

Daily Editorial Analysis 29 January 2026

January 29, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com

India, the Beautiful — But first, India the Functional

Context

- India is a land of extraordinary contrasts and unmatched **diversity**. Snow-capped mountains, tropical beaches, ancient monuments, and modern cities coexist within one nation, giving it immense tourism **potential**.
- Yet this richness presents a **paradox**: despite its scale and appeal, India attracts far fewer foreign tourists than expected.
- With only 5.6 million foreign tourist arrivals by August 2025, India trails significantly behind smaller nations.
- Tourism today is defined not merely by attractions but by the quality of the **experience**, an area where India must improve to compete globally.

India's Tourism Performance: A Global Comparison

- A comparison with regional peers reveals India's weak **competitiveness**.
- Singapore, despite its small size, attracted more than double India's foreign tourists, while Thailand earned over \$60 billion from tourism revenue.
- These gaps highlight India's inability to convert assets into sustained economic outcomes.
- In a global market where travellers prioritise ease, comfort, and reliability, India struggles to match the standards set by its neighbours.

The Three Core Challenges: Image, Infrastructure, and India Itself

- **Image: The Battle of Perception**

- India's global **perception** is often shaped by concerns over **safety**, especially for women, poor **sanitation**, scams, and bureaucratic hurdles.
- While branding campaigns highlight cultural richness, they cannot fully counter negative narratives.
- Tourists seek reassurance and consistency, qualities that successful destinations carefully cultivate.
- India's scale makes a single tourism narrative ineffective. Strategic **segmentation** offers a solution.
- Promoting Spiritual India, Adventure India, Luxury India, and Cultural India through clearly defined circuits can help target different global audiences with precision and clarity.

- **Infrastructure: The Foundation of Tourist Experience**

- Strong **infrastructure** is the backbone of tourism. Airports, immigration counters, roads, signage, internet access, and clean public facilities shape first impressions.
- In India, weak last-mile **connectivity**, poor signage, and inconsistent maintenance often undermine even premium hospitality offerings.
- India also faces a cost disadvantage. While perceived as affordable, mid-range and luxury travel can be expensive compared to Southeast Asia.
- Improving transport, heritage-site upkeep, digital museums, and **accessibility** is essential for enhancing tourist satisfaction and value for money.

• **India Itself: Scale, Service, and Social Challenges**

- India's vastness can overwhelm visitors. Dense **crowds**, noise, inconsistent service standards, and the presence of touts and scammers reduce comfort and erode **trust**.
- These issues are worsened by a shortage of trained hospitality staff, driven by the lack of **professionalisation** in tourism careers.
- **Immigration** procedures also influence visitor experience. Despite e-visas, India ranks low on ease-of-travel indices.
- A welcoming approach grounded in **openness** is vital for projecting confidence and hospitality at points of entry.

Strategies for Reform: Fixing the Tourism Deficit

• **Rebranding and Targeted Promotion**

- Tourism branding must shift from generic messaging to focused storytelling using digital platforms, immersive content, and global influencers.
- Well-marked circuits with strong safety standards should anchor promotion.

• **Infrastructure Development**

- Public-private partnerships should support heritage conservation and transport upgrades.
- Cleanliness, signage, and digital integration must be prioritised nationwide.

• **Safety and Skill Development**

- Dedicated tourist police, especially women officers, verified service platforms, and skill training can improve safety and service quality.

• **Visa and Immigration Reforms**

- Simplified visa processes, long-term visas for frequent travellers, and courteous border management are essential components of meaningful **reform**.

• **Sustainability and Authenticity**

- Long-term growth requires **sustainability**. Regulating footfalls, promoting eco-tourism, and empowering local communities will protect fragile cultural and environmental assets.

Tourism as an Economic and Strategic Imperative

- Tourism generates large-scale **employment**, especially for the unskilled and semi-skilled, driving social **inclusion**.
- Compared to manufacturing, tourism delivers higher job returns per unit of **investment**. In regions vulnerable to youth unemployment, tourism can enhance economic stability.
- Policy support, however, remains inadequate.
- Tax structures affecting hospitality reduce profitability and discourage growth, underscoring the need for coherent economic **governance**.

Conclusion

- India possesses all the ingredients of a global tourism leader, but success depends on **refinement**, not reinvention.
- Improving image, infrastructure, and experience requires institutional capacity, policy coherence, and national **confidence**.
- By addressing these fundamentals, India can move from being an attractive idea to a destination the world actively chooses, and returns to.

India, the Beautiful — But first, India the Functional FAQs

Q1. What paradox defines India's tourism sector?

Ans. India has immense tourism potential but attracts relatively few foreign visitors.

Q2. Which three factors explain India's tourism challenges?

Ans. India's tourism challenges stem from image, infrastructure, and visitor experience.

Q3. Why is India's global image a concern for tourism?

Ans. Safety concerns, sanitation issues, and scams negatively shape international perceptions.

Q4. How does infrastructure affect the tourist experience in India?

Ans. Weak connectivity and poor maintenance undermine comfort and first impressions.

Q5. Why is tourism considered strategically important for India?

Ans. Tourism generates employment, supports inclusion, and strengthens economic stability.

Source: **The Hindu**

Cybercrime and the Crisis of Global Governance

Context

- The signing of the **United Nations Cybercrime Convention** in late 2024 marked the first new multilateral criminal justice instrument in over two decades.
- Rather than signalling renewed **multilateralism**, the refusal of several major states to sign revealed deep divisions in governing **cyberspace**.
- For **India**, the Convention exposes a strategic dilemma shaped by shifting power balances, contested norms, and weakening global institutions.

The Politics Behind the UN Cybercrime Convention

- The Convention emerged from a 2017 resolution led by **Russia** and supported by **China**, aimed at challenging existing cyber governance frameworks.
- Until now, global cooperation in this area had largely revolved around the **Budapest Convention**, a European-led treaty that excludes non-invited states.
- Its limited inclusivity explains why many countries outside **Europe** declined to join.
- Although the UN Convention is formally open to all, consensus remained elusive.
- European states signed largely because the treaty incorporates definitions and procedures familiar from earlier frameworks, allowing them to retain influence over rule-making.
- By contrast, several countries, including the United States, expressed concern that vague definitions could legitimise expansive state control and undermine **human rights**.
- These disagreements illustrate how cyber governance has become deeply entangled with **geopolitics**, trust, and competing visions of digital order.

India's Reluctance and the Limits of Global Influence

- India's decision not to sign reflects a careful cost-benefit calculation rather than disengagement.
- Unlike earlier cybercrime frameworks, New Delhi participated actively in negotiations but failed to secure acceptance of its proposals, particularly those aimed at protecting national **sovereignty** and control over citizens' **data**.
- This outcome points to a broader decline in India's influence over global norm-setting compared to its earlier successes in climate diplomacy.
- India's caution is driven by concern over preserving institutional autonomy in a fragmented system.
- While some powers seek to reshape global norms and others aim to preserve their seat at the table, India remains wary of commitments that could constrain domestic policymaking.
- The resulting divisions cut across traditional **alliances**, highlighting the growing complexity of contemporary **governance**.

The Growing Gulf Between Principles and Practice

- The Convention also illustrates the widening gap between shared **principles** and uneven **implementation**.
- Initial agreement focused on combating universally condemned harms, such as online child sexual abuse.
- However, broad and imprecise definitions of cybercrime allow states significant discretion in expanding criminal liability, potentially at the expense of civil liberties.
- This pattern mirrors developments in the regulation of **artificial intelligence**.

- Across global forums, governments endorse common values such as safety and trust, yet translate them into highly divergent domestic rules.
- India's draft requirements for watermarking AI-generated content demonstrate how accepted objectives can lead to unusually prescriptive **regulation**, complicating cross-border cooperation and raising questions about proportionality.

Polycentrism and the Crisis of Multilateralism

- The Cybercrime Convention must be viewed within a wider crisis of global institutions. Financial retrenchment, institutional paralysis, and declining trust have weakened traditional forums.
- In this environment, global rule-making increasingly relies on smaller, overlapping arrangements, producing **polycentricism**.
- Multiple frameworks now coexist, interact, and sometimes conflict, placing heavy demands on state **institutions**.
- Cybercrime and cross-border data governance exemplify this trend. While there is broad agreement on goals, mechanisms differ widely, increasing compliance costs and testing national **capacity**.
- For countries like India, navigating this dense institutional landscape is becoming progressively more challenging.

Conclusion

- The UN Cybercrime Convention reflects not a unified digital future but a fragmented international order.
- For India, maintaining strategic **autonomy** will require more than principled restraint.
- It demands sustained investment in technical expertise, regulatory coherence, and the ability to engage simultaneously across multiple forums.
- Without such efforts, India risks losing influence in shaping the rules that will govern its digital and economic future.

Cybercrime and the Crisis of Global Governance FAQs

Q1. Why did the UN Cybercrime Convention fail to achieve broad consensus?

Ans. It failed to achieve consensus because major states disagreed over definitions of cybercrime, human rights safeguards, and control over data.

Q2. Why did India choose not to sign the Convention?

Ans. India did not sign the Convention because its concerns about sovereignty and institutional control over citizens' data were not adequately addressed.

Q3. How does the Convention reflect current global geopolitics?

Ans. The Convention reflects global geopolitics by revealing competing visions between authoritarian, liberal, and cautious powers over cyber governance.

Q4. What does the gap between principles and practice signify in cyber governance?

Ans. The gap signifies that shared international principles often mask divergent domestic regulatory approaches.

Q5. What challenge does polycentric global governance pose for India?

Ans. Polycentric governance challenges India by requiring high technical and institutional capacity to engage across multiple overlapping frameworks.

Source: **The Hindu**

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/daily-editorial-analysis-29-january-2026/>

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