



INDIAN STAFFING FEDERATION
18TH NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT CONFERENCE

HUMAN × AI
EMPLOYMENT FORWARD

#staffingisgood

EVENT REPORT



19th August 2026

Shangri-La, New Delhi

HUMAN * AI EMPLOYMENT FORWARD



EMINENT SPEAKERS



Sangeet Kumar
Co-Founder &
Chief Executive Officer
Addverb Technologies Ltd



Dr. Shailendra Shukla
Managing Director –
Mobility Group, India
Eaton



Sanjay Bhatnagar
Vice President &
Chief Human Resource Officer
Sony India



Dr. Preet Sandhu
Founder & Managing Director
AVPL International



Sanjiv Kanwar
MD, **Yara South Asia** &
Country Manager
Yara India



Rishmantra Basu
Chief Procurement Officer -
APMEA
Wipro



Sushil Baveja
Chief Human Resource Officer
Jindal Stainless Ltd



Seema Ahluwalia
Chief Human Resource Officer
Sonepar India Pvt Ltd



Abhishek Kumar
Head of People – GSCs & EGI
Ericsson Global & GCCs



Anannya Narain
Head of People & Culture Partner –
Upstream Oil & Gas (ASPAC & India)
bp



Chaitanya Suvanam
National Head - Financial Sponsors
IDFC FIRST Bank



Devanshi Parashar
Head - Talent Acquisition
HCL Healthcare



Joydeep Roy
Partner - Human Resources &
Talent Supply Chain Leader
PwC India



Nitin Sahai
Director – India & Capabilities
Rio Tinto



Amit Srivastava
India Director – GCC/GBS
BT Group



Aarti Kohli
HR Director - India & SAARC
Bausch + Lomb India Pvt Ltd



Pravesh Dudani
Founder & Chancellor
Medhavi Skill University



Vishnu Dev
Partner – People Consulting
Ernst & Young LLP

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



290+
PARTICIPANTS



10+
SPONSORS



170+
COMPANIES



25+
SPEAKERS



6+
SESSIONS



MULTIPLE
NETWORKING
OPPORTUNITIES

The **18th National Employment Conference**, themed **Human x AI: Employment Forward**, brought together India's staffing, HR, technology and policy leadership for a day of keynotes and panel dialogues on the future of work. Discussions ranged across the rise of physical AI and humanoid robotics, the evolving India employment story, manufacturing and green economy job creation, and the human skills that remain irreplaceable even as AI adoption accelerates. Through the day, speakers returned to a common thread: that the next phase of India's growth will be written not by AI alone, nor by human capital alone, but by their combination, with staffing and skill positioned as the connective infrastructure that turns policy and technology into formal, dignified jobs.

WELCOME ADDRESS

Suchita Dutta, Executive Director, Indian Staffing Federation inaugurated the **18th National Employment Conference – Human x AI: Employment Forward** with a warm welcome to speakers, delegates, and ISF members, setting the tone for a day of meaningful dialogue and collaboration. The address highlighted how artificial intelligence is steadily reshaping everyday life and the employment landscape alike, and posed the central question that would frame the day's proceedings: whether technology and the human workforce are truly being kept in balance. She noted that ISF would draw through the day on subject-matter experts from across industry to chart the way forward for India's employment ecosystem toward Viksit Bharat 2047.

The lamp-lighting ceremony that followed brought ISF's board and corporate members to the stage together, ahead of Manmeet Singh's presidential address. Ms Dutta thanked ISF's partner ecosystem — Orion Corporate Alliance as Silver Partner, First Meridian Business Services Ltd as Preferred Partner, Integrated Personnel Services Ltd (IPS Group) as HR Tech Partner, IDFC FIRST Bank as Banking Partner; Futurz Staffing Solutions Pvt Ltd, Calibehr Business Support Services Pvt Ltd and Medhavi Skill University as Associate Partners and Genius HR Tech Ltd, Prompt Personnel Pvt Ltd, Easybillnpay Techno Services Pvt Ltd (StaffingGo), Nelito Systems Pvt Ltd & Talent Recruit as Logo Partners— and encouraged delegates to treat the day as a working conversation rather than a series of one-way presentations.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS



Manmeet Singh, President, Indian Staffing Federation grounded the day's AI conversation in hard employment numbers before anyone touched the technology itself. Citing the Periodic Labour Force Survey and ISF's own research – now referenced in the Economic Survey of India – he noted that of the 56.7 crore people employed in the country, only 14% (7.9 crore) hold formal jobs, while 83.5% remain informal; gig workers, currently at 1.3 crore, are projected to grow to 2.25 crore; apprentices number 12 lakh; and India needs to create an average of 78.5 lakh jobs a year to sustain its growth story. "This room

provides jobs to more than 1.5 lakh individuals every month," he told delegates. "This room powers India – and it's going to keep powering India for the next decade."

He described this as a “watershed year” for the industry: four new labour codes have consolidated central labour laws and brought gig and platform workers formally into the social security net, with EPFO and PFRDA already moving to extend NPS and pension coverage

to gig workers. “It is a watershed moment,” he said. “I have never seen this many changes in one year in 30 years in this industry.” He linked this to ISF's continued advocacy for reducing GST on staffing services from 18% to 5%, and noted growing support from state governments and a formal request to the Union Finance Minister on the issue – advocacy for which ISF was recently recognised by the World Employment Confederation.

Mr. Singh also presented ISF research on where India's next jobs will emerge: beyond the metros, in emerging hubs such as Coimbatore, Indore, Bhubaneswar, Rewa, Sonapat and Thrissur, among others, as e-commerce, quick-commerce and manufacturing expand into Tier II and III India. He closed with a reminder that India's factories remain largely semi-automated and manual, with ISF member companies alone holding around 200,000 open positions at any given time in assembly, warehousing, quality inspection and AI-enabled operations roles – underlining that formal job creation, not job displacement, remains the more urgent challenge of the AI era.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS



Sangeet Kumar, Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Addverb Technologies Ltd's keynote turned to what he called “the other half of AI” – physical AI – drawing on Addverb's journey since 2016 into India's largest robotics company, exporting to 25 countries and employing 1,000 people on roll alongside 2,500 on flexi staff. He pointed to a striking pool of capital: \$50 billion invested in physical AI and humanoid robotics last year alone, second only to AI data-centre infrastructure, and cited multiple industry forecasts that the global robot population could rise from around 150 million today to as many as 10 billion by

2050 – roughly one robot per person, mirroring the smartphone's spread. He explained why humanoid form factors are gaining ground: the built world – factories, homes, tools – is designed for human bodies, so any robot working within it eventually needs to be human-shaped. The current bottleneck, he said, is not vision (where large vision-language models are already mature) but “action” data – teaching robots to move – which is why India has quietly become a hub for jobs collecting egocentric motion data for robotics training.

He closed by stressing that a “human in the loop” will remain a first-order safety principle, meaning the industry's task is not to fear physical AI but to start building the workforce that will design, deploy and supervise it. “The ChatGPT moment for physical AI hasn't happened yet,” he said, “because unlike text, there isn't a trillion-page internet of human movement to train it on. That's the bottleneck – and it's also where the next wave of Indian jobs is quietly being created.”

KEYNOTE ADDRESS



Sanjay Bhatnagar, Vice President & Chief Human Resource Officer, Sony India offered a people-first counterpoint, framing the day's theme as being about “the future of people,” not the future of technology. He argued that the real employment equation of the AI era is not human versus AI but human and AI, and set out three areas organisations must invest in equally: skills (AI literacy, digital fluency, adaptability), competencies (critical thinking, growth mindset, communication and leadership), and culture (inclusiveness, trust and transparency).

He illustrated this with Sony's own AI journey: since forming its AI Acceleration Division in 2025, the company has scaled to roughly 60,000 active users and 150,000 daily AI inferences globally, giving employees access to over 150 large language models through a secured & governed platform. He linked this adoption to Sony's employee-engagement scores, which have risen from the mid-60s to 93 in India and now sit well above the technology-sector average, which is typically in the 70s, attributing this to sustained investment in trust and culture alongside technology.

He concluded that AI cannot replace people, and that responsibility for driving safe, well-governed AI adoption sits with every departmental leader, not a single “AI team.” “Whichever technology comes, AI will not replace people,” he said. “It cannot. People who use AI effectively are the ones who will redefine the future of work.”

SESSION 1:

HUMAN X AI: EMPLOYMENT ROADMAP



Session 1 (L to R): Amit Srivastava, India Director – GCC/GBS, BT Group; Sushil Baveja, Chief Human Resource Officer, Jindal Stainless Ltd; Nitin Sahai, Director – India & Capabilities, Rio Tinto; Anannya Narain, Head People & Culture Partner – Upstream Oil & Gas (ASPAC & India), BP; Abhishek Kumar, Head of People – GSCs & EGI, Ericsson Global India Pvt Ltd; Vishnu Dev, Partner - People Consulting, Ernst & Young LLP

Speakers:

- **Sushil Baveja**, Chief Human Resource Officer, **Jindal Stainless Ltd**
- **Amit Srivastava**, India Director – GCC/GBS, **BT Group**
- **Nitin Sahai**, Director – India & Capabilities, **Rio Tinto**
- **Anannya Narain**, Head People & Culture Partner – Upstream Oil & Gas (ASPAC & India), **BP**
- **Abhishek Kumar**, Head of People – GSCs & EGI, **Ericsson Global India Pvt Ltd**

Session Chair:

- **Vishnu Dev**, Partner - People Consulting, **Ernst & Young LLP**

Chaired by Vishnu Dev, Partner, People Consulting, EY, this opening panel brought together HR, GCC/GBS, mining, oil & gas and manufacturing leadership for a CEO-level, business-outcomes read on where AI genuinely bites by 2030 – not where it makes for a good headline. Abhishek Kumar opened with global adoption data: roughly 9 lakh AI professionals are registered in India against 3.5 lakh job postings, and 70–74% of Indian enterprises have moved from pilot to full implementation. His central image was of the organisational pyramid reshaping into a diamond – entry-level, high-volume roles thinning out even as mid-and-senior capability roles expand, a shift with direct consequences for a staffing industry built largely on bottom-of-pyramid placement. Gartner's projection, he noted, puts 17 crore new jobs against 8–9 crore jobs made obsolete by 2030 – net positive, but only for organisations and individuals that reskill in time.

Nitin Sahai grounded the discussion in Rio Tinto's driverless rail network in Australia's Pilbara region – roughly 2,000 kilometres of fully automated iron-ore haulage with no human driver, running on AI-optimised scheduling and weather-responsive dust suppression. The efficiency gain has been close to 40%, he said, but the headcount impact wasn't job loss – it was redeployment into higher-value work, which is the pattern he expects staffing partners to plan around rather than resist. Sushil Baveja offered the manufacturing counterpoint from Jindal Stainless: AI is already being used to optimise raw-material blending and energy consumption on the shop floor, but the harder, less visible work – cleaning up decades of plant data and standardising it – has to happen before automation can meaningfully touch headcount, giving the workforce a longer runway to reskill than the headlines suggest.

Amit Srivastava offered a more cautious read from BT Group's India GCC/GBS operations: for a global business-services centre at this scale, AI hasn't meaningfully reduced headcount yet, because the underlying IT stack and data standardisation have to be modernised first. He estimated an 18-month runway before real headcount effects show up, and flagged that in the interim, senior technical roles based in India may quietly gain more authority as global functions lean on local expertise to get that modernisation done.

Anannya Narain reframed the conversation around governance rather than adoption. Using AI-assisted travel planning as an analogy, she pointed to the same blind spots showing up inside organisations – algorithmic bias baked into training data, and systems optimised for

convenience rather than long-term strategy. At BP, that has translated into structured checks in the performance-management system to catch bias against employees returning from maternity leave or sabbatical, and into apprenticeship pairings that put a young engineer alongside a 20–25-year veteran who can read early warning signs a model can't yet learn. Asked which human skill AI can never replace, the panel's answer converged quickly: empathy – social and human connection that, as one panellist put it, “will never be there.”

The panel closed on a lighter but pointed note: asked which workforce model disappears entirely by 2030, the consensus landed on repetitive, script-driven call-centre work. The caveat, voiced more than once, was that customer experience itself survives – just relocated up the value chain into judgement-heavy case management roles that still need a human on the other end.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS



Dr Shailendra Shukla, Managing Director, Mobility Group - India, Eaton, reframed the day's central question: not whether AI will affect employment, but how organisations prepare people to succeed alongside it. Using generative-AI-created visuals of an automobile designed by a human, by AI, and by both together, he illustrated his central argument that collaboration – not competition – between people and AI is the way forward, describing the shift ahead

as moving from automate, to augment, to reinvent.

He walked the audience through the widely discussed stages of AI's evolution – narrow, general, super and beyond – noting that human beings remain more capable than AI at the “narrow AI” stage the world is in today, with a projected “singularity” around 2030. “The future will not be AI versus people,” he said. “At least in the short run, it will be people amplified by AI.”

He offered a practical playbook for organisations: identify genuinely repetitive or hazardous tasks for automation, redesign work rather than just individual tasks, build explicit guardrails around data privacy and bias, invest in a continuous skilling engine, and measure adoption against real outcomes such as cost – because unmeasured AI investment tends to stay unmeasured value. He backed this with a labour-cost data point of direct relevance to staffing: an average chauffeur in India costs roughly ₹25,000 a month against roughly ₹80,000 in China, a gap he argued strengthens India's near-term labour-cost advantage even as automation scales, and closed by calling on industry, government, educational institutions and individuals to each play their part in building it.

SESSION 2:

EMPLOYMENT FORWARD: MANUFACTURING | GREEN ECONOMY | MSME'S



Session 2 (L to R): Dr Shailendra Shukla, Managing Director, Mobility Group - India, Eaton; Pravesh Dudani, Founder & Chancellor, Medhavi Skill University; Sanjiv Kanwar, Managing Director, Yara South Asia; Country Manager, Yara India; Dr Preet Sandhu, Founder & Managing Director, AVPL International; Chaitanya Suvanam, National Head - Financial Sponsors, IDFC FIRST Bank; Atanu Banerjee, CEO, Spectrum Talent Management; Corporate Member, Indian Staffing Federation

Speakers:

- **Dr Shailendra Shukla**, Managing Director, Mobility Group - India, **Eaton**
- **Sanjiv Kanwar**, Managing Director, Yara South Asia; Country Manager, **Yara India**
- **Dr Preet Sandhu**, Founder & Managing Director, **AVPL International**
- **Pravesh Dudani**, Founder & Chancellor, **Medhavi Skill University**
- **Chaitanya Suvanam**, National Head - Financial Sponsors, **IDFC FIRST Bank**

Session Chair:

Atanu Banerjee, CEO, **Spectrum Talent Management**; Corporate Member, **Indian Staffing Federation**

Atanu Banerjee opened the session with a sobering capital-markets data point: combined AI capex across Amazon, Meta, Google and Microsoft has gone from \$90 billion in 2020 to \$725 billion last year, against combined revenue of only \$71 billion from those AI investments – a gap the panel returned to more than once as a reason the technology still has real distance to travel before its economics are proven out. Dr Shailendra Shukla, drawing on Eaton's mobility business, named energy transition, digitisation and geopolitics as the sector's three live bottlenecks, and flagged that retraining a mechanically-trained workforce for electrical and chemistry-driven EV roles is proving harder than any single training module can fix. "AI is a problem we can solve," he said. "Don't only bother about it" – the bigger issue is capital allocation between EV, internal combustion and alternate fuels while the dominant technology remains genuinely unclear.

Sanjiv Kanwar laid out agriculture's scale problem plainly: 140 million Indian farmers, a field team of only 2,000–5,000 agronomists at Yara, and productivity running 50–60% below global levels for cereal crops. Yara's response has been to close the loop digitally – 6 million farmers now sit on its Farm Care app, feeding data back to agronomists as a dashboard rather than a surveillance tool. His stated ambition was to move from diagnostic to predictive, warning a farmer 15 days ahead of a pest event rather than after it. "It is not going to help me cut my cost," he said. "It is going to help me make more money. That's how we need to treat it."

Dr Preet Sandhu described AVPL International's shift from manual pesticide-spray training to drone-based crop monitoring, now training rural youth as certified drone entrepreneurs rather than contract labourers – a business model built to survive well beyond any single AI cycle. Chaitanya Suvanam described a four-part underwriting lens IDFC FIRST Bank now applies before extending debt capital to deep-tech and drone-sector startups: technology readiness level, unit economics, team scalability, and the founders' own ability to keep raising equity capital – a framework that has already supported roughly ₹4,000 crore in lending to India's new-economy sector.

Pravesh Dudani brought the discussion back to the classroom, arguing that the gap between academic learning and workplace requirements is now the binding constraint on India's AI-era job creation – not the technology itself. He pushed for apprenticeship and industry-integrated curricula over one-off certification courses, and cautioned the room against treating entry-level trainees as “cheap manpower” rather than investing in genuine skill academies and career ladders – calling that out as a corporate-responsibility failure, not a business strategy.

“If you really want to have Viksit Bharat,” one panellist closed, “it has to be a talent-first augmentation – not only a tech-first one. Unless we do that, every sector will keep fighting the same battle, day in, day out.”

SESSION 3:

Human Edge with Digital Inclusion



Session3 (L to R): Aarti Kohli, HR Director – India & SAARC, Bausch + Lomb India Pvt Ltd; Joydeep Roy, Partner – HR & Talent Supply Chain Leader, PwC India; Seema Ahluwalia, Chief Human Resource Officer, Sonepar India Pvt Ltd; Rishmantra Basu, Chief Procurement Officer - APMEA, Wipro; Devanshi Parashar, Head – Talent Acquisition, HCL Healthcare; Nitin Dave, Board Member, Indian Staffing Federation

Speakers:

- **Rishmantra Basu**, Chief Procurement Officer - APMEA, **Wipro**
- **Seema Ahluwalia**, Chief Human Resource Officer, **Sonepar India Pvt Ltd**
- **Joydeep Roy**, Partner – HR & Talent Supply Chain Leader, **PwC India**
- **Devanshi Parashar**, Head – Talent Acquisition, **HCL Healthcare**
- **Aarti Kohli**, HR Director – India & SAARC, **Bausch + Lomb India Pvt Ltd**

Session Chair:

Nitin Dave, Board Member, **Indian Staffing Federation**

Nitin Dave opened the final panel with a reframe that set the tone for the whole session: technology exists for people, not the other way round. “So tech is for people, and people are not for tech,” he said. “That’s point number one.” Seema Ahluwalia, who holds a combined HR and IT mandate at Sonepar, offered the day’s sharpest one-liner on adoption: “It is not that human is going to be replaced by AI – but people who don’t know AI applications, who don’t increase their efficiency, will definitely be left behind.” Her broader argument was that HR is the heart and IT the brain of any organisation navigating this shift, and the two functions succeed only by working in tandem rather than in sequence.

Asked bluntly whether AI has made consultants redundant, Joydeep Roy reframed the profession’s value chain: data synthesis, first-draft decks and pattern recognition across large datasets are increasingly automated, but the premium now sits squarely on judgement, relationship and the ability to bring something to the table that cannot simply be searched for. “If you can Google it, it’s already present,” he said – the differentiator has shifted from billable hours to genuinely scarce expertise.

Aarti Kohli made a related point through a sharper analogy: would anyone in the room choose a doctor purely because they had access to the latest machines? The differentiator, she argued, is the practitioner’s judgement and ability to diagnose – technology brings faster diagnosis, but not the trust that sits underneath it. Rishmantra Basu extended the same logic to procurement, arguing that negotiation and long-term supplier relationships remain a distinctly human skill even as data-driven sourcing tools mature: “as Aarti was saying, it’s like doctors, but also professionals” – trust becomes more valuable, not less, precisely as the underlying technology becomes more commoditised.

Devanshi Parashar brought the discussion back to healthcare directly, asking the room a pointed question: why is it the only industry with the word “care” built into its name? Wearables and diagnostics can track a heart rate continuously, she said, but almost no one in the room, asked directly, wanted to be treated by a fully automated, faceless clinician – a reminder that trust-based sectors will keep needing a human at the point of decision no matter how far the underlying technology advances.

On reskilling, the panel converged on three practical pieces of advice for the room’s own workforce: build AI literacy without necessarily chasing an AI-engineering career, champion the tasks AI genuinely cannot do – judgement, ambiguity, problem-solving – rather than competing with AI on speed, and treat learning agility as a permanent skill rather than a one-time training milestone. Aarti Kohli, reflecting candidly on her own teenage son’s career choices, admitted that even HR professionals are unsure whether a traditional degree still guarantees the outcomes it once did.

The session closed on a coinage the room visibly warmed to – staffing not simply as recruitment, but as accountability. “The connotation of staffing is deployment,” as one panellist put it, distinct from recruitment's more passive hand-off. “Staffing is capability. Staffing is compliance.” “Technology is transactional,” came the closing line. “The behaviour and the craft are relational.”

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF INDIAN STAFFING FEDERATION



(L to R): Somnath Banerjee, Board Member, Indian Staffing Federation; Nirupama Vellore Ganapathy, Board Member, Indian Staffing Federation; Narayan Bhargava, Board Member, Indian Staffing Federation; Mamneet Singh, President, Indian Staffing Federation; K Pandiarajan, Board Member, Indian Staffing Federation; Nitin Dave, Board Member, Indian Staffing Federation.

Board members of the Indian Staffing Federation shared highlights from the federation's Annual General Meeting, held the previous day, outlining a growth agenda built around five pillars: GST reform, regional expansion, workforce policy, talent supply chains, and the health of member businesses. They reported that ISF's membership, currently around 125+ organisations, is targeted to grow to nearly 300 by the end of the financial year, supported by newly formed zonal convenor structures for the North, South, East and West to extend formal staffing into smaller cities.

In a notable governance decision, the board disclosed that it had agreed, within minutes of discussion at the AGM, to reserve 30% of board seats for women – a move linked to the staffing industry's own workforce, where women make up a large share of employees at many member organisations. As part of Staffing Excellence Recognition 2026, eighteen best-practice initiatives submitted by member companies were showcased and documented in detail.

Board members closed the segment on a personal note, describing staffing as “a life well-lived” profession – one job, and one family, at a time. “If you give a job to one person and help one family build their life,” as one board member put it, “I think it's a life well-lived” – and reaffirmed the federation's commitment to advancing formal employment across India.

VOTE OF THANKS



Nirupama Vellore Ganapathy, Board Member, Indian Staffing Federation thanked the day's speakers, panellists, session chairs and sponsors for what she called a thoughtfully curated day. She recapped the conference – Manmeet Singh's opening reminder that the staffing industry exists to power India's jobs and formalise its workforce with dignity; Sangeet Kumar's look at humanoid robotics and physical AI; Sanjay Bhatnagar's counterpoint on irreplaceable human empathy and judgement; Session 1's honest read on AI-linked job creation and disruption toward 2030; Dr Shailendra Shukla's call to augment rather than resist; Session 2's reminder

that every new technology brings both challenge and opportunity across manufacturing, the green economy and MSMEs; and Session 3's closing message on staying relevant through continuous learning.

She summarised the day's single thread: that AI is not about automation, but about reinvention, and that the task ahead for the employment and staffing community is to build a future-ready Indian workforce that keeps the human at its center. She closed by thanking the ISF members, partners, speakers and delegates, and invited the room to carry the day's conversations back to their organisations.

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The Future of Employment Wasn't
Just Discussed.
It Was Reimagined.



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INDIAN STAFFING FEDERATION

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