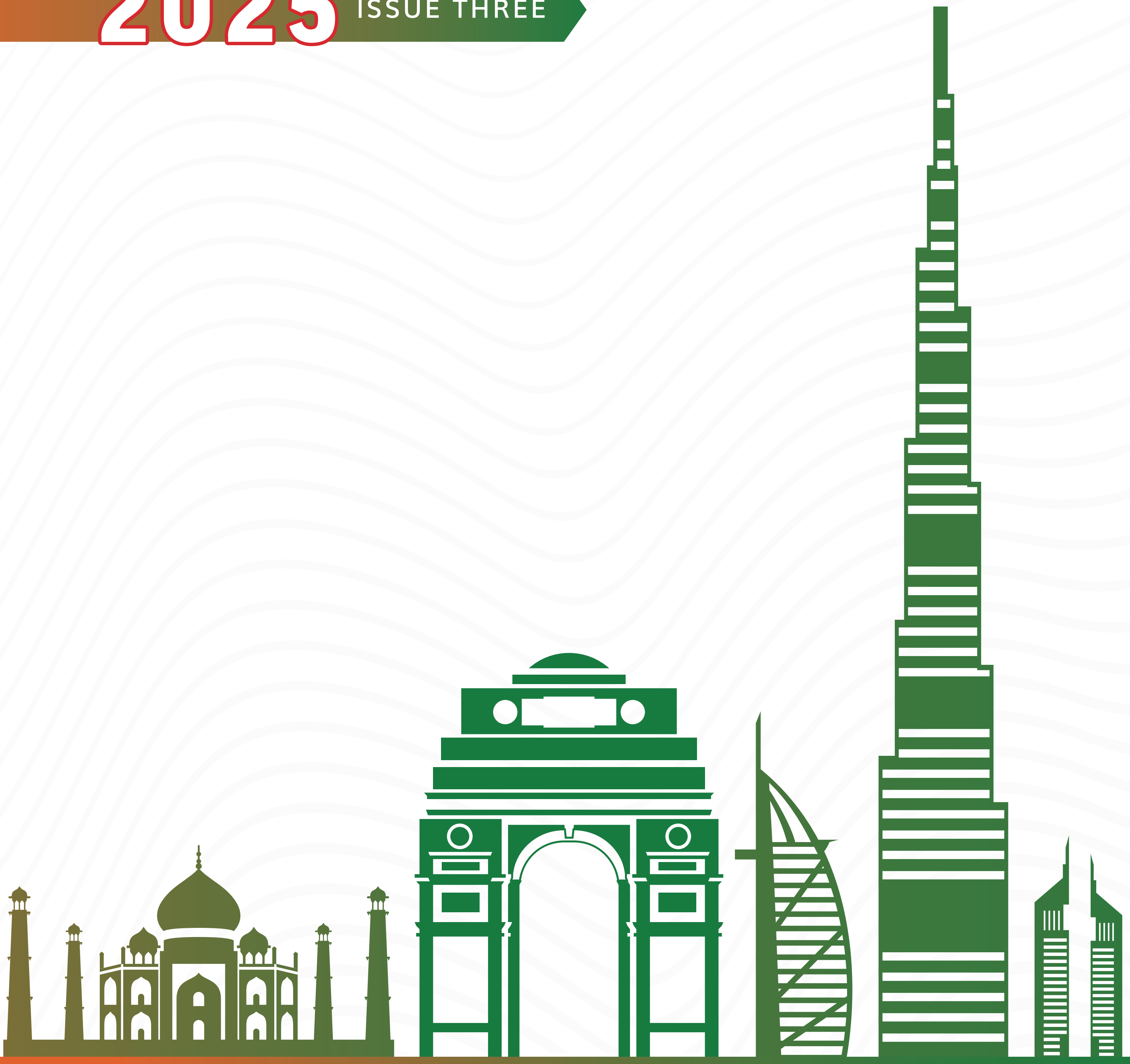
UAE-INDIA
CEPA COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

2025 ISSUE THREE



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Director's

Message

It is a pleasure to present the third quarterly newsletter of the UAE-India CEPA Council (UICC) for 2025. This quarter has been especially pivotal for our work in supporting bilateral innovation and entrepreneurship. Launched on 24 June, the UAE–India Start-up Series attracted close to 10,000 applications from start-ups across India by the 15 August deadline, underscoring the scale of interest in the initiative.

This remarkable response highlights the dynamism, creativity, and global ambition of Indian entrepreneurs. For the UAE, it is a significant moment of validation, reflecting recognition of its sustained efforts to establish itself as a hub for innovation, supported by progressive policies and institutions.

In the weeks following the launch of the Start-up Series, the UICC conducted roadshows, through which I had the privilege of visiting leading incubators, business schools, and universities across India. At every stop, I had the opportunity to meet exceptional founders, students, and faculty, who not only welcomed us with great warmth but also shared their ideas, challenges, and aspirations. I was deeply impressed by the tenacity and ambition of the start-ups we encountered. Having experienced the vitality of India's entrepreneurial community first-hand, I believe the timing of the Start-up Series could not be more opportune, with the UAE–India innovation partnership poised for further growth.

As we look ahead, I am pleased to share that the Top 500 start-ups have now been contacted. Selecting from among 10,000 applications was not an easy task. We encountered far more than 500 outstanding ventures, and every applicant demonstrated potential. Yet, as in any competition, choices had to be made.

Relevance to the UAE market was an important factor, especially the extent to which a start-up's solutions could integrate with the UAE's business ecosystem, address local and regional challenges, and open opportunities for future cross-border collaboration. While not every applicant could be advanced at this stage, the quality and breadth of the submissions underscored the remarkable depth of India's start-up ecosystem. For those not shortlisted this time, there will be many more opportunities to engage again in the future.

For the Top 500 start-ups, this marks just the beginning of the journey. Later this year, 20 will be invited to Delhi to showcase their innovations to leading UAE and Indian stakeholders, with five ultimately selected to receive a UAE soft-landing package to support their internationalisation efforts.

The UAE–India partnership in entrepreneurship is advancing with remarkable speed. What excites me most is the opportunity to see founders, investors, and institutions from both nations working side by side to create real impact.

Ahmed Aljneibi

Director, UAE-India CEPA Council

The UAE’s Innovation Ecosystem:

A Gateway for Indian Start-Ups

On 24 June, the UAE–India CEPA Council launched the UAE–India Start-up Series. By the close of applications on 15 August, a staggering 10,000 start-ups from across India had applied. Such an overwhelming response to a new initiative speaks volumes about the scale and energy of India’s entrepreneurial base. It highlights not only the readiness of Indian founders to take their products and ideas to global markets, but also the growing confidence in the UAE as a trusted destination for innovation, capital, and growth.

A Strategy-Led Innovation Hub

The UAE’s emergence as a global hub for innovation is the result of deliberate strategy, not chance. The UAE National Innovation Strategy of 2014, followed by successive national visions, committed billions of dirhams to research, entrepreneurship, and technology adoption. These policies laid the foundation for an enabling environment characterised by world-class infrastructure, business-friendly regulations, and institutions designed to accelerate ideas from concept to market.

Key measures contributing to the UAE’s success in the innovation space, include:

100% foreign ownership across most sectors.

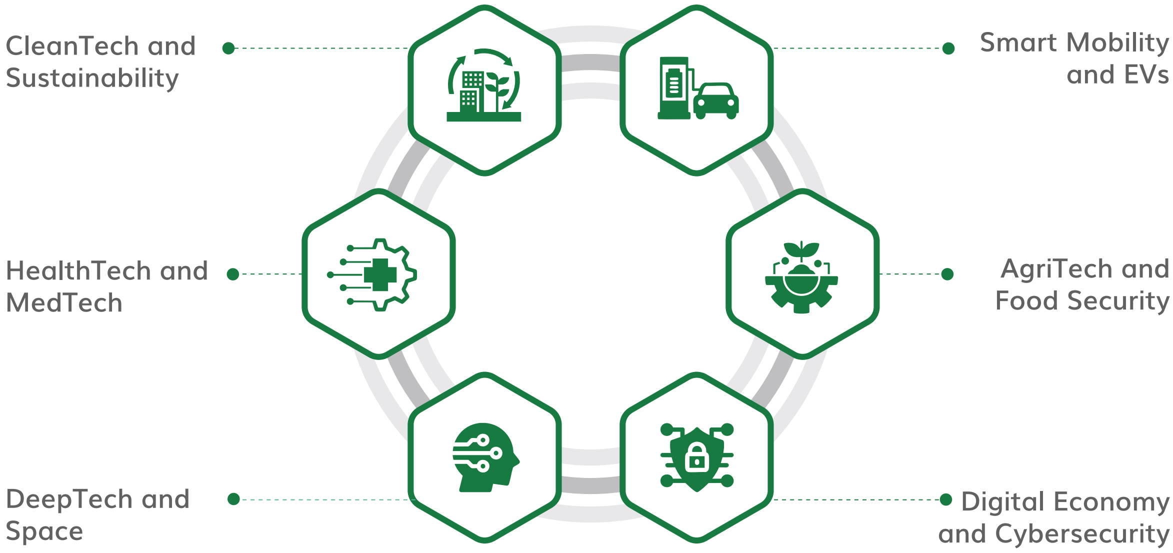
Long-term Golden Visas to ensure stable residency for founders, investors, and highly skilled professionals.

Specialised jurisdictions such as the **DIFC** and **ADGM**, offering modern regulations, independent legal frameworks, and innovation-friendly licencing regimes.

Together, these measures have transformed the UAE into a leading regional hub with global appeal, attracting entrepreneurs from every continent.

Focus on Future Sectors

Indian start-ups have increasingly concentrated in technology-led, future-facing industries, operating in digital technology-driven sectors such as fintech, health tech, and deep tech. This closely aligns with the UAE's own innovation priorities, creating strong grounds for collaboration.



CleanTech and Sustainability

Guided by the Net Zero by 2050 Strategy, the UAE has become a leader in climate innovation. Large-scale investments are flowing into renewables, hydrogen, carbon capture, and sustainable urban solutions, sectors where Indian start-ups are building scalable solutions.

Smart Mobility and EVs

Under its National Smart Mobility Strategy, the UAE is developing smart transport systems, autonomous vehicle testing corridors, and EV adoption targets. This creates space for Indian start-ups in EV technology, battery management, and urban mobility platforms to expand.

HealthTech and MedTech

Vision 2031 prioritises a digitally integrated healthcare system. The UAE is investing in telemedicine, AI-enabled diagnostics, and biotech, areas where Indian start-ups are innovating at speed and scale.

DeepTech and Space

With an AED 3 billion Space Fund and initiatives in quantum computing, robotics, and AI, the UAE is building a frontier-tech ecosystem. Indian deep-tech ventures in drones, semiconductors, and advanced materials can find natural synergies here.

AgriTech and Food Security

Given the UAE's desert climate, technologies in precision agriculture, vertical farming, and alternative proteins are national priorities. Indian agri-tech start-ups can bring proven models to address these challenges.

Digital Economy and Cybersecurity

With the UAE's rapid digitisation of government and commerce, demand for cyber solutions, digital payments, and blockchain applications is growing, areas where Indian start-ups have a strong track record.

This sectoral complementarity highlights the scope for deeper partnerships, with Indian innovation advancing UAE priorities, and UAE capital and global access accelerating the growth of Indian founders.

Ecosystem Enablers: Turning Policy into Practice

For start-ups, effective government policies set the foundation, but the right ecosystem enablers can turn ambition into action. They reduce friction, de-risk early ventures, and provide the networks that help young companies grow. In the UAE, these enablers include:

Investment Promotion Agencies such as the Abu Dhabi Investment Office (ADIO) and Dubai FDI, which guide international founders with tailored incentives, co-investment opportunities, and aftercare services.

Incubators and Accelerators like Hub71, Dubai Future Accelerators, FinTech Hive, and In5 Centres, which offer mentorship, subsidised infrastructure, and direct access to global venture capital.

Cross-Border Partnerships such as Hub71's MoU with T-Hub in Telangana, which facilitates exchanges between ecosystems and connects Indian start-ups with global markets.

By combining capital, mentorship, and market access, these enablers ensure that innovative ideas are nurtured into scalable businesses.

The UAE-India Innovation Corridor

Indian entrepreneurs are already integral to the UAE's innovation story. More than 30 percent of Dubai's start-ups have Indian founders, and UAE investors have channelled nearly USD 20 billion into Indian ventures since 2017. At the same time, many Indian start-ups, including FreshToHome, PolicyBazaar, Rebel Foods, and Urban Company, have expanded into the UAE, leveraging its role as a gateway to the Middle East and beyond. This corridor is no longer one-directional. It is a vibrant ecosystem of capital, talent, and ideas flowing both ways and enriching innovation in both nations.

The story of the UAE and India's start-up ecosystems is one of convergence and mutual growth. India brings scale, diversity, and a thriving pipeline of entrepreneurial talent. The UAE offers an enabling environment, infrastructure, and global connectivity. Together, they form a partnership that extends far beyond trade. It is an innovation bridge that will shape the next generation of growth for both economies.

The UAE-India

CEPA Council Roadshows

Following the launch of the UAE-India Start-up Series on 24 June, the UAE-India CEPA Council undertook a series of roadshows across India before the close of applications on 15 August. The purpose was not only to spread awareness of the Series but also to engage directly with India's diverse start-up ecosystem and understand their aspirations, challenges, and strengths.

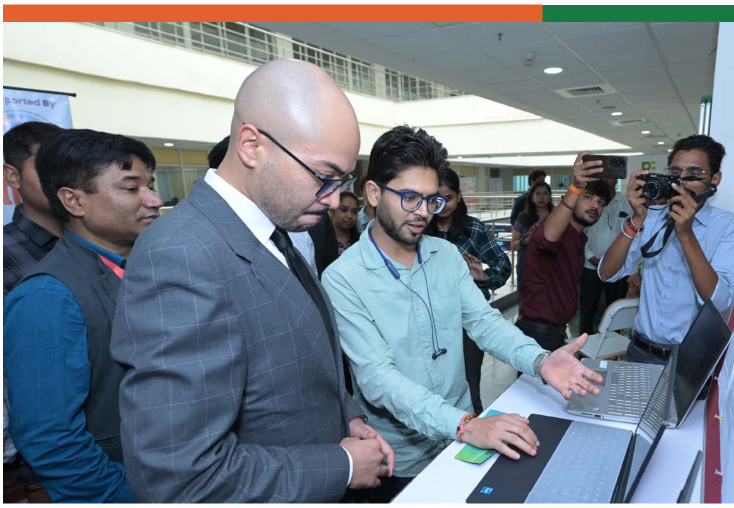
Led by Mr. Ahmed Aljneibi, Director of the UAE-India CEPA Council, the roadshows provided an opportunity to connect with founders, students, and faculty across multiple regions. The discussions reflected the scale and energy of India's entrepreneurial ecosystem and strengthened the Council's conviction that the UAE–India innovation partnership has the depth and breadth to achieve lasting impact.

Insights from India's Start-up Ecosystem

A key learning from the roadshows was the regional diversity of India's innovation landscape. Beyond established metros, Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are emerging as strong centres of entrepreneurial activity. Incubators in these regions are nurturing start-ups that are both impact-driven and globally ambitious, pointing to a deep reservoir of talent that can connect with the UAE's innovation ecosystem.

The visits also highlighted the importance of industry-academia collaboration. Institutions such as IITs, IIMs, and specialised universities are not only incubating ventures but also embedding entrepreneurial thinking within their education frameworks. Their emphasis on research-driven and socially relevant innovation aligns closely with the UAE's own national priorities in areas such as health, agri-tech, and sustainability.

More broadly, the roadshows reaffirmed that when start-ups are given the right mix of mentorship, networks, and market access, they can flourish rapidly. This combination of support systems is as important as capital, for building resilient and scalable innovation ecosystems.



Partnerships Forged through the Roadshows

During the roadshows, the UICC formalised partnerships with some of India's leading incubators, universities, and entrepreneurial networks. These institutions represent the breadth of India's start-up landscape, from premier technology institutes to emerging centres of innovation.

IIT Bombay's Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SINE)

One of India's most respected incubators supporting technology-led ventures. The MoU was signed by Mr. Shaji Varghese, CEO, SINE-IIT Bombay, in the presence of H.E. Abdulnasser Alshaali, UAE Ambassador to India.

Atal Incubation Centre, Mahamana Foundation for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Institute of Management, Banaras Hindu

A platform nurturing entrepreneurial talent in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. The MoU was signed by Prof. Rajeev P.V., Director and Professor-in-Charge.

IILM University, Gurugram

A leading institution championing entrepreneurial thinking and innovation. The MoU was signed by Lt. Col. Reagon Sinru, Registrar.

Masters' Union, Gurugram

A next-generation business school with a strong focus on entrepreneurship and business education. The MoU was signed by Mr. Saksham Kotiya, Head of Investments and Entrepreneurship.

NSRCEL, IIM Bangalore

The start-up incubator of IIM Bangalore, supporting ventures across diverse sectors. The MoU was signed by Prof. Shrivardhini Jha, on behalf of CEO Mr. Anand Sri Ganesh.

IIM Calcutta Innovation Park (IIMCIP)

A leading incubator driving inclusive and impact-oriented entrepreneurship. The MoU was signed by Dr. Subhrangshu Sanyal, CEO.

AIC BIMTECH

An incubation centre supporting early-stage ventures in fintech, health-tech, agri-tech, and social enterprise. The MoU was signed by Mr. Surya Kant, CEO.

GIC RISE, Galgotias University

The flagship incubation centre of Galgotias University, advancing innovation, research, and entrepreneurship in Greater Noida. The MoU was signed by Dr. Dhruv Galgotia, CEO.

Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer (FITT),

The industry interface of IIT Delhi and a key driver of deep-tech innovation. The MoU was signed by Dr. Nikhil Agarwal, Managing Director.

TiE Delhi-NCRDelhi

One of India's most influential networks of entrepreneurs, investors, and industry leaders. The MoU was signed by Ms. Upasana Sharma, Executive Director.

UAE-India

Latest News

UP expands across UAE to support cashless economy vision

NPCI International is accelerating the adoption of India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in the UAE, strengthening digital payments infrastructure and advancing the UAE's strategy for a cashless economy.

Madhya Pradesh CM promotes investment opportunities in Dubai

The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh concluded a visit to Dubai with pitches for investment and partnerships, highlighting the state's potential as a destination for UAE investors.

UAE Naval Forces Commander Visits India

Major General Humaid Mohammed Abdullah, Commander of the UAE Naval Forces, visited India to strengthen defence cooperation and explore new avenues of maritime partnership.

India-UAE trade crosses USD 100 billion under CEPA

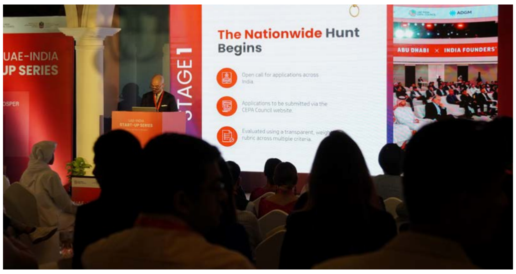
Since the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), bilateral trade between India and the UAE has crossed the USD 100 billion mark, reaffirming the strength of economic ties.

Investopia highlights Andhra Pradesh as India's economic corridor

At the Investopia Global AP Conference, the UAE Minister of Economy, His Excellency Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri noted Andhra Pradesh's potential to become an economic corridor for India–UAE trade and investment.

India named Partner Country for Gulfood 2026

India has been announced as the Partner Country for Gulfood 2026 in Dubai, reflecting its growing role in shaping global agri-food trade and innovation.



[10,000 Indian start-ups apply to UAE–India CEPA Council's Series]

The UAE–India CEPA Council's Start-up Series closed its first round with 10,000 applications, underscoring the strength of India's entrepreneurial ecosystem and the UAE's growing role as a global hub.

[IIM Ahmedabad inaugurates Dubai campus]

IIM Ahmedabad has opened its Dubai campus with a one-year MBA programme, marking a significant step in expanding Indian higher education into the UAE.

[Ras Al Khaimah joins CEPA Council's Start-up Series]

The Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone and the UAE-India CEPA Council have announced a partnership under the UAE-India Start-up Series to enhance opportunities for Indian founders.

UAE-India

Business In Focus

As part of its continual efforts to promote the crucial role that businesses both large and small play in supporting the broader UAE-India partnership, each issue of the UICC newsletter provides an in-depth overview of a UAE or Indian company that is making a positive contribution in driving the bilateral relationship forward.

Future Shift Labs (FSL)

Founded with a mission to bridge technology and governance, Future Shift Labs (FSL) stands at the forefront of India's emerging technology-policy ecosystem. The organisation brings together technologists, lawmakers, researchers, and civic leaders to design frameworks for responsible and inclusive AI governance. Guided by the belief that artificial intelligence must evolve in harmony with human values, democratic principles, and social justice, FSL works to ensure that innovation remains aligned with public good and ethical foresight.

Operating as both a think tank and catalyst, Future Shift Labs helps policymakers and institutions anticipate the implications of rapid technological change. Through research-driven initiatives, foresight programmes, and executive dialogues, it transforms abstract technological challenges into actionable public-policy solutions. Its interdisciplinary approach, blending policy design, communications strategy, and ethical foresight, ensures that technology serves society's long-term interests rather than outpacing them.

A flagship initiative under FSL's banner is the AI Legislators' Forum (AILF), a pioneering platform designed to empower Indian lawmakers with the knowledge, foresight, and global perspectives needed to navigate the evolving landscape of artificial intelligence. The Forum serves as a bridge between emerging technology and parliamentary practice, offering legislators hands-on workshops, case-based discussions, and policy toolkits that translate complex AI concepts into practical governance frameworks. Through AILF, Future Shift Labs ensures that India's elected representatives are active participants in shaping the digital future, not passive recipients of its

The organisation is led by Nitin Narang and Sagar Vishnoi, whose combined experience anchors FSL's vision and impact. Nitin, a seasoned political consultant, entrepreneur, and investor, brings strategic insight from over a decade of experience advising political campaigns and leading data-driven innovation initiatives. As President of the All India Chess Federation, he embodies analytical precision and long-term foresight, qualities that guide FSL's approach to AI readiness and institutional reform. Sagar, a UN-awarded policy expert and recognised global voice on ethical technology, leads international research and partnerships, with his work featured in leading global platforms such as the BBC, MIT Technology Review, and Harvard Political Review. Together, they have built Future Shift Labs into a hub of strategic, ethical, and intellectual leadership, a space where innovation meets integrity.

As the organisation looks outward, Future Shift Labs' planned expansion to the United Arab Emirates marks a pivotal next step in its mission. The UAE has rapidly emerged as a diverse and dynamic global hub for ethical and future-ready AI innovation, home to a wide spectrum of institutions spanning academia, government, industry, and research. These include the Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI), the Dubai Future Foundation, Digital Dubai, the UAE Council of Artificial Intelligence, and government-backed R&D programmes that actively promote cross-sector collaboration. This integrated ecosystem - further strengthened by innovation platforms such as Hub71 and leading research centres including G42, the Technology Innovation Institute (TII), the Fiker Institute, and the Falcon Foundation - reflects a shared commitment to advancing responsible AI and technological excellence.

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