



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
Karnataka Regional Branch, Bengaluru

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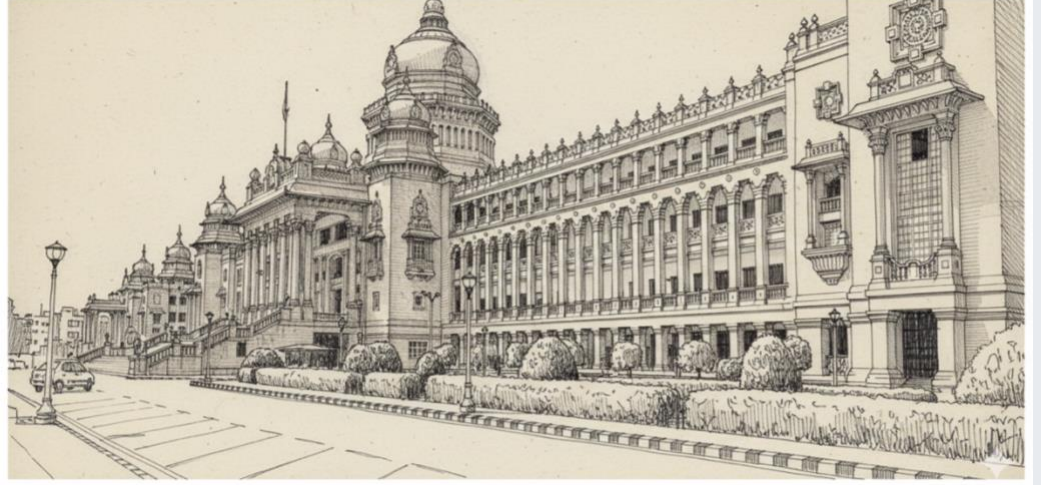


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WHAT'S NEW

LEAD FEATURE

***EASE OF DOING BUSINESS
IN KARNATAKA***

LEAD ARTICLE

***Safe and Ethical Use of
Artificial Intelligence by
Students***



From the Chief Editor

It gives me great pleasure to place before readers **the September 2026** issue of our **Newsletter**, the **74th** since we began this initiative.

Our **Lead Feature** is on ***“Ease of Doing Business in Karnataka”***. Karnataka is preparing to overhaul the way investors obtain government approvals. The system could help move Karnataka from episodic clearance drives to lifecycle-based investment facilitation.

Our **Lead Article** is by **Prof. Arvind Rao**, Professor of Computational Medicine and Bioinformatics at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, USA on ***“Safe and Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence by Students”***. It is based on the **Distinguished Lecture** delivered by him last month at **Bangalore University**. In his words, *“Students should use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to extend their intellectual abilities—not to replace the thinking, learning and responsibility that education is intended to develop.”*

In our **Communication Pulse** column, **Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander** writes on ***“From Policy to Programme: The Administrative Journey of Delivering Public Value”***.

In our section on **Branch Events**, we report on the **Distinguished Lecture** delivered by **Dr. Arvind Rao** at **Bangalore University** on ***“Safe and Ethical Use of AI by Students”***.

In our section on **Branch Members’ Writings**, we provide links to thought-provoking articles written by our members.

In our **Book Review** column, we carry a review by our Editor of the recently published memoir by **Mr. J.S. Deepak**, IAS (Retd.) titled, ***‘I Dared to Dial Differently: An Insider’s Account of the Indian Administrative Service’***. The book offers an engaging account of administrative courage, policy innovation and the possibilities—and perils—of India’s civil service.

And in our **Food for Thought** column, we carry an infographic of the surprising decision of resignation from the Indian Administrative Service of **Ms. Divya Mittal**, after 13 years of service in the UP cadre.

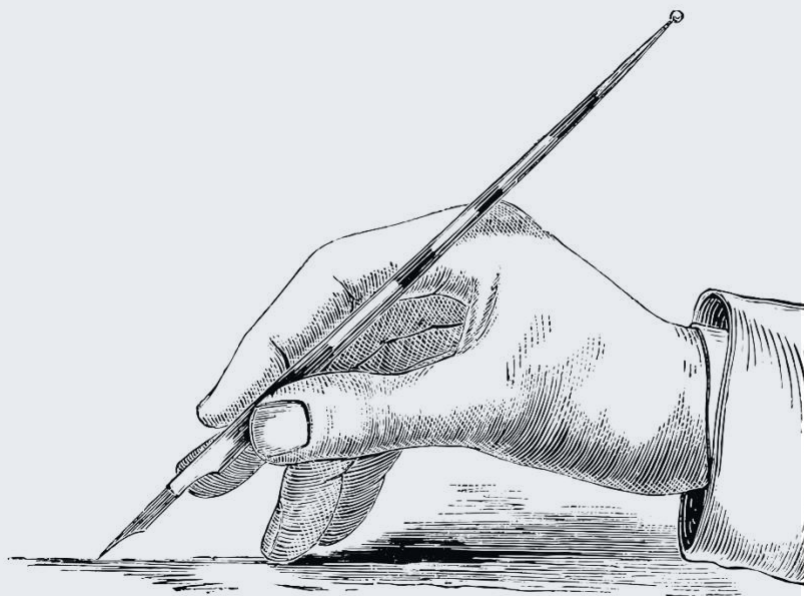
Shri T.M. Vijay Bhaskar, IAS (Retd.)

Former Chief Secretary,
Government of Karnataka.
Former Chairman, Karnataka
Administrative Reforms
Commission-2.

Chairperson, Indian Institute of
Public Administration, Karnataka Regional Branch



I add our usual disclaimer here that the views expressed by the contributors in this issue of the Virtual Newsletter are personal and do not represent the views or position of the Editorial Board or the Executive Committee of the Branch. Do write in, with your responses, views and ideas for improvement of the Newsletter.





Lead Feature

EASE OF DOING BUSINESS IN KARNATAKA

From Single Window to Seamless Governance

Karnataka's proposed digital approval system could reduce delays and strengthen investor confidence—but technology must be matched by administrative accountability.

Karnataka is preparing to overhaul the way investors obtain government approvals. The proposed unified digital system promises a single interface through which businesses can submit documents, apply for clearances, track decisions and meet compliance requirements, *without repeatedly approaching different departments.*

The reform forms part of the **Karnataka Industries (Facilitation) Amendment Bill, 2026**, which was passed by the Karnataka Legislative Assembly on August 24, 2026. Its central objective is simple but potentially transformative: ***government departments should function as parts of one administrative system rather than as separate regulatory islands.***

Karnataka already operates a **Single Window System** through **Karnataka Udyog Mitra**, the State's investment-facilitation agency. The existing **Invest Karnataka** portal brings together more than 150 business services administered by over 30 departments. Investors can identify the permissions applicable to a project, submit a Combined Application Form, ascertain available incentives and track applications through an online dashboard.

The proposed changes seek to carry this process further—from providing a common digital entry point to creating an integrated approval architecture.

What will change?

1. The most important feature is the proposed **"once-only" document-submission principle**. At present, an investor may have to provide the same company registration, identity, address, land and project documents to several departments. Under the proposed arrangement, *Know Your Customer* information and other records already available with the government may be accessed by

authorized departments for subsequent processing.

For investors, this would mean fewer duplicate applications, reduced documentation costs and fewer visits to government offices. For the administration, it could create a common and more reliable record of each enterprise.

2. The *second* major reform is **the introduction of enforceable turnaround times for different services**. Applications would be routed digitally to the departments concerned and their progress monitored against prescribed deadlines. Where an authority fails to decide an application within the stipulated period, the proposal provides for "deemed approval".

This is intended to replace administrative uncertainty with predictability. An investor should know what documents are required, which authority is responsible and when a decision can reasonably be expected. If properly implemented, the mechanism could prevent applications from remaining indefinitely pending merely because one department has failed to act.

3. *Third*, the Bill proposes **expanding affidavit-based clearances from 15 to 20 services**. Their validity would reportedly extend to three years for micro, small and medium enterprises, and five years for large industries, or until commercial operations begin, whichever is earlier. Eligible enterprises could therefore commence preparatory activity on the strength of formal undertakings, while completing the remaining regulatory requirements within the permitted period.

4. *Fourth*, Karnataka proposes **a risk-based inspection system**. Instead of inspecting all industrial units with the same frequency and intensity, **regulators would classify enterprises according to factors such as the nature of their operations, environmental impact, safety record and compliance history**. Administrative attention could then be concentrated on higher-risk establishments, while compliant, low-risk businesses would face fewer routine inspections.

Why the Reform Matters

Karnataka possesses formidable advantages as an investment destination: **a skilled workforce, strong research and educational institutions, an internationally recognized technology ecosystem and established strengths in aerospace, biotechnology, electronics, automobiles, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing.**

Attracting investment commitments, however, is only the beginning. Their value ultimately depends upon conversion into functioning enterprises, employment and regional development. Projects can be delayed by difficulties relating to land, power, water, building plans, fire safety, pollution control and local-body permissions. When each clearance follows a separate procedure and timeline, the resulting uncertainty raises the cost of investment.

The proposed system could help move Karnataka from episodic clearance drives to lifecycle-based investment facilitation. A project could be followed from its initial proposal through land allocation and construction to the commencement of production, subsequent renewals and expansion.

This could be especially valuable to smaller enterprises. Large corporations can employ specialists to navigate regulatory systems; micro and small enterprises frequently cannot. A transparent portal that identifies required approvals, reuses documents and shows application status could reduce this inequality of access.

The reform also has implications for the internal functioning of government. **A properly designed dashboard can show how many applications each department has received, how long they have remained pending and where procedural bottlenecks occur.** Digitization can thereby become an instrument of administrative accountability, rather than merely a convenience for investors.

A Single Window must not Hide many Doors

The success of the reform will nevertheless depend on implementation. Many single-window arrangements provide only a common place for submitting applications; decisions continue to travel through the same departmental hierarchy. **A portal becomes genuinely effective only when databases**

communicate, workflows are redesigned and officials are held responsible for delays.

Deemed approval also requires careful safeguards. It is appropriate for routine and low-risk permissions, particularly when an applicant has submitted complete information and an authority has failed to respond. **It should not automatically override essential requirements concerning environmental protection, occupational safety, public health, land rights or hazardous industries.**

The system must clearly specify which approvals qualify, when the statutory clock begins and what happens if an application is incomplete. Otherwise, deemed approval could generate legal disputes rather than administrative certainty.

Risk-based inspections must similarly rest on transparent and publicly defensible criteria. Reduced inspections for compliant units should not become regulatory neglect. High-risk establishments require qualified inspectors, reliable data and effective enforcement. Randomized checks and strong penalties for false declarations will remain necessary.

Data protection and cybersecurity are equally important. A unified platform containing corporate, financial, land and identity records will become a valuable digital asset—and a potential target. Departments should receive access only to information necessary for their statutory functions, while investors must be able to see how their data are being used.

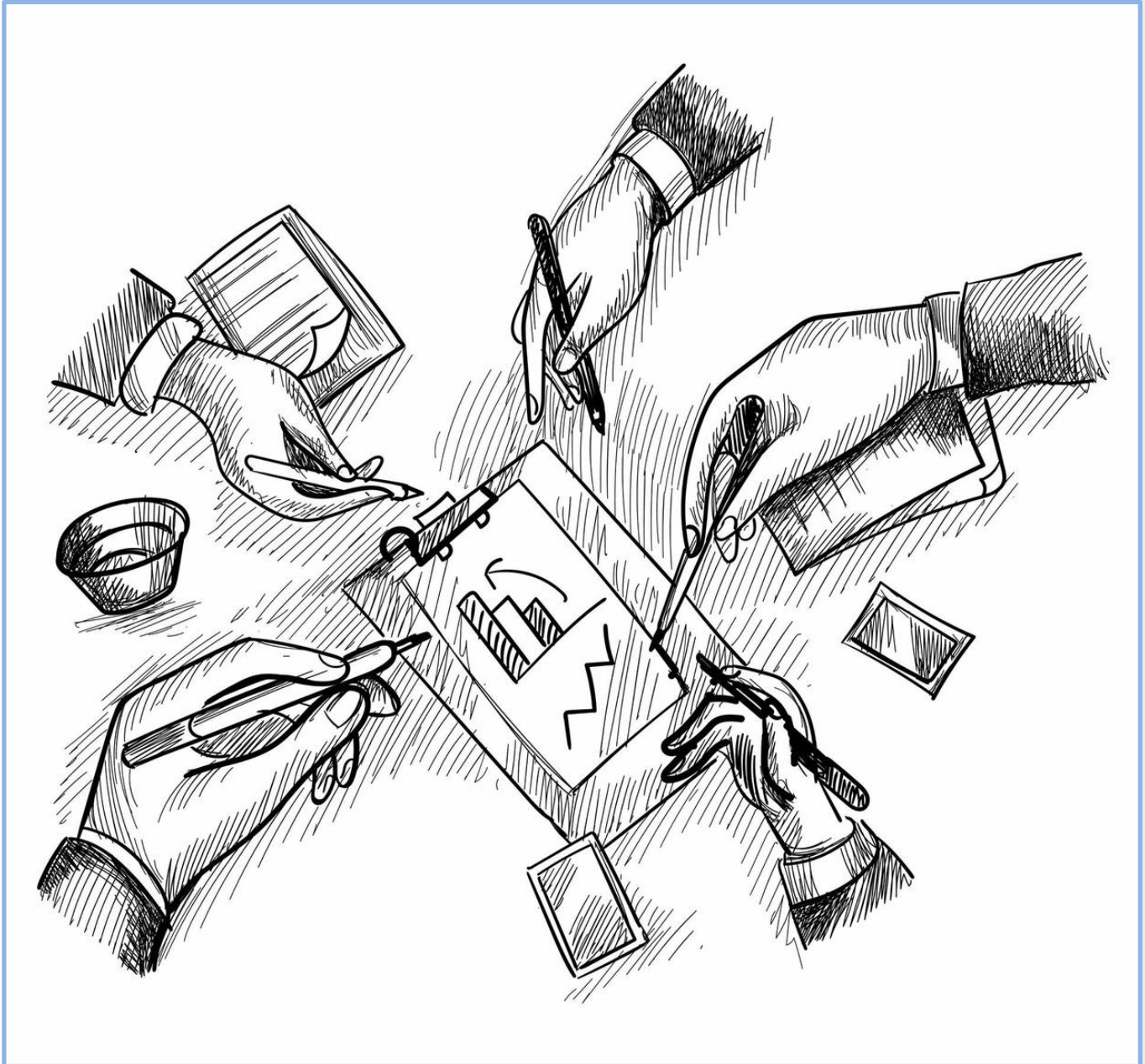
From Ease of Doing Business to Responsible Investment

The larger purpose of investment facilitation must be kept in view. Faster approvals are desirable not simply because they improve rankings or attract capital, but because responsible investment can create decent employment, promote innovation, strengthen local supply chains and widen development beyond Bengaluru.

The system should therefore disclose not only approval statistics but also implementation outcomes: projects grounded, capital invested, jobs created, regional distribution and compliance with environmental and labour obligations. **Investor facilitation and public accountability need not be competing objectives.**

Karnataka's proposed reform represents a welcome shift towards integrated, time-bound and digitally enabled governance. Its real test, however, will not be the sophistication of the portal. It will be whether an entrepreneur can secure a clear and lawful decision without making repeated visits, whether an official can be held accountable for an unexplained delay, and whether regulatory safeguards remain effective.

If Karnataka combines technology with process simplification, departmental coordination and transparent accountability, the single window could become more than a website. It could become *a new compact* between government and enterprise—one that offers investors certainty, while protecting the wider public interest.





Lead Article

Safe and Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence by Students



Dr. Arvind Rao

Professor of Computational Medicine and Bioinformatics
The University of Michigan Ann Arbor, USA
Member, Voxel Analytics, LLC

Students should use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to extend their intellectual abilities—not to replace the thinking, learning and responsibility that education is intended to develop.

Major Arguments

1. Fluency should not be mistaken for truth

Generative AI is essentially a highly sophisticated prediction system. It produces language that is statistically plausible, but it does not “*know*” (epistemologically) whether its answer is true.

AI-generated responses can appear convincing because they possess clear structure; authoritative tone; specific names, dates and figures; apparent confidence; and well-formatted references.

Yet these qualities belong to the presentation of an answer, not to its evidentiary validity. As the presentation puts it, confidence is a property of the response, while correctness is a property of the evidence.

The most dangerous answers are therefore not those that are obviously wrong, but those that are *almost right*. A single response may seamlessly combine accurate information, useful synthesis and fabricated or unsupported claims.

2. Students remain accountable for AI-assisted work

AI does not know the instructor’s intentions, the course readings, the grading rubric, the institutional policy or the capability an assignment is meant to assess. It usually sees only what the student enters in the prompt. Consequently, responsibility cannot be transferred to the chatbot.

The model does not receive the grade. The student does.

Students remain responsible for every claim, citation, calculation, interpretation and line of code they submit, irrespective of whether it originated with them or with an AI system.

3. Irresponsible AI use can cause four forms of harm

(1) Epistemic Harm—Harm to Truth

Unchecked AI output may cause students and readers to believe something false. Fabricated references are a particularly serious example. A citation may look perfectly authentic while referring to an article that does not exist. The rule is unequivocal: *if a source matters, the student must open and read it.*

(2) Learning Harm—Harm to Capability

AI may help a student complete an assignment without acquiring the competence the assignment was intended to develop. The visible product may be polished, while the invisible processes of reasoning, struggling, making mistakes and developing intuition have been bypassed.

The presentation’s “capability test” asks:

Could I solve, explain or reproduce the essential reasoning without the chatbot?

If the answer is no, the assignment may have been completed on paper but not as a learning experience.

(3) Authorship Harm—Harm to Proper Credit

The ethical issue is not simply whether AI was used, but whether the submission gives an honest account of the student’s intellectual contribution. Assistance and substitution exist along a continuum. AI may polish a student’s ideas, help restructure prose or provide feedback; at the other extreme, it may formulate

the thesis, construct the argument or generate the logic of the code.

The crucial question is: *who formed the central idea and made the “load-bearing” intellectual decisions?*

(4) Privacy and Safety Harm—Harm to Data and People

Students should not place personal information, confidential records, unpublished research, examination material, proprietary code or information protected by institutional rules into public AI systems. **Once information is submitted, the student may lose control over how it is stored, retained or used.**

AI should also not be treated as a substitute for qualified human help in high-stakes situations such as a serious mental-health crisis.

4. Ethical AI use depends on context, not percentages

AI use cannot be judged by calculating the percentage of AI-generated material. A five-per-cent contribution might supply the entire thesis, while a much larger contribution might involve only routine formatting.

Responsible use should instead be judged according to four considerations:

1. **Purpose:** *Is AI extending the student’s abilities or helping the student avoid developing them?*
2. **Policy:** *Is the proposed use permitted by the instructor, course and institution?*
3. **Disclosure:** *Has the student honestly acknowledged what AI contributed?*
4. **Retained competence:** *Can the student still explain, reproduce and defend the work?*

The same activity may therefore be acceptable in one setting and prohibited in another. **AI-generated code might be appropriate in a design course that assesses ideas, conditionally acceptable in a disclosed take-home project, and unacceptable in a programming examination intended to test whether the student can code independently.**

5. AI uses can be placed on a responsible-use spectrum

(1) **Green Zone** uses generally **support learning** because the student remains intellectually active. These include obtaining an alternative explanation;

generating practice questions; preparing a study plan; conducting a mock oral examination; and receiving feedback on the clarity of one’s own writing.

(2) **Yellow Zone** uses require **contextual judgement**. These include generating an outline, rewriting prose, drafting code, analyzing data, summarizing unread sources and producing an initial draft. The decisive question is whether AI has replaced the capability the assignment was designed to assess.

(3) **Red Zone** uses clearly **cross the ethical line**. These include using AI in a prohibited examination; submitting fabricated evidence or references; passing AI-generated work off as one’s own; concealing AI assistance when disclosure is required; and exposing confidential or personal data.

6. Verification is part of scholarship, not an afterthought

Verification should not be treated merely as final “cleanup.” It is the intellectual work through which a student converts AI output into a claim that can responsibly be defended.

Students should independently verify facts, dates, names and statistics; citations, quotations and page numbers; calculations and every stage of the reasoning; computer code, including its safety and data practices; and interpretations and unsupported inferential leaps.

A programme that runs is not necessarily understood or safe. Similarly, a polished literature review is not academically sound, unless the student has located, read and assessed the cited sources.

7. The CLEAR framework offers a practical safeguard

Element	Student Responsibility
C — Check the rules	Consult the assignment instructions, instructor’s policy and institutional academic-integrity code.
L — Limit what you share	Protect personal, confidential, proprietary and unpublished information.
E — Examine the evidence	Verify factual claims, references, reasoning, calculations and code.

Element	Student Responsibility
A — Acknowledge the assistance	Explain honestly how AI was used whenever disclosure is required.
R — Retain responsibility	Be able to explain, reproduce and defend the final work.

The framework transforms AI use into a five-stage checkpoint between prompting and submitting.

8. Students should practice “assured authorship”

There is a need to distinguish between *generated authorship* and *assured authorship*.

In **generated authorship**, the machine produces material that the student simply forwards. In **assured authorship**, AI may assist, but the student verifies the content; shapes the result; discloses the assistance; exercises human judgement; and accepts responsibility for every substantive part.

Assured authorship rests on transparency, verification, human judgement and reflexivity—understanding not only how AI was used, but why it was used and which decisions remained with the student.

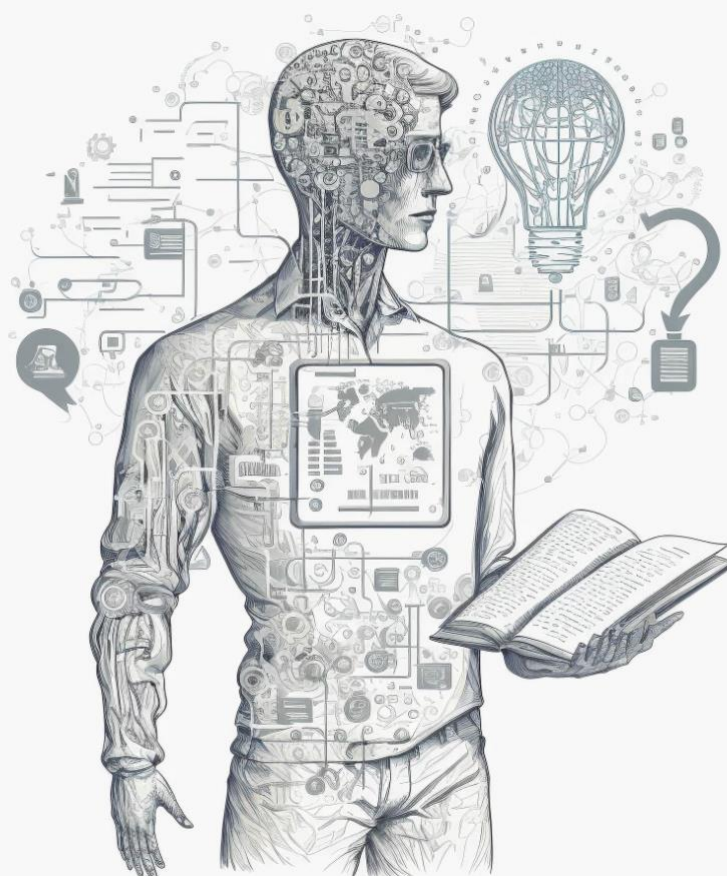
Concluding Message

Education is not the production of assignments; ***it is the formation of a person capable of observing, questioning, reasoning, verifying, creating and accepting responsibility.***

In short, students should use AI to become more capable, not merely to appear more accomplished.

Acknowledgements:

We acknowledge the contributions of Prahlad Uchila (of Harmony School of Innovation, Sugarland, TX) and Achyutha Rao (Clague Middle School, MI) for important review and feedback through the preparation of the material.





Communication Pulse

Probe, Reflect, Act

From Policy to Programme:

The Administrative Journey of Delivering Public Value

Introduction

Public Policy represents the intent of a State and ideally articulates the government's vision, priorities, and commitment to addressing societal challenges. However, for citizens, policies acquire meaning only when they are translated into programmes that deliver tangible outcomes. **The true test of governance therefore lies not in announcing policies but in designing and implementing programmes that improve people's lives.**

The journey from Policy to Programme is neither automatic nor linear. It is a complex administrative process requiring evidence-based planning, institutional coordination, financial prudence, technological support and continuous learning. It is in this space that the Civil Service assumes its most critical role—**transforming political vision into administrative action.**

Context

To start with, the first step in this transformation is to interpret and communicate the intent of a policy with clarity. Policies often express broad aspirations such as improving learning outcomes, enhancing agricultural productivity, strengthening public health, or promoting sustainable urban development. These aspirations need to be converted into clearly defined objectives with measurable outcomes and operational priorities. A well-crafted programme answers fundamental questions: ***Who are the beneficiaries? What services will be delivered? Through which institutions? What timeframe? Are there resources?***

Evidence must guide every stage of programme design. Baseline data, socio-economic surveys, field consultations and lessons from previous initiatives to help ensure that programmes respond to actual needs rather than perceived ones. **Ideally, quantitative data must be complemented by qualitative insights from frontline officials, community organizations, local governments and citizens themselves.** Listening to stakeholders often identifies implementation challenges that statistics alone cannot capture.

Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander
Freelance Consultant



Localizing Policies

India being a diverse country, a policy conceived at the national or state level often encounters varied realities across districts. **Differences in geography, demography, institutional capacity and socio-economic conditions require contextual adaptation,** while preserving the core objectives of the policy. The most effective programmes therefore combine standardization, where necessary, with flexibility where possible. District administrations frequently demonstrate that innovation within a common policy framework can significantly improve outcomes.

An important factor is planning resources to help in programme conversion. Governments often face a challenge in financial allocations, delegation of human resources, institutional capacity, technology, infrastructure and partnerships which are equally important. A programme may have adequate funding but still struggle because of shortages of trained personnel, weak procurement systems, or limited implementation capacity. **Administrative planning must therefore adopt a comprehensive view of resources, ensuring that every component required for execution is available and aligned with programme objectives.**

What is important is coordination between agencies to ensure a functional flow of activities during implementation. For example, improving nutrition requires convergence between health, women and child development, education, water supply, sanitation, agriculture and local government institutions. Similarly, climate resilience, urban mobility, skill development and rural livelihoods demand coordinated action across multiple agencies. Regular communication, shared monitoring mechanisms and collaborative problem-solving helps in effective programme implementation. **Civil servants increasingly serve not merely as departmental managers but as coordinators of complex governance ecosystems.**

How does Technology help?

In recent times, technology has emerged as a powerful enabler in bridging the gap between policy and programme. Digital platforms facilitate beneficiary identification, direct benefit transfers, real-time monitoring, grievance redress and transparent financial management. Geographic Information Systems (GIS), artificial intelligence, predictive analytics and mobile-based reporting tools are enhancing administrative efficiency and decision-making. At the same time, ***technology should remain an instrument rather than an objective*** and ensure that digital solutions are inclusive, accessible, and sensitive to the realities of citizens with limited connectivity.

Institutional Approach

No programme succeeds without capable institutions and motivated frontline workers. Teachers, health workers, *anganwadi* workers, police personnel, engineers, agricultural extension officers, and local government functionaries represent the face of government for most citizens. Their training, motivation, accountability and working conditions significantly influence programme outcomes.

Capacity building should therefore be viewed as a continuous investment rather than a one-time activity. Equally important is creating an organizational culture that encourages innovation, learning, and responsiveness.

Importance of Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation complete the policy-to-programme cycle. Traditionally, monitoring focused on financial expenditure and physical targets. **Contemporary Public Administration increasingly emphasizes outcomes and impact.**

The central question is no longer how much money was spent, but whether the intended change occurred in people's lives. Well-designed monitoring systems combine administrative data, independent evaluations, citizen feedback, social audits, and field inspections. Such mechanisms provide early warning signals, identify implementation bottlenecks, and enable timely course correction.

Citizen Participation

Involving citizens strengthens every stage of programme implementation. Beneficiaries are not passive recipients of government services but active partners in governance. **Public consultations during programme design, participatory planning through local governments, grievance redress mechanisms, community monitoring and social audits enhance transparency, accountability and public trust.** Programmes that incorporate citizen voices are generally more responsive, equitable, and sustainable.

Conclusion

The conversion of Policy into Programme is not merely an administrative exercise; ***it is the process through which democratic promises are realized.***

Every policy announcement creates expectations among citizens. It is through thoughtful programme design, effective implementation, institutional collaboration and continuous evaluation that these expectations are translated into meaningful public outcomes.

For the Civil Service, this responsibility extends beyond compliance with procedures. It requires leadership, empathy, innovation and an unwavering commitment to public service. **As governance becomes increasingly complex, the ability to convert policy into well-designed, citizen-centric programmes will remain one of the defining competencies of effective administration.**

Often governments are judged less by the policies they formulate than by the programmes they execute and the lives they transform. **Bridging the gap between policy intent and programme impact is therefore not only the essence of good administration but also the foundation of inclusive and sustainable development.**



Branch Events

Safe and Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence by Students

Prof. S.R. Keshava, Senior Professor of Economics and Coordinator of the BA Programme at Bangalore University welcomed the guest and gathering. **Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar**, Secretary of the Branch proposed a vote of thanks.



The **Karnataka Regional Branch** of IIPA, in collaboration with the **BA Programme** of **Bangalore University**, organized a **Special Lecture** by **Dr. Arvind Rao**, Professor of Computational Medicine and Bioinformatics at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, USA on “**Safe and Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence by Students**” on 18 August 2026 for the undergraduate students of Bangalore University.

The deepest argument of Dr. Rao’s presentation was educational rather than merely technological. ***Education is not the production of assignments; it is the formation of a person capable of observing, questioning, reasoning, verifying, creating and accepting responsibility.*** Dr. Rao advocated using AI carefully and consciously—as a coach, critic, explainer or productivity aid—***while ensuring that it does not displace the intellectual struggle through which competence is acquired.***

Presidential remarks on the occasion were delivered by **Mr. T.M. Vijay Bhaskar**, IAS (Retd.), former Chief Secretary of Karnataka and Chairperson of the Karnataka Regional Branch of IIPA.

Dr. Arvind Rao is seen seated second from left. To his left is Mr. T.M. Vijay Bhaskar. At extreme right is Prof. S.R. Keshava. At extreme left is Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar.



Dr. Arvind Rao was felicitated by Prof. S.R. Keshava and Mr. T.M. Vijay Bhaskar



A section of the audience

Branch Members' Writings in the Media



Dr. A. Ravindra, IAS (Retd.)
Former Chief Secretary of Karnataka

India's Accountability Crisis: When Leaders Fail, who takes Responsibility?

In *Deccan Herald* dt. 24 August 2026
<https://www.deccanherald.com/india/indias-accountability-crisis-when-leaders-fail-who-takes-responsibility-4121616>



Shri G. Gurucharan, IAS (Retd.)
Director, School of Social Sciences
MS Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences
Bengaluru

NEET is more than an Exam. It is a Social Contract

In *Deccan Herald* dt. 23 August 2026
<https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/neet-is-more-than-an-exam-it-is-a-social-contract-4120935>

When AI outruns Governance: What the Hugging Face breach signals for Machine Safety

In *Deccan Herald* dt. 13 August 2026
<https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/when-ai-outruns-governance-what-the-hugging-face-breach-signals-for-machine-safety-4109117>



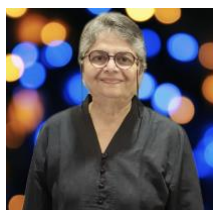
Smt. Uma Mahadevan, IAS
Additional Chief Secretary and Development Commissioner,
Government of Karnataka

The Legacy of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

In *The Hindu*, dt. 29 August 2026
<https://www.thehindu.com/books/the-legacy-of-dolly-partons-imagination-library/article71395694.ece>

When Healthcare comes too Late | Review of Ramani Atkuri's 'Staying Alive'

In *The Hindu*, dt. 2 September 2026
<https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-reviews/review-of-ramani-atkuri-staying-alive/article71355631.ece>



Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander
Freelance Consultant

Kodaikanal: Nine Stops, A Thousand Moods [Kodaikanal: Nine stops, a thousand moods - Meghalaya Monitor](#)

Beyond Communication: Why Engagement Matters more than Ever?

<https://meghalayamonitor.com/beyond-communication-why-engagement-matters-more-than-ever/>

Six lessons from the OTT Conference 2026:
Trust, People, and Impact — Rethinking the Future of Think Tanks
[On Think Tanks | Six lessons from the ott conference 2026: trust, people, and impact — rethinking the future of think tanks](#)



Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar

Hon. Professor
Mahatma Gandhi Rural Development & Panchayat Raj
University, Gadag, Karnataka

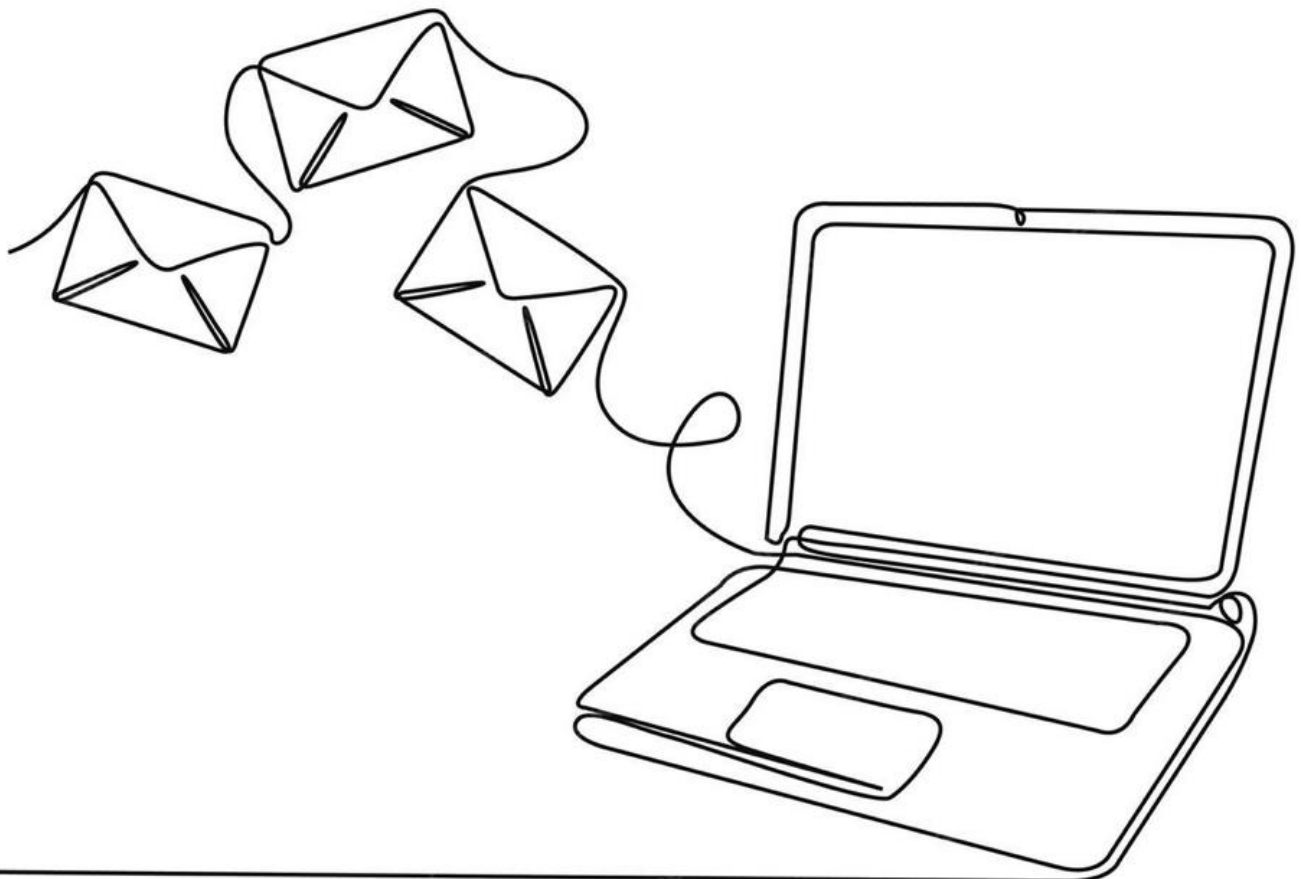
***Book Review: S.S. Patagundi, Foreign Policy
Decision-Making in India: A Political Psychology
Perspective***

In *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*,
Vol.72/Issue 2/June 2026

***Why India's Peacekeeping Experience Matters
as UN Missions come under Strain***

In *Deccan Herald*, Bengaluru dt. 25 August 2026

<https://www.deccanherald.com/world/rest-of-world/why-indias-peacekeeping-experience-matters-as-un-missions-come-under-strain-4122898>





Book Review

Dialling Conscience into Governance

D. Jeevan Kumar

'I Dared to Dial Differently' offers an engaging account of administrative courage, policy innovation and the possibilities—and perils—of India's civil service.

**J.S. Deepak, *I Dared to Dial Differently: An Insider's Account of the IAS.*
Hachette India, 2026.
344 pages. ₹799. HB.**

Memoirs by retired civil servants often become chronological accounts of postings, personalities and achievements. J.S. Deepak's *I Dared to Dial Differently*, however, goes beyond the story of an individual career. **It offers an insider's view of how public policy is formulated and implemented within a system shaped by political authority, bureaucratic hierarchy, corporate influence, institutional inertia and personal conscience.**

A 1982-batch IAS officer, Deepak served for nearly four decades in positions ranging from administration in Uttar Pradesh to telecommunications, international trade and economic diplomacy. He eventually became Secretary in the Department of Telecommunications and India's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the World Trade Organization in Geneva. This breadth of experience gives the memoir its distinctive character: **it moves seamlessly from the delivery of school meals to spectrum auctions, public procurement, international negotiations and the management of a major sporting event.**

The title cleverly captures the book's central message. "*Dial*" refers to Deepak's long association with telecommunications, while "*differently*" signifies his **willingness to question convention, resist improper pressure and accept the consequences of acting according to his judgement.**

One of the book's most socially significant episodes concerns the implementation of the cooked mid-day meal programme in nearly 1,00,000 government primary schools in Uttar Pradesh, reaching more than 15 million children. **The account illustrates that Public Administration is not ultimately about files and procedures but about converting policy**

decisions into improvements in people's lives. Implementing a programme of such scale required coordination among government departments, schools, local institutions, suppliers and monitoring agencies.

This experience highlights an important administrative lesson: ***scale does not diminish the importance of detail.*** The larger a welfare programme becomes, the more it depends upon clear procedures, reliable information, local participation and continuous supervision. A policy announcement acquires meaning only when an effective implementation system carries it to the intended beneficiaries.

The most prominent part of the memoir concerns India's first auction of Third Generation (3G) telecommunications spectrum in 2010. Spectrum is a scarce and valuable public resource, and its allocation affects competition, technological development, consumer services and public revenue. Deepak's account explains how a transparent electronic auction was designed in a sector characterized by high commercial stakes and complex technical considerations.

The combined 3G and Broadband Wireless Access auctions yielded approximately ₹1.06 lakh crore to the exchequer, far exceeding initial expectations. **The achievement lay not only in the revenue generated but also in establishing that a valuable public asset could be allocated through a competitive, transparent and credible process.** The episode becomes a case study in regulatory governance and institutional innovation.

Equally revealing is Deepak's account of blocking an allegedly questionable procurement proposal at Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited. This episode brings administrative courage to the centre of the narrative. ***Preventing irregular procurement requires more than personal honesty.*** It demands the ability to scrutinize technical and financial details, identify procedural weaknesses, record objections and withstand pressure from powerful interests.

The episode also challenges the common view that bureaucratic procedure is invariably an obstacle to efficiency. Rules can certainly create delay and encourage excessive caution. Yet intelligently applied procedures can protect public funds, promote equal treatment and prevent arbitrary decisions. **The real choice is not between rules and results, but**

between mechanical proceduralism and principled *due process*.

Deepak's assignment connected with the Commonwealth Games Village before the 2010 Delhi Games provides another lesson. **Crisis administration requires quick decisions, inter-agency coordination and the willingness to assume responsibility when established arrangements have broken down.** The episode demonstrates what may be called "*administrative presence*"—remaining at the point of difficulty, obtaining accurate information and ensuring that problems are resolved before deadlines become unmanageable.

The chapters dealing with international trade and the WTO broaden the memoir beyond the conventional boundaries of an IAS narrative. Deepak's participation in negotiations involving the WTO, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the proposed India-European Union trade agreement shows how international economic rules affect domestic policy.

His involvement in defending India's food-security and public-stockholding programmes is especially instructive. **Questions discussed in Geneva may appear highly technical, but they influence food procurement, agricultural support and the ability of governments to provide subsidized food.** Trade diplomacy therefore requires not merely economic expertise but a clear understanding of national developmental priorities.

The book neither uncritically celebrates the IAS nor dismisses it as an outdated "steel frame". Instead, it humanizes the Civil Service by showing that administrative institutions are ultimately inhabited by individuals who must make difficult choices. Officers may speak or remain silent, innovate or follow precedent, record objections or avoid responsibility.

At the same time, the memoir's focus on one unusually accomplished officer raises a broader question. **Good governance cannot depend indefinitely upon the presence of heroic individuals. Personal integrity must be supported by**

transparent procurement systems, stable tenures, professional expertise, protection for principled dissent and institutional accountability. Deepak's experiences are therefore valuable not only as examples of individual courage but also as arguments for stronger administrative institutions.

Like every memoir, the book presents events from the author's perspective. Controversial episodes involving procurement, transfers, corporate influence or policy disagreements may admit alternative interpretations. **A fuller discussion of failures, misjudgments and lessons drawn from unsuccessful initiatives might have made the account even more instructive.**

Nevertheless, *I Dared to Dial Differently* is an engaging and valuable contribution to contemporary administrative literature. Civil Service aspirants will gain a realistic view of the opportunities and pressures of public service. Students of Public Administration will find useful cases concerning programme implementation, regulation, procurement, crisis management and international negotiation.

The book's enduring message is that integrity in administration is not a passive personal virtue. It must be converted into action—asking uncomfortable questions, designing transparent processes, placing objections on record, protecting the public interest and accepting the consequences.

Deepak's career demonstrates that even within a complex and resistant system, an officer who chooses to "*dial differently*" can influence outcomes affecting millions.





FOOD FOR THOUGHT



DIVYA MITTAL, IAS WHEN A POST ENDS, THE PURPOSE CONTINUES

2013 Batch | Uttar Pradesh Cadre | 13 Years of Service

On 30 August 2026, she announced her voluntary resignation from the IAS. She gave no public reason, but called the journey unforgettable.



“Behind every government file is a person, and upholding their dignity is what justice truly means.”

A CAREER OF PUBLIC PURPOSE



- District Magistrate: Sant Kabir Nagar, Mirzapur and Deoria



- Piped water for 125 Lahuriya Deh households after a 75-year wait



- Land rights, dignity for persons with disabilities, and water for farmers



- A free mobile learning app for rural first-generation learners

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD



DEORIA: Standing with what is right is a duty.



MIRZAPUR: ‘Impossible’ is not a fact; it is merely an opinion.



PUBLIC SERVICE: She entered believing she had come to give; she left saying she had received far more.



PURPOSE: The position may end, but the dream of serving people need not.

“

WHEN COMMITTED OFFICERS LEAVE EARLY, SHOULD WE ASK ONLY WHERE THEY ARE GOING— OR ALSO WHAT INSTITUTIONS MUST DO TO RETAIN INTEGRITY, INITIATIVE AND EMPATHY?

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Photo: @divyamittal_IAS/X, via The Indian Express | 30 August 2026

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