

WELCOME STEP

The recent approval by the Union Cabinet for the development of a new civil enclave at Srinagar International Airport - at an estimated cost of Rs 1,677 crore - marks a transformative moment for aviation infrastructure in the Kashmir Valley and a welcome step toward strengthening regional connectivity and economic growth.

Spread over 73.18 acres, the ambitious project includes a state-of-the-art terminal building of about 71,500 square metres, designed to handle nearly 2,900 passengers during peak hours and around 10 million passengers per annum. This dramatic upgrade from the present capacity reflects foresight in planning for future demand as travel and tourism continue to grow in the region.

For decades, Srinagar's airport has served as a vital link between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of the country. However, constraints in capacity and infrastructure have often limited its potential to act as a true gateway for business, tourism, and cultural exchange. The expansion of the civil enclave - the civilian portion of the airport located on the Indian Air Force's Budgam Airbase - signals a leap toward modernity. It promises not just larger passenger handling but an enhanced travel experience through improved lounges, security systems, and passenger processing areas that meet global standards.

The implications extend beyond aviation logistics. Improved air connectivity catalyses economic activity in multiple sectors. Tourism, a cornerstone of the Valley's economy, stands to benefit enormously. Easier access to iconic destinations such as Dal Lake, Shankaracharya Temple, Mughal Gardens, and the surrounding mountain landscapes will not only encourage deeper domestic travel but also attract international visitors, provided broader geopolitical and airspace challenges are managed.

Beyond tourism, the project is poised to stimulate investment, job creation and service sector growth - from hospitality and transport to retail and allied services. Enhanced connectivity boosts confidence among investors and entrepreneurs who view reliable infrastructure as a prerequisite for expansion. The civil enclave's development also promises to generate employment during both construction and operation phases, creating opportunities for local youth and skilled professionals alike.

In addition, the design places emphasis on sustainability, incorporating features such as advanced water harvesting systems and eco-friendly materials, targeted to achieve a 5-star GRIHA rating. This reflects a thoughtful approach that honours both environmental stewardship and architectural heritage, blending modern efficiency with locally inspired aesthetics.

Most importantly, this project has strong symbolic value. It underscores the government's commitment to integrating Jammu & Kashmir more fully with the national mainstream through infrastructure that connects people, ideas and opportunities. While challenges remain - including ensuring seamless security coordination and navigating seasonal weather impacts - the civil enclave stands as a testament to forward-looking policy that prioritises sustainable development and inclusive growth.

The civil enclave at Srinagar International Airport is thus not merely an airport upgrade - it is a road map for progress, a bridge to broader horizons, and a welcome step toward realising the Valley's latent potential.

From Panini to the AI Stack: Delhi's AI Moment and the Logic of National Capability



HARDEEP S PURI

When Panini reduced the chaos of spoken language into a compact, computable grammar, he proved something that still holds: intelligence is most powerful when it is expressed as structure. Nalanda took that instinct into institutions, building methods to debate, preserve, and transmit knowledge across borders. India's decision to host the India AI Impact Summit 2026 draws from the same civilisational impulse, because the next leap in technology is about systems that can learn, reason, and act at scale, and the world cannot afford a future in which only a few capitals decide how those systems are built. Held at Bharat Mandapam last week, the Summit was the first global AI summit hosted by a Global South nation, and no previous edition drew participation at this scale: over 20 heads of state, 60 ministers, more than 500 AI leaders from over 100 countries, and 300 exhibitors across ten thematic pavilions. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India is putting forward an organising idea of its own: sovereignty over data, inclusion by design, accountability by default. And it is inviting global capital to build here on those terms.

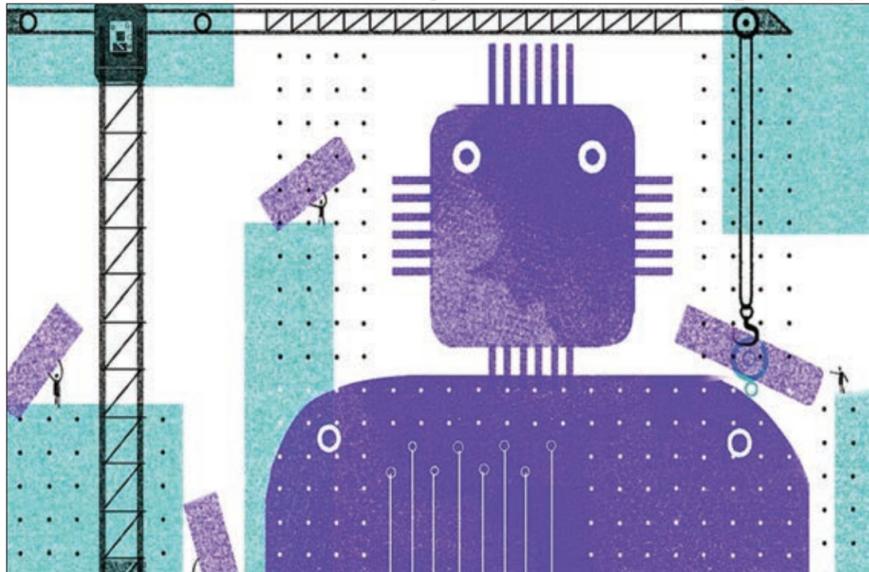
That idea finds its sharpest expression in the Prime Minister's M.A.N.A.V. vision: ethical guardrails, accountable governance, sovereignty over data so that the raw material of intelligence is not extracted the way commodities once were, broad access so that the benefits reach a farmer in Madhya Pradesh as surely as an engineer in Bengaluru, and legal validity so that every deployed system remains answerable to democratic scrutiny. His formulation about

giving AI an open sky while keeping command in human hands draws a line many advanced economies have been reluctant to draw.

Those principles now carry multi-lateral weight through the Delhi Declaration, adopted at the summit and already being called the first major AI governance blueprint from the Global South; taking a development-oriented view, anchored in a techno-legal approach that favours flexible guardrails over rigid compliance. It organises global collaboration around three pillars: People, Planet, and Progress. Population-scale solutions like BharatGen, which supports 22 Indian languages, address the reality that most of the world does not operate in English. A proposed global Compute Bank, modelled on India's own subsidised GPU access at \$65 per hour, lowers entry barriers everywhere. And the Declaration's insistence on data sovereignty directly challenges AI extractivism: the pattern in which developing nations' data is harvested to train models they must then pay to use.

What gives that framework its credibility is the decade of execution that precedes it, because this government did not arrive at AI through a white paper but through the most ambitious digital public infrastructure programme any democracy has undertaken. UPI processed over 228 billion transactions in 2025, worth roughly USD 3.4 trillion, nearly half the world's real-time digital payment volume, more than Visa processes globally. The JAM trinity has delivered over \$3.48 lakh crore in welfare savings since 2015. No other country has built identity, payments, and entitlement delivery at this scale within a single policy arc, and that is the foundation on which India's AI moment stands.

If the logic of digital public infrastructure was to connect every citizen to the state, the logic of AI infrastructure is to connect every citizen to capability, and here the numbers reveal a striking gap: India generates nearly 20 percent of the world's data but hosts roughly 3 percent of global data centre capacity. That gap is now being closed with the same intent that built UPI: fast, at scale, and with sovereign design. Consider what was announced in a single week at Bharat Mandapam.



Microsoft: USD 50 billion by 2030 for the Global South, with USD 17.5 billion already committed to India. Google: the America-India Connect initiative, anchored by USD 15 billion over five years. Amazon Web Services: USD 8.3 billion in Maharashtra. Adani Group: USD 100 billion toward renewable energy-powered AI data centres by 2035. Yotta Data Services: over USD 2 billion for one of Asia's largest AI computing hubs using Nvidia's Blackwell Ultra chips. Larsen & Toubro: a proposed venture with Nvidia to build India's largest gigawatt-scale AI factory. The IndiaAI Mission's national compute cluster has crossed 38,000 GPUs and is scaling to 58,000, available to startups at roughly one-third of global cost. The government's target of USD 200 billion in AI infrastructure investment over the next two years is not aspiration; the commitments already announced bring it within reach.

Ensuring that this investment becomes long-term structural advantage is the purpose of the Union Budget for 2026-27, which extends a tax holiday until 2047 for foreign companies using Indian data centres for global cloud services and commits USD 1.1 billion to a venture capital fund for AI and advanced manufacturing startups. The National Critical Mineral Mission, at over \$34,000 crore, secures the lithium, cobalt, and

rare earths that AI and semiconductor manufacturing depend on. None of this matters, however, unless it reaches people. On the first day of the Summit, more than 2.5 lakh students took a pledge to use AI for responsible innovation, a number submitted for Guinness World Records recognition. Thirty Data and AI Labs are operational in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, the first wave of a planned 570-lab network, while AIKosh offers over 7,500 datasets and 273 models as shared public infrastructure. When this government took office India had 16 IITs; today there are 23. OpenAI's CEO disclosed that India is ChatGPT's second largest market, with 100 million weekly active users. The consumption is here, and the production capability is catching up: three sovereign AI models were unveiled at the summit, including Sarvam AI's 105-billion-parameter large language model trained entirely on Indian compute and BharatGen's Param2, a 17-billion-parameter multilingual model supporting all 22 scheduled languages. These are not finetuned adaptations of foreign models; they are built from scratch on sovereign infrastructure.

Equally telling is how partnerships are now structured, because they are no longer about licensing foreign technology but about co-building sovereign capacity. The Tata Group's strategic partnership with OpenAI, beginning with 100

megawatts of AI-ready data centre capacity under the Stargate initiative and scaling to one gigawatt, signals that Indian industry is moving from the demand side to the supply side of global intelligence. India's formal signing of the Pax Silica Declaration on the sidelines of the summit places it in the US-led coalition securing supply chains for AI, semiconductors, and critical minerals alongside Japan, South Korea, the UK, and Australia. The bilateral India-US AI Opportunity Partnership, signed alongside, commits both nations to pro-innovation approaches on critical technologies, while the India-France Year of Innovation in 2026 adds another axis organised around joint skilling and measurable outcomes.

Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, the first Global South nation to host the global AI summit series did not merely convene a conversation but laid out the terms on which it intends to compete: a Delhi Declaration that rewrites the rules of AI governance, digital infrastructure processing nearly half the world's real-time payments, investment commitments in the hundreds of billions, sovereign models built from scratch, and entry into the supply chain security architecture of the AI age. Panini's lesson was never complicated. Structure is intelligence. India is building that structure now.

(The author is Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas)

22 February 1994 Resolution: When India Turned the Diplomatic Tables on Pakistan

DR. DEEPAK KAPOOR

The Parliamentary Resolution adopted unanimously on 22 February 1994 on Jammu & Kashmir remains one of independent India's most significant diplomatic assertions. Passed during a period of intense militancy and heightened international scrutiny, the resolution reaffirmed that Jammu & Kashmir "has been, is and shall be an integral part of India."

Escalating International Pressure

The early 1990s were marked by escalating militancy in Jammu & Kashmir and a sustained diplomatic campaign by Pakistan. Under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan intensified efforts to internationalise the Kashmir issue, raising allegations of human rights violations and pushing for implementation of UN resolutions.

Statements by certain U.S. officials at the time, including Robin Raphel and John Malott, were viewed in

India as lending weight to Pakistan's narrative. Meanwhile, Pakistan mobilised support within the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and prepared to move a resolution against India at the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHRC) in Geneva in early 1994.

For India, which was still stabilising its economy after the 1991 balance-of-payments crisis and economic reforms, the prospect of international censure or sanctions posed a serious concern.

The Parliamentary Response

In this climate, Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao sought to forge a united national position. On 22 February 1994, both Houses of Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution declaring: o Jammu & Kashmir is an integral part of India.

o India possesses the will and capacity to counter threats to its unity and territorial integrity. o Pakistan must vacate areas of the



Indian State of Jammu & Kashmir under its occupation.

o Any interference in India's internal affairs would be met resolutely.

The unanimity of the resolution - across ruling and opposition parties - sent a clear message domestically and internationally that India's polit-

ical spectrum stood united on the question of sovereignty.

Geneva Diplomacy: A Strategic Move

Anticipating Pakistan's move at the UNHRC in March 1994, India mounted an unprecedented diplomatic effort. A multi-party delegation

was dispatched to Geneva, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then Leader of the Opposition, Farooq Abdullah, Manmohan Singh, and Hamid Ansari.

The inclusion of opposition leaders and representatives from Jammu & Kashmir strengthened India's case by demonstrating national consensus.

Simultaneously, Indian diplomacy engaged key countries, including Iran and Indonesia, to counter Pakistan's lobbying within the OIC. As support for Pakistan's draft resolution weakened, the arithmetic at Geneva appeared unfavourable to Islamabad.

Facing the likelihood of defeat, Pakistan eventually withdrew its resolution at the UNHRC in March 1994. Strategic Implications

The events of February-March 1994 are widely regarded by many analysts as a significant diplomatic success for India for several reasons:

1. National Unity on Sovereignty - The unanimous resolution projected rare political consensus.

2. International Positioning - India successfully resisted efforts to internationalise the Kashmir issue.

3. Economic Safeguarding - Avoiding adverse international action was critical at a time of economic restructuring.

4. Long-Term Policy Marker - The 1994 resolution remains an official parliamentary assertion regarding Pakistan-occupied territories.

A Defining Moment

More than three decades later, the 22 February 1994 resolution stands as a defining parliamentary assertion on Jammu & Kashmir. Under the leadership of P. V. Narasimha Rao, India combined political unity with diplomatic engagement to counter a potentially damaging international challenge.

For many observers, the episode remains a textbook example of how domestic consensus can translate into diplomatic strength on the global stage.

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Prepaid Power: A Costly Burden on Consumers

BAIRAJ CHAWLGAMI

The proposed shift from the traditional post-paid electricity billing system to a prepaid regime by the Power Development Department (PDD) in Jammu and Kashmir has generated deep anxiety and widespread dissatisfaction among consumers. This contemplated transition is being perceived not as a reformative measure, but as an anti-consumer initiative that threatens to exacerbate public inconvenience and financial distress. At a time when citizens are already grappling with erratic power supply and escalating tariffs, the imposition of a prepaid billing mechanism appears ill-timed and insensitive to ground realities. Despite the installation of smart meters across both the Jammu and Kashmir regions, the promised assurance of uninterrupted 24x7 electricity remains largely illusory. Consumers continue to endure frequent outages and voltage

fluctuations, even as they faithfully discharge their obligations by paying increased and often burdensome electricity charges. The rhetoric of seamless and uninterrupted supply has, for many households, proven to be a mirage. Instead of rectifying systemic inefficiencies and strengthening infrastructure, the authorities now appear inclined to transfer additional responsibility and risk onto consumers through prepaid billing.

One of the gravest concerns associated with prepaid electricity is the risk of immediate disconnection once the prepaid balance is exhausted. Unlike the postpaid model, which provides a billing cycle and a reasonable grace period for payments, the prepaid system typically results in instantaneous power cuts when credit runs out. This poses severe hardships, particularly for economically vulnerable families who may struggle to arrange advance payments. The

specter of "energy poverty" looms large, as households could find themselves plunged into darkness at inconvenient or even critical moments, including late at night or during extreme weather conditions. Electricity, being an essential service, cannot be treated as a discretionary commodity subject to abrupt termination. The operational complexities of the recharge process further compound consumer inconvenience. In many cases, recharging requires the input of lengthy numerical codes or reliance on digital platforms that may be plagued by network disruptions, server delays, or technical glitches. In situations where systems fail or connectivity is compromised, consumers may be left without recourse, enduring power outages despite having the willingness to pay. Additionally, prepaid meters often incorporate strict load thresholds, and simultaneous use of multiple appliances can



trigger "overload errors," necessitating manual resets and causing further disruption. Financially, the prepaid model can impose higher upfront costs and concealed charges. While utilities may highlight the absence of security deposits or credit checks as advantages, there are instances where consumers are compelled to bear the cost of installing expensive smart meters. Prepaid tariffs in cer-

tain contexts may carry higher per-unit rates, and additional service fees-such as daily charges or reconnection fees-can inflate overall expenditure. Moreover, pre-existing arrears, including disputed amounts, may be automatically deducted from initial recharges, effectively diminishing usable credit and intensifying financial strain. Technical malfunctions and lack of transparency also remain pressing concerns.

Delays in updating recharge transactions, meter malfunctions, and sporadic instances of exorbitant or erroneous billing-even under prepaid arrangements-have been reported in various regions. Such anomalies erode public trust and generate panic, especially when consumers are confronted with inexplicably high charges. The absence of a robust grievance redressal mechanism only deepens frustration and reinforces perceptions of administrative indifference. The prepaid system also shifts the entire burden of monitoring consumption onto the consumer. Households must vigilantly track usage, anticipate seasonal variations-particularly during colder months when heating demands surge-and ensure timely recharges. For large families or high-energy households, the frequent need to top up balances can become onerous.

To be fair, proponents of pre-

paid electricity cite certain advantages. These include the elimination of security deposits and credit checks, greater control over daily consumption, the absence of long-term contractual obligations, same-day activation of services, and the avoidance of unexpected lump-sum bills. The real-time deduction of charges may encourage energy conservation and enhance awareness of consumption patterns. However, these benefits appear to be overshadowed by the tangible disadvantages experienced by consumers, particularly in regions where supply reliability and digital infrastructure remain inadequate. Electricity is not a luxury but a fundamental necessity integral to modern life. The manner in which it is billed and regulated has profound implications for household stability and social equity. A system that risks abrupt disconnection, imposes higher per-unit costs, and demands constant vigilance

from consumers cannot be reconciled easily with the principles of a welfare-oriented state. Policy reforms in essential services must prioritize accessibility, affordability, and fairness over mere revenue optimization. In light of these considerations, it is imperative for the authorities to reconsider the proposed imposition of prepaid billing. Before embarking on such a consequential transition, the government must ensure that infrastructure is robust, supply is reliable, grievance mechanisms are responsive, and safeguards are in place to protect vulnerable sections of society. Reform, if undertaken without sensitivity to socio-economic realities, may prove counterproductive both for consumers and for the administration. A prudent reassessment at this juncture would serve the larger public interest and reaffirm the state's commitment to equitable and humane governance.