



INDIA-NORDIC ENGAGEMENT:

A VERITABLE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN REIMAGINE AND CONFIGURE

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At a time when strategic partnerships are conceived, either at the altar of existential security driven geopolitics, the cannibalized inevitability of transactional economics, or for that matter, transcendental narratives engendering notions of solidarity, the budding India-Nordics engagement in blossom is cut from a different cloth. A veritable ‘Strategic Partnership’, embodying dimensions of soft-sector infrastructure capacitation, exuding socio-economic beneficence and wellness, and inducing social capital enhancing civil society compacts, founded in an innovation and sustainability construct—its emblematic of a congruent convergence, around ‘values’ and ‘virtues’. A cogent shared commitment, to the trinity Ds of ‘democratic’ diversity and plurality, ‘demographic’ ingenuity, and ‘demand’ for skills-knitted scale of operation, is driving mutually productive endeavors, in fructifying the three Cs of ‘Connectivity’ across spatiality, the ‘Commerce’ of knowledge driven entrepreneurship, and ‘Cultures’ of sustainable innovation and rules-based ordering for global commons development.

Introduction

Since Prime Minister Modi’s ascendance to power in 2014, India’s doctrinal foreign policy moorings and operative diplomatic orientation has been undergoing a marked discernible pivot, through a cartographic re-imagination of geographies, in pursuance of national security and national development priorities. On the evidence of recent transpiring, the Nordic sovereigns have emerged as New Delhi’s cynosure of attention, in amelioration

of the hitherto benign but enduring attention-deficit-disorder, at either end—with the coveting being mutual. The Nordics have come to appraise and appreciate India—the world’s most populous democracy, and premier ascendant economy next to China—with burgeoning sovereign capabilities committed to regional and global strategic stability, and whose checkered socio-economy of young vibrant human resource amidst an ecosystem woefully low on R&D, procreates business and social opportunities, for mutually productive beneficent

relations. India, for its part, veritably construes the Nordic nations as high value economies and higher trajectory societies, steeped in innovation processes and sustainable practices, segueing to higher order ecosystems. New Delhi has come to comprehend the exceptional profile of individual Nordic states, as also the delectability of collectivized exceptionality in Nordic experientialism, exuding symbiotic syncretism in market economy principles, macro-economic priorities, and the entails of a progressive socio-economy.¹ India internalizes the Nordics as an integral stakeholder in its unfolding national development heavy-lifting, besides, a change-agent in enabling projection of Indian national power in the extant, through leveraging of core-competencies, emblematic of human enterprise and endeavor, in the High North.²

Cultivating the Strategic Partnership

In the modern day schema, where perceptions, imagined or otherwise, often condition and drive realities of content-configurations in equations, New Delhi and the Nordic capitals have had to ameliorate the stereotypical conceptions, that impelled them to construe the other, as peripheral locale in obscurantism. Both sides lacked adequate sensitization of each other's world views and

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perspectives. For India, the democratic Nordic cohort of nations at the Northern extremity of Europe, notwithstanding isolated instances of commonly championed causes, represented regimes highly preachy and pontificating on human rights, and a repository of societies in forerunning ecologically-

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sentient zealousness around sustainable development, quite out-of-sync with the aggravating compulsions of the developing comity of nations.³ Inversely, the Nordics (in individuality and collectively) viewed peer democracy India as chaotic and autarkic at home, and idealistic and unrealistically disposed from time to time to negotiating propositions and portfolios of global governance; a part of the problem rather than contributor to solutions. This disconnect persisted, despite Sweden's commune with India over espousing global nuclear disarmament, and broader Nordic nations' affinities with New Delhi, over extending diplomatic good offices mediation, to conflict management and resolution in South Asia⁴

An effusive political track that signals unmistakable mutual prioritization in strategic calculus was imperative to move the needle on ties, and it's been refreshing to witness a reboot to relations since the advent of the Modi dispensation in India, and enlightened statesmanship within the Nordic nations' constellation of echelon leaderships, brought on by mutually redoubtable, recalibration and renewal.⁵ Indian Presidential peregrinations to Norway and Finland in late 2014,⁶ and to Sweden in June 2015 (the first Indian President to ever visit); and Prime Minister Modi's ensuing seminal sojourn to Sweden (a first for 30 years), on a bilateral as also to co-chair the maiden India-Nordic Summit in April 2018, have been reciprocated since, through visits by Swedish, Finnish, Danish

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and Norwegian Prime Ministers to India, with the momentum in sustained political exchanges, kept up, across the slew of virtual meetings, despite the pandemic and not due to it. Political expressions and affirmations within bilateral Joint Statements since 2014-15, and across the Joint Communiqué post the maiden India-Nordic Summit of 2018, have met with observable celerity in peregrinating to the inking of G2G framework MoUs, the establishment of G2G Joint Working Groups (JWGs), the delineation of actionable blueprints and roadmaps crystallizing innovation partnerships and peer niche institutional partnering for research and development collaboration. Besides, the premier industry association viz., the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), picking-up the threads on its 2012 Strategy Report and formulating an updated thrust in approach,⁷ is testament to catalyzed bureaucracies, galvanized businesses, and enthused societal institutional protagonists, at both ends, processing the strategic guidance emanating from the high water-mark of political concord. From the foregoing, it's a no-brainer that, the India-Nordic interface, at the heart of action-inducing and outcomes-oriented purposefulness, exemplifies embodiment, albeit nascent, in a multi-actor stakeholder-centric relations framework, of curated cooperative compact, in capacitation.⁸

What India and the Nordics: Loose Skein Concert of Democracies in the Offing?

There is little gainsaying that, the India-Nordics trajectory in engagement has witnessed an expeditious catapult, up the sweepstakes. This said, the epochal sense in relations, is further reinforced by the privileging fact of the uniqueness of democratic fervor underpinning the intensification of interchange, such that, the only other sovereign-entity with whom the Nordic nations have thus far collectivized in this format of interlocution is the oldest democracy and wherewithal-preponderant United States, in Stockholm during 2013, and at the White House in May 2016.⁹ For that matter, the Nordics enjoy 10-fold higher trade with an exponentially ascendant

but quintessentially authoritarian China than they do with the glacially rising but innately democratic India. Notwithstanding the brimming opportunities for trade that accrue to Nordic country businesses from increasingly pronounced partnerships across industrial and technological dimensions with the PRC, yet, the latter's predatory rise chafes,

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with its intentions at sovereign insubordination, dissuading such collectivization. The same goes for Russia, whose unbridled subversive hegemony on the Nordics' periphery is legendary, but whose intimidation shall not compel the European High North into collectivization for crass appeasement. Incongruence even reigns, inter-se fellow democratic European continental powers, or the institutional firmament of the EU for that matter, with whom the Nordics are neither uniformly nor universally invested, instead, staked out in staggered tiers of institutionally integrated interaction.¹⁰ The embrace of the Euro-Zone has been qualified, the queuing up behind major European powers in reflexively unveiling an Indo-Pacific strategy has been resisted, the strident stance against China has ploughed a different furrow to that of peer European bigwigs, not to mention the European nations' chagrin, at recent revelations of Danish intelligence facilitation of snooping by the US.

The ostensible connective tissue of an ardent and shared commitment to democratic principles of diversity, pluralism, instincts at deliberated consensus and impulses of tolerance and accommodation, have found serenading rendition, at different junctures, during the recent upswing in ties. The joint read-out, after the collectivized huddle of the maiden

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India-Nordic Summit of 2018, was eloquent in its accent on the intrinsically democratic commitment of the parties, and emphasized deference to a rules-based international order, and remaining tethered to globally enjoined and enshrined legal principles, in the amicable resolution of disputes and settlement of competing claims, maritime jurisdictional in particular. Norwegian Prime Minister Solberg on a visit to India in January 2019 followed up the India-Nordic Summit's commendation of India and its respect for Law of the Sea regime with a full-throated laudation of New Delhi's democratic credentials, as key to its law abiding demeanor and disposition, in maritime boundary delimitation with Bangladesh, in keynote remarks to the Raisina Dialogue conclave.¹¹ Amidst the pandemic-wake setting, where the international firmament is finding itself hived, along juxtapositions of authoritarian spearheaded and democratically helmed nations, in searing competition along strategically existential axes and fault-lines, a rising democratic India, in all its resilience and beheld splendor, being accorded the same pride of place as closet United States, in Nordic reckoning, is moot.

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The Nordics' Five: Panaceatic for Reconceptualized Indian Development Paradigm

Seven years of the Modi premiership has witnessed the trenchant pursuit of a tectonically mutated Indian development paradigm, premised on a rudimentarily and pioneering development coalesced growth model and a people-centric governance milieu, which condones moderated growth index in the short-term in favor of propelling Indian economy and society

into a higher orbit of sustenance, and an enduring higher growth trajectory over the long horizon. This distills itself into five strategic developmental vistas that can succinctly be marked down, as modernizing build of broad-sheet infrastructure for optimal productivity at home and exporting competitiveness by global benchmarks; revamping old order industrialization and creaking urbanization through S&T infusion and R&D collaboration; addressing legacy social welfare infirmities of pockmarked development historicity, such as food security, energy independence, water scarcity, affordable housing, rudimentary healthcare, etc.; empowering citizenry in education and entrepreneurship; and, slick, efficient governance mechanisms.¹²

To this extent, the Nordic set of countries constitute a regaling catchment in knowledge and process eco-systems, of exquisite innovation, pioneering excellence, and policy interventions attuned to societal sensitivities, emancipating and aspirational, to an avidly gleaning Indian socio-economic cosmos. The likes of Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland headline global pecking-orders, across a slew of attributes that are reckoned as integral parameters of slick and efficient governance, holistic capacitation for sustainable development, and inclusive and welfare emancipation embedded within societal prosperity. The Scandinavian triumvirate, and Finland in particular, are precocious trailblazers in seeding, harnessing, and leveraging technologically verdant environs; they stand out from peer innovative Western nations, in their whole-of-stakeholder approach, full-spectrum development, and communities-centric utilitarian deployment, thereby procreating niche wealth whilst preserving socio-ecology, in the pink of health.¹³ What's more, notwithstanding the delectability of the compositeness of experience of what's christened as the 'Nordic Way', each of the sovereign protagonists behold pedigreed core competencies in specific strategic domains that allows for exclusivity and leveraging of such strengths in cogent bilateral relationship strands. This bolsters the sound proposition for cogent bilateralism to enmesh with enlightened multilateralism, in interchange

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with sovereign suitors, who gravitate towards such exponents of excellence.

The inaugural India-Nordic Summit identified a quadrant pillared strategy girdling around attribute dimensions of Trade and Investment, Technological Innovation, Climate Change, and Global Security, appraised in consonance with the changing trends and patterns in global intermediation of geopolitics and geo-economics. While the clamor for an India-Nordic FTA, pending since 2007, continues its inconclusive meander, the thrust seems to be on sewing up high-tech trade and other wares of comparative advantage in the trade basket.¹⁴ The bigger drive is to solicit investment inducing commercial opportunities, by going beyond the import-export dialectic, in mainstreaming new industries and foraging for expansion of existing industrial slivers, in pursuance of engendering employment and raised incomes.¹⁵ Climate change as a point of convergence is rationalized through the comprehension of the Nordics procreating close to two-thirds of their energy requirements qua renewables, and India poised to be the third largest economy by 2030 and an 8-10 trillion dollar economic space come 2040, has underscored its aggressive climate adaptation and mitigation commitment through the Niti Aayog's Vision 2030, that pitches for a diversified mix of energy from renewables, as also soliciting breakthroughs, in new fuel cycles.¹⁶ The global security component of India-Nordic engagement makes for a potential straddle, portending more conventional forms of defense and security sector cooperation in the mainstay of militarized capacitation but also to leverage each other's competencies in addressing newer transnational and non-traditional anxieties in domains of cyber-security, protection of critical digital infrastructure, ensuring the integrity and sanity of technology ecosystem, and insulating sovereign data-pools from predatory mining.

'Sweden' the Regional Sheet-Anchor in India's Outreach

The Stockholm–New Delhi bilateral track marks the latter's strongest suit within the Nordic fold, and

such is the spread-sheet of Sweden-India strategic cooperation and broader politico-diplomatic convergence that the former could veritably be treated as the latter's gateway to the region. Hence, it comes as little surprise that Prime Minister Lofven sojourned to the Make-in-India Week in Mumbai in 2016, with the largest ever business delegation on hand, besides, effusively embracing the Modi bandied idea of an India-Nordic Summit, fructifying its staging as expeditiously as in 2018.¹⁷ The lynchpin of contemporary India-Sweden exchanges are the Joint Innovation Partnership (JIP) pact and the Joint Action Plan (JAP), conceptualizing and operationalizing in-concert endeavors across a slew of strategic portfolios, from crafting defense manufacturing to advents in renewable energy, infusing technological and knowledge innovation to carving smart urban solutions, cyber-security to biosciences cooperation.

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Buttressing Sweden's \$59-million innovation pledge are hand-holding and stake-holding initiatives under the strategic frameworks of collaborative industrial research and development programs, in realms of smart cities, clean technologies, generic digitization, and Internet of Things (IoT) applications—curated cooperative innovation edifice focused on 'digital health', leveraging the instrumentality of AI for innovative, sustainable, and flexible solutions in a pandemic-wake schema—collaborative industrial research and development coalesced around 'SmartGrids', imparting adaptation and mitigation responses to energy utilization, and instilling efficiency to renewable and alternative energies—besides, incubating and pioneering cross-sector futuristic technologies, within a 'Joint Centre of Excellence in Innovation and Entrepreneurship', for mutual harness and commercial global leveraging,

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under prototype institutional partnering of the KTH Royal Institute of Technology and IIT Madras.¹⁸

Sweden has been an ardent supporter of India's progressive integration within the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture and associated missile and materials technology control regimes,¹⁹ even as it was a source of defense acquisition, harking back to the Bofors Anti-Aircraft gun deal of the 1980s.²⁰ Notwithstanding the infamy that accrued to the transaction, emanating from collateral acts of graft, the technical superiority of the military hardware was never in qualm. This has hence allowed Sweden to join the Indian Air Force requirement for inducting 114 Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft, by proffering its SAAB developed top-of-the-line 'Gripen' fighter, under a transactional tranche sale of 18 aircrafts out of Sweden with the bulk to be co-produced in India, in the Strategic Partnership model of AtmaNirbhar (Self-Reliance) smitten Defence Acquisition Policy 2020. The open invitation by India at various forums for Sweden to join the development of defense industrial corridors across a raft of defense production-lines under the Make-in-India defense indigenization strategy is testament to the stellar contribution it can engineer in electronics systems, communications networks, and militarily capacitive, security bolstering allied aerial, land-based and under-water platforms. This said, the diplomatic comfort levels are visible, in New Delhi and Stockholm joining forces in 2019, to co-spearhead the 'LeadIT' (Leadership for Industry Transition) project from the portals of the UN, an initiative that convenes 13 countries and 30 global private sector entities in a unique public-private partnership, seeking to align commercial emission practices of vanguard heavy industry sector conglomerates to decarbonizing footprint goals of SDG 2030 and Net Carbon Neutral 2050.²¹

The Norwegian-Indian Track

From an Indian standpoint, Norway ploughs its furrow within the Nordics as a country that dovetails its rich splendor of blue economy legacy and architecture with financial deep-pockets. And such is the virtually unblemished and irrepressible

techno-industrial infrastructure and experience of the Norwegian oceans ecosystem that it becomes an inescapable partner for an India, which, under its current dispensation, has had no compunctions in publically acclaiming and conceptualizing a Blue Economy strategy as critical and integral to broad-based designs of national security and national development. No wonder then that the New Delhi-Oslo canvas has witnessed an expedited scale-up of normative, conceptual, and operative cooperation, in enterprise and industry, coalesced in blue domain innovation.

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Prime Minister Solberg's visit in early 2019, following on from her government's delineation of the 'India Strategy 2030'²² a year prior, forged the 'India-Norway Task Force on Blue Economy and Sustainable Development'. Within a year of this, the protagonists have proceeded to ink a research and development collaboration framework for integrated management of ocean expanses, which promotes the creative harness of ocean resources, ecologically sentient development of ocean-based industrial tapestry, and responsibility towards replenishing the oceans, by tending to marine flotsam litter.²³ The mutual identification of blue economy as the cornerstone of bilateral cooperation segues well on myriad fronts. It proffers Norway cavernous opportunities, to showcase and leverage strengths in port modernization, redefining of shipping lines through decarbonizing surface fleet industry, and diversified pioneering ocean economy actions of conventional extraction to fisheries occupation, in climate deferent enterprise. These comparative advantages chime with India's own prioritization, of the vast blue space at its disposal, through enunciation of the 2015 SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrinal strategy, and launch of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

template, in collaboration with ASEAN in 2019.²⁴

While incandescently prioritizing blue economy cooperation, Oslo and New Delhi have not been impervious to capturing areas of complementary strategic convergence, in diversified renewable energy sources, scientific and expeditionary polar research, niche higher education, and biosciences based health and healthcare compact, as productive investment avenues for the former's State Pension Fund already staked out to the tune of \$10 billion, out of the approximately \$14-billion Norwegian investment in Indian businesses.²⁵

Denmark and India: Gearing for a Greening Future

Such has been Copenhagen's sterling contribution to the trajectory of global standards of innovation and attendant excellence that we are inured to hearing averment of the 'Denmark Way', an oft-touted sobriquet that constitutes a benchmark of path-breaking but resilient solutions ecosystem, founded in tangible and sustainable experience-practices of pragmatism, performance, and stakeholder participation.²⁶ Both New Delhi and Copenhagen have exhibited enlightened disposition in re-establishing stalled diplomatic ties, over protracted aggravations of the Kim Davy extradition brief, in the Purulia arms and ammunition dropping case of the mid-1990s, with Denmark joining the Vibrant Gujarat Summit, as a partner.²⁷

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that endeavors to build on complementarities in a range of actionable realms—of renewable energy, urban renewal, agriculture and animal husbandry, food processing, science technology and innovation (STI), and the ilk—by pitching for collaboration amongst line ministries, decentralized local state institutions, private sector business and corporations, niche institutions, and societal stakeholders.²⁹ The headline underpinning an expanded canvas of political actions, economic activities, and socially oriented projects is the trenchant inexorable quest for green and smart solutions, to meet sustainable development and climate change mitigation targets, inherent to Denmark and India's 'skill-intermediating with scale' convergent model of innovation.³⁰ As a country with proven expertise, showcased in places as afar as China (clean air strategies) to South Africa (water conservation practices) and Brazil (greater digitalization methodologies),³¹ Denmark is aptly poised to foster effective traction in India's currently pursued flagship projects of 'Water for All by 2024' and 'Sustainable Energy Independence 2030', besides spawning path-breaking 'Waste-to-Wealth' processes for sanitation and litter-dispense, and 'Greening-Smart' options for urban mobility, sustainable living and tourism, etc., bringing instrumentalities of capital, technology, and human skill factor productivity to bear in the soundly framed, outcomes accomplished elixirs, in compositeness. Under the overarching rubric of the Indo-Danish Water Technology Alliance, both sides have accelerated cooperation in full spectrum elements of water harness, involving dimensions of supply, distribution, curative treatment, regulated dispense, source conservation and management, attendant and spin-off energy optimization, and the ilk. This does not detract or dilute from the cooperative mechanism between the Jal Shakti Ministry and the Danish Environmental Protection Agency and the Danish Ministry of Environment and Food which has delineated a three-year Work Plan (2021-2023), towards instituting integrative measures for considerations of food productivity, water efficiency, and environmental regulation and replenish.³²

Instances of 'Udaipur-Aarhus' and 'Tumakuru-

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Aalborg's inter-city cooperation for sustainable urban development are iconic examples of decentralized provincial interaction and collaboration.³³ Notwithstanding the 140 odd Danish companies with footprint across the Indian landscape, Prime Ministers Modi and Frederiksen during their 2020 virtual summit concurred on establishment of a Danish-India Skill Institute, to imbue and impart requisite functional wherewithal; a behooving empowering imperative in a pandemic-wake schema, where workplace contours and future of work is tectonically metamorphosing.³⁴

Finland-India Commune: Finessing a Landscape of Convergence

The Finnish contextualized experience, in curating knowledge frontiers and shaping nuances within generic innovation, renders it a highly advanced, high-income and higher-order sovereign. With specific core competencies and pedigreed performance, Helsinki brings to the India-Nordic high-table, an exquisite proposition in enabling New Delhi find solutions of tomorrow for the problems of today. India and Finland have plausibly identified strategic nodes of convergence, around sunrise ICT cooperation through harnessing full-spectrum competencies in quantum computing and allied technologies; composite build of futuristic mobile technologies and applications, all the way into 6G, 7G, and 8G product research and software development; and vistas of prospective education, with techniques of instruction, methodologies of pedagogy and instruments of learning, being reshaped in wake of a pandemic, but also primed for redesign as part of the landmark New Education Policy 2020 in India.³⁵

The foregoing digital partnership stands complemented in a sustainability compact, anchored in clean energies and shaping industrialization and urbanization patterns consonant with ecology.³⁶ Finland, for its part, has pegged ambitious goals for itself in turning carbon neutral by 2035, and consequently enjoying the distinction of becoming the world's maiden fossil-free welfare state.³⁷ This

aligns congruently with no less ambitious objectives set out in India, which has emblazoned its credentials through a huge domestic push on solar power, and weaned France into building the International Solar Alliance (ISA) platform, for leveraging solar power solutions in developing nations of the Global South.³⁸ India's renewable energy capacity excluding hydroelectric projects has notched 100 GW making it the world's fourth largest in terms of installed green energy capacity, largely achieved since the 2015 projection of erecting 175GW of installed renewables infrastructure, come 2022.³⁹ The Modi-Marin Joint Statement encapsulates integration of water and climate policies, and a shared commitment to promote biodiversity flora and fauna, in aggressively targeting SDGs 6 & 13, on clean water and climate action, respectively.⁴⁰

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A third dimension to Finland-India relations is raising social capital, vide empowering for equitability. Finland sits atop the global pile in being reposed of the largest number of start-ups per capita whereas India is the emerging global hub for technology absorption and leveraging for societally empowered national development, with the fourth largest telecom market, a grossly under-tapped e-commerce locale, not to mention a government whose prioritized pertinacity lies in bridging the crass digital divide.⁴¹ Finland can make significant contributions to Indian flagships of Digital Manufacturing, Start-up India, and the National Skill Development Mission, besides seminal interventions to circular economy platforms, pharmacological value addition, and broad-based virtualization, in diversifying risks for a pandemic world.⁴²

India and Iceland: Thawing an Underexplored Relationship

Despite being arguably the slenderest of New Delhi's slivers, within the Nordic constellation, the purpose inherent in the New Delhi-Reykjavik relationship is far from minimalist or notional.⁴³ The northernmost of the Nordics is enabling India to enrich its cross-sectoral renewables quest for sustainable energy transition, vide a collaborative accord in exploratory commercialization of geothermal energy.⁴⁴ India, having piloted many a scientific expedition to the Antarctica, an Iceland, geographically forged in the Arctic, is a salutary partner in gleaning practices and competencies pertaining to diversified business-prospecting and industry-scoping in the progressively mainstreaming northern ocean.⁴⁵ Furthermore, one cannot but underscore the experiential strengths, which Iceland brings forth in shaping sustainable stakeholder-centric rather than commercialist-oriented models of recreational eco-tourism, situated at the intersection of infrastructure and services' industries. Similar experiences coalesced around optimal fisheries and fish-stock management systems has significant off-take for India, which has identified and prioritized a quantum leap of the industry, through capacitation and policy incentive intervention, notably, in a post-COVID 19 economic revival scenario.■

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