

THE REAL HERO

Today, all Indians are holding their heads high at the bravery of Captain Smit Machchhar, whose courage and sense of responsibility saved 180 lives and prevented a major tragedy. They also have their prayers for Machchhar’s speedy recovery on their lips. While the world is praising Captain Machchhar and wishing him speedy recovery, Indians also remember Neerja Bhanot, a PAN AM air hostess who saved lives of passengers during a plane hijacking while laying down hers. The two incident are 40 years apart yet have striking similarities. How come Indians always rise to the occasion to save fellow human in the times of grave emergencies? This comes from our philosophy of vasudhaiva kutumbakam, meaning the earth is one family, something which is part of Indians’ DNA and directs their behaviour. This is one of the reasons why Indians of any religion don’t get into conflict with other cultures and are the most welcomed immigrants in other countries. The Indian ethos never teaches us to look at people differently. All humans are one and being of use to preserve and enhance these values should guide our thoughts and actions.

Captain Smit Machchhar’s courage after being stabbed by the copilot midair when they were flying a passenger plane from Dubai to Tel Aviv comes from integrity and experience. He not only fought the copilot but also managed to press a button to open the cockpit door which ultimately led to passengers rushing in and taking control of the plane and preventing its crash. Also the incident showed how prepared Israeli citizens are for dealing with emergencies. This may also be because of conscription that required all able bodied men and women to undergo military training. Given the threat perceptions, India should also promote the culture of military training to the youth.

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

Tourism in a country does not grow merely because it has beautiful mountains, ancient temples or beaches. A tourist needs good roads and flights to reach a destination. There should be hotels or homestays for accommodation. Correct information, safety, cleanliness and good behaviour are also essential. Above all, the tourist needs an experience that they can remember for a lifetime. The World Economic Forum’s Travel & Tourism Development Index assesses these very aspects. Its 2026 report shows that India has taken strong steps in this direction.

India has moved from 65th position in the world in 2014 to 39th in 2024 and has now moved further ahead to rank 31st among 160 economies. Our overall score is 4.42, which is 4.3 per cent higher than in 2024. Compared to the 2019 score of 4.36, recalculated using the new methodology, this is also an increase of 1.4 per cent. India ranks first among South Asian and lower-middle-income countries. This is not merely an improvement in ranking. It is global recognition of the impact of the tourism policy being pursued on the principle of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi’s vision of “Development as well as Heritage”.

To understand this year’s ranking, one point needs to be understood. The 2019 index had four major areas and 90 indicators. In 2026, countries have been assessed on 17 pillars and 102 indicators. Indicators based on people’s perceptions have declined from 33 to 18. This means that the assessment is now based more heavily on actual data. The number of countries has also decreased from 140 to 110, so it would not be appropriate to directly compare the old and new rankings. However, the increase in the score on a comparable basis clearly establishes India’s progress.

India is among the top ten countries in the world in 13 indicators. India ranks first in the average length of stay of foreign tourists and in the timely submission of tourism data. It may be noted that the av-



erage stay of foreign tourists in India is approximately 17-18 days, which is more than twice the average in other major tourism countries. India ranks fourth in airport connectivity and sixth in price competitiveness, hotel rates, purchasing power and tourism jobs with good incomes. India ranks tenth in road density.

The new highways built across the country, improved rail services, new airports and regional flights are now also giving a boost to tourism. Under the UDAN scheme, 687 routes are connecting 95 airports.

India’s greatest strength is its diversity. In terms of travel resources, we rank fourth in the world. We rank seventh in natural resources, ninth in cultural resources, and eighth in business, education and other non-leisure travel resources. India ranks third in large sports stadiums and top universities, and fifth among global cities. This means that India is not merely a country for spending holidays. It is also emerging as a major hub for travel related to conferences, sports, education, weddings, spirituality, health and business.

Prime Minister Modi’s thinking is clear: heritage has to be preserved as well as connected with the prosperity of local people. With this thinking, the Ministry of Tourism has focused not merely on creat-

ing tourist attractions but on the development of entire destinations. Under Swadesh Darshan, 76 projects worth more than Rs 5,295 crore have been sanctioned across tourism circuits based on 15 themes, of which 75 have been completed. Under Swadesh Darshan 2.0, 53 projects worth more than Rs 2,207 crore are progressing. The 54 projects under the PRASAD scheme are improving cleanliness, safety, facilities and employment at pilgrimage sites.

The impact of these efforts is visible in the report. India’s ranking in the indicator related to ensuring that tourist arrivals are not limited to just a few months has improved from 80 to 46. The availability of hotel rooms in proportion to the population has improved from 117th to 84th position. The ranking for the use of digital tourism services has improved from 106th to 91st, government tourism expenditure from 113th to 101st, and the ranking related to the economic impact of tourism from 41st to 31st. There has also been improvement in small rental accommodation. With the Tourism Digital Stack announced recently on World Tourism Day becoming operational, the ranking of digital tourism services in the coming years is bound to improve, while the increasing number of hotel rooms due to the facilities and concessions being provided by the Centre and State Governments for investment in tourism will inevitably bring improvements in indicators measuring room availability in proportion to the population in the coming years. This is directly

benefiting new cities, villages, homestays and local businesses.

Digital facilities have accelerated this transformation. E-visas are now available to citizens of 172 countries. Around 78 per cent of visas are issued electronically, and approximately 95 per cent of e-visa applications are processed within 72 hours. The Incredible India digital platform, NIDHI Plus and the multilingual tourist helpline have made access to information and services easier. Technology is now becoming a means of connecting small hotels, guides, tour operators and service providers with larger markets, along with providing convenience to tourists.

This growth in tourism is also visible in the economy and employment. Tourism contributes 5.22 per cent to the national Gross Domestic Product. In 2023-24, the sector supported 8.46 crore jobs. In 2025, domestic tourist trips reached 428.55 crore, foreign tourist trips reached 2.53 crore, and foreign exchange earnings from tourism reached Rs 2,76,831 crore. Behind these figures are millions of families of guides, taxi drivers, artisans, weavers, folk artists, dhaaba owners, small hotel owners and homestay operators. Therefore, tourism development directly takes its benefits to the common citizen.

Yet this achievement cannot be a reason for complacency. We have to work further on good hotels, trained guides, convenient last-mile connectivity and better destination management.

Artificial intelligence and digital technology have to be used to make journeys simpler and more personalised. Lesser-known destinations also need to be developed in such a way that tourists can easily discover them, book them and have a safe experience there.

The 31st rank in TTDI is not the destination; it is evidence that we are moving in the right direction. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, tourism is becoming a major force for connecting India’s vibrant civilisation with the world and creating employment across every region.

The author is Union Minister for Culture & Tourism, Government of India; Views presented are personal.

FROM EGO TO HUMILITY: DISCOVERING THE SELF

Rajyogi Brahma Kumar Nikunj

Most of us identify ourselves with the body that we have acquired because we are unaware of the immortal entity called the ‘Soul’, which resides within us and functions through our body. As a result of this ignorance, one letter that dominates our lives is ‘I’. Even when we are thinking of something or someone, it is linked to ‘I’, i.e., to the needs, desires and feelings of the self in relation to objects and people. The ‘I’ manifests in different forms, literally and metaphorically. There is a capital or big ‘I’ and a small ‘i’.

The big ‘I’ has no dot above it, while the small ‘i’ has one. In that sense, the big ‘I’ represents ego, while the small ‘i’ represents its antidote, humility. When we are acting from ego, we think of ourselves as big and tend to dominate others, whereas in humility, we are aware of our true self and feel grateful to the Supreme for all the goodness that we see in ourselves and others.

Our ego stems from body consciousness, i.e., the false identification of the eternal spiritual self with the mortal physical body. A dead body becomes hard and loses its softness as soon as a soul leaves it. Likewise, the big ‘I’ has no soul, and a proud person is rigid in their opinions, beliefs and attitudes. Whereas the



small ‘i’ has a dot above it. The dot symbolises the soul, and its lower part may be seen as representing the body. The soul is a sentient point of light, while the body has a vertical shape.

So, in that sense, the small ‘i’ connotes a

complete human being, i.e., the soul and the body. Hence, it represents the ongoing activities conveyed by the suffix ‘-ing’, as in speaking, looking, walking, eating, etc. In the true sense, we only live when we are aware of the self as a soul; however,

when we live and act out of ego or big ‘I’ consciousness, we are as good as dead.

A subtle reflection would show that when we pronounce the small ‘i’, it conveys a sense of humility, gentleness and flexibility, whereas the big ‘I’ is pronounced in an emphatic and loud way. A lighted candle is similar to the small ‘i’, and its flame represents light, the light of an enlightened person who is always aware of the self as a point of light.

That is why we see that during the Diwali festival, people light up rows of lamps, lights and candles, spreading so much light and joy. It represents the Golden Age, the soul-conscious community and era in which all humans are naturally aware of themselves as souls and live in peace and joy.

Remember! The more we return to our original state of being, which is that of a pure, loving and peaceful soul, the easier it will be for us to connect to the Supreme Source and draw His powers of peace, love and truth to share with others around us, thereby bringing peace within ourselves and the world.

So, let’s embark on this wonderful journey of discovering the new self, feeling very light and banishing all mental agony.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and popular columnist; Views presented are personal.

India’s new maritime growth model

Debesh Lahiri |
Ayushi Srivastava

India, as the world leader in ship recycling, is simultaneously seeking to increase its shipbuilding capabilities manifold as an integral part of its maritime transformation, which is being shaped by two major long-term frameworks: the Maritime India Vision 2030 (MIV 2030) and the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 (MAKV 2047). MIV 2030 and MAKV 2047 are not only about increasing the number of ships built in India; they represent a broader attempt to develop maritime capacities and capabilities across infrastructure, shipping, shipbuilding, repair, recycling, technology and human capital. The MIV 2030 seeks to position India among the world’s top 10 shipbuilding and repair nations, while the MAKV 2047 ambitiously aims to place India among the top five global shipbuilding nations while maintaining its numero uno position in ship recycling. The Union Budget 2025-26 has provided the much-needed fillip to the maritime sector, with substantial budgetary allocations for new shipbuilding clusters, modernisation of existing shipyards, the Maritime Devel-

opment Fund and an enhanced Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy/Scheme (SBFAP/SBFAS) 2.0. The GoI has earmarked `18,090 crore for SBFAS 2.0, while the proposed shipbuilding clusters are envisaged at capacities of more than 1.0 million gross tonnage each. Within this larger transformation, the Ship Recycling Credit Note (SRCN) directly connects two important activities — ship recycling and shipbuilding — that have traditionally been treated separately.

Killing ‘more-than-two’ birds with one stone

The basic mechanism is simple and straightforward. A shipowner, on recycling an end-of-life (EOL) vessel at a Hong Kong Convention-compliant Indian recycling yard, would receive a credit note equivalent to 40 per cent of the vessel’s fair scrap value. The credit note is valid for three years from completion of recycling and can subsequently be used towards the construction of a new vessel in an Indian shipyard, with an offset of up to 5 per cent of the fair price of the new vessel. The credit note can also be stacked, partially utilised and transferred, with market-driven pricing. The credit



note effectively creates a closed-loop economic pathway, with an additional economic incentive for the shipowner to recycle the EOL ship in India and potentially convert part of the vessel’s fair scrap value into a discount for the construction of the next vessel in an Indian shipyard, thus boosting the attractiveness of shipbuilding in India. Financial flexibility is also afforded to the shipowner to trade the SRCN within three years of issue, at a market-determined value.

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has championed this scheme as an instrument to incentivise both EOL ship recycling and new ship construction in India. There is also a broader industrial implication. Ship recycling is traditionally viewed as an end-of-life activity. The credit note reframes it as one component of a larger maritime manufacturing cycle. For India, this matters because strengthening shipbuilding requires not only new yards and financial assistance,

among other influencing factors, but also a stable new-build demand. SBFAS 2.0 provides direct financial assistance to Indian shipyards to address cost disadvantages and bolster their ability to secure orders. The credit note complements this by creating an additional route through which shipowners can be encouraged to place new-build orders with Indian shipyards. Ship recycling activity supports material recovery and generates employment while directing end-of-life vessels towards compliant facilities. The credit note, therefore, has the potential to bring shipbuilding and ship recycling into a more interdependent relationship.

Why this matters for shipowners

For shipowners, the value proposition is not simply the additional monetary benefit. The more significant aspect is the possibility of integrating fleet renewal and end-of-life decisions. An owner planning to retire an older vessel can consider three linked elements: the residual scrap value, the credit generated through HKC-compliant Indian recycling, and the potential reduction in the cost of a subsequent Indian-built vessel. The transferability and stacking provisions also provide greater flexibility than a nar-

rowly structured one-time subsidy. The mechanism could, therefore, become particularly relevant as fleet renewal accelerates and shipowners face increasing pressure to consider environmental performance, regulatory compliance and life-cycle costs alongside conventional commercial considerations.

The passage ahead

The real test will be implementation: ensuring transparent valuation of scrap, efficient issuance and redemption of credit notes, adequate awareness among domestic and international shipowners, and continued development of compliant recycling facilities and competitive shipyards. If these elements work together, the SRCN could become an important building block in India’s emerging circular maritime economy — where the end of one vessel’s life can help finance the beginning of another, within the country’s own maritime ecosystem. It augurs well that, as of September 21, 2026, four SRCNs have already been issued and more are being processed. In essence, the SRCN has the potential to boost both ship recycling and shipbuilding in India and catalyse India’s ongoing maritime transformation.