

UTTHAN: From the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor
to the Government of India

BUREAUCRACY INDIA

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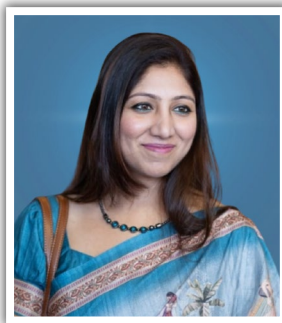


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This September issue of Bureaucracy India comes at a moment when India's global engagement is being viewed through an increasingly consequential lens. Our cover story presents exclusive coverage of BRICS 2026, examining the conversations, priorities and partnerships shaping this expanding multilateral platform and India's role in steering its agenda.

Beyond the summit, we explore how the BRICS conversation is moving from diplomacy to capability. Our Perspective on BRICS CONNECT examines India's push to place capacity building, employability, digital public infrastructure and future-ready skills at the heart of cooperation.

The issue also turns to challenges and transformations closer to the ground. Nepal's devastating floods underline the urgency of climate resilience and stronger regional cooperation, while Catching the Sun explores how solar power is reshaping everyday lives across India.

We spotlight UTTHAN, connecting Tier-2 and Tier-3 institutions with India's innovation ecosystem, and examine how waste-to-value models can advance cleaner rivers, women's livelihoods and green growth.

Our Mind n Matter series looks deeper into the cognitive biases that can quietly influence administrative decision-making, while our Culture pages celebrate Sattiriya's remarkable journey from Assam's Sattras to the global stage, including its presence at BRICS.

Together, these stories capture governance not merely as policy, but as diplomacy, innovation, resilience, judgment and culture constantly evolving in a changing world.

Suhani Nagpal

Suhani Nagpal
Editor-in-Chief



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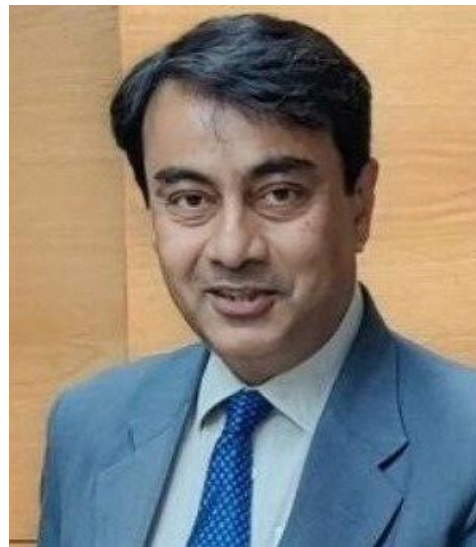
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Rajeev Singh Thakur appointed Chief Secretary, Manipur

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Rajeev Singh Thakur as Chief Secretary of Manipur on inter-cadre deputation. A 1995-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre, Thakur was serving as Additional Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, before taking charge in the northeastern state. He succeeds Vineet Joshi as the state's top bureaucrat. During his career, Thakur has held several key assignments in both the Government of Rajasthan and the Centre, including serving as Joint Secretary in the Department of Military Affairs, where he was associated with defence administration and policy coordination.



Hansraj Singh Verma appointed India's next Ambassador to Cuba

The Ministry of External Affairs has appointed Hansraj Singh Verma, a 2008-batch Indian Foreign Service officer, as India's next Ambassador to the Republic of Cuba. Verma is presently serving as Consul General of India in São Paulo, Brazil, and is expected to assume his new assignment shortly. During his diplomatic career, he has served in Indian missions in Argentina and held assignments at the Ministry of External Affairs dealing with multilateral affairs, consular services and protocol. His appointment comes as India continues to strengthen political, economic and developmental cooperation with Latin American and Caribbean nations.



IPS Sanjay A. Lathkar appointed Director General (Security), Department of Atomic Energy

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Sanjay A. Lathkar as Director General (Security) in the Department of Atomic Energy. A 1995-batch IPS officer of the Jharkhand cadre, Lathkar was serving as Additional Director General (Operations) in Jharkhand Police prior to his appointment. He has held several important policing assignments during his career, including leadership roles in counter-insurgency operations and service with the Central Reserve Police Force. His appointment comes at a time when the Department of Atomic Energy continues to strengthen the security framework of India's strategic nuclear establishments.

Bharath Kumar Kuthati appointed India's next High Commissioner to Trinidad & Tobago

The Ministry of External Affairs has appointed Bharath Kumar Kuthati, a 2006-batch Indian Foreign Service officer, as India's next High Commissioner to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. He is presently serving as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs and is expected to assume his diplomatic assignment shortly. During his career, Kuthati has held several important postings in Indian missions abroad and at the Ministry, handling bilateral relations, economic diplomacy and multilateral engagements. His appointment comes as India continues to deepen cooperation with Caribbean nations in areas including trade, development partnership, capacity building, healthcare and cultural exchanges, while strengthening its longstanding ties with the Indian diaspora in the region.



Sanjukta Parashar Becomes First Woman IG of CRPF's CoBRA

IPS officer Sanjukta Parashar of 2006-batch, AssamMeghalaya cadre has been appointed Inspector General (IG) of the CRPF's elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), becoming the first woman officer to hold the post.

The CRPF raised CoBRA (the paramilitary force's special jungle warfare commando unit) in 2008-09 to tackle left-wing extremism in multiple Indian states and insurgency in certain Northeast states. Widely known as the "Iron Lady of Assam" for her tough work against militant groups, Sanjukta's appointment comes amid a growing presence of women officers in senior CRPF operational roles, with women Inspector Generals also heading formations covering the Rapid Action Force, Jammu, North-east region, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

IAS Neeraj Kharwal given additional charge as MD & CEO of IICCL

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the assignment of Neeraj Kharwal, a 1993-batch IAS officer of the AGMUT cadre, as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of India International Convention and Expo Centre Limited (IICCL), in addition to his existing responsibilities. Kharwal is currently serving as Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and has previously held several senior positions in the Government of India and the AGMUT cadre.

The additional responsibility places him at the helm of one of India's premier convention infrastructure projects, responsible for managing the Bharat Mandapam complex and promoting India as a global destination for international conferences, exhibitions and business events.



Punjab govt transfers two IAS officers

Punjab government transferred two IAS officers. Those transferred include Gurkirat Kirpal Singh, (IAS 2001) Principal Secretary, Social Security, Women & Child Development and in addition Principal Secretary, Industries & Commerce Investment Promotion to Principal Secretary, Social Security, Women & Child Development and in addition Principal Secretary, Power and in addition Principal Secretary, New & Renewable Energy Sources.



Basant Garg, (IAS 2005) Administrative Secretary, Power and Administrative Secretary, New & Renewable Energy Sources with additional charge of Chairman-cum-Managing Director, Punjab State Transmission Corporation Ltd. and Chairman-cum-Managing Director, Punjab State Power Corporation Ltd. has been transferred as Administrative Secretary, Industries & Commerce and in addition Administrative Secretary, Investment Promotion with additional charge of Administrative Secretary, Promotion of Information Technology Industry.



IAS Vivek Kumar Dewangan designated Secretary, National Commission for Scheduled Castes

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet officially cleared senior bureaucrat Vivek Kumar Dewangan (IAS:1993:MN) for his new assignment as the Secretary of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

The central notification, issued in mid-September 2026, details that he systematically takes charge of the apex commission in the rank and pay scale of a Union Secretary.



Kamlesh Chandra Varshney reappointed Whole-Time Member, SEBI

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet officially approved Kamlesh Chandra Varshney's reappointment as a Whole-Time Member of the Securities and Exchange Board of India. The 1990-batch IRS officer, who handles the critical corporate finance and surveillance departments, will continue his regulatory tenure at the apex market regulator until August 4, 2029.



IAS Meera Mohanty appointed Government Nominee Director at MIDHANI

Senior bureaucrat Meera Mohanty (IAS:2005:HP) has been officially appointed as the Government Nominee Director on the board of Mishra Dhatu Nigam Limited (MIDHANI). The tracking notification confirmed that she assumed her corporate governance duties on September 17, 2026, systematically replacing the outgoing nominee director, Prakash Rajpurohit, following central ministry clearances.





Bhagwat Prasad Makwana appointed Chairperson, National Commission for Safai Karamcharis

The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment officially announced the appointment of senior leader Bhagwat Prasad Makwana as the Chairperson of the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK). Backed by extensive governance exposure in social welfare, Makwana previously served as the head of Uttarakhand's state-level commission. The central administration cleared this notification alongside designating a new vice-chairman and three executive committee members. According to the dynamic mandate issued by the central government, Makwana will head this national apex body until March 31, 2028, prioritizing the systemic protection, socio-economic empowerment, and welfare rights of sanitation workers nationwide.

IPS Sudha Singh assigned key role at National Crime Records Bureau

In a significant administrative development, the central government formally waived the mandatory tenure policy cooling-off period for senior IPS officer Sudha Singh. Following a successful seven-year central deputation stint with the CBI, the Ministry of Home Affairs officially posted the 2006-batch Odisha-cadre officer to a top leadership position within the National Crime Records Bureau.



IAS Saumya Gupta granted service tenure extension by central government

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet approved a major two-year service extension for senior bureaucrat Saumya Gupta (IAS:2004:TR). According to the official directive issued by the Department of Personnel and Training on September 19, 2026, she will continue serving in her current central deputation capacity as the Joint Secretary within the Department of Higher Education.



Air Marshal Sandeep Thareja appointed Director General Armed Forces Medical Services

Air Marshal Sandeep Thareja officially assumed charge as the 47th Director General Armed Forces Medical Services (DGAFMS), spearheading medical operations across the Indian military. An alumnus of Armed Forces Medical College, Pune, the distinguished gastroenterologist brings nearly four decades of academic, clinical, and administrative experience to the apex role.

He systematically takes over the responsibilities following the superannuation of Surgeon Vice Admiral Arti Sarin. According to the defense ministry, Thareja's tenure begins during a major structural realignment focused on digital health integration, advanced medical research, joint logistics, and upgrading healthcare systems for active defense personnel and veterans.



NTPC Renewable Energy commissions additional solar and wind capacity

NTPC Renewable Energy Limited, a step-down subsidiary of NTPC through NGEL, commissioned additional renewable energy capacity during September, including new phases of its Gujarat Solar PV Project at Dahod and the Vanki Wind Energy Project in Kutch. The fresh capacity additions form part of NTPC's expanding clean-energy portfolio as the Maharatna PSU continues progressing towards its long-term renewable energy targets and supporting India's transition to a low-carbon power sector.

Coal India ramps up production and dispatch as monsoon impact eases



Coal India Limited (CIL) has accelerated coal production and dispatch following an improvement in weather conditions across key mining regions after prolonged monsoon disruptions. During April–August FY27, the Maharatna PSU supplied 322.90 million tonnes of coal, marking a 6.7 per cent increase over the corresponding period last year. The company expects further gains as mining operations, haul-road restoration and coal evacuation gather pace, strengthening fuel availability for India's power sector ahead of the festive season.

Indian Oil advances clean energy transition with sustainable fuel initiatives



Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) continued expanding its clean energy portfolio by accelerating investments in sustainable aviation fuel, green hydrogen and biofuel projects across multiple locations. Alongside strengthening its conventional refining and marketing operations, the Maharatna PSU is advancing low-carbon energy solutions in line with India's net-zero ambitions. The initiatives reinforce IOC's long-term strategy of diversifying its energy mix while ensuring reliable fuel supplies and supporting the country's evolving energy security objectives.

GAIL expands city gas and pipeline infrastructure across India

GAIL (India) Limited has accelerated the expansion of its natural gas transmission and city gas infrastructure, commissioning new pipeline sections and strengthening connectivity across multiple regions. The Maharatna PSU is also advancing pipeline integration projects to improve gas availability for industrial, commercial and domestic consumers. The expansion supports the government's vision of increasing the share of natural gas in India's energy basket while improving nationwide energy accessibility.



GAIL (India) Limited

BEL secures fresh defence orders worth ₹648 crore

Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) has secured fresh orders worth ₹648 crore since late August for a range of defence systems, including communication equipment, radar components and electronic warfare solutions. The Navratna defence PSU continues to strengthen its order book amid sustained procurement by the armed forces and growing emphasis on indigenous defence manufacturing. The latest contracts reinforce BEL's position as one of India's leading suppliers of advanced defence electronics and strategic systems.



SAIL records higher crude steel production in first five months of FY27

Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) reported improved crude steel production during the first five months of FY27, supported by higher capacity utilisation and operational efficiencies across its integrated steel plants. The Maharatna PSU also continued increasing the share of value-added and special steel products to enhance profitability and meet growing demand from infrastructure, construction and manufacturing sectors. The performance reinforces SAIL's ongoing focus on operational excellence and capacity expansion.



Oil India begins production from Bakhri Tibba gas project

Oil India Limited (OIL) has commenced production from its Bakhri Tibba gas field in Rajasthan, marking another milestone in the PSU's efforts to enhance domestic hydrocarbon output. The project is expected to strengthen natural gas supplies while supporting India's objective of reducing dependence on imported energy. The Maharatna PSU continues to invest in exploration, production and field development projects as part of its strategy to expand indigenous oil and gas production.

NALCO strengthens aluminium output with operational expansion

National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) continued to strengthen its operational performance during the period by enhancing production across its bauxite mines, alumina refinery and aluminium smelter. The Navratna PSU maintained strong output levels while advancing ongoing capacity expansion projects aimed at meeting rising domestic demand. The company remains focused on improving operational efficiency, expanding value-added aluminium production and supporting India's growing manufacturing and infrastructure sectors through sustained investment.



POWERGRID acquires Fatehgarh II Transmission project under TBCB route

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) has acquired Fatehgarh II Transmission Limited, the special purpose vehicle established for a key interstate transmission project under the Tariff-Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) route. The acquisition strengthens the Maharatna PSU's transmission portfolio and supports the evacuation of renewable energy from Rajasthan. The project forms part of India's broader strategy to expand green-energy infrastructure and reinforce the national power transmission network through competitively awarded projects.





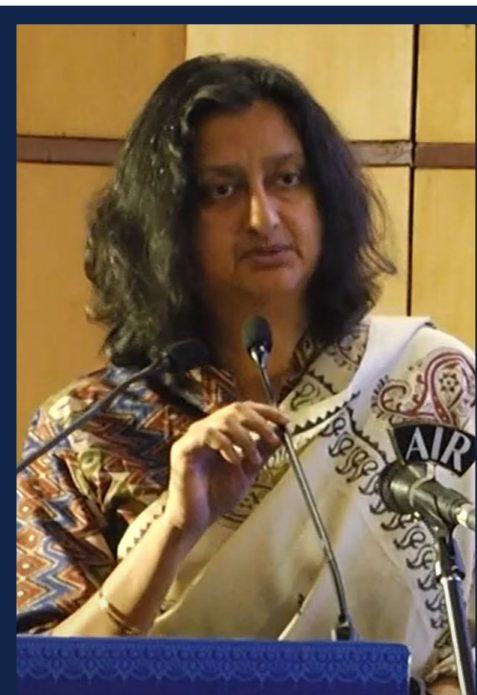
Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser
to the Government of India

UTTHAN

From Institutional Capacity to Innovation on the Ground

by Dr. Sapna Poti

Director, Strategic Alliances in the Office of Principal
Scientific Adviser to the Government of India



India's innovation ecosystem is being strengthened through the coordinated efforts of institutions, industry and technology partners. At the forefront of this effort, the **Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India** is working to align research, technology and innovation with real-world challenges.

Building on this vision, **UTTHAN – Upscaling Tier-2 and Tier-3 Institutions for the Holistic Advancement of the Nation** has emerged as a national handholding initiative to strengthen the capabilities of nearly **300 higher education institutions**, enabling them to become active contributors to industry and societal problem-solving.

The initiative begins with a structured understanding of each institution — assessed not on existing achievements alone, but on its potential and the capabilities it needs to develop. Through the **LEAP (Learn–Engage–Accelerate–Perform)** framework, institutions are evaluated across seven dimensions:

- Research outputs and deployment
- Research governance and strategic alignment
- Partnerships and economic value
- Infrastructure and digital readiness
- Faculty capability and research culture
- Student innovation and talent development

- Sustainability, ethics and societal impact

This enables calibrated interventions based on institutional maturity.

UTTHAN has established differentiated engagement pathways for institutions at varying stages of maturity. **The first cohort, with the Ministry of Education, Australia**, strengthens research capabilities and institutional research ecosystems. **The second cohort, supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB)**, focuses on **MSME problem statements**, building capabilities relevant to industry requirements. **Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis and PALS** also handhold institutions, strengthening research quality, publication capability and scholarly output.

At the core of this initiative are six emerging domain areas:

1. Health & Biosciences
2. Space Technology
3. Energy, EV & Battery Technology
4. Semiconductors & Electronics
5. Climate Risk
6. Sports Technology

This is where UTTHAN connects institutional capability directly with the economy.

UTTHAN LEAP (Learn Engage Accelerate Perform) Framework



1. Domains



Energy, EV & Battery Tech



Semiconductors & Electronics



Climate Risk



Space Tech



Health and Bioscience



Sports Tech

2. Three Pillars Architecture

1. Dimension Scan

- Research Outputs & Deployment Impact
- Research Governance & Strategic Alignment
- Partnerships, Funding & Economic Value
- Infrastructure, Labs & Digital Readiness
- Faculty Capability & Research Culture
- Student Innovation & Talent Development

OUTPUT

Snapshot score + institutional readiness signal

C
A
P
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I
T
Y

B
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D
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2. Diagnostics Tool

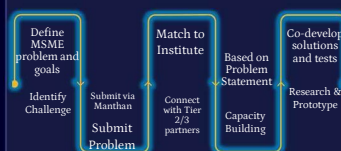
Deep Dive to understand the maturity of institutions

- Verified Maturity Scores
- Capability Strengths
- Engagement Modes

OUTPUT

Trust Card + detailed institution profile

MSME Problem Solving Institutions



3. MiTTi Innovation Hubs



Manthan Industry Tier 2 / 3 Technology Innovation Hubs

MSMEs bring forward real-world problems; institutions bring knowledge, research and talent. Under this initiative, problem statements are identified through industry engagement, categorised, validated and mapped to institutions by capability. The current focus spans seven areas:

1. Industry 4.0
2. IoT & Artificial Intelligence
3. Assistive Technologies
4. Advanced Textile Technologies
5. Automotive & Ancillary Technologies
6. Energy Efficiency
7. Advanced Testing

Institutions are supported through targeted capacity building, industry mentorship and ecosystem linkages to develop and test solutions, with progress monitored as validated solutions advance towards deployment.

The final component is the establishment of **MiTTi Innovation Hubs** within institutions. MiTTi — **Manthan Industry Tier-2 and 3 Technology Innovation Hubs** — is a consortium of industries supporting institutions in policy governance, innovation programme design, technology translation, and industry and investor connects.

The broader ambition of UTTHAN extends beyond institutional handholding, seeking to establish a **self-sustaining innovation pipeline** in which institutional assessment leads to capacity building, capacity building enables industry engagement, industry engagement drives research and technology solutions, and successful solutions progress towards validation, deployment and scale- hence enabling MSME to access validated industry ready technologies that strengthens their productivity, quality and competitiveness.

By connecting **institutions, MSMEs, industry and technology**, UTTHAN is creating meaningful new pathways for Tier-2 and Tier-3 institutions to participate in India's innovation and economic development trajectory. **BI**



by Arun Arora
Consulting Editor,
Bureaucracy India

Catching the Sun

How Solar Power is Quietly Transforming India from the Ground Up

On the outskirts of an East Delhi resettlement colony, perched atop a modest one-room home made of corrugated tin sheets, two dark blue photovoltaic panels glint in the harsh afternoon glare. Inside sits Sunita Devi, stringing marigold garlands under the cool breeze of a whirring ceiling fan. For over a decade, summers meant suffocating heat, sporadic load-shedding, and an electricity bill that consumed a third of her seasonal earnings. Today, her electricity bill reads exactly zero.

“The sun has always beat down on our tin roof,” Sunita laughs. “Now it pays the rent.”

Sunita’s story is no longer an anomaly. Across India, the clean energy transition is shifting away from distant multi-gigawatt desert parks and arriving directly on the roofs of ordinary citizens. In informal settlements, rural hamlets, and dense urban clusters, solar energy is shedding its image as an exclusive luxury for eco-conscious elites. It has become a tool of survival, social mobility, and quiet rebellion against rising living costs.



Policy Fueling Grassroots Change

A powerful convergence of aggressive policy intervention and grassroots necessity is accelerating this transformation. Under ambitious central initiatives like the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, alongside regional frameworks such as the Delhi Solar Policy, governments are subsidising domestic rooftop installations down to near-zero initial expense for lower-income tiers.

Delhi's push has created a blueprint: households consuming minimal power can install rooftop systems where government subsidies and generation-based incentives offset equipment and installation costs entirely. For a low-income family running two bulbs and a pedestal fan, this doesn't just mean clean energy—it means redirected monthly savings for school fees, healthcare, and nutrition.

The ripple effect is even more pronounced in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities—from Gorakhpur and Indore to Hubballi and Surat. Here, independent plots and flatter concrete roofs make domestic adoption structurally easier. In these smaller cities, residents are using solar to bypass voltage fluctuations, ditch erratic diesel backup generators, and gain true energy sovereignty.

Everyday Life, Powered by Photons

Beyond grid-tied rooftop setups, micro-solar innovations have rewritten daily routines in rural pockets.

The hiss of traditional kerosene lamps—dim, noxious, and fire-prone—has been replaced by clean, bright LED solar study lights, allowing children to read safely late into the evening.

In agrarian belts, parabolic solar cookers and community solar dryers are changing how kitchens and small farm businesses operate. Women no longer have to spend backbreaking hours gathering damp firewood or breathing in choking smoke. Meanwhile, solar water pumps hum rhythmically across farmlands, freeing smallholder farmers from erratic grid rationing and crippling diesel expenses.

Simultaneously, the energy transition has sparked aspiration at the higher end of the spectrum. Urban homeowners and

luxury farmsteads are marrying high-efficiency monocrystalline panels with smart hybrid inverters and home battery storage. Wealthier households are setting up domestic microgrids capable of powering high-capacity air conditioning, automated irrigation, and direct Level-2 chargers for their electric vehicles. Clean energy has become both an economic lifeline for the vulnerable and a lifestyle statement for the affluent.

The Macro Leap to Global Dominance

This widespread domestic momentum reflects India's meteoric rise on the global renewable stage. Over the past decade, the country's solar power capacity skyrocketed from barely 3 gigawatts in 2014 to surpassing 85 gigawatts—a more than thirty-fold expansion. In the process, India leapfrogged legacy clean-energy stalwarts like Japan to cement its rank as the third-largest solar energy producer in the world, trailing only China and the United States.

What makes India's trajectory remarkable is its alignment with broader national imperatives:

- **Energy Security:** Lowering dependency on expensive fossil fuel imports.
- **Aggressive Climate Targets:** Pushing toward 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2070.
- **Democratic Energy Access:** Delivering decentralised power to the last mile where traditional grid expansion faces geographical friction.



A Sun-Drenched Tomorrow

India's energy narrative is rare because it proves climate policy does not have to be an elite trade-off. When a rickshaw-puller charges his battery from a community solar shed, a schoolgirl studies under a subsidised solar lantern, and an urban professional powers an electric car from their rooftop array, the transition becomes irreversible.

The battle for a sustainable future will not be won solely in multilateral summit halls. It is being decided day by day, watt by watt, on the patchwork rooftops of a billion people learning to harvest the light above them. **BI**



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Capacity Building Takes Centre Stage

What India's BRICS 2026 Push Means for L&D and HR Leaders

by Deepika Arora

Founder and CEO, Cøherence Cøncepts (Coherence Concepts Training Academy Pvt. Ltd.),
Ex-Indian Oil



At the 12th BRICS Communications Ministers' Meeting this month, India put forward BRICS CONNECT — the BRICS Cooperation Network for Capacity Building, Employability, and New Skills and Technologies — a voluntary platform built around a shared repository of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) models and dedicated capacity-building hubs for a future-ready workforce across BRICS nations. Announced during India's 2026 BRICS chairship, under the theme "Building Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability", this is a landmark move, and a fine example of the thoughtful, forward-looking statecraft that has defined India's presidency this year.

BRICS has traditionally focused on trade and financial co-operation. That India's leadership is elevating workforce capability to the same table as infrastructure and finance reflects deep, considered policy thinking about where India's enduring strengths lie — in its people, its platforms and its institutions.

Capacity building, properly defined, isn't a single training programme — it's the deliberate development of the skills,

processes, mentorship structures and institutional knowledge that let capability compound and transfer across people and organisations, rather than fading with one cohort.

BRICS CONNECT is built around four priority areas: expanding social security coverage, including cross-border portability for gig and platform economy workers; lifting female labour force participation through more inclusive workplace policies; joint skills mapping and future-ready training; and using digital public infrastructure to widen access to services and improve worker well-being. Taken together, these four pillars read less like a diplomatic wish-list and more like an HR charter — social protection, workforce inclusion, skilling and digital access are exactly the four levers most India Inc people-strategies are already built around.

Why demographics and AI make this timing exceptional

This proposal lands at a uniquely opportune moment. India's median age is under 29, and the country will supply one of the world's largest working-age populations well into the

2030s — a demographic dividend that only pays off if that youth cohort is genuinely employable. Simultaneously, AI is compressing the shelf-life of technical skills faster than any previous technology wave, making structured, renewable capacity building — not one-off certification — the only durable response. By anchoring BRICS CONNECT in India's own DPI stack (Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker), India is offering its youth and its digital public platforms as a genuine, replicable model for AI-era digital transformation across the Global South — a generous vision that puts shared capability-building at the heart of the BRICS agenda.

Here is the signal worth sitting up for: when capacity building shows up on the ministry's agenda, next to cybersecurity and trade, it stops being an HR line item and becomes national infrastructure and infrastructure gets funded, standardised and benchmarked in ways a training calendar never does.

There is a second, more immediate takeaway. The voluntary, demand-driven hub model at the core of BRICS CONNECT is, structurally, the same model mature L&D

functions have quietly been building as centres of excellence and communities of practice, which means whoever already has that hub-and-repository architecture running internally is best placed to plug into something larger as these frameworks mature.

The opportunity

Organisations in fintech, govtech and IT services can help shape sector skilling standards early, while HR functions with sizeable gig or platform workforces have a direct, immediate stake in how the social-security portability piece develops. HR teams can benchmark their own academies and centres of excellence against this hub model, ensuring they build for knowledge transfer, not just delivery. And with India's youth dividend and AI-era demands converging, this is a moment to actively partner with government and industry bodies shaping the country's contribution — a rare instance where national policy and corporate people-strategy can move in step, thanks to a genuinely commendable piece of policy leadership. **BI**



COVER STORY

THE BRICS BLUEPRINT



The BRICS Blueprint

How India can turn an expanded economic coalition into a 200 billion dollar export opportunity

by **Suhani Nagpal, Editor-in-Chief, Bureaucracy India**

With inputs from Ravi Nandan Sinha, Director, MSME Business Forum India

Two Way Trade

417.5bn USD

Exports

95.7bn USD

Imports

321.8bn USD

Trade Deficit

226.1bn USD

The 18th BRICS Summit, held at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on September 12 and 13, brought together an expanded coalition spanning Asia, Africa, West Asia and Latin America. Together, these nations account for more than 40 per cent of global GDP in purchasing power parity terms and are home to nearly half the world's population, giving the gathering in New Delhi considerable economic and geopolitical significance. Beyond the ceremonial welcomes, bilateral meetings and crowded media briefings, however, one question shaped Bureaucracy India's on-ground coverage: *can BRICS convert its collective strength into institutions that make trade easier, fairer and more balanced?*

The summit was the centrepiece of India's year-long BRICS Chairship, under which more than 400 meetings and engagements were held across 30 cities. It followed the BRICS Business Forum on September 11, where policymakers and industry leaders examined opportunities in trade, investment, technology and supply-chain cooperation. The Leaders' Summit subsequently combined closed-door deliberations with an expanded outreach session involving partner countries and international organisations, bilateral meetings and a visit to the Bharat Innovates exposition.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed an influential gathering that included **Russian President Vladimir Putin**, **Chinese President Xi Jinping**, **South African President Cyril Ramaphosa**, **Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian**, **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi** and **Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto**, alongside senior delegations

representing Brazil, the UAE, Ethiopia and other participating nations.

Formal negotiations were complemented by a diplomatic dinner hosted by the Prime Minister for visiting leaders, delegates and prominent Indian dignitaries. The evening brought state hospitality and cultural diplomacy together, with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's rendition of a Kishore Kumar classic emerging as one of its most memorable moments.

Adding a symbolic touch to the diplomatic proceedings, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also released two commemorative postage stamps marking two decades of BRICS cooperation and reflecting India's "humanity-first, people-centric" chairship.



For India, the significance of hosting this diverse gathering extended well beyond diplomatic visibility. BRICS is no longer simply a platform seeking a stronger voice for the Global South; it has become a commercial geography of energy producers, manufacturing centres, consumer markets and rapidly expanding technology ecosystems. Chairing the summit under the theme **“Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability,”** India positioned itself as an economic bridge among countries with widely differing strategic priorities. Its ability to build consensus culminated in the unanimous adoption of the 140-paragraph New Delhi Declaration. The opportunity for India is immense but so is the imbalance embedded in its trade with the bloc.

The trade boom and its imbalance

An ASSOCHAM assessment cited in the summit business discussions shows that India’s two way goods trade with BRICS economies more than doubled in five years, rising from about 203 billion dollars in 2020 to 2021 to 417.5 billion dollars in 2025 to 2026. Indian merchandise exports reached 95.7 billion dollars, up 48.8 per cent over the period. Imports, however, climbed much faster to 321.8 billion dollars, widening the deficit to 226.1 billion dollars.

The composition explains the gap. Russia has become indispensable to India’s energy security, while China remains a major source of electronics, machinery, components and industrial inputs. The United Arab Emirates, by contrast, has emerged as India’s strongest export destination within the grouping, receiving goods worth about 37.4 billion dollars. This is the central BRICS paradox for India: trade is expand-

ing, but imports are expanding faster. The bloc can strengthen India’s strategic autonomy only if Indian firms move from being predominantly large buyers to becoming competitive suppliers of higher value goods and services.

That makes ASSOCHAM’s projection of 200 billion dollars in Indian exports to BRICS countries by 2030 more than an aspirational number. It is a test of industrial policy, export readiness and diplomatic execution. Doubling exports in four years will require companies to diversify markets, governments to remove non tariff barriers, and institutions to reduce the cost and uncertainty of cross border transactions.





What the New Delhi Declaration changes

The New Delhi Declaration, adopted unanimously at the summit, is a 140-paragraph document setting out the future direction of BRICS cooperation. It calls for reforms in institutions such as **the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization** so that emerging and developing economies have a greater voice in global decision-making. The leaders also supported restoring the WTO's dispute-settlement system and expressed concern that unilateral tariffs, trade restrictions and economic sanctions could disrupt supply chains and increase inequality.

For businesses, the Declaration contains several practical proposals. These include **digitising trade documents, improving coordination between customs authorities and strengthening the participation of BRICS countries in global supply chains**. It also supports greater cooperation among special economic zones and programmes that provide faster customs clearance to trusted businesses. Another important area is **cross-border payments**. BRICS countries will continue exploring ways to make payments faster, safer and less expensive, while considering greater use of local

currencies wherever appropriate.

The Declaration also places **MSMEs** at the centre of economic cooperation. It welcomes the first **BRICS SME Forum** held in Agra and supports initiatives that can help smaller businesses access finance, technology and international markets. Cooperation is also being expanded in areas such as solar energy, intelligent manufacturing, robotics, digital skills and logistics. These commitments will not create a common BRICS market immediately, but they establish practical channels through which trade, investment and industrial co-operation can grow.



BRICS The New Economic Geography



Four export frontiers for India

1. Digital Technology and Payment Systems

India has built strong digital systems for identity verification, instant payments and public services. Indian technology companies can take this experience to other BRICS markets by offering payment platforms, cybersecurity solutions, digital training and paperless trade systems. These solutions must be adapted to the laws, security requirements and data-protection rules of each country.

2. Advanced Manufacturing

India has significant export potential in electronics, engineering products, automobile components, solar equipment and industrial machinery. To succeed, Indian manufacturers must compete not only on price but also on quality, design, timely delivery and after-sales service. BRICS cooperation in robotics, smart factories and advanced manufacturing could help

Indian companies enter new supply chains.

3. Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals

India is already a major supplier of affordable medicines to developing countries. The next opportunity lies in vaccines, biosimilars, medical devices, telemedicine and collaborative research. Common standards, smoother approvals and faster customs clearance could make it easier for Indian healthcare companies to expand across Africa, West Asia and Latin America.

4. Agriculture and Green Industries

Indian businesses can offer irrigation systems, climate-resilient farming solutions, processed foods, sustainable textiles and renewable-energy equipment to BRICS markets. MSMEs can play an important role in these sectors, provided they receive easier access to export finance, certification, international buyers and reliable logistics support.

From declaration to delivery

The summit also exposed BRICS' limits. Its members have different political systems, security priorities and economic interests. Consensus language can conceal disagreement, and local currency settlement is not the same as a common BRICS currency. Many proposals are still voluntary, at an early stage or dependent on the domestic laws of individual countries. BRICS may be large, but it is not yet a fully connected economic market.

India must now convert its diplomatic relationships into actual export growth. This will require separate strategies for different BRICS markets, common product standards, faster testing and certification, easier trade finance and more dependable shipping links. Indian MSMEs must also be connected directly with international buyers. At the same

time, India needs to reduce its dependence on imported energy, electronics and industrial components. Replacing imports will help, but the larger solution lies in making Indian products and services more competitive internationally.

The central message from New Delhi was practical: BRICS does not need to position itself against the West to remain relevant. Its real value will come from improving development finance, payment systems, customs procedures, technology partnerships and supply chains for emerging economies. If India can use this platform to increase its exports to BRICS countries from approximately \$96 billion to \$200 billion by 2030, the summit will be remembered not only for the leaders who assembled at Bharat Mandapam, but also for the new markets it opened for Indian businesses. The blueprint is ready; its success will depend on implementation. **BI**

India's Path to 200 Billion Dollars

\$95.7bn

EXPORTS IN 2025 TO 2026

\$200bn

2030 OPPORTUNITY

Nearly halfway to the target

01

Digital infrastructure

Payments, cybersecurity, public platforms and digital trade services.

02

Advanced manufacturing

Electronics, engineering goods, auto components and solar equipment.

03

Healthcare

Pharmaceuticals, vaccines, medical devices and telemedicine.

04

Agriculture and green industry

Agritech, processed food, sustainable textiles and renewable energy.



Nepal's Flood Disaster and the Urgent Call for Resilience

by Anjali Bhardwaj

The Himalayas have long been a source of life for South Asia, feeding mighty rivers, sustaining agriculture and supporting millions of livelihoods. Yet, in recent years, these same mountains have increasingly become the starting point of devastating disasters. Nepal's recent floods once again served as a stark reminder of how vulnerable the Himalayan region has become to extreme weather events, changing climate patterns and fragile infrastructure.

Days of relentless rainfall triggered flash floods and landslides across several parts of Nepal, turning rivers into raging torrents that swept away homes, roads and bridges. Communities living along riverbanks were among the worst affected, with thousands forced to flee as floodwaters rose rapidly. Entire villages found themselves cut off after road networks collapsed and communication lines were disrupted, making rescue operations challenging.

For Nepal, floods are not uncommon during the annual monsoon season. However, experts point out that the frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall events have increased significantly over the past decade. Climate scientists attribute this trend to rising global temperatures, which allow the atmosphere to hold more moisture, resulting in heavier bursts of rainfall over shorter periods. In a mountainous country like Nepal, where steep terrain accelerates the flow of water, the consequences can be catastrophic.

How the Disaster Unfolded

The floods were triggered by intense monsoon rainfall across Nepal's central and eastern regions. Rivers swelled beyond their carrying capacity, overflowing into nearby settlements and agricultural land. At the same time, saturated hillsides gave way, causing landslides that buried roads, damaged homes and blocked major transport routes.

The geography of Nepal makes such disasters particularly destructive. Thousands of settlements are located in narrow river valleys or on unstable mountain slopes. When heavy rain falls continuously, rivers rise within hours while weakened slopes collapse without warning. The combination of flash floods and landslides leaves very little time for evacuation.

Emergency teams from the Nepal Army, Armed Police Force and local authorities launched rescue operations soon after warnings were issued. Helicopters were deployed to rescue stranded residents in inaccessible areas, while security personnel worked around the clock to evacuate families, restore connectivity and deliver relief supplies. Despite these efforts, difficult terrain and damaged infrastructure slowed rescue operations in many locations.

Human and Economic Impact

The floods claimed numerous lives and left many others injured or missing. Thousands of families were displaced as houses were washed away or rendered unsafe. Schools, healthcare facilities and public buildings also suffered damage, disrupting essential services for affected communities.

Agriculture, the backbone of Nepal's rural economy, experienced significant losses. Standing crops were submerged, livestock perished and fertile farmland was buried under layers of mud and debris. For many farming households, the disaster meant the loss of both income and food security.

Transport infrastructure suffered extensive damage as highways, rural roads and bridges were washed away or severely weakened. The destruction isolated several districts, delaying relief operations and affecting the movement of goods and essential supplies. Rebuilding this infrastructure will require substantial financial resources and careful planning.

Tourism, another key pillar of Nepal's economy, also faced setbacks. Trekking routes, mountain roads and tourism-related facilities were damaged in several regions, raising concerns about the impact on local businesses that depend heavily on seasonal visitors.

Climate Change and Himalayan Vulnerability

The Nepal floods once again brought attention to the growing risks facing the Himalayan region. Scientists have repeatedly warned that rising temperatures are accelerating glacier melt while increasing the likelihood of extreme rainfall events. The result is a complex disaster landscape where floods, landslides and glacial lake outburst floods pose simultaneous threats.

Rapid urbanisation, deforestation and construction in vulnerable areas have further increased disaster risks. Encroachment along riverbanks and inadequate drainage systems often worsen flooding, particularly in growing towns and cities.

Experts believe that reducing disaster risk will require stronger early warning systems, better land-use planning, climate-resilient infrastructure and greater community preparedness. Investments in weather forecasting, river monitoring and public awareness can significantly reduce the loss of life during such events.

Lessons for South Asia

Nepal's floods are not an isolated tragedy. Countries across the Himalayan region, including India, Bhutan and Bangladesh, are increasingly experiencing the downstream effects of extreme weather. Rivers do not recognise political boundaries, making regional cooperation essential for effective flood forecasting, data sharing and disaster response.

India and Nepal have already strengthened cooperation in hydrological data exchange and flood management. As climate risks continue to grow, further collaboration in river basin management, early warning technologies and resilient infrastructure will become increasingly important.

The disaster also reinforces the need for governance that places resilience at the centre of development planning. Disaster management can no longer focus only on emergency response. It must also prioritise prevention, preparedness and sustainable infrastructure capable of withstanding future climate shocks.

A Shared Responsibility

Behind every statistic is a family that has lost a home, a livelihood or a loved one. While rescue teams and relief agencies continue their efforts, the long process of rehabilitation and rebuilding has only begun.

The Nepal floods are a reminder that climate resilience is no longer a distant policy discussion but an immediate governance challenge. As weather extremes become more frequent, governments, institutions and communities across South Asia must work together to strengthen preparedness, invest in resilient infrastructure and protect vulnerable populations.

For Nepal, recovery will take time. For the region, however, the lessons are immediate. Building resilience today will determine how effectively societies can face the disasters of tomorrow. **BI**



How Waste-to-Value Innovation Can Advance Clean Rivers, Women's Livelihoods and Green Growth

A flower offered in devotion can become a source of pollution in a matter of hours. India generates an estimated eight million tons of floral waste every year, most of which comes from places of worship, households and festivals. An act of faith can turn into an environmental burden when thrown-away flowers reach rivers or city waste. Let's consider the opposite. What if this waste didn't have to become waste, but create livelihoods, desirable products and cleaner rivers?

This is the promise of waste-to-value innovation: turning discarded resources into products, enterprises, livelihoods and green growth.

From Waste to Worth

India's waste challenge is connected to limited understanding of opportunities from green growth. **Phool**, an IIT Kanpur-incubated startup, demonstrates how flowers from temples can be converted into incense sticks, compost and biomaterials. It collects around 21 tons a week across cities like Ayodhya, Varanasi, Bodh Gaya and Badrinath. **Holy Waste and Aaruhi** are similar initiatives that transform floral waste into consumer products while creating livelihood opportunities.

The message is simple: waste can be a resource for enterprise, jobs and green growth, not just something to throw away.

When Luxury Becomes Sustainability

There is an opportunity for us to make sustainability interesting. Masstige sustainable luxury is all about accessible prestige, craftsmanship, sustainability and emotional value in emerging countries like India where middle class willingness of pay for luxury product made out of waste is limited. Indian brands like Nicobar, No Nasties and Bare Necessities are examples of how aspirational sustainable design and storytelling can make responsible consumption. The source of the product is part of its value for waste-to-value companies. Storytelling creates transparency, fosters co-creation, and transforms consumers from passive consumers to active participants in sustainable innovation.

Government as a Co-Creator, Not Just a Regulator

The government should go beyond regulation and waste collection



by Prof. Ruchi Agarwal
MDI, Gurgaon

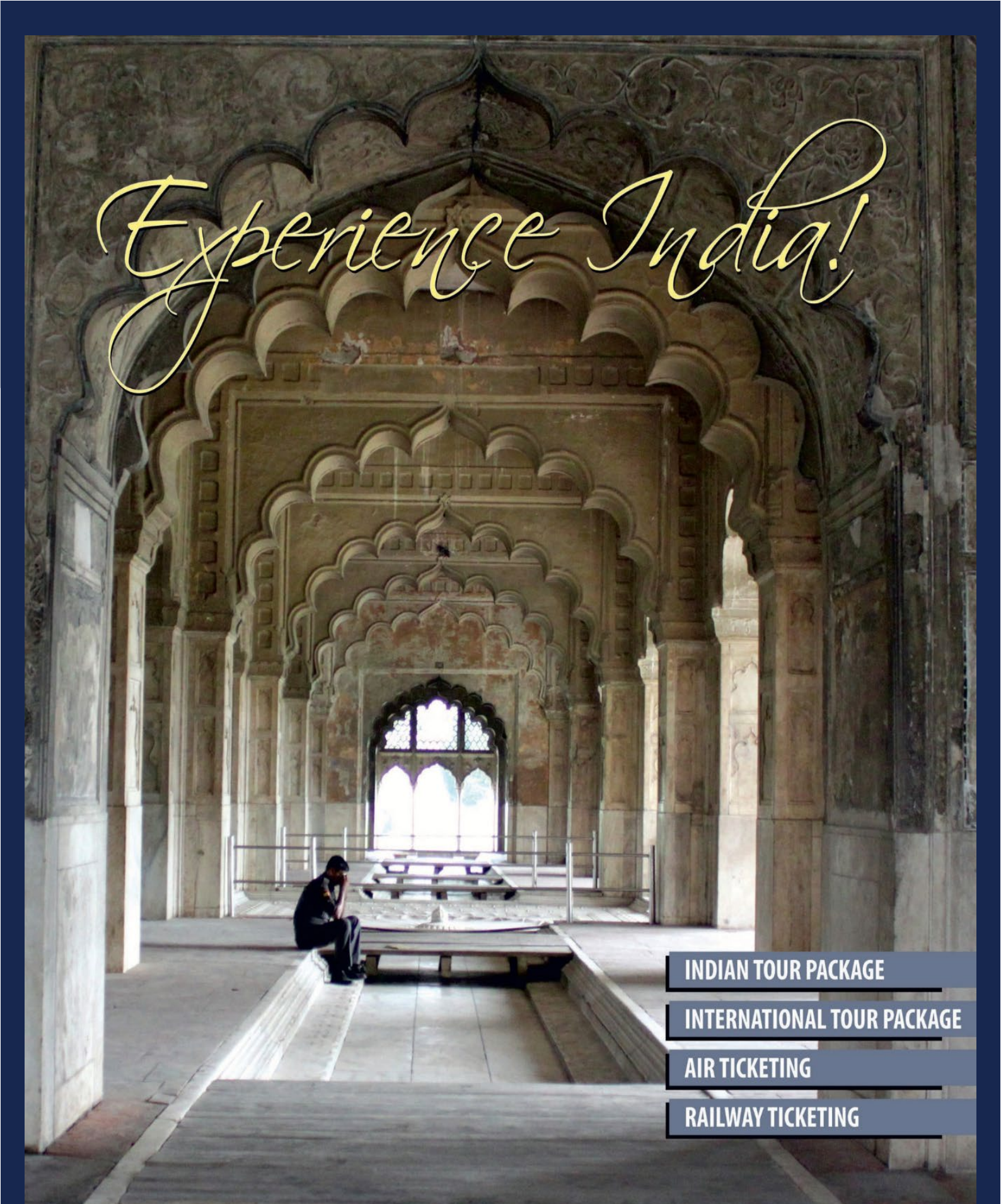
to act as co-creator and market-maker of circular innovation.

The Netherlands is an interesting example, bringing together government, businesses, knowledge institutions and civil society while using public procurement as a 'launching customer' to create markets for circular solutions.

India can draw inspiration from initiatives like the **One District One Product (ODOP) program** in Uttar Pradesh by creating district-level circular co-creation labs that bring together administrators, municipalities, temple authorities, women's self-help groups, start-ups, universities and consumers. These types of platforms need knowledge of sustainable business models to transform local waste into viable products and businesses. Women can be micro-entrepreneurs and co-creators, involved along the value chain from collection, processing, to product design and marketing. There are four actions which can accelerate this transition:

1. Establish source level collection of floral waste from temples, ghats and pilgrimage centers.
2. Establish district co-creation platforms between government, businesses, women's groups and knowledge institutions.
3. Cultivate early markets for circular products with public procurement and innovation challenges.
4. Measure the value created, including pollution avoided, women employed, income generated and resources recovered.

The goal is to change the conversation from "How do we get rid of waste?" to "What can we get from it?" With government facilitating collaboration and markets, waste can be a pathway to cleaner rivers, dignified livelihoods, new enterprises and masstige sustainable luxury. **BI**



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Arabian Travel Market 2026

Dubai Sets the Course for the Future of Global Tourism

by BI Desk

The global travel and tourism industry gathered once again in Dubai as the 33rd edition of the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2026 brought together tourism leaders, policymakers, airlines, hospitality brands, technology companies and travel buyers from more than 115 countries. Held at the Dubai World Trade Centre from 14 to 17 September, the four-day event reinforced its position as one of the world's most influential travel trade exhibitions, serving as a platform for business, innovation and international collaboration.

This year's edition reflected the growing confidence of the global tourism sector, with participation from decision-makers representing markets including the UAE, India, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, China, the United States, South Africa and several other countries. More than 55 destination stands showcased tourism offerings, while airlines, hospitality groups, transport providers and travel technology firms presented new products and partnerships.

Innovation Takes Centre Stage

Held under the theme “**Travel 2040: Driving New Frontiers Through Innovation and Technology**,” ATM 2026 focused on how artificial intelligence, digital transformation, smart mobility and changing traveller expectations are reshaping the future of tourism. More than 90 conference sessions were organised across the Global Stage, Future Stage and Experience Hub, alongside 28 live technology demonstrations at the Tech & Innovation Hub. The event also marked the debut of the co-located ATM Travel Tech exhibition, highlighting the industry's growing focus on digital innovation.

Technology emerged as one of the defining themes of the event. Mastercard and Trip.com introduced TripGenie, an AI-powered travel booking platform developed with Network International, aimed at transforming how travellers search, plan and pay for their journeys. The showcase reflected the increasing role of artificial intelligence in delivering personalised travel experiences and improving customer convenience.

Major Announcements Shape the Event

ATM 2026 witnessed several significant announcements across aviation, tourism, hospitality and transport.

One of the biggest highlights was the launch of Visit UAE, the country's first unified national tourism brand designed to promote the UAE as a single, integrated destination. Alongside it, authorities unveiled the UAE Grand Tour, a digital platform encouraging visitors to explore all seven emirates through one connected travel route.

The aviation sector also recorded important developments. Emirates signed 11 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with regional and international partners to strengthen collaboration in technology, tourism marketing, travel packages and passenger experiences. Meanwhile, Etihad Airways and Etihad Rail announced a partnership to develop a seamless air-rail travel experience, improving connectivity between Abu Dhabi and destinations across the UAE.

In another major announcement, a consortium comprising Air Arabia Group, Nesma Group and KUN Holding Company confirmed the launch of a new Saudi Arabian airline connecting Dammam with Riyadh, Madinah and Jeddah. The move reflects the Kingdom's continued investment in expanding domestic and regional connectivity.

The hospitality sector also demonstrated strong growth ambitions. Rotana Hotels revealed the next phase of its regional expansion strategy, with 40 new hotels and more than 8,300 rooms currently under development. A significant portion of these projects will be located in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the country's growing importance in the regional tourism landscape.

Driving the Future of Travel

Beyond business deals and product launches, ATM 2026 reinforced Dubai's role as a global



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meeting point for the travel industry. The event also introduced a refreshed brand identity, reflecting its evolution from a traditional trade exhibition into a year-round platform for collaboration, networking and knowledge sharing.

As tourism continues to recover and evolve, the conversations at ATM 2026 made one message clear. The future of travel will be driven by technology, stronger partnerships and seamless visitor experiences. From AI-powered travel planning and integrated transport networks to destination branding and sustainable growth, the event highlighted the trends that are expected to shape the global tourism industry in the years ahead.

With preparations already underway for ATM 2027, the Dubai event once again demonstrated why it remains one of the most important gatherings on the international tourism calendar, bringing together ideas, innovation and opportunities from across the world under one roof. **BI**



WTM SPOTLIGHT RIYADH MAKES ITS DEBUT

by BI Desk



- *WTM Spotlight Riyadh officially opens at the Riyadh Front Exhibition & Conference Center (RFECC), marking the launch of a new platform connecting the world to Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia to the world*
- *Leading regional and international destinations and travel brands come together for three days of business, networking and knowledge exchange*
- *Conference programme brings together senior Saudi and international voices to examine Vision 2030, outbound market opportunities and the future of connected travel experiences*

On behalf of H.E. Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Minister of Tourism, Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) CEO Ageel AlShaibani has officially opened the inaugural WTM Spotlight Riyadh, marking the launch of a new international meeting place for the travel and tourism industry as Saudi Arabia continues its transformation into one of the world's most dynamic tourism markets under Vision 2030.

Organised by RX and taking place from 8th to 10th September at the Riyadh Front Exhibition & Conference Center (RFECC), WTM Spotlight Riyadh, in strategic partnership with the Ministry of Tourism, brings together destinations, tourism authorities, hospitality and experience providers, airlines, travel technology companies, travel buyers, investors and industry leaders, creating a focused environment for business, collaboration and knowledge exchange.

The opening marks an important milestone as Saudi Arabia continues to strengthen its position as one of the world's fastest-growing tourism destinations. Under Vision 2030, tourism has become a key pillar of the Kingdom's economic diversification strategy, with the sector targeted to contribute 10% of GDP and Saudi Arabia aiming to welcome 150 million domestic and international visitors annually by the end of the decade.

The exhibition floor reflects the breadth of the global travel industry, spanning destinations, hotels, attractions, transportation, experiences and travel technology.

High-profile Saudi Arabian organisations exhibiting at WTM Spotlight Riyadh include, amongst others, Amsa Hospitality,

Taiba Investments, flyadeal, Hilton KSA Hotels, and The Jeddah Edition. They will be joined by international brands including Accor, MSC Cruises, Delta Air Lines, Etihad Airways and Webook.com.

Visitor registration for WTM Spotlight Riyadh is now open, with travel professionals invited to secure their place at the inaugural event and engage directly with one of the world's fastest-growing tourism markets. **BI**

Ageel AlShaibani, CEO of the Saudi Tourism Authority, said: "With tourism spending growing by 5% year-on-year in H1 2026, Saudi's tourism fundamentals remain exceptionally strong, underscoring the depth and durability of our market. WTM Spotlight Riyadh brings that opportunity to life for our partners, connecting global travel buyers directly with the destinations, products and experiences shaping the future of tourism in Saudi. We look forward to deepening these relationships and unlocking new opportunities for the travel trade across the Kingdom."

India–Saudi Arabia Dialogue Highlights New Opportunities for Trade and Industrial Cooperation

by BI Bureau with inputs from Mr. Ganpat Kothari



A high-level meeting in Mumbai highlighted new opportunities to strengthen business, trade and social relations between India and Saudi Arabia, with discussions focusing on exports, industrial investment and long-term commercial cooperation.

Dr. Khalid Al Thumairi, CEO of Modco Power & Modern Dimension Co., was warmly welcomed during his visit to Mumbai. He was accompanied by Khadeer Ahmed, Syed Ishaq, Soumiya Ranjan Mahapatra and other distinguished delegates. The meeting was hosted by Ganpat Kothari, President of the Rajasthan Foundation, Mumbai Chapter, and was also attended by Dr. Bipin Bihari Mishra.

The participants exchanged views on the current state of India-Saudi Arabia relations and explored practical avenues for expanding bilateral engagement.

A significant portion of the meeting focused on increasing Indian exports to Saudi Arabia. The export of Indian marble emerged as one of the key areas of interest, reflecting the potential for Indian producers and exporters to access the expanding Saudi market.

The discussions also examined the possibility of establishing manufacturing facilities in Saudi Arabia for cables, electrical goods and other industrial products. Such initiatives could create opportunities for joint ventures, technology partnerships, investment and market expansion while enabling Indian companies to strengthen their presence in the region.

As both nations continue to explore new avenues for partnership, Mumbai's discussions represent a positive step toward developing stronger business connections and creating a more dynamic framework for bilateral trade and investment. **BI**

Diljit Dosanjh's Czechia Journey Shines a Spotlight Beyond Prague

by BI Desk

Between the Berlin and Dublin legs of his AURA World Tour 2026, global music icon Diljit Dosanjh took a break from the stage to explore Czechia, offering millions of fans a glimpse into one of Central Europe's most captivating destinations. The collaboration with CzechTourism has not only showcased Prague's timeless charm but also highlighted the country's lesser-known natural attractions.

Diljit visited the stunning Tisá Walls in North Bohemia, a spectacular sandstone rock formation known for its dramatic landscapes and outdoor adventures. He also explored Prague through a cruise on the Vltava River, a vintage car tour, and visits to iconic landmarks including the Charles Bridge and the Lennon Wall, while sampling traditional Czech cuisine.

The campaign made a remarkable impact online, with content shared by Diljit and his team crossing 10 million Instagram views. The initiative introduced Czechia's blend of history, culture and nature to a vast Indian and international audience, encouraging travellers to look beyond the capital city.

Barbara Andelova, International Marketing Middle East and India at CzechTourism, described the collaboration as a meaningful opportunity to present Czechia to millions through one of India's most influential global artists. She praised Diljit and his team for their enthusiasm and professionalism, expressing hope for future collaborations.

The campaign also reinforced Czechia's diverse tourism appeal. While Prague remains the country's biggest draw, destinations like the Tisá Walls, historic towns, spa regions and scenic countryside offer travellers a wealth of experiences waiting to be explored. In an era where travel inspiration often begins on social media, Diljit Dosanjh's visit has successfully positioned Czechia as more than just a city break, inviting visitors to discover the country's many hidden gems. **BI**



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Carrying the Sattrra Within My Journey with Sattriya

By Smt. Prateesha Saikia Suresh, Senior Dance Practitioner, Choreographer and Researcher; Director, Pratishruti Foundation, Mumbai

Mahapurush Shrimanta Shankardeva (1449–1568) founded Sattriya dance as an integral part of his religious and cultural philosophy. The dance tradition has been preserved and practised in the Sattras established by him and transmitted through the guru-shishya parampara. Traditionally, Sattriya was performed by male practitioners, with young boys also portraying female characters. It was only in the latter part of the twentieth century that women began entering the tradition in increasing numbers.

My journey with Sattriya began very early in life as a young child of three years. Later, I went to Kalakshetra, Chennai, to train in Bharatanatyam and, on my return in 1989, resumed my training in Sattriya. This was also a significant period in the history of the dance. My Gurus, together with noted scholars and senior practitioners from the Sattras, were working collectively towards establishing Sattriya as a major Indian classical dance tradition. They encouraged me, as a young dancer, to contribute to this endeavour, and I embraced the opportunity with great excitement.



It was a challenging journey for everyone involved to take Sattriya beyond Assam. I began with lecture-demonstrations and performances, which became important means of creating awareness and visibility for the tradition. In 1999, along with my Guru, I presented what was then the first lecture-demonstration and performance of Sattriya in New Delhi. The presentation received attention from dancers, scholars and the media, with several newspapers covering the event. The response was deeply encouraging and strengthened my resolve to continue taking the tradition to new audiences. Many more lectures, demonstrations and performances followed in different parts of the country.

Gradually, I began to realise that I was no longer simply learning and performing a dance tradition; I was also carrying a responsibility to propagate and transmit it. On 15 November 2000, Sattriya received recognition from Sangeet Natak Akademi, as a major Indian classical dance tradition. With this recognition

ways of engaging creatively with the vocabulary of the form while remaining rooted in its tradition.

In 2005, I travelled to London, where Sattriya dance was presented for the first time. For me, this was a significant moment, not only because I was taking the dance beyond India, but because a tradition rooted in the Sattras of Assam was encountering an international audience for the first time. Thereafter, I travelled to South Korea, Boston and Edinburgh, where I had the opportunity to share Sattriya with audiences unfamiliar with the tradition and yet appreciative and curious about the art form. Each journey brought a new experience of seeing Sattriya enter different cultural spaces and connect with new audiences.

At the recently concluded BRICS Summit, Sattriya was presented alongside other Indian classical dance traditions. To see my dance form represented on such an international platform was



came a new phase in its journey. Tradition and creative work now had to move hand in hand.

I began focusing on choreography, teaching and research. Towards this, I established Pratishruti Foundation in 2008, engaging in dance-drama productions and creating opportunities for dancers. Costumes became an important part of these productions, with an emphasis on authentic representation. My research on costumes led me to recreate both female and male costumes, reviving certain components of the tradition that had been discarded over time. As I explored new choreographic possibilities, I found new

deeply fulfilling. It also made me realise that we may be entering a new chapter in Sattriya's journey. The dance that travelled from the Sattras of Assam to stages across India is now reaching the global stage.

For me, however, taking Sattriya to the world has never meant taking it away from its roots. Its strength lies in the living tradition from which it emerged. As I continue to perform, teach, choreograph and research, my journey remains one of carrying that tradition forward, while ensuring that, wherever Sattriya travels, the Sattra travels with it. **BI**

Mind n Matter: The Human Side of Governance

(The Psychology behind Bureaucracy and Decision-making)

by Lt Col (Dr) Ratnesh Sinha, Retd, Editorial Patron, BI

Article 3: Bias in the System: How Cognitive Shortcuts Shape Policy Outcomes

“Not every flawed decision is born of incompetence or intent. Sometimes, an intelligent mind simply fails to see the bias through which it is looking.”

When Good People Make Questionable Decisions

When an administrative decision goes wrong, we instinctively search for a reason. Was there inadequate information? Was the officer inexperienced? Was there political pressure? Was procedure ignored? Was there corruption or vested interest?

Sometimes, the answer may be far less dramatic.

The decision-maker may have been competent, sincere, experienced and acting entirely in good faith. And yet, the decision may still have been flawed.

Why?

Because between information and judgment stands something extraordinarily powerful—the **human mind**.

Confirmation Bias: Seeing What We Already Believe

Perhaps one of the most powerful biases in administration is confirmation bias—our tendency to notice, seek or give greater importance to information that supports what we already believe.

Imagine an administrator who has developed the view that a particular programme is ineffective. A review is ordered. Ten indicators are presented. Seven suggest weaknesses. Three indicate encouraging results. Which ones are likely to receive

greater attention? Very often, the evidence supporting the existing belief.

Now reverse the situation.

If the administrator was personally involved in introducing the programme, the same evidence might be interpreted differently. The data has not changed. The mind interpreting the data has.

This is precisely why disagreement within organisations can be valuable.

A colleague who asks, “What evidence would make us change our mind?” may contribute more to sound governance than someone who merely agrees with the prevailing view.

Authority Bias: When Hierarchy Influences Thought

Hierarchy is essential to administration. Responsibility must ultimately rest somewhere. But hierarchy carries a psychological side effect. Human beings tend to attach greater credibility to the opinions of people perceived as powerful or authoritative. This is known as **authority bias**.

In bureaucratic organisations, a senior officer’s initial view can unconsciously shape the entire discussion that follows. Subordinates may possess contrary information but hesitate to express it. A meeting intended to generate options can quickly become an exercise in validating the senior-most person’s preference.

The danger is not necessarily an authoritarian superior. Often, no one has been instructed to agree. People simply do. The stronger the hierarchy, therefore, the greater the respon-

-sibility of leadership to deliberately invite dissent.

A powerful question for a senior administrator may be:

“Tell me why my assessment could be wrong.”

It does not diminish authority. It strengthens judgment.

The Availability Bias: When the Dramatic Becomes the Important

Human beings naturally give greater importance to events that are recent, dramatic or easily remembered. A highly publicised accident may suddenly generate intense regulatory attention. A viral social-media complaint may receive immediate administrative priority. A recent crisis may disproportionately influence resource allocation. Public responsiveness is essential. Administrators must respond to emerging concerns.

But there is a difference between what is visible and what is important. A problem affecting thousands quietly may deserve greater attention than an incident dominating headlines for three days.

The administrator must therefore repeatedly ask:
“Am I responding to the scale of the problem—or merely to its visibility?”

That distinction is increasingly important in the age of social media.

Groupthink: When Consensus Becomes Dangerous

Administrative decisions are frequently made through committees, boards and consultation. This should theoretically reduce individual bias. Sometimes it creates another one.

Groupthink occurs when maintaining harmony within a group becomes more important than critically examining alternatives.

Everyone around the table appears to agree. The proposal moves quickly. The meeting ends successfully. Yet perhaps nobody truly challenged the central assumption.

Can Bias Ever Be Eliminated?

Probably not. And perhaps that is the wrong objective. Bias arises partly because the human mind must simplify an overwhelmingly complex world. We cannot switch off this architecture merely through training.

But we can become more conscious of it. This leads to an im-

portant distinction. The opposite of bias is not perfect objectivity. The opposite of unconscious bias is conscious examination.

Before an important decision, an administrator can pause and ask:

- What am I assuming?
- What evidence contradicts my current position?
- Whose voice have I not heard?
- Am I favouring familiarity over effectiveness?
- Would I reach the same conclusion if this proposal came from someone else?
- What would an intelligent critic say about this decision?

These questions take minutes. Their consequences may last years.



Designing Institutions That Think Better

We should also avoid making cognitive bias entirely an individual responsibility. Good institutions can be designed to reduce its influence. Important decisions can include independent review. Senior leaders can invite junior officers to speak first so that hierarchy does not anchor the discussion. Policy proposals can deliberately include contrary evidence. Teams can appoint a member to challenge the prevailing recommendation. Pilot projects can test assumptions before large-scale implementation. Data can be examined before narratives are constructed around it.

These are small institutional interventions. But they create something extraordinarily valuable: **psychological checks and balances**.

Just as financial systems require audit mechanisms, decision systems require cognitive audit mechanisms.

The Mind n Matter Perspective

Governance traditionally concentrates on the visible architecture of administration—rules, procedures, hierarchies, budgets, institutions and technology.

That is the **Matter**.

But operating within this architecture is another system: perception, judgment, emotion, experience, assumptions and bias.

That is the **Mind**.

We can redesign procedures endlessly, but if we ignore how human beings actually think, the reform remains incomplete.

The objective is not to create administrators without biases. Such administrators do not exist. The objective is to create administrators sufficiently self-aware to recognise when their own minds may be misleading them. That transition—from merely intelligent decision-making to self-aware decision-making—may represent one of the most important frontiers in public administration.

Closing Thought

“The finest decision-maker is not the one who believes he is objective, but the one who has developed the humility to question the lens through which he sees.” **BI**



With over thirty five years of distinguished service in the Indian Army, international advisory roles, and senior corporate and academic leadership, **Lt Col (Dr) Ratnesh Sinha (Retd)**, brings unmatched

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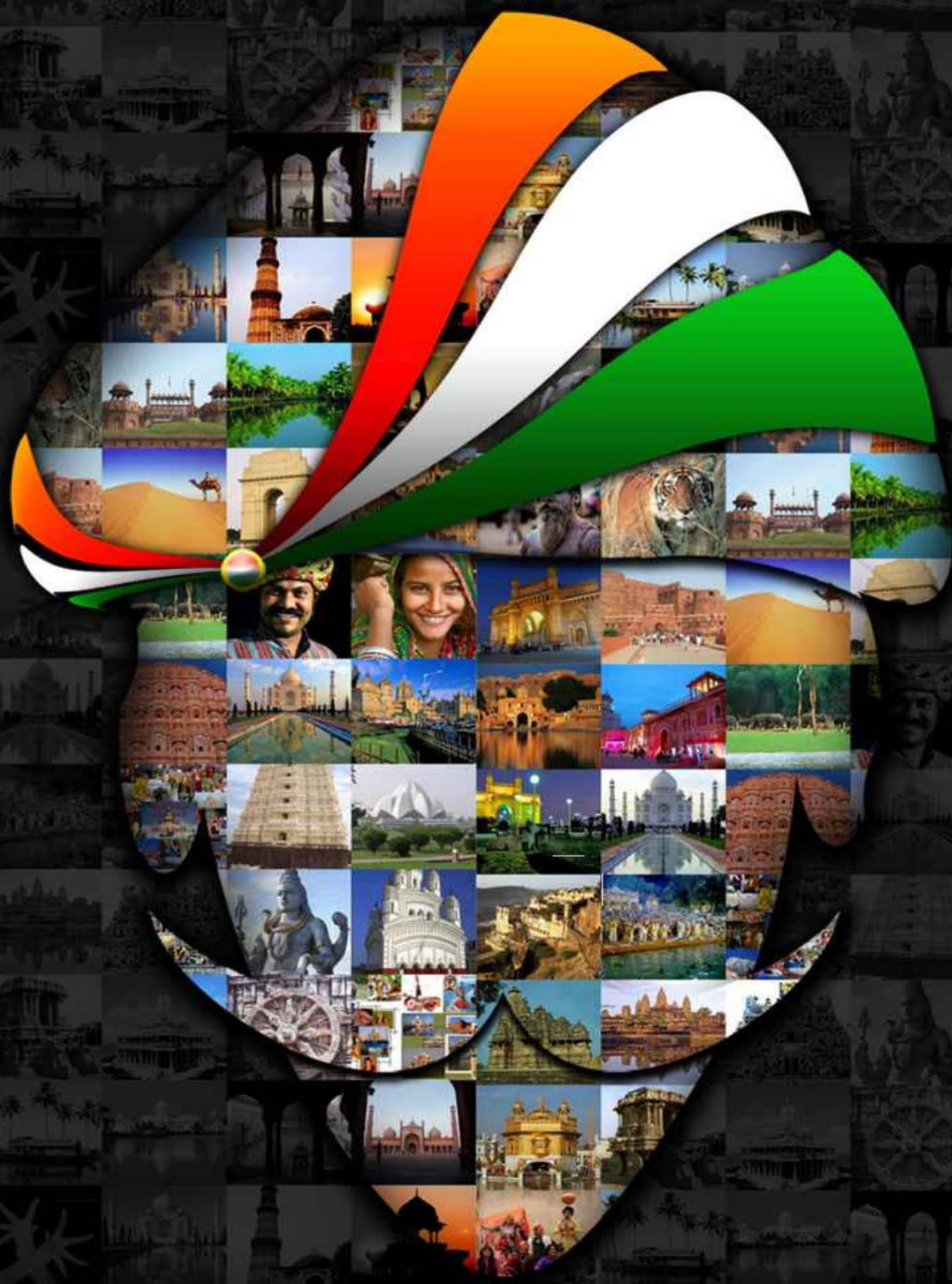
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