

NEWSLETTER

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Director's Message

It is a pleasure to present the fourth quarterly newsletter of the UAE-India CEPA Council (UICC) for 2025. This quarter marks the culmination of the UAE-India Start-Up Series, an initiative launched in June 2025 that has concluded with five promising Indian start-ups poised to commence their UAE growth journey.

In November, we had the privilege of bringing twenty start-ups from across India to New Delhi to pitch live before UAE partner institutions and investors. Selected from over 10,000 applications, each of these start-ups reflected the depth, diversity, and ingenuity that define India's innovation landscape. The two-day pitch event offered a first-hand glimpse into the passion, vibrancy, and entrepreneurial spirit that Indian founders are known for. Their commitment to solving real-world challenges through innovation was both inspiring and reaffirming.

While the pitch event was a significant milestone, the journey of the Start-Up Series, from its conception and launch to its conclusion, has been nothing short of extraordinary. The programme has grown into the largest start-up initiative of its kind ever conducted in India. The overwhelming response received from every corner of the country, exceeded all our expectations. This level of participation speaks volumes about the ambition of India's founders and underscores the UAE's growing appeal as a launchpad for start-ups seeking to scale globally.

Early in 2026, the five selected start-ups will formally begin their incubation process and their journey into the UAE ecosystem. I extend my best wishes to them as they enter this new phase of growth. Their progress represents not only individual success stories, but also a tangible outcome of what the UAE-India bilateral partnership can achieve. We look forward to many more such collaborations and outcomes in the future.

Ahmed Aljneibi

Director, UAE-India CEPA Council

Start-Up Series Pitch Event

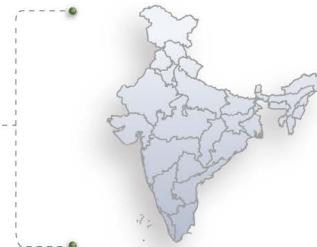
Launched on 24 June 2025, the UAE-India Start-Up Series was created to strengthen cross-border innovation by identifying high-potential Indian ventures capable of scaling into the UAE. The initiative received an extraordinary 10,000 applications from across India, each evaluated through a rigorous, weighted 100-point rubric assessing innovation depth, team capability, feasibility, and alignment with the UAE's priority sectors.

From these, 500 start-ups were invited to submit full pitch decks to the UICC. Their presentations were assessed for technology defensibility, commercial logic, customer traction, financial maturity, and readiness for cross-border expansion. Ultimately, 20 start-ups were selected to travel to New Delhi, each represented by two team members, to present live before UAE partner institutions and investors.

These partners included DP World, Emirates NBD, First Abu Dhabi Bank, Hub71, and the Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ), each representing a key pillar of the UAE's innovation ecosystem.

Initial Phase

- **10,000+**
(Applications Nationwide)



Evaluation Process

- 100-Point Evaluation Process



Top 500 Decks

- 500 Start-Ups advanced to the full pitch deck submission stage.
- Pitch decks were assessed across innovation strength, market logic, traction, financial preparedness, and global scalability.



Pitch Event in New Delhi

- 20 Start-Ups were selected to travel to New Delhi and pitch live to UAE partners and investors.





Mentorship and Ecosystem Immersion

Hosted at the Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, the first day of the programme offered the 20 finalists an intensive immersion into the UAE business landscape. Senior representatives and experts from the five partner institutions conducted mentorship sessions that covered key facets of expansion into the UAE. The sessions included:



Guidance on logistics, supply-chain integration, and global trade opportunities.



Practical insights on business establishment, licencing pathways, and regulatory ease.



An overview of Abu Dhabi's start-up ecosystem, incentives, and global innovation networks.



Deep dives into banking, treasury services, cross-border finance, and corporate banking norms for international founders.



The Sustainability Partner of the Series, delivered a special session on brand building and responsible marketing.



The day-long interactions provided the finalists with a comprehensive understanding of the UAE's innovation environment. Start-up founders engaged directly with sector specialists, asked targeted questions, and gained clarity on market-entry pathways. The atmosphere also encouraged peer networking, enabling the cohort to build meaningful connections ahead of the main pitch event.



Live Pitches Before the Jury

The second day marked the culminating moment of the Series, the live pitching session before an eminent jury that included H.E Abdulknasser Alshaali, PhD, UAE Ambassador to India; Mr. Ahmad Ali Alwan, CEO of Hub71; Mr. Utsav Somani, Founder of Offline; and Mr. Arjun Vaidya, Co-Founder of V3 Ventures. UAE partner representatives and invited investors from both the UAE and India were also present.

Across the day, each of the 20 start-ups delivered a three-minute pitch, followed by a brief but incisive Q&A with the jury. The cohort represented a wide range of sectors, including fintech, healthtech, HR tech, spacetech, and sportstech, reflecting the diversity and strength of India's innovation landscape.

Following the presentations, the jury, along with UAE partners, convened for deliberations to finalise the five winning start-ups that would receive tailored soft-landing and market-entry support in the UAE.



Cocktail Reception

The day concluded with an evening cocktail reception, attended by esteemed guests from government, industry, and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Addressing the gathering, Mr. Ahmed Aljneibi, Director of the UICC, noted that the 20 start-ups demonstrated remarkable depth, diversity, and excellence, reflecting the strength of India's innovation pipeline. He also observed that the Start-Up Series had grown into the largest initiative of its kind ever held in India.

The UAE Ambassador further noted that the Start-Up Series was inspired by the exceptional innovation he encountered across India's start-up ecosystem. His engagements with founders from diverse regions highlighted the scale and dynamism of Indian entrepreneurial talent, with the strong response to the programme reflecting the deepening momentum in UAE-India economic and people-to-people ties.



Following this, each UAE partner announced the start-up they had selected as their chosen winner. The start-ups chosen by the respective UAE partners were as follows:



DP World - DocketRun



Emirates NBD – Data Sutram



First Abu Dhabi Bank – SBNRI



Hub71 – Endimension



RAKEZ - Bioreform

The announcements marked the beginning of each winner's UAE journey. The UAE Ambassador further announced that the winning start-ups would be invited to attend the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix the following week and would subsequently commence their incorporation and soft-landing processes in the UAE.

Insights from the Start-Up Series

A Window into India's Innovation Ecosystem

The journey of the UAE-India Start-Up Series, and the thousands of start-ups encountered through it, offered a comprehensive assessment of India's entrepreneurial activity. It provided a grounded view into how the country's innovation ecosystem has evolved, where it stands today, and the structural shifts shaping its next phase of growth.

For much of the past decade, India's start-up ecosystem was closely associated with a small number of metropolitan hubs, notably Bengaluru and Mumbai. Since the emergence of India's first unicorn in 2011, the ecosystem has expanded significantly in scale, ambition, and maturity. By 2025, unicorns are no longer exceptional, with over 118 such companies, alongside a growing number of decacorns.

The Start-Up Series helped contextualise this evolution by highlighting the diversity, geographic spread, and problem-solving focus of emerging ventures, underscoring the breadth and depth of India's contemporary innovation. The Democratisation of Innovation landscape.

The Democratisation of Innovation

One of the clearest insights from the Series was the growing democratisation of India's innovation landscape. While Tier-1 cities have historically dominated start-up formation, applications to the Series were received from across the country, with strong participation from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. Notably, among the Top 20 start-ups invited to New Delhi, selected from over 10,000 applications, were ventures headquartered in cities such as Nagpur, Vadodara, and Hubli.



This trend mirrors broader national patterns. As highlighted in the Indian Government Economic Survey for FY24, over 45 percent of new start-ups in India now originate from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. This shift is driven by strong fundamentals, including lower operating costs, the rise of incubation and entrepreneurship programmes within educational institutions, improved digital connectivity, and the spread of physical and digital infrastructure over the past decade. Crucially, founders rooted in these regions often possess a sharper understanding of local challenges, enabling them to design context-specific, scalable solutions.

Start-Ups Solving Everyday, High-Impact Problems

Another defining insight from the Series was the nature of the problems Indian start-ups are choosing to solve. Within the Top 100 cohort, a significant proportion operate in cleantech, fintech, healthcare, and agriculture, sectors that directly affect millions of people and where gains in access, efficiency, and transparency generate immediate social and economic value.

Rather than focusing on peripheral use cases, these start-ups are addressing structural frictions across healthcare delivery, financial inclusion, energy use, food security, and sustainability. In a country as large and diverse as India, such problem-led innovation plays a vital socio-economic role, combining commercial viability with measurable impact.



Innovative Solutions and Impactful Use Cases Encountered Through the Series

Agritech and Food Security

- GeoAI-based crop and soil intelligence platforms.
- Climate-controlled agriculture automation systems.
- Residue-free bio-stimulants and bio-pesticides.
- AI-driven precision pest monitoring solutions.
- Automated precision irrigation and nutrient management.



CleanTech and Sustainability

- Compostable packaging alternatives to single-use plastics.
- Zero-energy decentralised sewage treatment systems.
- AI-driven supply-chain emissions optimisation.
- Waste-to-fuel solutions for industrial use.
- Low-carbon cement-free construction materials.



Fintech

- MSME cashflow-based supply chain financing.
- AI-driven hospital receivables financing platforms.
- Virtual ATM infrastructure for cash access.
- Real-time fraud detection and identity intelligence.
- Secured lending and digital collateral infrastructure.



Health and MedTech

- Portable AI-enabled cardiac screening devices.
- Digital health records and smart health cards.
- Integrated healthcare payments and credit solutions.
- Home-based neuro-rehabilitation and therapy platforms.
- AI-driven custom prosthetics and orthopaedic devices.



AI as a Core Business Enabler

A cross-cutting insight from the Series was the pervasive adoption of artificial intelligence across Indian start-ups. AI is no longer confined to internal automation or cost reduction, it is increasingly embedded within core business models across healthcare, agriculture, education, finance, and sustainability. This enables start-ups to scale operations without proportionate increases in cost, and positions AI as a critical enabler of productivity and efficiency.

Importantly, this trend reflects the maturity of India's broader AI ecosystem. Global benchmarks consistently rank India highly in AI adoption, with the Stanford University AI Index recently placing it third among the world's most dynamic AI ecosystems. India is also the second-largest contributor to AI projects on GitHub, underscoring the depth of its developer community. Supported by a strong STEM workforce, expanding research base, and robust digital public infrastructure, AI is transitioning from research labs and large corporations into everyday applications.

The widespread integration of AI within start-up solutions signals that it has become a foundational layer of India's innovation economy, one that will play a central role in driving productivity, inclusion, and long-term economic transformation aligned with India's long-term developmental goals.

Strengthening the UAE-India Innovation and Investment Corridor

Taken together, these insights from the Start-Up Series underscore the growing depth, diversity, and readiness of India's innovation ecosystem. The geographic spread of entrepreneurship, the focus on solving high-impact, real-world problems, and the increasing integration of advanced technologies such as AI point to an ecosystem that is both scalable and resilient. For UAE stakeholders, this provides a clearer, more granular understanding of where Indian innovation is emerging, the sectors driving value, and the types of ventures positioned for cross-border growth.

These learnings meaningfully strengthen the UAE-India bilateral investment corridor. By reducing information asymmetries and highlighting investable opportunities beyond traditional start-up hubs, the Series enables UAE investors and institutions to engage more confidently with India's next generation of founders. At the same time, the strong alignment between India's applied innovation strengths and the UAE's strategic focus on technology, artificial intelligence, and future-ready industries reinforces India's position as a compelling partner market. As the UAE continues to rapidly adopt and institutionalise advanced technologies, including AI across governance, education, and industry, India's innovation pipeline offers a natural avenue for sustained investment, collaboration, and long-term value creation.



UAE-India

Latest News



CBSE to Establish Office in the UAE

India announced plans to open a CBSE regional office in the UAE to support over 100 CBSE-affiliated schools in the UAE and strengthen education cooperation.



UAE-India Strategic Cultural Council Meets

India and the UAE convened a Strategic Cultural Council meeting to expand collaboration in culture, heritage preservation, museums, and creative industries.



Andhra Pradesh CM to Visit UAE Ahead of Partnership Summit

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu visited the UAE to engage investors ahead of the Global Investors Summit.



Emirates NBD Makes Landmark Investment in RBL Bank

Emirates NBD acquired a significant stake in RBL Bank, marking the largest cross-border banking investment between the UAE and India.



UAE Land Forces Chief Visits India

Maj Gen Yousef Maayouf Saeed Al Hallami, Commander of the UAE Land Forces, visited India to strengthen military cooperation and joint engagements.



Indian Population in UAE Reaches Nearly Four Million

The UAE remains the top destination for Indian expatriates, with the Indian community now estimated at close to four million.

IAF Pilot Killed in Tejas Crash at Dubai Airshow

A pilot was killed after a Tejas fighter jet crashed during an aerial display at the Dubai Airshow, with authorities initiating an investigation into the incident.

UAE-India Start-Up Series Attracts 10,000 Founders

The UAE-India Start-Up Series received over 10,000 applications, underscoring strong entrepreneurial interest and growing bilateral economic ties.

Indian Start-Ups Highlight Innovation at UAE-India Series

Indian start-ups showcased AI, sustainability, and healthcare innovations during the UAE-India Start-Up Series Final Pitch event held in New Delhi on 25 November.

India-UAE Shared Prosperity Highlighted at UAE National Day

Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal emphasised shared growth and economic collaboration at UAE National Day celebrations in India.



UAE Hosts Second Founders' Retreat

The UAE Embassy in Delhi organised the second Founders' Retreat to deepen innovation, start-up, and investor engagement with India.

EAM Jaishankar Co-Chairs India-UAE Joint Commission

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar co-chaired the Joint Commission, reviewing progress across trade, defence, and technology cooperation.

UAE Presidential Guard Commander Visits India

Major General Ali Saif Humaid Al Kaabi, the Commander of the UAE Presidential Guard visited India to enhance defence cooperation and strategic security engagement.

Business in Focus

Winners of the UAE-India Start-up Series



In this edition, the Business in Focus section spotlights the five winning start-ups of the UAE-India Start-up Series. Each of these companies reflects the depth and diversity of India's innovation ecosystem and will now begin their journey in the UAE.

Bioreform

Bioreform operates at the intersection of sustainability, design, and manufacturing, addressing one of the most pressing global challenges today, the environmental impact of single-use plastics. The company develops certified biodegradable and compostable packaging solutions that are designed to be both functional and commercially viable, offering an alternative that does not compromise on performance or affordability.



What distinguishes BioReform is its integrated approach. Rather than treating sustainability as a material substitution problem alone, the company positions itself as a design-led partner to businesses, enabling customised, compliant, and brand-aligned packaging solutions. This model allows sustainability to be embedded directly into product and supply-chain decisions, rather than added as an afterthought.

BioReform's focus aligns closely with the UAE's Net Zero by 2050 ambitions and its growing emphasis on sustainable materials, circular economy models, and environmentally responsible consumption. As the UAE accelerates efforts to reduce plastic waste and promote green alternatives across retail and food systems, Bioreform's solutions offer a scalable pathway to support these national objectives.



Data Sutram

Data Sutram addresses a foundational challenge in the digital economy, which is how institutions can build trust, manage risk, and unlock growth in an increasingly data-driven financial system. The company provides a unified intelligence layer that helps enterprises derive real-time insights from fragmented internal, regulatory, and alternate data sources.



By enabling more accurate customer profiling, fraud detection, and risk assessment, Data Sutram supports financial institutions in making faster and more informed decisions. Its platform reflects a broader shift within fintech and RegTech, where intelligence and context are becoming as critical as transactions themselves.

This capability is particularly relevant to the UAE, which has positioned itself as a regional hub for digital finance, cross-border payments, and fintech innovation. As regulators and financial institutions in the UAE continue to prioritise secure, compliant, and inclusive digital ecosystems, Data Sutram's approach to real-time intelligence and risk management offers strong complementarities with the country's financial services landscape.



DocketRun

DocketRun brings artificial intelligence directly onto the factory floor, focusing on industrial safety, DocketRun brings artificial intelligence directly onto the factory floor, focusing on industrial safety, compliance, and operational efficiency. The company uses edge-based computer vision and real-time analytics to identify unsafe behaviour and hazardous conditions before they escalate into accidents, enabling proactive intervention rather than reactive monitoring.



Designed for deployment in demanding industrial environments, DocketRun's solutions operate reliably even in offline settings, making them particularly well-suited to heavy industries such as manufacturing, steel, mining, and energy. By combining hardware, software, and intelligent alerts into a single system, the platform helps organisations strengthen safety culture while improving productivity.



The UAE's industrial growth agenda, including its focus on advanced manufacturing and smart industrial infrastructure, creates strong scope for such technologies. As industrial operators in the region adopt automation and AI-driven oversight, DocketRun's emphasis on safety-first innovation aligns with broader goals of resilient, efficient, and human-centric industrial development.



Endimension

Endimension operates in the rapidly evolving space of AI-enabled healthcare, with a focus on improving access, speed, and accuracy in medical imaging. The company's platform supports radiologists by automating the detection and prioritisation of critical findings across X-rays, CT scans, and MRIs, while retaining human expertise at the centre of clinical decision-making.



By combining artificial intelligence with a network of certified medical professionals, Endimension addresses capacity constraints in radiology without compromising diagnostic quality. This hybrid model reflects an important principle in healthcare innovation where technology becomes an enabler of clinicians, not a replacement for them.

The UAE's healthcare strategy places strong emphasis on digital health, AI adoption, and world-class clinical standards. As demand for advanced diagnostics continues to rise, solutions that enhance efficiency while maintaining regulatory and clinical rigour are increasingly valuable. Endimension's approach fits squarely within this vision, offering scalable support to healthcare systems seeking to deliver timely and accurate care.



SBNRI

SBNRI focuses on a globally dispersed yet economically significant community, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). The platform simplifies access to Indian financial services by bringing together investments, banking, and taxation into a single, integrated digital experience tailored specifically for NRIs.



By addressing longstanding pain points such as fragmented processes, regulatory complexity, and lack of trusted guidance, SBNRI enables global Indians to manage their financial lives in India with greater ease and confidence. The platform's design reflects a deep understanding of cross-border financial needs and compliance requirements.

Given the UAE's role as home to one of the world's largest Indian diaspora communities, SBNRI's offering is particularly relevant. As financial institutions and digital platforms in the UAE continue to strengthen services for expatriate populations, solutions that bridge home and host-country financial systems can play a meaningful role in enhancing financial inclusion and cross-border economic engagement.





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