules and ensure safety compliance. Senior airline officials were summoned, explanations were sought, and internal oversight failures came under scrutiny. In a significant move, multiple flight operations inspectors were removed from their roles, signalling the seriousness with which regulators viewed the disruption.

For passengers, the experience was deeply frustrating. Many reported cancellations within hours of departure, forcing last-minute rebookings or cancellations of entire trips. Airport terminals became crowded with travellers seeking information, refunds, or al-

ternative flights. While IndiGo announced refunds and compensation in line with regulations, the sheer scale of affected passengers made resolution uneven and slow. The airline later estimated that compensation payouts could cross several hundred crore rupees, underlining the financial cost of operational instability.

Beyond immediate inconvenience, the episode raised deeper questions about India's rapidly expanding aviation ecosystem. IndiGo operates a massive network and carries the largest share of domestic passengers. When such an airline falters, the ripple effects spread across the entire system. The crisis highlighted structural challenges: aggressive capacity expansion, crew availability, regulatory transitions, and the pressure of maintaining punctuality at scale.

Industry experts noted that India's aviation growth has outpaced institutional readiness in some areas. While airports, fleets and passenger numbers have grown rapidly, crew training pipelines, scheduling resilience, and regulatory harmonisation remain under strain. The IndiGo disruption brought these gaps into sharp focus.

By mid-December, operations began to stabilise, and the airline indicated that full normalcy would return in early 2026. Yet the episode left behind more than delayed flights. It prompted a renewed debate on passenger rights, airline accountability, and the balance between growth and operational discipline.

For India's aviation sector, the IndiGo crisis of 2025 may prove to be a turning point. It served as a reminder that scale without resilience carries risks, and that reliability is built not only on efficiency but also on robust planning, regulatory alignment, and human resource readiness. As air travel becomes central to India's economic and social mobility, ensuring system-wide stability will matter as much as expanding routes and fleets.

The turbulence may have eased, but the lessons are likely to linger long after the last delayed flight finally took off. 

# The Future of Airlines in India: Growth with Responsibility

by Gajesh Girdhar

Chairman Governing Council & Founder Member, NIMA

India's airline industry stands at a critical juncture, driven by robust passenger demand, expanding infrastructure, and ambitious capacity growth. Rising incomes, a growing middle class, and improved air connectivity have made flying more accessible across the country. Domestic travel continues to anchor the market, while international traffic is growing steadily as Indian carriers expand their global footprint, positioning India among the world's fastest-growing aviation markets.

Fleet expansion remains a defining trend shaping the industry's future. Indian airlines have placed large aircraft orders to support rising demand, modernise fleets, and improve fuel efficiency. The entry of new carriers and the expansion of regional operators are intensifying competition and extending air connectivity to underserved destinations. This rapid scale-up reflects strong confidence in long-term growth, but also places increasing pressure on operations and service delivery.

India is simultaneously strengthening its position as an emerging global aviation hub. The development of major airports such as Navi Mumbai and Jewar is expected to ease congestion and support long-haul operations. Aviation also plays a pivotal role in driving tourism and MICE growth, enabling faster access to leisure destinations and supporting international conferences, exhibitions, and incentive travel. Reliable air connectivity, direct routes, and schedule integrity are critical for attracting global delegates and high-value business travellers, making airlines a strategic pillar in India's tourism competitiveness.

However, 2025 exposed notable weaknesses in passenger expe-

rience. Travellers reported frequent delays, last-minute cancellations, inconsistent communication during disruptions, baggage delays, and prolonged refund processes. Overcrowded terminals and stretched customer service teams further impacted passenger confidence, highlighting the gap between rapid capacity growth and service quality.



Safety and operational resilience also came under scrutiny during the year. India witnessed several aviation accidents and serious incidents, including runway excursions, technical snags, emergency landings, bird hits, and ground-handling lapses. While most incidents did not involve major casualties, they raised concerns around maintenance standards, crew fatigue, training adequacy, and operational pressure amid rapid expansion.

Looking ahead, the future of Indian aviation will depend on how effectively airlines balance growth with responsibility. Investments in technology, safety culture, staff training, and transparent passenger communication will be critical. Airlines that prioritise reliability, service consistency, and uncompromising safety alongside expansion will be best positioned to earn passenger trust and lead India's aviation growth story in the years ahead. 

# Czechia Reconnects with India

## Mumbai Consulate Reopens After 15 Years, Eyes Tourism & Cultural Boom in 2026

After nearly fifteen years, Czechia has rekindled its diplomatic and travel ties with India through the reopening of its Consulate General in Mumbai, a move that marks a strategic pivot towards deeper engagement with Indian travellers, students, business communities and cultural exchanges.

The reopening event, held in Mumbai on December 9, 2025, brought together senior representatives from the Czech Consulate, CzechTourism, Prague Airport and CzechTrade, presenting a unified “One Czechia” vision to Indian stakeholders. This collective effort aims to strengthen tourism, trade, education, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions) and cultural collaborations between the two nations.

### A Game-Changer for Indian Travellers

One of the most immediate impacts of the Mumbai Consulate's return is the easier access to Schengen visas for travellers from western and southern India. With the renewed consular services in place, applicants no longer need to travel to distant cities for visa processing, a convenience expected to significantly boost outbound travel to Czechia.

The move responds to a growing curiosity among Indian travellers not just for Prague's famed historic charm but increasingly for diverse Czech experiences from the lush vineyards of South Moravia and the therapeutic spas of Karlovy Vary, to the storybook lanes of Český Krumlov and heritage attractions in Brno.

Czechia is pitching itself as more than a single-city destination. Tourism boards are promoting gastronomy, culture, wellness and heritage circuits through an integrated marketing campaign planned for early 2026. This strategy reflects a conscious effort to appeal to a wide spectrum of Indian travellers, solo backpackers, families, wellness seekers and MICE groups alike.

Officials emphasise that India now ranks among the fast-growing outbound travel markets, especially from western and southern regions, making it a priority for Czechia's tourism and business outreach.



### Unified Strategy for Deepening Ties

At the launch event, Barbara Andelova, International Marketing Manager, New Markets at CzechTourism, noted that the reopened consulate brings Czechia “closer to travellers and partners in a region that has been promoting Czechia beyond Prague.” Her remarks underscored the country's intent to diversify Indian visitor itineraries and expand awareness of its varied landscapes and cultural treasures.

### What This Means for India-Czech Relations

For Indian travellers, the renewed consular presence promises smoother travel planning and enhanced access to one of Europe's most enchanting destinations. For Czechia, it opens doors to a vibrant and growing market that increasingly values cultural immersion, wellness travel and experiential journeys beyond conventional city stays.

As Czechia gears up for its 2026 marketing campaign, India can expect more collaborative tourism initiatives, promotional roadshows and partnerships that help tell the story of a Central European nation that offers history, wine, wellness and much more for the curious Indian traveler. BI

# Bintan's India Focus Signals the Next Phase of Experience-Led Island Travel

As global travel stabilised in 2025, destinations that combined ease of access with depth of experience emerged stronger. One such destination was Bintan Resorts, which closed the year with renewed momentum and a sharper focus on the Indian outbound market.

Between January and November 2025, Bintan welcomed over 13,000 travellers from India, underlining the market's growing relevance to the island's tourism strategy. The numbers reflect a larger behavioural shift among Indian travellers—towards short-haul, high-value destinations that offer seamless planning and diverse experiences within limited travel windows.

Bintan's accessibility has been central to this growth. Connectivity via Singapore continued to anchor travel flows, while expanded ferry services through Malaysia, including routes from Johor Bahru, added flexibility. Short travel times and predictable logistics positioned the island as an efficient island escape, particularly attractive to families, leisure travellers and wellness seekers.

What sets Bintan apart is its integrated resort model. Purpose-built leisure zones, beachfront resorts and curated experiences allow visitors to explore the destination without extensive internal travel. Spa and wellness offerings, championship golf courses, water sports and structured activities have helped the island move beyond the conventional beach holiday narrative.

Experience-led travel shaped Bintan's 2025 calendar. Signature IP events such as the Mandiri Bintan Marathon, sailing regattas, the BRAVE music festival, triathlons and wellness retreats attracted travellers seeking immersive, active holidays. These events strengthened year-round

demand and resonated strongly with Indian travellers who increasingly prioritise meaningful, activity-driven experiences over passive sightseeing.

According to Abdul Wahab, India remains a priority growth market. Interest has been recorded across leisure travel, FITs, group travel, MICE and destination weddings. The destination's strategy focuses on building relevance across segments while maintaining ease of access, robust infrastructure and a broad experience portfolio tailored to Indian preferences.

Looking ahead to 2026, Bintan plans to deepen its engagement with India through targeted collaborations, stronger storytelling and experience design aimed at longer stays and repeat visits. While leisure travel will continue to anchor arrivals, sharper emphasis on MICE and destination weddings is expected, supported by resort-led event infrastructure and purpose-built venues.

As travel preferences evolve, Bintan enters 2026 with a clear direction. Its positioning as an accessible, experience-driven island destination aligns well with India's fast-growing outbound market. For Indian travellers seeking efficiency without compromise, Bintan's 2025 performance offers a clear preview of what lies ahead. **BI**

# Malaysia Sets the Stage for a Tourism Renaissance in 2026

## Warm Welcomes, Cultural Richness and Mascots with Meaning

**A** In December 2025, the High Commission of Malaysia in New Delhi played host to a pivotal event in tourism diplomacy, an appreciation and engagement programme that amplified Malaysia's tourism ambitions for 2026 and showcased its official Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (VM2026) mascots to Indian stakeholders and travel partners.

### A Strategic Push for a Key Market

Malaysia views India not just as an important tourism market but as one of its fastest-growing and strategically significant ones. Between January and December 2024, over 1.13 million Indian tourists visited Malaysia, representing a significant rise compared to pre-pandemic levels and positioning India as one of Malaysia's top medium-haul source markets.

Capitalising on this momentum, Tourism Malaysia, under the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 campaign (VM2026), has unveiled a cohesive year-long strategy aimed at bolstering tourism arrivals, promoting sustainable cultural experiences, and deepening connections with Indian travellers through tailored outreach initiatives.

### Meet Wira and Manja: The Faces of VM2026

At the core of the VM2026 promotional push are two official mascots: Wira and Manja, inspired by the Malayan Sun Bear the smallest bear species native to Malaysia and a symbol of its rich biodiversity. The choice reflects Malaysia's commitment to conservation, cultural pride and welcoming hospitality.

The mascots were officially introduced alongside the VM2026 logo and theme at tourism-focused events including the December gathering in New Delhi. Their friendly personas are designed to appeal across demographics, especially families and young travellers, anchoring Malaysia's image as an inviting yet adventure-rich destination.

### Surreal Experiences and Sustainable Tourism

The VM2026 campaign themed "Surreal Experiences" emphasises Malaysia's multifaceted appeal: from verdant rainforests and



world-class urban experiences to cultural festivals and heritage trails. The government aims to attract over 40 million international visitors in 2026, using a mix of immersive events, festive cultural showcases and eco-tourism initiatives that support both economic growth and environmental stewardship.

Partnerships with airlines, hospitality players and cultural institutions are central to this strategy. In India, Tourism Malaysia has actively engaged travel trade partners, influencers and media to amplify visibility and ease of travel including enhancements to connectivity and promotional campaigns tailored to Indian interests.

### Cultural Diplomacy Meets Travel Aspirations

The December event in New Delhi framed as an appreciation ceremony underlined Malaysia's intent to deepen bilateral tourism ties. It brought together industry leaders, travel agents, cultural ambassadors and media, offering an early preview of what 2026 holds for Indian travellers. With the VM2026 mascots present on stage and in promotional media, Malaysia delivered a message that goes beyond numbers: it's about experiences that resonate emotionally, culturally and sustainably.

As Malaysia embarks on Visit Malaysia Year 2026, its strategy blends tradition with modern travel dynamics inviting the world, and especially India, to explore "Malaysia Truly Asia" in ways that are vibrant, responsible and unforgettable. **BI**

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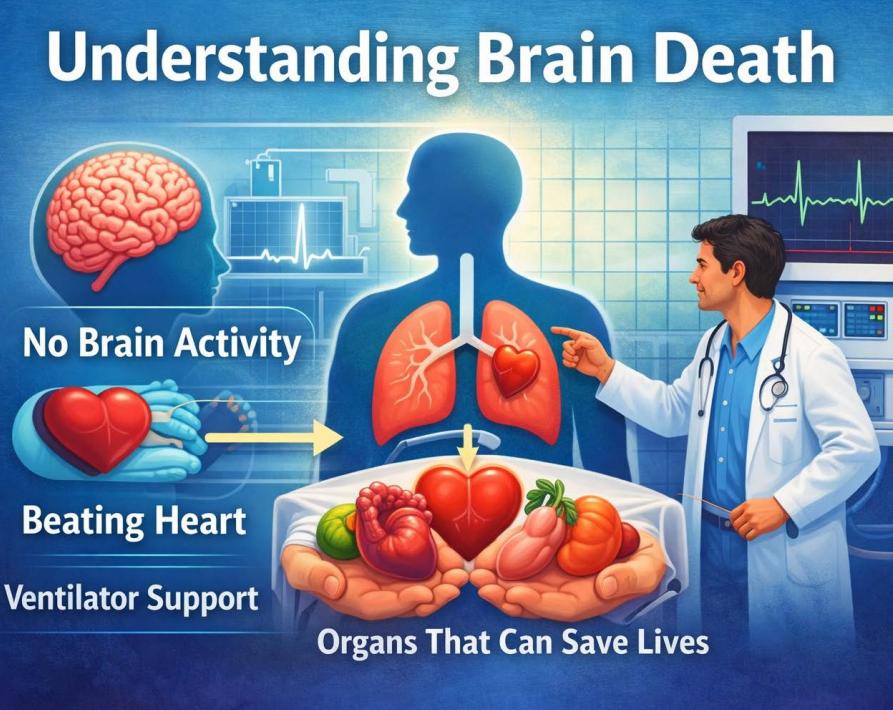
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# From Grief to Giving

## How Brain-Dead Donors Keep Hope Alive

by Arun Arora



When the call came, Meera was sure it was another update telling her to “keep praying.” Her husband, Amit, had been on the liver transplant waiting list for months. Each day was a careful balance between hope and exhaustion. This time, however, the doctor’s voice sounded different. “I am Doctor Umang, we may have found a suitable liver,” he said. “It’s from a young man who was declared brain-dead after a road accident. His family has agreed to donate his organs.” For Meera, that one sentence felt like a lifeline thrown into a sea of despair.

Behind that miracle was another family, standing in an ICU corridor, staring at machines that still showed a beating heart and moving chest, and yet hearing the words no one is prepared for: “Your son is brain-dead.” The monitors around them blinked and beeped as if nothing had changed, but the doctors explained gently that his brain had permanently stopped functioning. He would never wake up, never speak again, never come home. In that moment of unbearable grief, they were asked to consider something almost unimaginable

would they allow his organs to be donated, so that others could live?

In India, this moment of decision is where many potential transplants are lost. Families often struggle to accept brain death because, to the eye, the person still looks alive. The skin is warm, the chest rises with each ventilator-assisted breath, the heart continues to pump. Yet medically and legally, brain death is defined as death: there is no possibility of recovery. For many relatives, the idea of organ donation at this point feels like “giving up” or even “harming” their loved one, when in reality, it is the only way their organs can remain in the best possible condition to save others.

What makes organs from brain-dead donors so special? When a person is brain-dead but still on life support, the heart continues to push oxygen-rich blood into the liver, kidneys, heart, lungs and other organs. These organs are still working; they are simply in a body whose brain can no longer direct life. Surgeons can carefully retrieve these organs while they are well perfused and healthy, giving recipients a far better chance of survival and long-term recovery. By contrast, when a person dies and the heart stops, blood flow ceases. Within minutes, tissues start to deteriorate, and the quality and “acceptance rate” of those organs for transplantation fall sharply. Living donors, on the other hand, can only donate parts of certain organs—such as one kidney or a portion of the liver—because the rest is needed for their own survival.

Amit’s case, like thousands of others, reflects this medical reality. The liver he received from a brain-dead donor was functioning and nourished until the very moment it was transplanted. Within days, his yellowing eyes began to clear, his energy slowly returned, and the fear that had tightened around his family for months started to loosen. For them, the anonymous donor’s family became a quiet, unseen presence in their lives. “How do you thank someone you will never meet,”

Meera often wondered, “for giving you back your husband?”

On the other side of the story, the donor’s parents had their own journey. At first, the word “brain-dead” sounded like a technical term, one more medical label in a stream of bad news. They clung to the faint hope that their son might still hear them, that some miracle might occur. It took time, multiple conversations with doctors, and the courage to ask difficult questions before they understood that brain death was final. When the transplant coordinator gently explained how many lives their son could save—how his heart could beat in someone else’s chest, how his kidneys could free two people from the prison of dialysis, how his liver and lungs could pull others back from the edge—they began to see a fragile meaning in their loss.

“I realised that if we said no, all those healthy organs would simply be buried or burned,” the father later recalled. “He always wanted to help people. This was his last chance to do that.” The mother added, “I won’t see him walk into the house again, but somewhere, his heart is still beating. That thought keeps me going.”

Stories like this are not rare in developed countries; they are the backbone of successful organ donation systems. In nations such as the USA, the UK and several European countries, years of awareness campaigns, clear laws and strong hospital protocols mean that families are informed and supported at exactly this critical moment. They understand what brain death means, they have often heard about organ donation long before any personal tragedy, and many people have already discussed their wishes with their loved ones. As a result, the number of organs available from brain-dead donors is far higher, and thousands more patients receive transplants every year.

Dr Umang Arora, DM (Gastro) AIIMS and A Fellow at Mayo clinic, USA opines, “When we compare these with India’s deceasing (mostly brain-dead) donation rate, which has generally been in the low single digits per million, we realise that with better awareness of brain-dead donation,

India could potentially move closer to US–UK–European levels and save thousands more lives each year.”

In India, the science and surgical skills exist, and large public and private hospitals perform world-class transplants. What is missing is not medicine, but mindset. There is still a deep cultural hesitation, a sense of taboo and fear around the idea of “taking organs” from someone who looks alive but is medically gone. Many families simply have never considered the possibility until it is suddenly presented to them in a moment of shock and grief.

That is why awareness must move beyond slogans and posters into conversations at dining tables, in schools, in community gatherings and workplaces. People need to know, well before any crisis, that:

- Brain death is legally and medically recognised as death.
- Organs retrieved from brain-dead donors have the best chance of saving lives.
- One brain-dead donor can save several people and improve the quality of life for many more.

Most importantly, families should talk openly about their wishes. If a person has clearly expressed, “If anything ever happens to me, I want my organs to help others,” it becomes much easier for relatives to take that brave decision when the time comes.

It transforms organ donation from a sudden, overwhelming question into a heartfelt act of fulfilling a promise.

Amit now plays cricket again with his children, something that once seemed impossible. He doesn’t know the name of the young man whose liver he carries, but every year, on the anniversary of his transplant, his family lights a candle and says a quiet prayer for the donor and his parents. Somewhere, perhaps in another city, that family may still be grieving. Yet they can also hold on to the knowledge that their son did not simply die—he lives on in many others.

If more people understand this, and more families find the courage to say “yes” to organ donation after brain death, countless stories like Amit’s could unfold across the country. In the space between loss and love, a simple decision can turn one life’s ending into many new beginnings. **BI**

# From Noise to Knowing:

## Why 2026 Will Be the Year of Inner Leadership

SPIRITUALITY



by Vibha Gurtu

Director, Spiritual Tara

### *January is always a time for a psychological reset.*

2026, however, is uniquely different due to the disruption in the global peace either through controlled or uncontrolled situations. People are getting exhausted by the constant chattering, confusion and chaos.

There is a silent global craving not for motivation — but for clarity.

There has been a lot of noise and its reactions. We are living in 'The Age of Noise which seems to now moving towards its End'. With an overload of content and dopamine dependency, peace is clouded and buried under the noise. It is now yearning to stop escaping from the truth. It is time for discretion and discernment, a time to make wise and sharp judgements by separating the truth from artificially created lies.

Today, Spirituality is no longer about renunciation, escaping the world or simply following a guru to seek answers, it is more about getting engaged consciously, developing an inner authority and learning how to ask better, more relevant questions.

Probably, it is a time to re-ignite the Inner wisdom and Inner Leadership

### **What is Inner Leadership?**

It is the ability to pause before reacting; To listen before judging; To choose before drifting. The need is Not for domination of others — but sovereignty over the self.

2026 will not reward those who run faster, it will honour those who choose deeper. Right Thought, Right Action, Right Method; just what Krishna taught us about Living Consciously in 2026.

## How do we do it?

### 1. From Noise to Knowing

We don't suffer because we don't know what to do. We suffer because we don't know when to act.

Krishna consciousness is not escapism — it is clarity inside chaos.

### 2. Krishna Didn't Teach Withdrawal

He taught Discernment. Arjuna's breakdown in Kurukshetra, was not a weakness, it was an overwhelmed reaction. Krishna didn't remove him from the battlefield, nor replaced him on the chariot, He simply changed Arjuna's inner positioning and shifted his perspective from confusion towards rightful & timely action. This is the essence of consciousness, Not changing the situation, changing the perspective.

### 3. Right Action, Right Time (RART)

Krishna talks about the differences between unconscious and conscious living.

When we react out of fear, act to escape discomfort and make choices out of urgency, we are in reality avoiding to grow, live and thrive consciously. We are on a survivor mode. On the other hand when we choose to open our eyes and the senses to make conscious choices to live and thrive we start responding from a seat of awareness, we act in sync, honour the alignment and understand divine timing.

Right Action without Right Time becomes force. Right Time without Right Action becomes delay.

#### *Krishna consciousness is a marriage of both.*

Today, the battles and battlefields have changed. The mind is in an overdrive. Our emotions are riding high on us. Look at some simple examples; today we reply to messages (personal or otherwise) emotionally, we make decisions out of loneliness and say 'Yes' when our entire being is shouting out 'NO'. Guilt and Fear control everything that we say or do. It may no longer be the Kurukshetra, but it is a battlefield nonetheless.

If Krishna lived in our times, and walked alongside us what would He tell us to do or not do in 2026? Here's my understanding of Krishna's teachings for our battlefields of today.

#### 1. The Pause of Krishna

Before action — pause and ask:

"Is this fear speaking or clarity?"

#### 2. The Timing Check

"Am I acting because it's right — or because I'm uncomfortable?"

#### 3. The Inner Gita

One sentence daily:

What would Right Action look like if I trusted life? What if the Right happens through me?

Krishna consciousness is not about becoming divine. It is about becoming deliberate — in what we choose, and when we choose to act. It is to claim the inner authority with courage and authenticity.

Ignite the leader within yourself as the leader you desire to be led by.

'Living is ordinary, Thriving is Extraordinary' - TARA

Happy 2026! 



Vibha 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.

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An insight on Bihar Elections 2025

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