

The Law of Today: India's Absent Ministry of AI

As nations from the UAE to the EU build AI ministries, laws, and institutes, India risks becoming the world's departure lounge for innovation — unless it creates a dedicated Ministry for Artificial Intelligence to lead the century ahead

A Ministry is Born Elsewhere

In 2017, the United Arab Emirates startled the world by appointing a Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence. What seemed like a symbolic flourish became a strategic anchor: a full cabinet seat for AI, later expanded to cover the digital economy and remote work. It was a declaration that in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, artificial intelligence was not a laboratory hobby, it was a national priority.

Singapore has followed with precision. Its National AI Strategy 2.0, launched in 2023, is a whole-of-nation plan to harness AI for growth, safety, and social good. It is backed by AI Verify, an open-source framework to test and assure AI systems, and Tech. Pass, a visa that lets top entrepreneurs and engineers found, work, invest, and mentor with freedom. The signal is clear: here is a jurisdiction that pairs trust with talent.

China has moved heavier and faster. It has binding rules for algorithmic recommendation and generative AI, making providers responsible for accuracy, bias, and security. Models must be filed, tested, and monitored. Japan, more softly, has embraced “agile governance” iterative standards, safety-by-design, and co-regulation with industry.

Across Asia, the pattern is unmistakable: AI is treated as a system, not a side project. And systems get ministries, strategies, and institutions.

The West Builds While We Watch

The European Union has already enacted the AI Act, the world's first comprehensive, risk-based AI law. The United States has leaned on executive authority: President Biden's Executive Order on AI directs federal agencies to watermark outputs, test models for safety, and adapt procurement. The United Kingdom has built the AI Safety Institute, which stress-tests frontier models before release. Even Australia has published “guardrails” and is consulting on mandatory rules for high-risk AI.

As Satya Nadella has said, “AI is the defining technology of our time.” The US, UK, and EU are stress-testing, regulating, and scaling. India, meanwhile, is still debating whether AI even deserves a portfolio at all.

Whether by statute, standards, or institutes, governments elsewhere are not dithering. They are building frameworks that give clarity to innovators and confidence to societies.

The \$4-Trillion Blind Spot

And India? We are absent from this list.

We are a \$4-trillion economy, the world's largest democracy, and the deepest reservoir of STEM talent on the planet. Yet we have no Ministry for AI. No portfolio, no manifesto, no funding, not even the designation of AI as an industry. Authority remains scattered between MeitY, NITI Aayog, the RBI, and line regulators. Yes, we have the IndiaAI Mission, and a proposed IndiaAI Safety Institute. But without legislative ownership and enactment, these risk becoming another set of files in a bloated docket.

India supplies nearly one-fifth of the world's AI talent, yet attracts less than 2 percent of global AI investment. The result is absurd: we export minds, import platforms, and watch the wealth flow elsewhere.

Meanwhile, in sunrise sectors, our reflex has been fear first, vision later. Online money gaming has been legislated illegal. Crypto is taxed into flight. Fintech founders reel under circulars that change faster than their roadmaps. Instead of creating magnets, we manufacture mazes.

The Visa Republic

And so we arrive at the national irony: a \$4-trillion economy still behaving like a supplicant. We cheer when doors abroad crack open, and panic when they close. Our national mood swings with H-1B allocations in Washington rather than with innovation in Bengaluru.

Why should India, with its scale, talent, and capital, define itself by the doors others open for us? Why are Dubai and Singapore, tiny dots on the map, magnets, while India is still treated as a stopover?

In 2023, Indian-origin founders raised over \$20 billion abroad, while at home frontier-tech ventures raised under \$2 billion. We are a talent superpower behaving like a venture lightweight.

We are catching up to the past, not building for the future.

A Mother's Lesson

It reminds me of something my mother used to tell me as a child: "If you don't plan for your future, Sid, you'll fall into somebody else's plan, and you'll spend your life working for them."

That is exactly what India is doing today. Because we have not planned our AI future, our brightest engineers, doctors, and coders are building other people's plans.

I grew up in the 1980s watching my uncles move to America and Europe, chasing jobs, careers, and schools. Five decades later, it feels like *déjà vu*. My peers, their families, their children are still looking outward for colleges, for jobs, for opportunity.

How long will India remain the place talent leaves, instead of the place talent comes to?

Every year, thousands of our brightest land in Silicon Valley, Singapore, Toronto, Sydney. They thrive there not because they are different, but because those nations wrote the laws of tomorrow before the talent arrived. Imagine if we wrote those laws here. Imagine if the future was not the great Indian export, but the great Indian homecoming.

We speak proudly of a \$4-trillion economy, the world's fourth largest, but we are not planning to surpass it. We are not building the foundation for innovation and growth to be rooted here. The exodus continues because the ecosystem is not yet magnetic enough.

From Fear to Framework

It is time to change posture. India cannot lead the AI century with fear, fragments, and files. It needs a lighthouse.

A Ministry for Artificial Intelligence must be that lighthouse. Not a token portfolio but a full ministry with vision, manifesto, funding, and authority. A cabinet seat to own AI strategy, compute infrastructure, model testing, procurement, and international accords. An institution that anticipates, not just reacts.

Around it, we must build policies that magnetise talent rather than repel it:

- India Tech Talent Visa: ten-year residency with spousal work rights for top AI researchers, principal engineers, CISOs, and founders.
- City charters in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, and NCR for single-window clearances, startup courts, and 90-day dispute timelines.
- Predictable regulation: a harm-minimised framework for permissible gaming, licensing for crypto custody under AML/KYC, fintech sandboxes before enforcement.
- Safety that scales trust: an IndiaAI Safety Institute publishing test suites, watermarking protocols, and red-team guidelines, aligned with peers in the UK, US, and EU.
- Government as lead adopter: mission labs in health, justice, agriculture, education, and climate; procurement playbooks that make India the world's largest buyer of trustworthy AI.

As Jensen Huang of NVIDIA has said, “India is in a position to build the world's largest AI workforce.” But without a ministry, manifesto, or funding, that workforce will build the future everywhere but here.

The Future Was Yesterday

Because the real horizon is not 2025. It is 2050, and then 2100.

By 2050, justice backlogs should be history, compressed by explainable AI decision support and privacy-safe retrieval. By 2100, health systems should use population-scale models to spot non-communicable diseases decades earlier, prevent maternal mortality, and track climate-linked illnesses. Farmers should get AI forecasts in their own languages, not PDFs in English. Education should revolve around micro-credentials and safe AI tutors, so reskilling is continuous and borderless. India will not arrive when visas abroad are easier.

India will arrive when the world lines up at our doors, not for heritage, not for hospitality, but because this is where tomorrow is made. That is not pride. That is sovereignty. That is the law of tomorrow.

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