Digital from India: Leapfrogging development through text-enabled citizen-centric governance

by Amb Debnath Shaw

At the 2nd Voice of the Global South Summit hosted virtually by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on 17th November 2023, one key focus area was on, "Sustain the momentum of exchange and sharing of ideas and best practices between member countries…" At the 3rd Summit also hosted by the Indian PM on 17th August 2024, there was focus on, "…challenges of new technologies and need for South-South Cooperation co-operation for technology transfers…". Of the four-fold Global Compact put forward by PM Modi one is on technology sharing. Thus, it is clear, that as a responsible voice of the Global South, India is willing to share its knowledge and expertise acquired in governance and other fields, which accelerate development, and is also keen to learn from other nations.

India's journey in leapfrogging development through tech-enabled citizen-centric governance has been nothing short of transformative. Key milestones in India's digital governance experience have been:

Digital India Initiative - the flagship programme of the Government of India, launched in 2015, with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy;

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) – platforms like Aadhaar (over one billion citizens with a unique digital identity), UPI (with over 18 billion transactions in June 2025), DigiLocker (eliminating the need for physical documents) and e-Sign, have revolutionized service delivery;

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) – India became the first country to use DBT at scale, reducing corruption and ensuring timely delivery of welfare benefits; and

AI Integration in Governance – from grievance redressal systems to predictive analytics in healthcare and agriculture, AI is helping tailor services to citizen needs.

Institutional support and strategic vision to India's Digital Governance is provided by the Digital India Corporation (DIC), under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the National Informatics

Centre (NIC), the National Institute of Smart Governance (NISG) and a Digital Brand Identity Manual (DBIM).

The DIC is responsible for establishing the National e-Governance in Accountability, Efficiency, Efficacy and Transparency, to promote digital literacy, accessibility, and inclusion, to develop and empower skilled manpower, to guide ministries/departments in enhancing accessibility and efficiency in public service delivery, and to support the MeitY in all its endeavours.

The NIC integrates emerging technologies like AI, blockchain and data analytics into governance frameworks.

The NISG acts as a strategic partner in implementing digital transformation across central ministries and states, including international collaboration with Global South nations.

DBIM standardizes government websites and applications for a unified citizen-friendly experience.

Impact on Governance and Society

In terms of Transparency and Accountability, E-governance platforms have reduced bureaucratic opacity and increased public trust.

In terms of Efficiency and Accessibility, public services are now available 24/7, with reduced paperwork and faster processing times.

In terms of Inclusivity, AI-driven tools and multilingual platforms ensure services reach marginal communities.

In terms of environmental benefits, the digital processes have led to paperless offices and reduced carbon footprints.

Some of the **Programmes and Applications** which are noteworthy and have received industry-based awards are:

MyGov.in – a platform to share inputs and ideas on matters of policy and governance, engaging citizens in governance through a “Discuss”, “Do” and “Disseminate” approach

POSHAN Tracker - a mobile-based application used by Anganwadi workers to provide real-time data on the delivery of nutrition and childcare services

DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) is a national platform for school education

AYUSH Information Hub (AIH) has been set up to disseminate all authentic and verified information related to Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy

UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance), for accessing over 1200 central and state government services in multiple languages, including services such as Aadhaar, DigiLocker, Bharat Bill Payment System, PAN EPFO, PMKVY, AICTE, CBSE, etc,

National AI Portal [INDIAai] (https://indiaai.gov.in), is the constant and dynamic source of knowledge on AI related topics

Chic-CAD Plus, is an open-source software used by artisans in making 2D designs like embroidery, chikankari, painting work, etc,.

The **Digital India Campaign** supports other Government of India schemes such as:

BharatNet, - provides broadband connectivity to unserved regions

Make in India – to produce in India for the country and the world

Startup India – aimed at fostering innovation, supporting entrepreneurs and building a robust ecosystem

Industrial Corridors – being developed along new railway and road alignments

Bharatmala - to enhance road connectivity and improve freight and passenger movement through development of highways and economic corridors

Sagarmala - port-led development modernising ports, promoting coastal shipping and boosting maritime activities

Atmanirbhar Bharat, whose aim is to make the country and its citizens independent and self-reliant in all senses. Its five pillars are Economy, Infrastructure, System, Vibrant Demography and Demand

Developed in India – Shared with the World

India ranks high in digital competitiveness among G-20 nations, though challenges remain in data security, cybersecurity and digital literacy. India's model is now being replicated globally, with the India Stack serving as a blueprint for digital governance in other developing countries.

UPI system is operational in Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Singapore and France. It is at various stages of integration in Qatar, Cyprus, Malaysia, Thailand, UK, Oman and Maldives. On 9th July 2025, during PM's Visit,

Namibia became the first country globally to sign a licensing agreement to adopt UPI technology. On 4th July 2025, during his meeting with his counterpart, PM Modi congratulated Trinidad & Tobago on becoming the first Caribbean country to adopt UPI.

Several African nations, Cambodia and the Philippines are keen on replicating India's DPI deployment and India Stack and are availing of capacity building programmes offered by GOI.

DPI, UPI, AI, Aadhaar, DigiLocker, e-Sign, and other digital governance tools have been the subject of discussion and dialogue at the highest levels with countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America, including Singapore, France, Cyprus, Ghana, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Cuba, Argentina, Namibia, BIMSTEC partners, and Central Asian countries.

India is committed to sharing its experience and expertise with its global partners, on using technology for governance and growth. India is also keen to learn and assimilate the positive experience of friendly nations in the development of technology, for the welfare and prosperity of its people.