Public Affairs Forum of India

13th ANNUAL FORUM 2026

INDIA 3.0 - Engaging for Growth in a Disrupted World

IDEAS | INSIGHTS | IMPACT

24 - 25 SEPTEMBER 2026

NEW DELHI

FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

PAFI - Advancing the practice of Public Affairs, Public Policy and Advocacy


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FORUM 2026
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Message from the Founder

India stands at a defining moment in its journey. Having been associated with India's public policy and public affairs ecosystem over the years, I have had the opportunity to observe our country's remarkable transformation. What strikes me most is not just the scale of our economic progress, but the growing confidence, ambition and capacity of India to engage with the world on its own terms.

It is this moment, and the opportunity it presents, that inspired the theme of the 13th PAFI Annual Forum: India 3.0: Engaging for Growth in a Disrupted World.



Ajay Khanna

The world is undergoing profound change. Geopolitics, technology, artificial intelligence, trade, energy, supply chains, capital and national security are increasingly interconnected. These shifts are reshaping economies and the way countries engage with one another. For India, the challenge is not simply to react, but to understand these changes, anticipate what lies ahead and engage with purpose and confidence.

I see India 3.0 as the next chapter in our national journey. If India 1.0 was about building India and India 2.0 about growing India, India 3.0 is about India increasingly engaging with, contributing to and helping shape the world. Our domestic strengths, entrepreneurial energy, technological capabilities and growing global connections provide a strong foundation. The opportunity now is to translate these into greater competitiveness, innovation, investment and leadership, while ensuring that growth creates meaningful opportunities for our people.

But leadership is about more than economic scale. It is also about ideas, institutions, partnerships, and the ability to contribute to solutions for shared global challenges. India has an opportunity to help shape the global conversation on technology, sustainable growth, resilient supply chains, and international cooperation. Our ambition must be not merely to participate in a changing world, but to help influence its direction.

Realising this ambition will require collaboration across government, business, policymakers, experts, and society. It will require spaces where different perspectives can meet, challenge assumptions, and develop a deeper understanding of the choices before us. My experience has reinforced a simple conviction: better public policy rarely emerges from louder voices; it emerges from better conversations.

This belief has been at the heart of the Public Affairs Forum of India since its founding in 2008. We set out not simply to create an organisation, but to help build a profession and a platform for dialogue, knowledge, and responsible engagement. Today, public affairs sits at the intersection of business strategy, public policy, geopolitics, technology, and competitiveness. Its real measure is not simply influence, but trust—and its contribution lies in helping turn informed dialogue into practical outcomes for India.

Over the years, I have seen a significant evolution in the role and recognition of public affairs professionals in India. PAFI has played an important part in this journey by encouraging professional standards and knowledge-sharing, and helping establish public affairs as a credible, responsible and valued profession. I am often asked whether the government listens to PAFI.

The 13th Annual Forum reflected how this conversation is evolving. Policymakers, Ministers, Members of Parliament, senior officials, business leaders, international voices, experts and younger professionals brought a broad range of perspectives to the questions shaping India's future. The participation of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu as our Partner States enriched the discussions, connecting national ambitions with opportunities emerging across India's states. Our expanding international engagement also reflects the need for India's public affairs and policy conversations to become increasingly global.

Over these two days, the many sessions and conversations generated a wealth of ideas, insights and perspectives. The value of the Forum lies not only in what is discussed on stage, but also in the candid exchanges, new connections and different viewpoints that emerge along the way. The key takeaways captured in these Forum Highlights offer a glimpse of this collective thinking. I hope they serve as more than a record of our deliberations—that they stimulate further dialogue, inform new thinking and help translate ideas into action.

As I look ahead, I believe India 3.0 calls for a public affairs profession that is thoughtful, intellectually ambitious, inclusive, global and, above all, useful to India. PAFI must continue to evolve with the country, creating opportunities for dialogue, bringing new voices into the conversation and strengthening the trust that enables stakeholders to work together. Our responsibility is to help India navigate disruption with confidence, realise its immense potential and contribute meaningfully to the world.

My sincere thanks to **Shivnath Thukral, President of PAFI, and Virat Bhatia, Co-Chair of the Annual Forum**, for their leadership and commitment. I am deeply grateful to the PAFI Advisory Council, the Annual Forum Core Group and the entire PAFI Secretariat for their dedication and hard work. My thanks also go to our distinguished speakers, Partner States, sponsors, supporting organisations and delegates, whose contributions made the Forum possible and meaningful. Above all, I thank the PAFI community for continuing to strengthen this shared platform and for contributing to India's evolving public affairs and policy journey.

I look forward to seeing you all at the **14th PAFI Annual Forum on 16–17 September 2027**, as we continue our conversations and collective efforts to advance India's journey towards India 3.0. **The opportunity before India is immense. Our task is to turn that opportunity into leadership, and that leadership into lasting national progress.**

Ajay Khanna
Founder, PAFI
Chairman Emeritus,
PAFI Annual Forum

Message from the President

Looking back at the two days we spent together at the 13th Annual Forum, what stays with me is not just the scale of the conversations, but the quiet, intensive journey that brought us all into that room. Putting together a platform like this is never a solitary effort; it is a labour of love, shaped by a community that cares deeply about the future of public policy in India.

The programme you experienced did not come together overnight. In the months leading up to the Forum, the PAFI Core Group met ten times.



Shivnath Thukral

We poured over multiple drafts of the agenda, navigating debates, sharing ideas over coffee, and engaging in long discussions about what truly matters to our ecosystem right now. We wanted to ensure that every session and every format felt purposeful. We stepped away from the comfort of traditional panels because we wanted to create a space that felt less like a conventional conference and more like a shared, honest dialogue. This vision came to life through our new *PAFI@Varq* format—intimate breakout sessions limited to just 40 attendees to foster candid, unscripted, and highly interactive conversations.

When we looked at the themes defining our world, we knew we had to tackle the complex realities head-on. Our sessions explored the granular details of macroeconomic strategy and the structural roadmap to 2047, while also stepping back to look at the shifting tectonic plates of global trade and geoeconomics. We explored frontier sectors, debating the democratisation of artificial intelligence and the realities of our national energy transition. The goal was to connect the boardroom with the frontlines of policymaking, bringing genuine substance to the idea of India 3.0. To capture this widening global footprint, for the first time, the Forum featured dedicated sessions navigating the geopolitical and geoeconomic nuances of India's relations with the US, Europe, China, and the Middle East.

Perhaps the most meaningful decision we made this year was to structurally embed the voices of the next generation into our agenda. Public affairs is evolving rapidly, and we cannot afford to leave young professionals out of the room where decisions are shaped. By introducing dedicated platforms like the Future Leaders Dialogue, we made a conscious choice to give our younger colleagues a rightful seat at the table. Bringing their energy, fresh perspectives, and bold questions into direct contact with seasoned policymakers and industry champions brought a wonderful vitality to the Forum.

None of this ambition would have translated into reality without an extraordinary bedrock of trust. We are deeply humbled to have been backed by 36 sponsors and 34 supporters this year—the highest number in PAFI's history. This record level of partnership is a testament to how crucial the public affairs function has become, and how committed our wider ecosystem is to building a robust, shared narrative.

A gathering of this magnitude relies entirely on the people working tirelessly behind the scenes. I want to express my deepest gratitude to the PAFI Secretariat. This young, incredibly energetic team worked long hours, managing countless moving parts and hundreds of stakeholders with grace and a smile. They are the quiet engine of this organisation, and we owe them a great deal.

Finally, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our Founder, Ajay Khanna. Ajay, your visionary leadership, quiet wisdom, and enduring commitment have built the very foundation of trust that allows PAFI to dream a little bigger every year.

Thank you to everyone who joined us, challenged us, and shared their ideas.

Shivnath Thukral
President, PAFI
Vice President - Public Policy and Government Affairs
PhonePe Limited





Broadening Horizons:
New Initiatives at the Forum

The 13th Annual Forum marked a transformation in how PAFI conceives, curates, and experiences its flagship event. The objective was to move beyond a conventional conference of predictable panels and create a more high-impact, participative, and outcome-oriented platform for the public affairs community.

A Redesigned Programme Architecture

For the first time, the Forum moved to a new venue—the Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi—and introduced a dynamic dual-track format. The architecture combined 17 flagship plenary sessions with an entirely new parallel breakout track, PAFI@Varq, which hosted eight focused sessions strictly limited to an intimate capacity of 40 seats on a first-come, first-served basis to maximise unscripted audience participation. We also introduced PAFI Conversations: four dedicated, 30-minute one-on-one dialogues completely stripped of prepared speeches, presentations, or formal panel setups, diving straight into candid executive insights.

A Wider Lens on the World: The Geopolitics Track

Recognising that public affairs is increasingly shaped by global disruptions, the Forum significantly expanded its geopolitical dimension. For the first time, the agenda featured dedicated, deep-dive conversations on and with China, the European Union, and the Middle East, sitting alongside the crucial India–US strategic leadership dialogues. The programme wove together critical themes of geoeconomics, trade, and energy security, anchored by prominent international diplomatic representation, including the serving ambassadors of the European Union and Denmark.

Two Partner States

This edition also introduced a dual Partner State model for the first time, welcoming both Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Their extensive ministerial and administrative participation brought vital sub-national perspectives on infrastructure, the speed of doing business, and investment promotion, enriching the national dialogue surrounding India 3.0.

A Stronger Women's Voice

Diversity was treated as a structural foundation of this year's agenda, reflected by women constituting a historic 41.5% of total attendees and taking up nearly a quarter of all speaking and leadership roles. To tackle the specific realities women face in the profession, the Forum hosted dedicated, high-impact dialogues, including the PAFI@Varq breakout session "Women in Public Affairs: Breaking the Invisible Barriers," which addressed the structural constraints hindering mid-career advancement, and "The Future of Influence" marquee conversation with Nneka Chiazor, exploring actionable steps to move women from participation to genuine positions of global influence.

A New Generation at the Table

Recognising that the public affairs landscape is evolving rapidly, the Forum made a conscious choice to bring the next generation directly into the conversation, with 176 delegates under the age of 35 actively participating. This intergenerational integration was driven by substantive new session formats, such as the "Future Leaders Dialogue: Leading India 2047" and a dedicated YLAC collaboration on "AI, Young India and the Future of Opportunity", ensuring that rising practitioners were given priority access to intimate breakout sessions and a rightful seat at the table to directly engage with seasoned policymakers.

100+ Distinguished Speakers

600+ Delegates











267 Women delegates, constituting a historic **41.5%** of total attendees

20 Women leaders speaking, moderating, or chairing sessions (accounting for ~24% of all agenda leadership positions)

176 Delegates in the 20–35 age bracket, driving **27.5%** next-generation participation



36 sponsors

34 supporters

2 Partner States



Opening Remarks |

Purpose, Trust, and Dialogue

In his opening address, Ajay Khanna welcomed delegates to PAFI's 13th Annual Forum, reflecting on the organisation's eighteen-year journey from a simple idea in 2008 to an enduring community of 150 corporate members. Rather than merely building an organisation, PAFI was established to build a credible profession—creating a trusted table where government, business, media, experts, and emerging voices can engage responsibly.

The Evolution of Public Affairs

Public affairs has evolved to sit firmly at the intersection of business strategy, public policy, geopolitics, technology, regulation, and competitiveness. In this complex landscape, the true measure of the profession is trust, not influence. Operating on the conviction that better public policy emerges from better conversations rather than louder voices, PAFI's enduring contribution lies in sustaining a continuous, constructive space for dialogue in active partnership with both the Central and State governments.

A Community-Owned Platform

Highlighting how the Forum has become increasingly community-driven, Mr. Khanna acknowledged the extensive groundwork of the PAFI Core Group—which met ten times to curate the agenda—alongside the leadership of President Shivnath Thukral, Co-Chair Ishteyaque Amjad, T.S. Vishwanath, Subho Ray, the Advisory Council, and the Secretariat. He also placed on record special gratitude to Co-Chair Virat Bhatia and Apple India for graciously hosting the Core Group meetings at their office. Backed by 36 sponsors and 34 supporting organisations, the Forum has grown into a platform built by people who stay invested in its mission.



Ajay Khanna

An Unprecedented Scale and Scope

Drawing over 600 delegates and more than 100 speakers across 27 substantive sessions (and over 30 sessions including pre-Forum dialogues), this year's architecture mirrored India's expanding global and domestic priorities. For the first time, PAFI welcomed two Partner States—Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu—while broadening its international lens beyond the US to host dedicated tracks on Europe, China, and the Middle East alongside global public affairs leaders. Crucially, diversity and next-generation voices were structurally embedded into the agenda—with women constituting 41.5% of total attendees—moving women and young professionals from the audience directly into the conversation through intimate formats like PAFI@Varq and PAFI Conversations.

India 3.0 and the Path Ahead

Anchored by the theme, *"India 3.0: Engaging for Growth in a Disrupted World — Ideas, Insight, Impact,"* the address underscored a vital transition in the national journey. If India 1.0 was about building the nation and India 2.0 was about growing it, India 3.0 is defined by India proactively engaging with, contributing to, and helping shape the global order. Navigating the convergence of trade, AI, energy, and national security demands a public affairs profession that is thoughtful, intellectually ambitious, inclusive, and useful to the nation.

Concluding his remarks, Mr. Khanna reminded delegates that the most transformative ideas often emerge not from the stage, but from candid conversations in the corridors. He urged participants to challenge their assumptions, embrace differing perspectives, and use the Forum to build the confidence and trust required to turn dialogue into lasting action.







The Ministerial Vision: Shaping India's Trajectory

Special Leadership Address |
India 3.0: Engaging for Growth in a Disrupted World

India is reshaping its trade strategy to secure market access across a $70 trillion global economy and hit a $1 trillion export target this year. To achieve this, the government is upgrading urban infrastructure, reforming shipping rules to boost direct trade routes, and reviewing its investment treaty framework. Rather than fearing automation, India plans to embrace artificial intelligence by skilling millions of young people whilst maintaining strict human oversight. Future competitiveness will rely on abandoning low-cost models in favour of high quality standards and deep integration into global supply chains.



Shivnath Thukral, Piyush Goyal, Virat Bhatia, Ranjeet Goswami

Key takeaways

- Current and near-complete trade agreements now provide Indian businesses with preferential access to global economies worth a combined $70 trillion.
- The government aims to hit a $1 trillion export target this year by introducing maritime reforms that encourage more commercial vessels to register under the Indian flag.
- India is currently reviewing its model bilateral investment treaty to address foreign investor concerns around dispute resolution and secure long-term capital.
- To ensure automation creates opportunities rather than job losses, the government will skill 10 million young people in artificial intelligence whilst mandating human validation.
- Exporters must shift away from low-cost pricing strategies and adopt strict quality standards to help the government secure mutual-recognition agreements with developed nations.



Our national mindset has transformed. We no longer operate from a defensive, protectionist posture, scared to compete with the world. Today, we negotiate complex trade agreements from a position of confidence, actively engaging with developed economies to secure markets that complement, rather than undermine, Indian manufacturing.

Chief Guest
Piyush Goyal
Minister of Commerce and Industry
Government of India



There is clear optimism across Indian businesses as we look toward the upcoming free trade agreements. While final details are still taking shape, the strategic direction is extremely positive. These partnerships promise to open new global markets and drive lasting growth for our economy.

Shivnath Thukral
President, PAFI, and Vice President of Public Policy and Government Affairs , PhonePe Limited



With a $75 trillion global market within our reach, technology is rapidly changing how the world works. India's top priority must be turning this global access into lasting jobs for our youth. To achieve this, we must substantially grow our own domestic market.

Virat Bhatia
Past President, PAFI
Co-Chair, PAFI Annual Forum



The message from the people is clear: stay hungry and aim high. This aspirational India will not rest until they secure a high quality of life and build a fully developed nation by 2047.

Major Ranjeet Goswami, Retd.
Vice President, PAFI, and Global Head, Corporate Affairs,
TATA Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS)

Leadership Dialogue |
India's Green Growth Story: Sustainability, Competitiveness and Global Leadership

India's pursuit of economic expansion must not come at the expense of its ecological security, a tension that requires a shift from viewing development and the environment as opposing forces. Achieving greener growth demands shared responsibility: the government is streamlining regulatory approvals to under 100 days to provide industry with predictability, whilst expecting businesses to adopt robust safeguards and citizens to actively support waste management. As global climate governance struggles with unmet commitments, India is advancing domestic solutions—from parallel environmental clearances to targeted conservation across wetlands and biodiversity hotspots—ensuring its transition to a $30 trillion economy remains structurally sustainable.



Rajat Prakash, Bhupender Yadav, Navika Kumar, Daulata Chakraborty

Key takeaways

- Environmental protection and economic growth are not contradictory; long-term development relies on integrating green energy, resource efficiency, and sustainable technology.
- The government has introduced technology-driven, parallel processing for wildlife, forest, and environmental clearances, aiming to complete approvals in under 100 days.
- Greener growth is a shared mandate: while the government sets evolving regulations, industries must operate responsibly and citizens must actively engage in solid-waste management.
- India continues to advocate for 'common but differentiated responsibility' internationally, whilst managing complex domestic ecological priorities across renewable energy projects and critical habitats.



Looking at the path ahead, our development rests on three clear priorities: delivering swift regulatory approvals, upholding strict environmental safeguards, and striking the perfect balance between the two. India is already successfully moving in this direction.

Chief Guest
Bhupender Yadav
Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Government of India

As India drives towards becoming a fully developed nation, our massive growth must not become an ecological burden on the world. Embedding climate resilience and environmental safety into every policy conversation is an absolute necessity, not an option.



Navika Kumar
Editor-in-Chief
Times Group



Even positive green initiatives, like electric vehicles, create new challenges such as safe battery disposal. True sustainability requires a carefully planned, step-by-step approach to environmental policy so we actually solve problems rather than just shifting them.

Rajat Prakash
Managing Partner
Athena Legal

Environmental protection is not just the government's responsibility. While we are seeing a strong, evolved policy push, industry must also step up to match it. The gap in understanding is closing quickly, and true alignment is now well within reach.



Daulata Chakraborty
Associate Director – Corporate Affairs
Jubilant Ingrevia Limited

Leadership Dialogue |
Building India at Scale: Securing India's Energy Future in a Disrupted World

India has protected itself from global shipping disruptions by buying oil from 41 countries instead of 27. The world has enough crude oil, so the real challenge is keeping sea routes safe. At the same time, India is boosting local oil output and expanding green fuels. Refining capacity is growing steadily to meet national demand. Overall, energy security and clean energy goals are moving forward together through stable government policies.



Ajay Khanna, Hardeep Singh Puri, Amb. Navdeep Suri, Mitali Sarkar

Key takeaways

- Buying crude oil from 41 different countries has helped India stay safe from fuel shortages. Global supply is sufficient, but shipping routes face real risks. Sourcing from more partners ensures the country gets oil even when key sea channels face trouble.
- India's refining capacity will rise from 267 million tonnes today to 320 million tonnes by 2030. This growth will easily meet rising domestic needs for fuel across the nation. It also allows Indian companies to keep exporting refined products to overseas buyers.
- Petrol now contains 20% ethanol, up from just over 1% a decade ago. The government plans to keep the blend at this level for now so the market can settle. Future work will concentrate on setting up second-generation plants that turn agricultural waste into fuel.
- Clean hydrogen projects will focus on making fuel close to where people actually use it. Transporting hydrogen over long distances is expensive and difficult to manage right now. Building local hubs helps bring down initial setup costs and supports domestic equipment makers.
- The government will keep its existing setup of separate energy ministries rather than creating a single unified office. Different departments are already coordinating their daily work effectively under shared goals. This steady approach gives businesses the policy certainty they need to plan ahead.



The world has enough crude oil, so our true challenge is the disruption of vital sea routes. By expanding our import base from 27 to 41 nations and steadily boosting refining capacity, we have protected our market. We saw the crisis coming, acted early, and turned a major disruption into lasting resilience.

Chief Guest
Hardeep Singh Puri
Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas
Government of India



Whilst key maritime choke points like Bab al-Mandab threaten global energy flows, India has navigated the crisis remarkably well. Our supply chains continue to function, industries remain active, and petrol pumps have avoided queues. Strong international relationships and experienced diplomacy have helped shield the country from severe disruption.

Amb. Navdeep Suri
Former Indian Ambassador to UAE and Egypt, and
High Commissioner to Australia



Progress depends on steady, open dialogue between government and industry. Stable policies and predictable rules turn ambition into real investment. By taking quick, bold decisions and working closely together, we can protect our supplies and deliver results even in a dif icult global environment.

Ajay Khanna
Founder, PAFI
Chairman Emeritus,
PAFI Annual Forum



Energy security and energy transition are not an either-or choice for India; we need both at scale and at the same time. None of this can succeed without genuine trust and close partnership between industry and government.

Mitali Sarkar
Head of Communications
bp India and South Asia

Engines of New India: Partner States

Andhra Pradesh – SwarnaAndhra@2047: The New Growth Laboratory

The Partner State session outlined the state's ambitious roadmap to achieve a $2.4 trillion economy by transitioning its regulatory focus from the 'ease' to the 'speed' of doing business. The dialogue highlighted how pioneering initiatives, such as the comprehensive 'Skill Census' and the 'P4' (Public-Private-People Partnership) model, aim to attract high-value global manufacturing whilst ensuring grassroots economic inclusion.



Sunita Patnaik, Arijit Sen, Nara Lokesh, Rakesh Swami

Key Takeaways

- Andhra Pradesh is pivoting its core strategy from the 'ease' to the 'speed' of doing business, an operating culture evident in internal file-clearance rankings, rapid project grounding, and the delivery of nearly 1,000 citizen services via the "Manomitram" WhatsApp platform.
- The state is developing 23 targeted industrial clusters, ranging from aerospace and steel to AI and aquaculture, which integrate vertical supply chains with horizontal support structures like education, skilling, and testing within concentrated 100-kilometre radii to minimise business costs.
- Moving beyond the traditional metric of signed Memorandums of Understanding, the state leadership has set a definitive expectation of achieving an 80% project grounding rate for its upcoming Partnership Summit to emphasise tangible execution.
- By expanding the traditional Public-Private Partnership to include a fourth 'P' for 'People', the state is focusing on inclusive job creation and poverty eradication through practical industry guidance and exposure alongside financial investment.
- To support its future workforce, the state is implementing significant educational reforms, including large-scale teacher recruitment, values-based and gender-balanced curricula, AI integration, and the active industry adoption of Industrial Training Institutes.



What India must learn is thematic clusterisation. In Andhra Pradesh, we are systematically building 23 such clusters through deep vertical and horizontal integration. Verticals unite the hundreds of companies that make up a supply chain, whilst horizontals align our education system, certification, and testing to meet that sector's specific needs. By building this entire ecosystem within a 100-kilometre radius, we significantly reduce the cost of doing business.

Chief Guest
Nara Lokesh
Minister of Human Resources Development,
Minister for Information Technology, Electronics and Communications, Minister of Real Time Governance
Government of Andhra Pradesh

The target of reaching a $2.4 trillion economy under the SwarnaAndhra@2047 mission is an ambitious and defining moment. While the rest of the country speaks about the ease of doing business, Andhra Pradesh is already speaking about the speed of doing business—a shift that speaks volumes about the State's positive intent and commitment to fast-track growth.



Rakesh Swami
Group President - Corporate Affairs
Godrej Industries Group



The strategy adopted by Andhra Pradesh creates a win-win outcome for all stakeholders. By advancing the innovative 'P4' model—Public, Private, and People Partnership—the state ensures that absolutely everyone is taken along in this transformative development journey.

Arijit Sen
President
vivo Mobile India Private Limited



When we expressed our interest to join the Make in India mission in 2015, we experienced Andhra Pradesh's 'speed of business' first-hand. What started from zero has now blossomed into a massive electronics ecosystem.

Murali Krishna Retineni
Founder – Director
Celkon Group



What is truly remarkable about Andhra Pradesh's approach is its unwavering focus on genuine inclusive growth. It is not merely about economic benefits at the top, but ensuring prosperity reaches every district and household.

Sunita Patnaik
Partner and Head of India Office
DGA Group







Partner State - Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh joined PAFI's 13th Annual Forum as a Partner State, showcasing its ambitious blueprint to achieve a $2.4 trillion economy by 2047. Through its visionary '**SwarnaAndhra@2047**' framework, the state positioned itself as India's "New Growth Laboratory." The partnership highlighted Andhra Pradesh's strategic shift in regulatory philosophy—moving from the traditional 'ease of doing business' to a forward-looking 'speed of doing business' model designed to attract high-value manufacturing and global capital.



The Forum featured a dedicated Partner State session with Nara Lokesh, Minister of Human Resources Development, Information Technology, Electronics and Communications, and Real Time Governance, Government of Andhra Pradesh, as the Chief Guest. The dialogue explored the state's investment-led growth strategy, powered by data-driven governance and pioneering capacity-building efforts like India's first comprehensive 'Skill Census' and a robust hub-and-spoke Innovation Hub network.

Beyond the plenary discussions, the partnership facilitated direct engagement with industry leaders. The state delegation held significant bilateral meetings with potential investors from amongst PAFI's member companies, translating the SwarnaAndhra vision into actionable opportunities for long-term economic collaboration.










Tamil Nadu: Vetri Tamizhagam – Building a Global Growth and Investment Powerhouse

Tamil Nadu is targeting a $1.5 trillion economy by 2036 under its "Vetri Tamizhagam" vision, combining cutting-edge industrial growth with broad-based job creation. To drive this, the state is developing a new industrial policy for 2027 that shifts focus from basic assembly to advanced manufacturing, R&D, and deep tech. Rather than competing purely on high financial incentives, Tamil Nadu is positioning itself through a predictable policy environment, a massive skilled talent pool, and aggressive regulatory reform, including a new 21-day deemed approval framework to fast-track investments.



Rishi Chawla, Deepak Jacob, Harish Krishnan, Lovneesh Chanana

Key takeaways

- The state aims to achieve a $1.5 trillion economy by 2036, ensuring investments translate into inclusive, geographically distributed employment, particularly for women and first-time formal workers.
- A revised industrial policy, expected to roll out in early 2027, will target value-chain advancement in emerging sectors such as semiconductors, aerospace composites, AI, and Global Capability Centres (GCCs).
- To radically improve the ease of doing business, the government has introduced a mandatory 21-day clearance requirement, complete with a deemed approval provision if regulatory deadlines are missed. 4. Tamil Nadu's competitive edge relies on policy continuity, the timely disbursement of committed subsidies, and established industrial ecosystems, rather than relying on unrealistic or unsustainable incentive packages.



A $1.5 trillion economy by 2036 is just a promise with a decimal point unless it translates into real impact—a first appointment letter for a family, women earning their own salaries, and youth finding good work in their home districts. To deliver this, we are making investment seamless: every approval will be decided within 21 days, or it is deemed approved. The cost of delay is moving from the investor to the government, exactly where it belongs.

Chief Guest
S. Keerthana
Minister for Industries, Investment Promotion and Commerce
Government of Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is actively moving up the global value chain—shifting from basic assembly to advanced manufacturing, R&D, and deep tech. By expanding industrial growth across districts and ensuring absolute policy continuity, we have achieved a 72% investment conversion rate.We are building a resilient, diversified ecosystem designed to create the high-value jobs the world wants next.



Deepak Jacob
Managing Director and CEO
Guidance Tamil Nadu



Tamil Nadu has established itself as one of India's leading investment destinations, driven by world-class manufacturing, a highly skilled talent pool, and a forward-looking approach to industrial development.

Rishi Chawla
Vice President – Corporate Affairs,
Carlsberg India



Tamil Nadu's enduring industrial success is built on a highly skilled workforce, progressive policies, and a stable, continuous bureaucracy. By seamlessly adapting to future sectors like electronics and green energy while championing inclusive growth, the state makes it exceptionally easy for industries to operate and thrive.

Harish Krishnan
Co-Founder & Past President, PAFI
Managing Director and Chief Policy officer
Cisco South and Southeast Asia

Tamil Nadu proves that cutting-edge technology and widespread job creation go hand in hand. With core manufacturing as the hardware, a skilled workforce as processing power, and transparent governance as source code, Tamil Nadu is positioned to turn investment promises into reality.



Lovneesh Chanana
Sr. Vice President
Asia Pacific Head for Government Affairs
SAP







Partner State - Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu joined PAFI's 13th Annual Forum as a Partner State, bringing a sharp focus on its ambitious '***Vetri Tamizhagam***' framework to build a global growth and investment powerhouse. The state's long-term roadmap centres on developing world-class infrastructure, advancing youth skilling, and strengthening healthcare and environmental sustainability.





S. Keerthana
Minister for Industries, Investment Promotion and Commerce
Government of Tamil Nadu

A major highlight of this partnership was a special video message addressed exclusively to PAFI delegates by **S. Keerthana**, Minister for Industries, Investment Promotion and Commerce, Government of Tamil Nadu. Her address underscored the state's forward-looking vision and its strong commitment to the investor and corporate affairs community. This was complemented by a dedicated Partner State session featuring Deepak Jacob, Managing Director and CEO of Guidance Tamil Nadu, who detailed the consultative process behind the state's upcoming industrial policy for 2027. The dialogue explored Tamil Nadu's dual economic strategy: aggressively attracting high-tech investments in sectors like green energy and electronics, while simultaneously creating thousands of formal jobs in traditional manufacturing.









Shaping India 3.0: Governance, Geopolitics, and Economic Transformation

Secretaries' Dialogue |
Incentivising Innovation: Agile Policy Frameworks for Future Ready India

Charting the path to Viksit Bharat 2047 demands a powerful convergence of data agility, fiscal discipline, and strategic trade realignment. From dismantling statistical silos with guarded AI to backing a fivefold surge in capital expenditure through leak-proof digital rails, modern statecraft is evolving at scale. As modern FTAs anchor India into resilient global value chains, this new governance architecture demonstrates that while data illuminates the direction, visionary administrative judgement delivers the destination.



Sandeep Aurora, Rajesh Agrawal, Dr Saurabh Garg, Major Ranjeet Goswami, Retd., V. Vualnam, Rishi Chawla

Key takeaways

- Official statistical systems are actively pivoting to real-time, interoperable, and disaggregated architectures, utilising platforms like PM Gati Shakti, digitized field collection, and guarded AI domain models to deliver granular district-level insights while eliminating administrative data silos.
- Long-term national growth is anchored in disciplined public financial management, where a fivefold increase in central CapEx over the past decade is balanced with rigorous output-outcome monitoring and digitised direct benefit systems to prevent idle capital.
- In response to global geopolitical volatility and supply chain realignments, India's trade strategy relies on new-generation FTAs to diversify export markets, secure tariff predictability, and anchor deep integration into global value chains.

Key takeaways

- Achieving true evidence-based policymaking requires institutionalising common statistical protocols across state Directorates of Economics and Statistics to produce comparable subnational metrics, including state-level export tracking and district domestic product.
- In complex governance environments where complete data is unavailable, data functions as an enabling guide rather than an absolute decider; effective executive action requires blending proxy indicators and empirical evidence with administrative experience and sound judgement.



Agile governance requires a learning system where data flows seamlessly across ministries and states. By harmonising data and breaking institutional silos, we can enable smarter decision-making, improve ef iciency and deliver citizen services at scale.

Dr Saurabh Garg
Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
Government of India

Fiscal prudence provides the foundation for sustainable growth, while strategic capital expenditure builds the physical infrastructure for Viksit Bharat. The focus must remain on ensuring that every rupee spent delivers measurable outcomes, strengthens productivity and improves citizens' lives.



V. Vualnam
Secretary, Department of Expenditure
Ministry of Finance
Government of India



In a fragmented world, trade is no longer driven by comparative advantage alone; resilience, diversified supply chains and domestic manufacturing are equally critical. India's FTAs seek to build on the complementary strengths of partner economies to create shared economic gains, while upholding a rules-based trading order.

Rajesh Agrawal
Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry
Government of India



AI can transform policymaking by unlocking insights from data that were previously inaccessible. However, its integration into governance must be anchored in evidence, accuracy and accountability, ensuring that technology strengthens policy decisions without compromising their integrity or diverging from ground realities.

Major Ranjeet Goswami, Retd.
Vice President, PAFI
Global Head, Corporate Affairs,
TATA Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS)

Building a Viksit Bharat requires more than vision; it demands evidence-driven policymaking and prudent public expenditure to translate national priorities into tangible outcomes and position India as a competitive, innovative and influential global power.



Sandeep Aurora
Secretary, PAFI, and Group Director &
Head - Public Policy & Government Affairs
Microsoft India & South Asia



Data, technology and forward-looking policymaking are the common threads, united by the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. The enthusiasm among the secretaries inspires confidence in India's journey towards this vision.

Rishi Chawla
Vice President – Corporate Affairs
Carlsberg India

Secretaries' Dialogue |
Building India's Competitive Advantage

India is rapidly accelerating its global competitive advantage through inter-ministerial strategies that prioritise domestic self-reliance, regional economic integration, and massive infrastructure scaling. By shifting defence capital expenditure heavily towards domestic manufacturing and private-sector integration, the nation is building a robust industrial base capable of meeting modern warfare demands and ambitious export targets. Simultaneously, u nlocking the high-value potential of the Northeast—from bespoke manufacturing to organic agriculture—and expanding the supply side of a booming domestic tourism market are acting as critical levers for sustained economic momentum. Driving this structural transformation requires public policy professionals to deliver evidence-based, participative governance that actively resolves state- and municipal-level bottlenecks to cement long-term growth.



Mohd. Areeb Imam, Rajesh Kumar Singh, Ishteyaque Amjad, K. Srinivas, Bhuvnesh Kumar, Aman Jain

Key takeaways

- The defence sector is aggressively pursuing self-reliance, targeting 75% of annual capital expenditure for domestic procurement while expanding private-sector production lines and directing DRDO to focus exclusively on cutting-edge research.
- While conventional battle tanks remain crucial for holding territory, strategic military procurement is actively adapting to asymmetric warfare by prioritising platforms with built-in counter-UAS (unmanned aircraft systems) and advanced air defence capabilities.
- The Northeast is being strategically positioned as a global hub for bespoke manufacturing and luxury inputs, leveraging its rich organic production, agar oil, and floriculture through targeted value-chain development and enhanced market connectivity.

Key takeaways

- Driven by expanding infrastructure and a rapidly growing domestic market—which saw 429 crore visits last year—the tourism sector strategy is strictly focused on increasing accommodation supply rather than introducing hotel price regulations.
- As the policymaking process becomes increasingly participative, policy professionals must shift their focus towards delivering rigorous, constructive research aimed at resolving persistent local-level gaps in land titling, contract enforcement, and judicial delays.



The Northeastern region is poised to be the next major economic driver of the Indian economy. From being the world's second-largest organic production area to holding immense, untapped potential in global luxury markets through essential oils and floriculture, the region's inherent skill and creative energy are extraordinary. With historic connectivity constraints now significantly overcome, the Northeast has everything it needs to become the bespoke manufacturing capital of the world—we simply need to build the value chains and connect it to the market.

K. Srinivas
Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region
Government of India

By directing 75% of our defence capital expenditure domestically, we are actively forging true strategic autonomy. We are moving decisively beyond single-supplier dependencies to build a resilient, multi-tiered industrial base. From establishing new fighter jet production lines to cultivating hundreds of private drone manufacturers, this is the definitive blueprint for India's technological sovereignty.



Rajesh Kumar Singh
Secretary, Department of Defence
Secretary DDR&D and Chairman DRDO
Ministry of Defence
Government of India



India's domestic tourism is experiencing an unprecedented boom, fuelled by massive infrastructure expansion—from doubling our airports to building world-class highways. This is driving extraordinary demand across Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. The scale is staggering; major hotel chains are set to double their century-old footprint in just three years. As we introduce modern measurement frameworks, the true economic power of this sector will finally be fully realised.

Bhuvnesh Kumar
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism
Government of India



We are operating in a period where weeks deliver the progress of decades. As the nature of global security evolves, the rise of asymmetric technologies like low-cost drones is fundamentally transforming how we view traditional platforms like the battle tank. This rapid shift isn't just a disruption; it is a powerful catalyst for innovation, pushing us to continuously modernise our doctrines and build a highly agile, future-ready defence force.

Ishteyaque Amjad
Past President, PAFI and Co-Chair, PAFI Annual Forum
Managing Director, Policy & Government Affairs India and South Asia
Abbott

India today is not just growing; it is fundamentally restructuring how it grows. Competitiveness is no longer a single-ministry project, but a cross-sectoral exercise spanning advanced manufacturing, regional development, and global governance standards. Ultimately, India's competitive advantage in the next decade will be built just as much on technology and AI as it is on world-class infrastructure and regulation.



Aman Jain
Senior Director and Head of Public Policy, India
Meta



Competitiveness is no longer a single-ministry project; it is a unified, cross-sectoral mission. The next decade belongs to an India that is structurally resilient, technologically sovereign, and driven by truly participative policymaking.

Mohd. Areeb Imam
Vice President - Public and Government Affairs
Edelman

Leadership Dialogue |
India's Next Growth Decade: Navigating Geoeconomics in a Disrupted World

Geopolitics, trade weaponization, and energy disruptions have abruptly ended the era of demand-driven economics, forcing a shift to a supply-constrained reality. For India to secure its "Viksit Bharat" ambitions in this landscape, building domestic manufacturing and locking in strategic supply chain buffers is no longer optional. Success now hinges on skilling workforces for AI-proof, human-touch jobs and rolling out industrial policies that explicitly tie state support to actual gains in global competitiveness.



T.S. Vishwanath, Dr V Anantha Nageswaran, Gautam Aggarwal, Shipra Tripathi

Key takeaways

- The 1980–2020 economic playbook of managing aggregate demand is obsolete, with global growth now dictated by supply chain resilience, technology controls, and higher capital costs.
- To protect against geopolitical shocks and trade disruptions, India must maintain 6-to-9-month strategic inventories of critical imported inputs, such as copper and niche technologies.
- Workforce development needs a redesign prioritizing labour-intensive, "human-touch" occupations—such as nursing, plumbing, and hospitality—that are highly resilient to AI replacement. 4. Industrial policy should not be a blank cheque; government incentives must come with a strict quid pro quo requiring industries to deliver measurable gains in productivity and global competitiveness.



The most durable signal we can send to investors is sustained economic growth anchored in macroeconomic stability. By maintaining steady growth of 7% alongside fiscal prudence, declining inflation, and absolute tax policy certainty, we create the foundational resilience that drives long-term returns. When this macroeconomic core is strong, and paired with private sector investment in skill building, the return-generating opportunities naturally follow.

Chief Guest
Dr V Anantha Nageswaran
Chief Economic Advisor
Government of India

Speaking from the perspective of a multinational, actively investing in skill building within private enterprise is absolutely critical. It is an area that we have to deliberately focus on to build long-term capabilities.



Gautam Aggarwal
President, India and South Asia
Mastercard



As India navigates a complex global economy and accelerates structural reforms toward the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, cross-sector dialogue has never been more critical. PAFI exists precisely for this purpose—bringing together industry, government, and policy leaders to have conversations around shaping the long-term direction of our economic and business landscape.

T.S. Vishwanath
Founding Member & Past President, PAFI
Founder & Executive Chairman
VeK Policy

To truly realize our demographic dividend, universities and higher education institutions must proactively step up. But they cannot operate in a vacuum—the regulatory environment must evolve simultaneously to ensure the next generation is fully equipped with the skills required to drive our future economy.



Shipra Tripathi
Vice President, Public Affairs
Ashoka University

PAFI Conversations

Leadership Dialogue |
India 3.0: The Next Tech Leap

The Leadership Dialogue outlined India's roadmap to becoming a global tech architect. Themes explored during the session included the goal of achieving sovereign autonomy and integration with important supply chains while navigating global disruptions.



Ajay Khanna, Shivnath Thukral, S. Krishnan, Virat Bhatia

Key takeaways

- India's technology strategy centres on achieving strategic autonomy by strengthening domestic capabilities while remaining open to global technologies, partnerships and participation in international value chains.
- Global disruptions have reinforced the importance of diversifying supply chains, reducing critical dependencies and investing in domestic manufacturing capabilities, even where resilience involves additional costs.
- India's semiconductor strategy prioritises building domestic manufacturing capabilities, initially focusing on mature technology nodes, while advancing research, innovation and technological expertise to support future development of advanced and specialised chips.
- India now manufactures approximately 99.2% of mobile phones used domestically, with domestic value addition at around 22–23% and an ambition to reach 35–40%. The next phase focuses on increasing local value addition, strengthening exports and supporting Indian mobile brands.



India requires a sovereign autonomy rooted in autonomous capacity building and the strategic imperative to secure a strong presence in crucial global supply chains. This means remaining open to the latest global technologies to empower our people and enterprises, whilst simultaneously building enough domestic capacity to withstand any future technology denial or global disruption.

Chief Guest
S. Krishnan
Secretary , Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology,
Government of India

The next five years of the global economy will be defined by three forces: geopolitics, trade, and technology. The countries that balance all three will shape the future.



Virat Bhatia
Past President, PAFI
Co-Chair, PAFI Annual Forum



In a world where technology outpaces regulation and geopolitics reshapes trade, engagement is not mere courtesy, it is a competitive advantage. The countries that grow will be those where the government, industry, and citizens adapt together quickly and with confidence.

Shivnath Thukral
President, PAFI and Vice President of Public Policy and
Government Affairs, PhonePe Limited

Leadership Dialogue |
Inside the State: How Government Thinks, Decides and Gets Things Done

The session demystified the intricate internal mechanics of government, offering corporate leaders a candid look at how policy transitions from intent to implementation amid competing institutional priorities. The dialogue emphasised the need for public affairs professionals to move beyond transactional lobbying towards building constructive, trust-based relationships with policymakers. By understanding what narratives and data genuinely resonate with the State, industry leaders can engage more meaningfully and foster durable, long-term partnerships.



Ajay Khanna, Bharat Lal, Harish Krishnan

Key takeaways

- The State operates as an organic, responsive entity rather than a mechanistic machine. Policymaking is continually shaped by ground realities, citizen inputs, and open deliberation that encourages contrarian views before final decisions are made.

- The central challenge of governance is execution rather than formulation. Bridging the gap between policy intent and actual outcomes—demonstrated by the massive scale and complexity of initiatives like the Jal Jeevan Mission—requires navigating varying institutional frameworks, resource constraints, and broader collateral impacts.

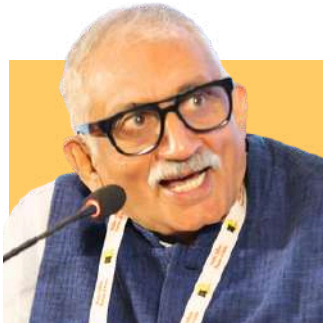
- Effective advocacy relies on aligning corporate objectives with national interests, prioritising the country first. Businesses should engage the government by proposing evidence-based, public-benefit solutions rather than advancing narrow commercial demands, fostering a collaborative partnership across the State, industry, civil society, and academia.



A common misconception is that the government operates as a purely mechanistic entity. In truth, it is an organic, living institution, constantly taking inputs from the ground and evolving day by day. It learns, adapts, and recalibrates in real time, drawing its true momentum from the voices, challenges, and aspirations of the citizens it serves.

Chief Guest
Bharat Lal
Former Secretary General and
CEO, National Human Rights Commission
Founder Mission Director, Jal Jeevan Mission

Over the years, senior policymakers have joined the PAFI platform to speak, listen, and engage. While not every conversation leads to an immediate outcome, creating a continuous space for dialogue is one of PAFI's key contributions to building the profession of public affairs.



Ajay Khanna
Founder, PAFI
Chairman Emeritus,
PAFI Annual Forum



A public af airs professional's job is not to sell products, reduce tax liabilities, or merely open government doors. The primary role is to find alignment between national goals and company goals.

Harish Krishnan
Co-Founder & Past President, PAFI and Managing
Director & Chief Policy Officer
Cisco South and Southeast Asia

Leadership Dialogue |
India at an Inflection Point: Building Strength for the Next Decade

The session explored the strategic policy priorities driving the Prime Minister's vision for Viksit Bharat and the economic transition to India 3.0. Anchored by robust growth momentum and rising private consumption, the discussion focused on formalising the broader economy, dismantling consumption barriers, and unlocking purchasing power beyond major metropolitan hubs. Crucially, the dialogue examined the dual imperative of domestic market expansion and long-term structural resilience, highlighting how clean energy transition, electric mobility manufacturing, and energy independence are essential to sustaining high growth whilst positioning India as a dependable global partner.



Shivnath Thukral, Tarun Kapoor, Arijit Sen

Key takeaways

- Industry should engage with the State confidently and lawfully. Recent ease-of-doing-business reforms, including the decriminalisation of minor offences, underscore the government's view of industry as a crucial partner in national development.
- A developed India is defined not just by economic scale, but by robust per-capita income, equitable quality of life, world-class infrastructure, and the resilience to withstand global shocks whilst leading in select innovation sectors.
- Business-to-business engagement with nations like China should remain robust to secure necessary raw materials and technology, distinguishing commercial collaboration from complex government-to-government political and border issues.
- The government evaluates foreign corporate engagement through three distinct lenses: national security safeguards (especially regarding data), the imperative to acquire critical technology, and the need to protect domestic manufacturing from import-led disruption.
- Whilst renewable sources constitute 22–23% of grid power, they account for only 4–5% of India's total energy consumption. Accelerating the green transition, particularly in the transport sector, remains a critical strategic priority for long-term energy security.



The Prime Minister's idea of Viksit Bharat starts with the people, ensuring equitable per capita income, robust health and education, and limited income disparity. It also pushes for the foundation of world-class infrastructure. Ultimately, our economy needs to possess the depth, strength, and self-reliance to withstand any future global shocks and become a developed economy.

Chief Guest
Tarun Kapoor
Advisor to the Prime Minister of India

In an era increasingly defined by geopolitical friction, India must firmly position itself as a reliable global growth partner—one anchored in continuous dialogue, strategic stability, and mutual benefit.



Arijit Sen
President
Vivo Mobile India Private Limited



For public af airs professionals, understanding how the government balances sovereign autonomy with global engagement is essential. By recognising whether policies are shaped by country-specific concerns or sectoral protections, professionals can navigate these complexities and ef ectively balance corporate demands with national strategic priorities.

Shivnath Thukral
President, PAFI and Vice President of Public Policy and Government Affairs PhonePe Limited

PAFI Conversation |
The Middle East Reset: What it Means for India

Anchored by $60 billion in annual remittances and critical energy dependencies, the Gulf remains structurally indispensable to India's strategic calculus. The Conversation dissected the UAE's rapid evolution into a primary trade and capital-allocation hub, while acknowledging that ambitious multilateral logistics networks like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor remain effectively stalled by severe regional security deficits. Against the backdrop of ongoing geopolitical disruption, the discussion underscored the necessity for Indian enterprises to leverage emerging free zones in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, while urging a recalibration of India's diplomatic hedging to preserve its traditional balanced influence across the wider region.





Rahul Sharma, Amb. Navdeep Suri

Key takeaways

- The UAE has decisively transitioned from a traditional labor destination to India's third-largest trading partner, serving as an indispensable logistics and financial gateway for Indian businesses expanding into the broader Middle East.
- While technical groundwork for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor is progressing on the UAE front, unresolved regional conflicts and active security deficits remain the definitive barriers to the project's viability.
- The demographic profile of the Indian diaspora is undergoing a structural shift with a rapid expansion in professional, entrepreneurial, and senior corporate roles, though current regional instability is triggering acute employment disruptions in the aviation, tourism, and hospitality sectors.
- Navigating the Gulf's complex geopolitics requires avoiding zero-sum calculations; Indian corporate strategy must maintain parallel, insulated engagements with both the UAE and Saudi Arabia rather than treating the two markets as mutually exclusive.



The GCC is our largest trading partner as a group—bigger than the EU—driving $60 billion in remittances and supplying 60% of our energy. We share centuries of history, to the point where the Indian rupee was their legal tender until 1966. We have to stop looking at the Gulf through a Western lens and recognise its centrality to our own economic security.

Amb. Navdeep Suri
Former Indian Ambassador to UAE and Egypt,
and High Commissioner to Australia

The Middle East while shaping global events— is also home to millions of Indians. We have a direct, living relationship with the region, which means whatever happens there impacts our lives here.



Rahul Sharma
Founding Member & Past President, PAFI and Managing
Director, US India Business Council (USIBC)







Leadership Dialogue |
Awaken the Leader in You

The Dialogue explored values-based leadership through the concept of the Raja Rishi, combining external business influence with inner discipline. True leadership requires service to a higher cause, rational decision-making, and strict ethical standards, especially in highly regulated sectors. Professionals must rely on personal merit and education to navigate job insecurity and unethical workplace cultures safely. Lasting corporate success ultimately depends on individual character, team unity, and leading by example.





Vinita Sethi, Jaya Row

Key takeaways

- Effective leadership requires balancing external business influence with inner discipline and a commitment to serving a larger cause beyond personal status.
- Professionals working in highly regulated or unethical environments must maintain strict boundaries by delivering outstanding work and resisting improper demands lawfully.
- Personal merit, continuous education, and proven excellence serve as the most reliable defences against modern job insecurity and economic uncertainty.
- Progress in women's leadership and workplace equality depends heavily on individual agency, self-belief, and strong educational foundations.



True leadership is never about chasing titles or personal power. You reach your full potential only when you stop worrying about yourself and start serving a larger cause. The best leaders step out of their own way to focus entirely on the work and the people they serve.

Chief Guest
Jaya Row
Founder
Vedanta Vision

True leadership is never defined by an impressive network or a fabulous career; it is measured by who you nurture. The greatest success is building an environment where everyone around you becomes a leader.



Vinita Sethi
Past President, PAFI







PAFI Conversation |
Beyond Access: The Future of Public Affairs in India

India's public affairs landscape has fundamentally shifted since 2014, moving away from just advocacy toward a highly consultative and evidence-based model. As global boards increasingly weigh talent, legal transparency, and infrastructure alongside sheer market size, the mandate for corporate engagement has broadened. Navigating digital enforcement, cross-border regulations, and rapid technological changes requires policy professionals to act as trusted translators who balance corporate interests with national development goals. Ultimately, securing a true social license to operate demands that businesses look beyond government corridors to actively align their commercial strategies with community impact and societal trust.





Subho Ray, Shivnath Thukral

Key takeaways

- Policymaking has become significantly more consultative, shifting the core value of public affairs professionals from simply securing access to building trust through mutually beneficial, evidence-based solutions.
- Global investment decisions no longer rely on India's market size alone; boards now critically evaluate legal legitimacy, engineering talent, consumer purchasing capacity, and regulatory transparency.
- While digital policy enforcement is becoming more assertive, major growth opportunities remain in digital credit expansion, AI applications, and API-driven public administration.
- Businesses must actively earn their societal permission to operate by directly engaging with communities and addressing public concerns, rather than relying solely on government relations.



To build true capacity in public af airs, we must start speaking the language of business. It is no longer enough to simply understand history or politics; a modern policy professional must be able to quantify their impact, defend the company's balance sheet, and maintain an absolute command of global current af airs. When you combine relentless curiosity with measurable business value, you elevate the entire profession.

Shivnath Thukral
President, PAFI
Vice President of Public Policy and Government Affairs
PhonePe Limited



For 35 years, India's FDI story was built primarily on the promise of a massive market. Today, to capture the imagination of global boards, we must elevate our game. It is time to evolve our narrative beyond sheer size and showcase India's immense value.

Subho Ray
Past President, PAFI
President , Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)







India in the World: Alliances, Trade, and Realpolitik

India and Europe |
Beyond the FTA: Building the Next Chapter of the India–Europe Partnership

Translating the 2026 EU FTA and the $100 billion TEPA investment mandate from policy into tangible market expansion demands a fundamental rewiring of cross-border supply chains. The discussion tackled the immediate regulatory frameworks Indian MSMEs and multinational corporations must navigate to integrate seamlessly into European value chains. Aligning digital public infrastructure and clean energy standards emerged as a critical priority to ensure non-tariff barriers do not derail advanced manufacturing growth and strategic mobility across the bloc.



Vaishali Chopra, Amb. Jawed Ashraf, Amb. Ajay Bisaria, Amb. Rasmus Abildgaard Kristensen, Anandi Iyer

Key takeaways

- Viewing the trade pact as an enabler rather than an end state, industry leaders must focus on operationalising the agreement to translate tariff concessions into tangible cross-border investment and resilient supply-chain integration.
- Unlocking the agreement's full potential for SMEs demands deliberate handholding, targeted awareness campaigns, intellectual property support, and market-mapping initiatives driven jointly by government and trade promotion bodies.
- Expanding far beyond transactional goods trade, the bilateral corridor offers immediate strategic opportunities in co-developing critical technologies, open-architecture AI frameworks, clean energy transitions, and defence manufacturing value chains.
- Sustaining long-term European investment flows will hinge on India’s ability to further streamline its ease of doing business, de-risk institutional capital, and establish direct digital platforms connecting domestic producers with European buyers.



The agreement goes far beyond traditional tarif s. In a world where restrictive trade measures are multiplying rapidly, it injects vital predictability into our supply chains. Crucially, it also anchors our collaboration in critical technologies like AI around a shared vision of public purpose.

Amb. Jawed Ashraf
Chairman, Indian Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) and
Former Ambassador of India to France

Europe is actively seeking to cultivate new partnerships, and there is no better or bigger power to engage with right now than India. The economic complementarity between our two regions is genuinely extraordinary.



Amb. Rasmus Abildgaard Kristensen
Ambassador, Royal Danish Embassy



This is truly the year of Europe in India. After nearly two decades of negotiations, the landmark India-EU FTA has secured preferential access across 97% of EU tarif lines. Covering two billion people and a quarter of global GDP, our focus now should be to make this historic agreement fully operational.

Amb. Ajay Bisaria
Corporate Strategic Advisor and Former High
Commissioner of India to Canada and Pakistan



While the India-EU FTA is fundamentally about market access, its true significance in today's shifting economic order is much larger. We need to move beyond viewing each other merely as target markets and the goal is to translate this relationship into genuine co-creation.

Anandi Iyer
Director, Fraunhofer Office India

The scale of opportunity in this new era of India-Europe engagement is immense. The results will depend on how ef iciently the government and industry work together to translate them into action.



Vaishali Chopra
Head – Public Affairs and Communications, India
YARA International







Beyond Tariffs |
Envisioning the Next Trajectory of India's FTAs

The Session examined the structural evolution of India's free-trade agreements, noting a strategic pivot from shallow, tariff-focused deals to deep economic partnerships with complementary, high-income markets. Driven in part by the institutional paralysis of the WTO, these next-generation agreements encompass investment commitments, supply-chain integration, professional mobility, digital trade, and sustainability frameworks like the EU's CBAM. While the expanding FTA network serves as a vital geopolitical tool to diversify export exposure and manage industrial dependencies on China, speakers cautioned that tariff concessions alone do not guarantee commercial success. Realising tangible gains will ultimately depend on domestic execution—specifically overcoming non-tariff barriers, building state-level regulatory capacity, and equipping Indian MSMEs to navigate complex compliance norms and integrate into global value chains.



Pranab Dhal Samanta, Amb. Sunjay Sudhir, T.S. Vishwanath, Amb J.S. Deepak, Dr. Rajeev Ranjan, Devashish Dasgupta

Key takeaways

- India's new-generation FTAs, such as the India–UAE CEPA and EFTA TEPA, have moved past simple customs-duty reductions to actively target investment-led supply-chain integration, skilled professional mobility, mutual recognition of regulatory standards, and sustainability requirements.
- With the WTO's negotiation and dispute-settlement mechanisms effectively stalled, bilateral and regional FTAs have become essential instruments for India to reduce export-market concentration and strategically manage, rather than abruptly sever, its industrial reliance on China.
- Historically, Indian exporters have utilised only 20% to 30% of FTA tariff preferences compared to 60% to 70% by partner countries; unlocking the value of new agreements requires simplified digital processes, targeted industry handholding, and upgraded domestic quality standards to help MSMEs overcome stringent non-tariff barriers.
- Translating trade pacts into manufacturing jobs and export growth demands robust coordination between the Centre, state governments, and regulatory agencies to resolve ground-level bottlenecks and align state-level policies with national trade ambitions.



Trade deficits should not be the sole measure of an FTA's success. The real objective must be to secure competitive inputs, strengthen export competitiveness and address non-tarif barriers that constrain India's access to global markets.

Amb. J.S. Deepak
Former Ambassador of India to the WTO

The new generation of FTAs marks a pivotal structural shift for India. We are moving far beyond simple tarif reductions to prioritise investment-led supply chains, regulatory alignment, and the global mobility of our skilled professionals. Crucially, by digitising compliance we are ensuring that these agreements finally work for our MSMEs while preparing them for modern realities like global sustainability and carbon mechanisms.



Dr. Rajeev Ranjan
Former Secretary to Government of India



FTAs go beyond tarif s to encompass services, mobility, investment and digital trade. With stronger trade safeguards, tighter rules of origin and regular follow-up mechanisms, they reflect a more strategic approach to trade that aligns with India's evolving economic and geopolitical priorities.

Amb. Sunjay Sudhir
Former Indian Ambassador to the UAE



India must move beyond exceptionalism and embrace higher standards in areas such as climate and labour to attract investment, strengthen manufacturing and build greater leverage in the global economic system.

Pranab Dhal Samanta
Executive Editor
The Economic Times

The new agreements have the potential to reshape its global economic partnerships, unlock new avenues for growth and redefine its position in the global trading order.



T.S. Vishwanath
Founding Member & Past President, PAFI
Founder & Executive Chairman, VeK Policy



The real challenge with FTAs lies not just in negotiating them, but in their implementation. Regulatory hurdles across national and state levels can mean that businesses must ef ectively negotiate a second agreement to realise the full benefits.

Devashish Dasgupta
Director – Corporate Relations
Diageo India

India-China |
The Thaw, the Challenges and the Road Ahead

Recent diplomatic re-engagement between India and China represents a pragmatic stabilisation of ties rather than a comprehensive reset, as profound trust deficits, troop deployments, and structural border disputes persist. Whilst China remains central to critical Indian industrial supply chains—notably in electronics, machinery, and active pharmaceutical ingredients—this dependence carries systemic vulnerabilities through limited domestic value addition, restricted technology transfers, and an escalating trade imbalance. Rather than choosing between uncritical engagement or outright decoupling, the panel championed strategic realism: substantially augmenting domestic research and manufacturing capabilities, diversifying vital dependencies, and engaging Beijing selectively where it genuinely advances India's commercial and sovereign interests.



Arijit Sen, Ashok Malik, Amb. Ashok Kantha, Rahul Sharma, Dr Sanjaya Baru, Rajeev Batra

Key takeaways

- Bilateral re-engagement marks tactical border stabilisation rather than a structural reset, with core security frictions, asymmetry, and geopolitical wariness remaining fundamentally unresolved.
- Blanket economic decoupling is unfeasible given China's entrenched position in vital Indian manufacturing inputs, requiring hard-nosed, selective commercial engagement.
- Economic partnerships must be scrutinised for substantive domestic value addition, equitable market access, and meaningful technology transfers, avoiding mere low-tier assembly.
- Strategic resilience demands that India aggressively scale domestic R&D, absorb lessons from China's industrialisation trajectory, and deliberately diversify critical supply chains.
- Corporate leaders and public affairs practitioners must practise strategic realism—sidestepping both naive complacency and reactive confrontation whilst navigating sustained bilateral competition.



We cannot avoid doing business with China, but the terms of engagement must protect our national interest. A massive trade deficit and shallow investments that of er little technology transfer will not build our domestic capabilities.

Amb. Ashok Kantha
Former Ambassador of India to China
Former Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs

India must navigate a complex economic corridor between two superpowers weaponising trade and supply chains. Diversifying across Europe, Canada, or Southeast Asia may feel suboptimal, but strategic resilience lies in finding pragmatic alternatives whilst cooperating with the big two strictly on our own terms.



Ashok Malik
Partner and Chair - India Practice
The Asia Group



Nations do not run on sentiment; they navigate structural power. China is a rising global heavyweight systemically relevant to every economy on earth. For a neighbouring power of 1.4 billion people, transactional tit-for-tat diplomacy will no longer suf ice—India must adopt bold, out-of-the-box strategic thinking to address the reality of China's rise.

Dr Sanjaya Baru
Former Editor
Financial Express & Business Standard



The missing foundation between our two nations has always been trust. Lasting progress cannot happen through diplomatic optics alone; it requires genuine confidence and honesty across every level of engagement.

Rahul Sharma
Founding Member & Past President, PAFI
Managing Director, US India Business Council (USIBC)



The most critical common language we need is not Hindi, English, or Mandarin—it is the language of time. Whilst we often define long-term planning in five- or ten-year horizons, China plans across fifty, a hundred, or a hundred and fifty years. Unless we embrace genuine long-termism and fundamentally recalibrate our perspective on the flow of time, we will continue to fall short.

Arijit Sen
President, vivo Mobile India Private Limited



The diplomatic thaw is genuine, but it represents an ongoing process rather than a settled outcome. For the corporate world, the critical distinction is between political normalisation and market predictability. Businesses do not require complete geopolitical harmony to function; they require regulatory clarity, operational continuity, and the confidence to plan ahead.

Rajeev Batra
Past President and Founding Member, PAFI

India and United States |
Shared Values, Evolving Dynamics: The Future of India–US Cooperation

Navigating the evolving India–US partnership requires a decisive shift from sentimentality to clear-eyed strategic realism. While tariff disputes and Washington's structural policy shifts often dominate headlines, the bedrock of this alliance—built on a quarter-century of robust commercial, defence, and diaspora ties—remains extraordinarily resilient. To thrive amidst global volatility, India is actively diversifying its strategic footprint while firmly safeguarding its core socio-economic interests. Simultaneously, global enterprises are acting as crucial stabilisers, pivoting towards agile, long-term capital commitments rather than short-term transactions. Ultimately, this unwavering operational continuity will successfully anchor the next decade of bilateral growth.



Saurabh Singh, Shivnath Thukral, Manish Tewari, Rahul Sharma, Amb. Arun Singh, Sandeep Aurora

Key takeaways

- Strategic realism must replace sentimentality, with India actively diversifying its global partnerships, safeguarding its sovereign socio-economic interests, and maintaining strategic autonomy rather than approaching great-power relations as a binary choice.
- The current policy volatility and shifting international posture in Washington reflect deeper structural realignments rather than temporary political friction, making an eventual return to previous diplomatic patterns unlikely.
- Operational and functional cooperation across defence exercises, maritime domain awareness, critical technology initiatives, and academic links remains resilient and serves as a vital anchor against high-level geopolitical disruption.
- Commercial engagement provides fundamental bilateral stability, but global businesses must adapt with operational agility and commit durable capital to India rather than relying on short-term horizons.



I think the main thing for India to consider is that the US is trying to figure out what it wants to do in the changed context, the changed priorities and behind it all is the fact that they haven't quite figured out what they want to do with China.

Amb. Arun Singh
Former Indian Ambassador to US, France and Israel

As global strategic priorities evolve, our foreign policy must be firmly grounded in clear-eyed realism. By pragmatically embracing these new international dynamics, India is perfectly positioned to proactively shape its own strategic destiny and forge a highly resilient, self-reliant future.



Manish Tewari
Member of Parliament
Lok Sabha



India cannot be treated as a part-time investment. Unlocking the immense, transformative potential of our market requires enduring commitment, deep engagement, and a long-term strategic vision from our global partners.

Shivnath Thukral
President, PAFI
Vice President of Public Policy and Government Affairs
PhonePe Limited



While tarif s and trade agreements often dominate the headlines, the underlying reality is that the last 25 years have forged an extraordinarily robust bilateral relationship. The true strength of the India-US partnership rests firmly on three enduring pillars: government, business, and people. It is this profound people-to-people connectivity that grounds our engagement, ensuring our shared future remains resilient and deeply collaborative.

Rahul Sharma
Founding Member & Past President, PAFI
Managing Director, US India Business Council (USIBC)

The strategic relationship between India and the United States remains fundamentally vital. As we look to the future, we must move beyond arm's-length, competitive engagement and forge a definitive partnership anchored in deep trust, shared values, and enduring mutual interests.



Saurabh Singh
Country Leader - Public Policy and Government Affairs
Optum India



Every professional serves as an ambassador for India within their global organisation. Championing this role with purpose and excellence is how we actively drive the nation's broader economic success.

Sandeep Aurora
Secretary, PAFI
Group Director & Head - Public Policy & Government Affairs
Microsoft India & South Asia

Women in Public Affairs: From Participation to Power

Women in Public Affairs | *Breaking the Invisible Barriers*

Navigating power dynamics, unwritten institutional rules, and the subtle mechanics of influence remains a complex challenge for women ascending to senior leadership in public policy. The panel tackled these realities head-on, unravelling the structural hurdles and implicit biases that disproportionately affect mid-career professionals. Emphasising the transformative shift from passive mentorship to decisive executive sponsorship, the discussion mapped out how institutional leaders and male allies must drive systemic equity, equipping emerging female leaders to secure their place at the highest levels of corporate statesmanship.



Deepshikha Dharmaraj, Virat Bhatia, Anita Kumar, Natasha Jog, Ophira Bhatia

Key takeaways

- Moving beyond traditional mentorship, career progression requires active sponsorship—executives who visibly advocate for women, create high-profile opportunities, and champion their advancement when they are not in the room.
- Mid-career advancement is often hindered by invisible barriers, including implicit stereotyping, assumptions regarding caregiving and availability, and a lack of access to both internal leadership perspectives and male-dominated stakeholder networks.
- Rather than treating accommodations for pregnancy and caregiving as favours, organisations must design these realities into their leadership pipelines, deliberately placing women in high-visibility, operationally demanding roles based on merit.
- Earning professional credibility and influence demands robust relationship-building—not only with senior external stakeholders but across internal business functions to demonstrate cross-functional impact and substantive expertise.



Women often face invisible stereotypes regarding our availability, caregiving responsibilities, and capacity for complex projects. While we have seen a positive shift in recent years, we must actively embed inclusion by design so the next generation of women can own their voices much earlier in their careers.

Natasha Jog
Director - Public Policy, Meta

We operate in a space where government stakeholders are predominantly male, which is why the toughest, high-visibility roles often default to men. To change this, male allies have to step up and actively encourage women on the front lines. We must also accommodate the realities of caregiving—not as a corporate favour, but as a baseline—because when we do, women win leadership roles fair and square.



Virat Bhatia
Past President, PAFI
Co-Chair, PAFI Annual Forum



While mid-career women in public affairs often drive the research and draft the policy briefs, they lack access to strategic leadership perspectives. When included in high-level deliberations, their deep subject matter expertise is transformed into sharp, compelling arguments that significantly strengthen their organisation's position.

Anita Kumar
Senior Country Manager – Government Affairs
Cisco Systems India and South Asia



Are women truly being considered for bigger opportunities in organisations? The barriers for women in public af airs are rarely about capability; they are fundamentally about access to the right opportunities, and crucially, the kind of mentoring and sponsorship you receive.

Deepshikha Dharmaraj
Past President, PAFI and Chief Executive Officer
Burson Group India

For women in the public af airs space, build your networks, seek active sponsorship, and truly own your voice. Stretch your boundaries by putting your hand up for those tough, frontline operational projects, and most importantly, have the absolute confidence to know you can do it.



Ophira Bhatia
Vice President - Corporate & Government Affairs (CGA), India
CGA Lead, Asia Pacific, Middle East & Africa,
Mondelez International







PAFI Conversation |
The Future of Influence: Global Public Affairs, Women in Policy & Leadership

True public affairs leadership thrives at the intersection of cultural empathy, sharp adaptability, and community purpose. Moving past transactional influence, the dialogue spotlighted how listening to silent majorities and dismantling systemic barriers for women and families build lasting institutional resilience. Real change demands more than good intentions—it requires active male allyship that advocates behind closed doors and amplifies overlooked voices. Ultimately, genuine influence is not about asserting power, but solving collective problems with courage and clarity.



Natasha Jog, Nneka Chiazor

Key takeaways

- Adaptability, cultural intelligence, and the capacity to actively listen to underrepresented stakeholders are the foremost leadership attributes required to navigate modern public policy and geopolitical friction.
- Policymaking and technological transformations, including artificial intelligence and trade realignments, must deliberately assess and integrate their disproportionate impacts on women and family structures.
- Meaningful advancement for women requires concrete male allyship—specifically through soliciting women's viewpoints, amplifying their voices when overlooked, advocating for them in decision-making rooms, and offering direct, actionable feedback.
- Professional influence is most effectively built by framing advocacy around the counterpart's core interests and collective societal problem-solving, rather than narrow, transactional self-interest.
- High-impact public affairs delivers greatest value at the direct intersection of business, government, and community, moving past traditional lobbying to build resilient public-private crisis responses and enduring trust.



In a world where superpowers turn inward and nations retreat into sovereignty, adaptability becomes our greatest leadership imperative. Navigating this fragmented landscape requires listening closely to the silent majority and meeting stakeholders where they truly are. As India demonstrates by engaging across multiple fronts, the leaders who thrive will be those who adapt swiftly to maintain global harmony amid rising national interests.

Nneka Chiazor
President and CEO
Public Affairs Council, USA

Subject-matter expertise and core technical capabilities are only the baseline —they are the easiest skills to acquire. The true differentiators in leadership are empathy, cultural intelligence, and having inclusion by design. It is the ability to connect disparate dots and draw from rich, diverse experiences that genuinely defines modern public affairs.



Natasha Jog
Director, Public Policy
Meta







Future-Proofing India: Youth, Innovation, and Urbanisation

Future Leaders Dialogue |
Leading India 2047: The Next Leap

The panel examined how India can convert its young demographic profile from a potential risk into a strategic advantage, cautioning that this opportunity is temporary and demanding. Discussions centered on the need for substantial investments in higher education capacity, agile regulatory frameworks that support innovation rather than stifle it, and the redirection of technology toward solving structural public problems like water and sanitation rather than mere consumer convenience. The speakers underscored that governments must engage an increasingly impatient and anxious youth cohort as equal stakeholders, arguing that providing market access and removing systemic friction for young entrepreneurs is far more critical than offering traditional incentives.



Rakesh Dubey, Shobhit Mathur, Shashank Mani, R. Sukumar, Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu, Rohit Singh, Aparajita Bharti, Sudhir Zutshi

Key takeaways

- India's demographic advantage is a closing window that requires immediate, large-scale intervention in higher education quality, skills development, and structural employment opportunities to prevent a demographic crisis.
- Rather than optimising for consumer convenience, technological innovation must be guided by a humanist approach to address core societal challenges in sectors like water, sanitation, and public health.
- The higher education sector is severely constrained by capacity shortages and rigid regulation; it urgently requires greater philanthropic investment, differentiated institutional models, and the flexibility to integrate industry practitioners.

Key takeaways

- Young entrepreneurs and deep-tech innovators require regulatory sandboxes, pilot programmes, and direct market access through government procurement, rather than relying solely on financial incentives.
- Public institutions must move past condescension to engage youth as active stakeholders, responding to their anxieties about career uncertainty with clear, direct, and transparent communication.



Shashank Mani
Member of Parliament
Lok Sabha

We need humanist technology that solves real problems for millions of Indians. To truly engage our youth, we must inspire them with homegrown talent and cultural resonance, because they are no longer chasing the mirage of happiness—they are searching for real meaning, purpose, and belonging.

Our young entrepreneurs are building world-class technology, but navigating government procurement remains a nightmare for young innovators. To foster deep-tech innovation, we need agile regulatory sandboxes and the courage to openly acknowledge the societal problems they are trying to solve. You simply cannot separate technological innovation from giving young people a genuine voice.



Aparajita Bharti
Co-Founder, The Quantum Hub and
Young Leaders for Active Citizenship



Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu
Member of Parliament
Lok Sabha

Today's youth are simultaneously an 'instant generation' demanding immediate clarity and an anxious cohort facing uncertain career landscapes. They have zero tolerance for jargon, fluf , or diplomatic evasion from policymakers. To harness their energy, governments must meet this impatience with concrete answers and address their anxieties with actionable pathways.



Our median age of 29 is a closing window of opportunity, not a permanent entitlement. To stop this demographic dividend from going to waste, we must move past incremental thinking and aggressively skill our youth for deep technology and global-scale manufacturing. We have to think big enough to match the sheer aspiration of this generation.

Rohit Kumar Singh
Former Secretary to the Government of India

With one crore students entering higher education annually, India has an extraordinary opportunity to build world-class institutions right here at home. By accelerating deregulation and unlocking private philanthropy, we can channel the billions currently spent abroad back into our own ecosystem. This is our moment to truly unleash the potential of our demographic dividend.



Shobhit Mathur
Co-Founder and Vice Chancellor
Rishihood University



Young people today have a healthy disrespect for everything that came before them, which is exactly how it should be. Our responsibility is to look past that natural youthful rebellion to truly understand their hopes, their aspirations, and what they ultimately expect from this country.

R. Sukumar
Editor-in-Chief
Hindustan Times

The true energy of this country lies in its youth. When we talk about young people, we are fundamentally talking about hope—and hope is perhaps the best of things. But to secure our future, that raw energy must always be tempered with wisdom.



Rakesh Dubey
Treasurer, PAFI &
Director - Global Government Affairs,
Carlyle Group



To truly capitalize on our demographic dividend, we must actively skill our youth to drive the new wave of manufacturing, deep tech, and aerospace. This requires high-quality education that empowers them to solve the nation's most pressing challenges, backed by agile regulatory institutions that champion innovation rather than stifle it.

Sudhir Zutshi
Director - Policy and Strategy, Asia Pacific
UL Solutions







Skilling in the AI Era |

AI, Young India and the Future of Opportunity

In collaboration with Young Leaders for Active Citizenship (YLAC)

Artificial intelligence presents young India with an unprecedented paradox: the power to dramatically democratise entrepreneurship and frontline problem-solving, set against growing anxieties over automated entry-level jobs and unequal technological access. The session challenged the narrow view of AI creation as merely training foundational models, urging youth to build high-impact applications for underserved communities, healthcare, and public service. While industry leaders pointed to shifting corporate skill sets and emerging creator economies, rising practitioners underscored the acute need for institutional safety rails, data sovereignty, and inclusive co-creation. Ultimately, turning AI into an engine of equitable mobility hinges on transforming higher education from passive consumption into critical, reason-driven problem-solving.



Pragya Misra, Shipra Baduni, Anil Padmanabhan, Bikas Kumar, Kainaat Arif, Rakesh Dubey

Key takeaways

- AI creation extends far beyond training foundational large language models; applying existing tools to solve urgent, large-scale societal challenges in healthcare, education, and governance is itself a vital form of national innovation.
- The automation of manual, repetitive, and entry-level tasks is eroding traditional corporate learning pathways, shifting employer expectations toward advanced AI, cloud capabilities, and non-linear career trajectories.
- Meaningful technological access demands much more than tool availability; it requires targeted skilling, regional language integration, and active outreach into Tier 2 and Tier 3 ecosystems to bridge deep digital divides.
- Sustainable and trustworthy AI deployment requires co-creation alongside impacted communities, institutionalised algorithmic accountability, and proactive governance around data privacy, worker welfare, and environmental impacts.

Key takeaways

- Bridging the gap between technological disruption and youth opportunity depends on reforming higher education, moving away from rote answers toward critical thinking, accountable curricula, and interactive, Socratic learning models.



Bikas Kumar
Vice President & India Head
Government Affairs
SAP

We over-index on defining a 'creator' as someone building foundational models. True creation is taking this baseline intelligence and delivering tangible outcomes for the underserved—empowering an Anganwadi worker to triage maternal care or tailor learning in a mother tongue. Consumer adoption of AI in India will continue to soar, but the real breakthrough lies in applying these models across civil society, healthcare, and education to solve India's most urgent grassroots challenges.

We over-index on defining a 'creator' as someone building foundational models. True creation is taking this baseline intelligence and delivering tangible outcomes for the underserved—empowering an Anganwadi worker to triage maternal care or tailor learning in a mother tongue. Consumer adoption of AI in India will continue to soar, but the real breakthrough lies in applying these models across civil society, healthcare, and education to solve India's most urgent grassroots challenges.



Pragya Misra
Head of Strategy and
Global Affairs, India
OpenAI



Kainaat Arif
Author, Artist and
International Relations Enthusiast

Democratising AI means looking at the people it impacts, far beyond large language models. AI now governs hiring, healthcare, banking, and the algorithmic mediation of our everyday reality. Data is neither neutral nor objective simply because it involves mathematics. If we truly want an inclusive AI economy, we cannot build our future on the invisible, precarious labour of marginalised data annotators while locking out the very communities living with its consequences.



Access has always been a historical hurdle, but technology gives us the power to rewrite that narrative. The core mission of building advanced AI is ensuring it benefits all of humanity—not just developed markets, but every community across India.

Anil Padmanabhan
Senior Journalist

Access to AI is not linear. Having access to a tool is vastly dif erent from possessing the capability to innovate with it, especially across the divide between a premier institute and a small town. Young people may use AI for homework or daily tasks, but turning that into meaningful innovation demands more than mere availability—it requires an urgent, deliberate investment in systemic skilling and institutional support.



Shipra Baduni
Chief Executive Officer
Young Leaders for Active Citizenship (YLAC)



Our higher education landscape today is an island of excellence surrounded by an ocean of mediocrity. If we aspire to become a Viksit Bharat, low cost cannot remain an excuse for low quality. Building a truly developed nation requires deep accountability in both public and private institutions, ending ad-hocism, and having the courage to fund world-class scale—with the state investing aggressively and beneficiaries paying their fair share.

Rakesh Dubey
Treasurer, PAFI
Director - Global Government Affairs
Carlyle Group

Boardroom 2030 |
Leading Through Disruption: Strategy, Innovation & India's Next Growth Story

Navigating compounded global volatility requires boards to look beyond rigid crisis playbooks and anchor long-term resilience in agile leadership and succession depth. Through strategic frameworks like DYME—integrating diplomacy, technology, security, and economics—enterprises must map dependencies and channel domestic R&D into next-generation breakthroughs. Concurrently, organizational agility demands moving boardrooms from token representation to substantive committee influence while empowering multi-generational talent with true ownership. Ultimately, sustained institutional trust and proactive government collaboration transform compounding disruptions into enduring national and corporate advantage.



Abhishek Lahiri, Pooja Goyal, Nivruti Rai, Ashok Kumar Bhattacharya, Pramath Sinha, Nithyashree S., Yashika Singh

Key takeaways

- Resilient leadership and structured succession planning constitute the fundamental organizational hedge against unpredictable, compounding shocks.
- The DIME framework (Diplomacy, Information/Technology, Military, Economics) enables boards to anticipate systemic friction, safeguard data sovereignty, and direct R&D toward future-proof technologies rather than legacy replication.
- Corporate governance must evolve from symbolic gender representation to substantive influence, elevating women's presence toward 30% with decisive roles on audit, risk, and compensation committees.
- Organizational agility hinges on the emerging passion economy, requiring leaders to replace hierarchical approval bottlenecks with autonomy for multi-disciplinary talent capable of executing without perfect information.
- Persistent, trust-centered engagement with responsive government institutions is indispensable for de-risking investments and building complex, frontier deep-tech ecosystems.



The emerging world order rests on the DIME framework—Diplomacy, Information and technology, Military, and Economics. In a disrupted era, boards and nations must use diplomacy to secure market of take, build technological sovereignty around data and next-generation innovation, and leverage economic alliances to build resilient, future-ready power.

Nivruti Rai
Managing Director and CEO
Invest India

You cannot design predictable formulas for unpredictable disruptions. When compounding shocks hit, the only true hedge is resilient leadership—people who avoid the panic, protect the core, and look around the corner to turn crisis into opportunity.



Pramath Sinha
Founder and Trustee, Ashoka University
Founding Senior Partner, Jetri



Diversity is not a compliance checklist; it is an active risk-management engine. Moving women's board presence beyond 30% means little unless they hold substantive seats on audit, risk, and compensation committees where key decisions are made.

Pooja Goyal
Founding CEO
Udaiti Foundation

The 21st-century workplace is being redefined by the passion economy. Loyalty is no longer tethered to tenure, but to purpose, high agency, and solving problems bigger than oneself. In a rapidly shifting world, expertise is no longer narrow specialisation—it is 'range': the agility to learn fast, connect unrelated disciplines, and replace 'that's not my job' with relentless, figure-it-out ownership.



Nithyashree S.
Associate Vice President
New Initiatives & Chief of Staff
The ePlane Company



In an era of relentless disruption, government is not an external obstacle but an indispensable ally. True resilience emerges when business and state build proactive, trust-anchored partnerships to navigate volatility and shape shared national progress.

Ashok Kumar Bhattacharya
Editorial Director
Business Standard

As geopolitical fragmentation deepens, boardrooms must adapt without losing sight of their long-term vision. The defining challenge of our time is building supply chain resilience amid structural fractures—ensuring that short-term global shocks do not derail sustainable enterprise growth.



Abhishek Lahiri
Vice President and Head, Government Affairs and
Public Policy - South Asia
Mastercard



The most consequential leadership challenge of our time is learning how businesses can thrive amid geopolitical volatility, technological disruption, and shifting economic ground. Seizing India's defining growth opportunity demands bold collaboration between industry and institutions—and above all, building adaptable, future-ready organisations where human resilience forms our true strategic advantage.

Yashika Singh
Chief Corporate Affairs Officer and
Head, Sustainability – India and South Asia
PepsiCo

Public Affairs Reimagined:
The Leaders We Need Next

Public affairs is undergoing a fundamental transformation, expanding far beyond traditional government relations to sit at the intersection of corporate strategy, geopolitics, and digital platforms. As artificial intelligence redefines how information is created and influence is built, the profession demands a radical rethink of leadership. Equipping the next generation of policy professionals to drive the vision of India 3.0 requires an intergenerational shift in capabilities: while AI scales productivity and automates tactical workflows, the core of the work remains irreducibly human. Success in this complex landscape ultimately relies on exercising nuanced policy judgment, building deep trust, and navigating intricate stakeholder relationships.



Ishteyaque Amjad, Vaishali Chopra, Smriti Sharma, Nneka Chiazor, Shubhashis Gangopadhyay, Neha Karnik, Saurabh Singh

Key takeaways

- AI is rapidly absorbing routine and tactical tasks, making it essential that human judgment drives strategy rather than relying on automated outputs.
- The profession remains fundamentally a relationship business. The efficiency gained through technology must be redirected into high-value, direct engagement with stakeholders, government, and local communities.
- Navigating this transformation requires leaders to prioritise empathy, discernment, and courageous conversations to manage the complex human friction of real-world policymaking.
- Evaluating emerging policy talent for India 3.0 means looking past flawless, AI-assisted drafts to assess contextual awareness, collaborative spirit, and the ability to seek meaningful help.



Public affairs professionals are the original influencers, wielding facts to deter harm and advance both profit and purpose. Whenever disruptive technologies like AI emerge, people question our relevance. Yet we remain essential because our true value lies in discernment.

Nneka Chiazor
President and Chief Executive Officer
Public Affairs Council, USA

In public administration, AI will play a massive role in driving productivity and eliminating problematic discretion. But in public policy, human judgment remains indispensable. Unlike the corporate sector where the customer is a means to a profit, in public affairs, the people are both the means and the end —a reality that AI simply cannot replicate.



Shubhashis Gangopadhyay
Managing Trustee and Research Director
India Development Foundation (IDF)



Never allow AI to take away your power to think, challenge, and question. The quality of its output depends entirely on the intelligence and rigor of your input. AI doesn't replace us—it simply raises the baseline, shortening the grind of drafting so we can elevate our ideas and debate at a much higher level .

Ishteyaque Amjad
Past President, PAFI and Co-Chair, PAFI Annual Forum
Managing Director, Policy & Government Affairs India and South Asia
Abbott



Public af airs was born at the boundary between the state and the market. Today, as India scales toward a $30 trillion economy by 2047 and states fiercely compete for investments, the mandate has shifted from the ease of doing business to the speed of doing business. The future public affairs leader must thrive exactly at this intersection—navigating rapidly changing geopolitics and continuously aligning business strategy.

Neha Karnik
General Manager – Corporate Affairs
Godrej Industries Group

Rigorous research and writing used to be the ultimate hallmarks of a policy professional, but AI has leveled that playing field. Today, our true differentiator isn't how perfectly we draft a brief—it's our agility to continuously evolve and navigate the complex intersections of law, economics, communications, and technology.



Smriti Sharma
Head – Policy and Strategy
Apple India



With AI, technology, and shifting geopolitics driving unprecedented change, public affairs professionals must adapt rapidly to remain relevant. The defining question we face today is: how do we identify the leaders of tomorrow and how do we do it early?

Vaishali Chopra
Head – Public Affairs and Communications, India
YARA International

While AI will inevitably evolve the day-to-day nature of our jobs, this is a powerful opportunity. It challenges us to step up, focus on where we add uniquely human value, and elevate the true impact of our work.



Saurabh Singh
Country Leader - Public Policy and Government Affairs
Optum India

Delhi 3.0 |
Reimagining India's Capital Region
In collaboration with Urban Land Institute (ULI)

Transforming Delhi/NCR into a more liveable urban space over the next five years requires an urgent pivot from high-level master planning to action-oriented implementation. With air quality and water supply now immediate crises, the primary barriers to citywide improvement are institutional fragmentation and municipal execution capacity rather than a lack of capital. While the new master plan ambitiously targets urban regeneration and 40 lakh new homes, its success depends on rigorous local-area planning to protect walkability, last-mile connectivity, and accessible cultural spaces. Ultimately, realising this vision demands a cohesive metropolitan governance framework, alongside private developers and residents taking active civic and financial responsibility well beyond their immediate property boundaries.



Nipun Sahni, Luis Miranda, Sahil Vachani, Manisha Bhartia, Vivek Narain, Anupam Yog

Key takeaways

- Severe air quality and water management deficits are recognised as active urban crises requiring immediate, coordinated implementation rather than prolonged future planning.
- The primary bottleneck for large-scale urban improvement is fragmented institutional governance and a deficit in municipal execution capacity, not a shortage of available capital.
- Although the master plan actively encourages regeneration and private-sector densification, it urgently needs detailed, neighbourhood-level policies to protect the street-level lived experience and pedestrian infrastructure.
- Private developers and communities must take deliberate responsibility for their surrounding ecosystems—such as dedicating specific project budgets for external-area upliftment—whilst integrating culture and public recreation as essential urban infrastructure.



Global cities like London, Singapore, and New York thrive not on gated communities, but on accessible, shared public spaces. When citizens from all walks of life rely on the same pavements and parks, that infrastructure is inherently better maintained. By building universal urban spaces where everyone is invested in the public realm, we naturally elevate the quality of life for the entire city.

Luis Miranda
Chairman of the Board & Co-Founder
Indian School of Public Policy

For the first time, Delhi's master plan acknowledges a fundamental reality: the city has no room left for outward expansion. As we prepare for a projected 50% population increase, our focus must completely shift from historical sprawl to internal regeneration.



Manisha Bhartia
Business Director and Head, BDP India



We are not waiting for an urban crisis in five years; the urgency to act is already here. While infrastructure needs vary across cities, securing clean air for over a billion citizens remains our absolute top priority, closely followed by sustainable water management.

Nipun Sahni
Chair - National Capital Region
Urban Land Institute



Sahil Vachani
Managing Director and CEO
Max Estates Limited

Transforming our cities begins with a fundamental shift in intention. We must move beyond the expectation that someone else will build our future, and instead take personal responsibility for the quality of our urban ecosystem. By educating the next generation and instilling a deep sense of civic duty, we elevate our collective standards. Ultimately, when this change starts with us, we redefine the very KPIs by which we measure and hold our leadership accountable.

To truly transform our cities, we must rethink our institutional frameworks and break urban gridlock. By devolving power to city-level leadership and equipping them with genuine authority, we create the essential structures for true accountability. Empowering local leaders is the critical next step in driving meaningful, lasting urban change.



Vivek Narain
Designated Partner
Quorum Club



Anupam Yog
Managing Partner
XDG Labs Pte Ltd

While our cities face complex pressures, they remain some of the world's most lovable places. As India evolves, our mandate is to bridge the gap between being lovable and truly liveable. Guided by the newly published Delhi Master Plan, we must now drive an action-oriented agenda—collaborating across sectors to build the robust urban infrastructure required for the capital's next era of growth.

Pre - Forum Events

Public Affairs 2035 – Building Trusted Institutions in an Age of AI, Geopolitics and Polarization

As part of the curtain-raiser engagements leading up to the 13th Annual Forum, PAFI convened a closed-door roundtable featuring Ms. **Nneka Chiazor**, President & CEO of the Public Affairs Council, to deliberate on the evolving charter of public affairs toward 2035. The session, hosted over lunch by Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), explored the imperative of anchoring institutional credibility amid rapid disruptions.





The Reputation Economy: Navigating Policy, Value, and Business Strategy

As part of the curtain-raiser engagements leading into the 13th Annual Forum, PAFI partnered with Burson Group India to host an exclusive dinner and salon featuring Mr. **Corey duBrowa**, Global CEO of Burson. The evening brought together senior public policy leaders and industry heads to deliberate on the shifting paradigm of corporate diplomacy, public policy, and reputation capital. The lunch was hosted by Burson India.





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U.S.-India Business Council
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STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP FORUM

Media Highlights

Media Highlights

- 380 media stories published across national, financial, and regional publications, carrying the Forum's policy discussions to a wider public audience.
- 132 stories in top-tier media, including 20 articles in leading national print dailies and 112 stories on major business and financial news portals.
- 248 stories in regional and sector outlets, extending the reach of the Forum’s conversations into state-level and industry-specific media.

Social Media Highlights

- During September 2026, anchored by the 13th Annual Forum, PAFI’s digital channels generated more than 150,200 total impressions and views alongside over 3,335 organic interactions, extending the Forum’s conversations far beyond the venue. Over 80 posts and stories, including real-time coverage, ensured continuous visibility and positioned the Forum at the centre of online policy discussions.
- This concentrated activity drove a substantial month-on-month surge in digital reach in September 2026 compared to August 2026. On LinkedIn, impressions grew by 191.9%, while page views and unique visitors more than tripled (+257.7% and +219.4% over August). This sharp rise reflects strong interest from senior industry peers actively seeking out Forum takeaways and speaker insights.
- Simultaneously, real-time session updates on X (Twitter) sparked a nearly nine-fold jump in impressions (+798% compared to August) and a 628% increase in profile visits.
- On Instagram, visual storytelling drew 17,900 total views with nearly half of all viewership coming from new, non-follower audiences.
- Crucially, this entire digital footprint was achieved 100% organically without paid promotion. Enhanced by more than 40 organic mentions from participating Union Ministers, Secretaries, and corporate leaders, the digital response underscores the high recall, credibility, and agenda-setting value of the PAFI Annual Forum.

Media Highlights



Impressions: **101.52K (+191.9%)**
Reactions: **2,390 (+178.9%)**
Page views: **1892 (+257.7%)**
Unique visitors: **757 (+219.4%)**



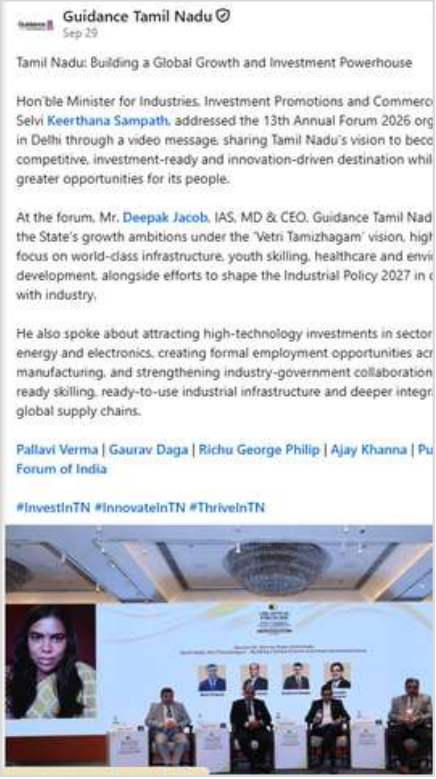
Impressions: **30.8K (+798%)**
Engagements: **398 (+337%)**
Profile Visits: **51 (+628%)**
Posts Shared: **31**





Total Views: **20.26K**
(9.8K from stories, 8.1K from posts)
Total Interactions: **547**
New Followers: **67+**

Media Highlights















Media Highlights



HEAD OF US VISIT FOR G20 TRADE MINISTERIAL

US Trade Deal Done & Dusted: Goyal

Pact to be executed once Washington gives New Delhi the right competitive advantage'

Our Bureau

New Delhi: The trade pact between ...ndia and the US is "done and dusted" ...nd will be executed once Washing... ...n gives New Delhi the right compet... ...ive advantage over its competitors ... the American market, said com... ...erce and industry minister Piyush ...oyal on Thursday at an event orga... ...ized by the Public Affairs Forum of ...dia.

He said India has finalised nine free ...rade agreements, "and I include the ...K, which is almost done and dust... ...d". "We just have to find the right ...eparable competitive advantage ...ver our competitors so that we can ...uickly execute the agreement," ...oyal said, ahead of his visit to the ...S for the G20 Trade Ministerial, to ...e held from September 30 to October ...in Wisconsin.

The minister will also hold a bilater... ...l meeting with US Trade Represen... ...tive Jamieson Greer and the pro... ...ress of negotiations for the pact is ...xpected to be taken up during the de... ...berations between the two leaders. ...oyal also said India was not part of ...

within the government at the time to ...join the negotiations would effectiv... ...ly have meant entering into an FTA ...with China.

He questioned whether such an ...agreement would have benefited In... ...dian businesses, manufacturers and ...workers, citing concerns over Chi... ...nese exports, dumping goods, lack of ...transparency and providing subsi... ...dies to exporters.

He said India could have been able to ...extract more concessions from the ...EU had the pact been negotiated ...earlier, as the bloc didn't have ...requirements such as the ...Carbon Border Adjust... ...ment Mechanism and ...deforestation regula... ...tion. The minister also ...said India aims to grow ...one million seafarers to ...the world. A trade deal ...with Israel, he said, might ...take time due to the ...geopolitical ...situation. ...Goyal ...noted ...that In... ...dia's ...

semiconductor consumption de... ...mand was expected to grow to over ...$320 billion in the next five years.

He said India was looking to partici... ...pate across the AI technology stack, ...from large language models to AI ...agents, as the government seeks to ...strengthen the country's position in ...emerging technologies.

He also cautioned businesses ...against relying entirely on AI-gener... ...ated information without human ver... ...ification, citing the possibility of in... ...accurate responses and the risks as... ...sociated with using such infor... ...mation in professional ...decision-making.

At the same event, com... ...merce secretary Rajesh ...Agrawal said India's ex... ...panding network of FTAs ...can help de-risk export ...supply chains by ...enabling Indian ...exporters to diversify ...across multiple mar...

while predictable tariffs and process... ...es can make the country more attrac... ...tive for global supply chain invest... ...ments. "If I am an exporter and I am ...reaching into a geography which is in ...ASEAN, I can also now go to Austra... ...lia, and now with New Zealand FTA I ...can go to New Zealand also, because ...it's the same region, same supply ...chain, but now I have that duty arbi... ...trage, which helps me take risk," he ...said.

"Since I am reaching the same prod... ...uct in ten markets, I am de-risking. So ...that is one way you can do risk your... ...exports, and that's important for ex... ...ports to grow sustainably," Agrawal ...said, adding that predictability was a ...key requirement for companies ...which FTAs provide. He said inves... ...tors need clarity on tariffs and proc... ...esses when they import inputs from ...one geography, add value in India and ...subsequently export to another mar... ...ket. On state-wise export data, Agra... ...wal said the government was work... ...ing to make trade statistics more ...granular and useful for states and in... ...dustry. Explaining that existing trade ...statistics are largely collected at the ...points from where goods are shipped...



ANDHRA REVISES TEXTBOOKS T... REMOVE GENDER STEREOTYPES

...chool textbooks in Andhra Pradesh have been revised ...o remove gender stereotypes and instil respect for ...omen from an early age, according to the State HRD ...Minister, Nara Lokesh.

The minister made the comments on Thursday during ...fireside chat organised by the Public Affairs Forum of ...ndia (PAFI) in Delhi and outlined the State's ongoing ...eforms in school and higher education, with a strong ...ocus on value-based education, gender sensitivity, ...echnology-enabled learning, curriculum reform and ...ndustry-linked skilling.

He said Andhra Pradesh is examining which courses, ...najors, and minors are offered, whether they remain ...elevant, and how closely curricula align with market ...equirements. "Textbooks for Classes 1 and 2 earlier ...epicted household chores as being performed entirely ...y women. The State has changed this approach so that ...0 per cent of the household chores shown are ...erformed by men and 50 per cent by women, aiming ...void gender stereotyping from the first grade itself," h... ...aid. Lokesh, who is also Andhra Pradesh's IT Minister, ...aid that Saturday is observed as a "No Bag Day" in

*Yadav Calls For Policy Stability, Green Innovation Union Environment, Forest And Climate Change Minister Bhupender Yadav

...has called for sustained government-industry dialogue, stable policy frameworks and greater green innovation ...turn India's environmental ambitions into scalable investments.

Speaking at the **Public Affairs Forum of India's (PAFI) 13th Annual Forum** during a session on 'India's Green Growth Story: Sustainability, Competitiveness and Global Leadership,' Yadav said economic growth and environmental protection must progress together, particularly while developing critical infrastructure in border areas.

Vualnam: Fiscal prudence supports Viksit Bharat goal

SHUBHAM RANA
New Delhi, September 24



FISCAL PRUDENCE, AGILITY in data and systems, and data harmonization are some of the things that will help India move towards its goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047, a senior central government official said here on Thursday.

Fiscal prudence will give India a strong foundation for growth, especially in volatile times as the last few months, and help the country move towards its goal of Viksit Bharat, said V Vualnam, secretary, Department of Expenditure.

His counterpart in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Saurabh Garg, said that agility in data and systems would be "extremely neces... ...readable and interoperable, Garg said. Data harmonisation among government departments and states is also important, Garg said at an event organised by the Public Affairs Forum of India.

The statistics ministry is using artificial intelligence for analysing data and also to improve the quality of data collection at the enumeration level, Garg said.

While the ministry is using ...nations," Garg said.

"I think it (AI) is still ...evolving area," Garg sa... ...adding that the statistics m... ...istry is using AI "as long as ...are able to ensure that the m... ...els work on data which is id... ...tified and verified. Vualn... ...stressed on the need for cap... ...expenditure to supp... ...growth, as the government ... ...been doing for a few ye... ...now. The Centre is also work... ...with state governments ...incentivise them to m... ...towards more product... ...expenditure, Vualnam said. ... ...expenditure secretary said t... ...the government is looking ...how agri-stack can be used ...better and more targeted d... ...tribution of fertilisers.

"It is better targe... ...because we spend a lot on f... ...tilisers, especially in India, ...how it goes to the exact farm ...depending on the land that

PTI

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New FTAs provide comfort to invest in global supply chains in India: Comm Secy

NEW DELHI: (Sep 24) The new free trade agreements (FTAs) finalised by India in the last 5-6 years have been designed to provide comfort to long-term investors looking

GST mop-... level of Rs ... demand be...



Lokesh outlines Andhra's strategy for jobs, investment and education

METRO INDIA NEWS | DELHI

Andhra Pradesh IT and Education Minister Nara Lokesh has outlined the State government's strategy to attract investment, create jobs and undertake reforms across technology, agriculture, industry and education, while addressing environmental concerns linked to the proposed expansion of data centers.

Speaking at a fireside chat organised by the Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI) in Delhi, Lokesh said Andhra Pradesh was developing 23 sector-specific clusters spanning traditional industries such as cement and automotive to rare earths, material sciences, pharmaceuticals, biomedicine, artificial intelligence, data centres and quantum technology.

...Left Bank Canal as a source to ...meet water requirements and ...said companies were being ...encouraged to establish de... ...salination plants.

Lokesh also announced that ...the Horticulture Mission ...would be launched on Oc... ...tober 2, with nearly Rs 1 lakh ...crore planned for research. He ...said the State was considering ...an Indian School of Agricul... ...ture, modelled on the Indian ...School of Business, to ...strengthen agricultural re... ...search and development. On ...education, Lokesh said re... ...forms were aimed at combin... ...ing value-based learning, ...technology and industry-...linked skills. He said the pro... ...portion of schools achieving ...the "one class, one teacher" ...standard had risen from 8% to ...35%, while 30,000 teachers had ...recently been recruited.

He said textbooks for ...Classes 1 and 2 had been re...

Puri flags supply risk amid W Asia oil crisis

SAURAV ANAND
New Delhi, September 24

DISRUPTION ACROSS KEY global oil supply routes, rather than availability of crude, remains the bigger risk as the West Asia crisis persists and could worsen, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Thursday. Global crude availability, he said, is around 102 million barrels per day (bpd) against requirement of 94-95 million bpd.

"The crisis is certainly not over; it is not only ongoing but has the potential of exacerbating and could get more serious," Puri said

Forum of India's annual con... ...clave in New Delhi.

"There is no shortage per s... ...of crude," he said, pointing ...instead to disruption across ...supply routes and risks around ...key energy chokepoints.

India has so far managed t... ...cushion the impact by diversify... ...ing crude purchases and ...expanding refining capacity. ...The country now sources crude ...from 41 countries, up from ...27 earlier. Domestic refin... ...ing capacity is around ...267 million tonne per ...annum and is expected ...to rise to about 290 ...MTPA within a year. India ...consumes 5.6 million ...bpd of crude, while ...exporting nearly 1 ...million bpd o...



CEA Terms Trade Curbs 'Sustained C...

Our Bureau

New Delhi: The Of... ...Act, in its ...other trade restrictions should be ...seen as "sustained coercion" aimed at ...making countries choose between ...getting geopolitical ...ideal economic ...ic adviser (CEA) V Anantha Nage... ...waran said Friday cautioning that ...India is wary of tying the ...ween ...two with free "significant cost".

The Act authorises the US presi... ...dent to stop sanctions or duties ...trade imports and levy tariffs of up to ...100% on India, China and other major ...buyers of Russian energy.

Nageswaran said, making it impos... ...sible to assess India's foreign direct ...investment ...performance ...and ...trade ...in ...the ...aftermath ...of ...the ...sanctions ...and ...tariffs.





"Can offer missiles at almost one-fourth price of foreign OEMs": Defence Secy highlights rise in India's defence exports

By Amreshree Mishra | Updated: Sep 25, 2026 11:10 IST

New Delhi [India], September 25 (ANI): Defence Secretary Rajesh Singh on Friday described cost advantage as among India's USPs in defence exports, emphasising that the ministry expects exports to reach Rs 50,000 crore in the next two years.

Answering a question on defence exports at the 13th PAFI Annual Forum 2026

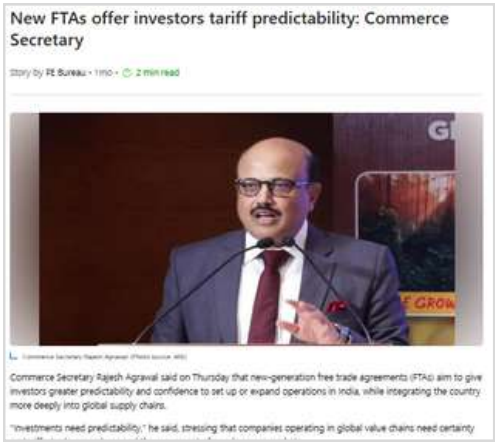
India's chip strategy: Be too important to be disrupted

Build domestic capacity against tech denial: Meity secy



S Krishnan, MeitY secretary, speaking at the inaugural session of the 13th Annual Forum 2026 in New Delhi

Media Highlights



New FTAs offer investors tariff predictability: Commerce Secretary

Story by FE Bureau • 1mo • 2 min read

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Thursday that new-generation free trade agreements (FTAs) aim to give investors greater predictability and confidence to set up or expand operations in India, while integrating the country more deeply into global supply chains.

"Investments need predictability," he said, stressing that companies operating in global value chains need certainty



ET Manufacturing

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Industry • 2 Min Read

New FTAs provide comfort to invest in global supply chains in India: Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal

India's latest free trade agreements are designed to foster long-term investments within global supply chains, also ensuring tariff stability, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal said.

PTI

Updated On Sep 24, 2026 at 06:13 PM IST



bid Beats in Brief.

EXPLAINERS BUSINESS DEFENCE INFRASTRUCTURE TECH ABOUT US EDITORIAL POLICY HOME

Defence

Explained: Why India Is Expanding Fighter Jet and Missile Production

BRIEF: India is on track to achieve its Rs 50,000 crore defence export target by 2028, two years ahead of schedule, according to Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh. With exports already at a record Rs 38,424 crore and rising global demand for missiles and artillery, the government is expanding fighter jet and missile production capacity to sustain the momentum.

Himanshu Pandey September 24, 2026



Real-time national data now achievable, states to be integrated soon: Mospi secretary

The government is aiming for machine-readable data and interoperable systems, statistics ministry secretary Saurabh Garg ho said.

PRIYANSHI VERMA & MEGHNA MITTAL | SEPTEMBER 24, 2026 / 12:26 IST



India-Canada FTA talks to get 'political heft', says Goyal

Rajeev Jayaswal

NEW DELHI: Negotiations for an India-Canada free trade agreement are progressing rapidly and will soon get "political heft", enterprise and industry minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday, adding that the proposed India-Canada deal is "almost done and dusted" and needs a competitive tariff architecture.

Goyal said he met his Canadian counterpart last week in Mumbai and indicated that ministers involved in the talks rather than leaving them to bureaucrats.

Speaking at the Leadership Dialogue at the 13th PAFI Annual Forum 2026 in New Delhi, Goyal said the Narendra Modi government was pursuing trade agreements based on what he described as "fair, equitable and balanced" terms, in contrast to deals negotiated by the erstwhile Congress-led UPA government.

"The mindset of the nation has changed today. Now we negotiate from a position of strength. Now we negotiate with confidence in

Piyush Goyal, commerce and industry minister.

recent trade agreements with the UAE, Australia, the UK, the EU and New Zealand. Goyal defended Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision in 2019 to keep India out

Economic Partnership (RCEP), saying membership of the China-led trade bloc could have resulted in a flood of imports that would have hurt Indian industry.

Referring to the recently concluded India-EU trade agreement, Goyal said India had secured larger quotas for steel, 4,500 mill lion chinese-finance-commitment and safeguards for sensitive sectors such as dairy and agriculture.

"It's only the beginning, there's going to be much more coming."

Goyal said the India-US trade agreement was among nine deals reached by the Modi government, although the two sides were still working on tariffs. "It is almost done and dusted. We have to find the right, pragmatic, creative advantage over our competitors so that we can optimise ensure the agreement," he said.

Goyal said the nine agreements collectively provided India preferential market access to economies with a combined GDP of about $60 trillion. Including trade agreements signed by previous governments, he said, India would have access to markets representing



T.N. outlines next phase of industrial growth

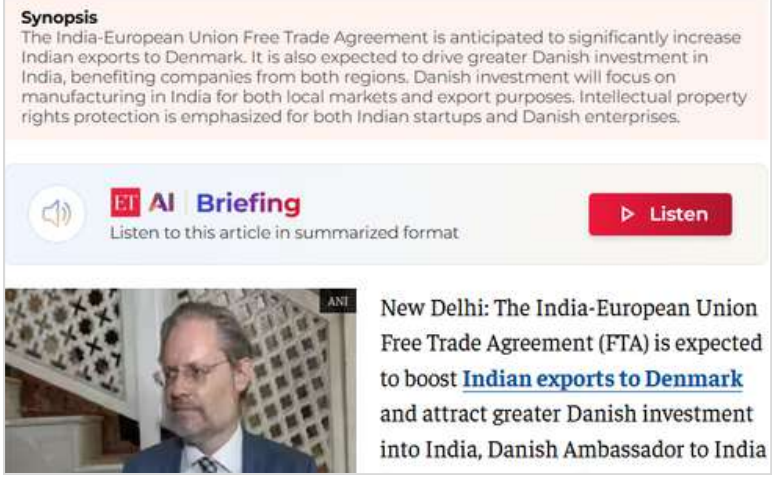
Our Bureau
Chennai

Tamil Nadu is pursuing an ambitious growth agenda, with a focus on advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, shipbuilding, artificial intelligence, space technology and global capability centres, Industries Minister S Keerthana said on Friday.

Addressing virtually a session, titled *Tamil Nadu: Vetri Tamizhagam – Building a Global Growth and investment Powerhouse*, at the 13th annual forum of the Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI) in Delhi, the Minister highlighted the State's ongoing reforms to make investing and operating in Tamil Nadu more bound appro- vals, a proposed 21-day deemed-approval framework, and a new Investment Promotion Commission, among other measures. She invited industry participants to share their concerns, challenges and criticisms candi- dly with the government.

Deepak Jacob, MD & CEO, Guidance TN, outlined the 'Vetri Tamil Nadu' vision and highlighted the State's continued engagement with investors and industry stakeholders.

The next phase will focus on advanced manufacturing, R&D, GCCs and emerging sectors, while continuing to promote district-led industrial development. The session also highlighted the State's approximately 72 per cent MoU



Synopsis

The India-European Union Free Trade Agreement is anticipated to significantly increase Indian exports to Denmark. It is also expected to drive greater Danish investment in India, benefiting companies from both regions. Danish investment will focus on manufacturing in India for both local markets and export purposes. Intellectual property rights protection is emphasized for both Indian startups and Danish enterprises.

ET AI | Briefing

Listen to this article in summarized format

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ANI

New Delhi: The India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is expected to boost Indian exports to Denmark and attract greater Danish investment into India, Danish Ambassador to India

Picture Gallery



















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Gala Dinner











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US, EU strongly criticise India's 'trade barriers'



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ANDHRA PRADESH

SwarnaAndhra@2047



Nara Lokesh

Minister for Information Technology, Electronics and Communications
Minister of Real Time Governance
Minister of Human Resources Development
Government of Andhra Pradesh

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Vetri Tamizhagam



S. Keerthana

Minister of Industries
Investment Promotion and Commerce
Government of Tamil Nadu

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DAYS	SESSIONS	SPEAKERS



Ajay Khanna | Rajat Prakash, Bhupender Yadav, Navika Kumar, Daxlata Chakraborty | Shivnath Thukral, Piyush Goyal, Virat Bhatia, Ranjeet Goswami



Ajay Khanna, Bharat Lal, Harish Krishnan | Shivnath Thukral, Tarun Kapoor, Arijit Sen | Ajay Khanna, Shivnath Thukral, S. Krishnan, Virat Bhatia



Sandeep Aurora, Rajesh Agrawal, Saurabh Garg
Ranjeet Goswami, V. Vaalnam, Rishi Chawla

Vaishali Chopra, Amb. Jawed Ashraf, Amb. Ajay Bisaria
Amb. Rasmus Abildgaard Kristensen, Anandi Iyer



Subha Ray, Shivnath Thukral | Arijit Sen, Ashok Malik, Amb. Ashok Kantha
Rahul Sharma, Dr Sanjaya Baru, Rajeev Batra | Saurabh Singh, Shivnath Thukral, Manish Tewari
Rahul Sharma, Amb. Arun Singh, Sandeep Aurora



Vinita Sethi, Jaya Rao | Nipun Sahni, Luis Miranda, Sahil Vachani
Manisha Bhartia, Vivek Narain, Anupam Yog | Deepshikha Dhermaraj, Virat Bhatia,
Anita Kumar, Natesha Jog, Ophira Bhatia

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About PAFI

Founded in 2008, the Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI) is India's leading professional organisation dedicated to advancing the practice of public affairs, public policy and advocacy. For nearly two decades, PAFI has worked to strengthen the interface between business, government and society through informed dialogue, ethical advocacy, research, executive education and professional development.

PAFI believes that better public policy emerges through collaboration. Its mission is to create opportunities for constructive engagement between policymakers, industry, academia and civil society while promoting the highest standards of professionalism, transparency and integrity in public affairs.

PAFI is independent, non-partisan and committed to long-term institution building. Unlike trade associations, chambers of commerce or lobbying organisations, PAFI does not represent sectoral or commercial interests. Instead, it provides a trusted platform where ideas are exchanged, perspectives are shared, relationships are built, and better understanding is fostered.

Its purpose is not simply to influence policy. Its purpose is to improve the quality of public policy dialogue in India.

Our Purpose

Public affairs is often viewed through the narrow lens of government engagement or advocacy. At PAFI, we believe it is much more than that. At its best, public affairs helps business understand government, helps government understand business, and strengthens the trust that enables both to work together in the larger public interest.

When the Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI) was established in 2008, public affairs in India was still an emerging discipline. There were very few platforms where practitioners could learn from one another, engage constructively with policymakers, or develop common professional standards. The profession itself lacked a shared identity. PAFI was founded to change that.

Our objective was never simply to create another business association. It was to help build a profession—one grounded in ethics, transparency, knowledge, dialogue, and responsible engagement. Over the years, that mission has expanded beyond professional development to institution building: creating spaces where business, government and society come together to exchange ideas, deepen understanding and contribute to better public policy. Today, as India assumes a larger role in the global economy, that founding vision is more relevant than ever.

Public Affairs Forum of India

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

Public Affairs Forum of India c/o IAMAI
202, First Floor, Okhla Industrial Estate – Phase III
New Delhi – 110020

Reach us at : director@pafi.in

www.pafi.in

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