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Foreign employers must rethink wages as India's blue-collar workforce gains bargaining power

By VS Abdulkareem
(President- IPEPCIL)

India's blue-collar labour market is undergoing a significant transformation, challenging long-held assumptions among foreign recruiters. For decades, jobs abroad were considered highly attractive due to salaries that far exceeded what workers could earn in India. Today, however, that equation is changing rapidly.



Strong growth in India's infrastructure, manufacturing, logistics, construction and services sectors has created unprecedented demand for skilled blue-collar workers. Elec-

tricians, welders, plumbers, machine operators, technicians, drivers and construction specialists are now commanding substantially higher wages at home than they did a decade ago. In many cases, workers are finding that the financial advantage of migrating abroad has narrowed considerably.

Yet many overseas employers continue to offer salary packages that have seen little meaningful revi-

sion over the past 10 to 15 years. While living costs, skill levels, and employment opportunities have changed dramatically, compensation structures in some foreign labour markets have failed to keep pace.

Industry observers note that if foreign employers wish to continue attracting experienced and reliable Indian workers, they must recognise the new (Cont. on page - 2)

Mumbai Port Authority handles 2.4 lakh cruise passengers



MUMBAI: Mumbai Port Authority (MbPA) handled more than 2.4 lakh cruise passengers and 95 cruise vessels during the financial year 2025-26, reinforcing

its position as a key gateway for India's growing cruise tourism sector.

According to data released by the port authority, a total of 2,40,346 pas-

sengers travelled through Mumbai's cruise facilities during the year. Domestic cruise operations accounted for the bulk of traffic, with 87 vessels carrying 2,26,837 passengers, while eight international cruise ships brought 13,509 passengers through the port.

JNPA Retains India's Top Port Ranking, Secures 22nd Spot Globally In World Bank's CPPI 2025.

The traffic figures come at a time when the Centre is pushing to expand cruise tourism as part of its broader maritime and tourism strategy. Mumbai's role (Cont. on page - 6)



AI's basic fare category offers extra baggage allowance

MUMBAI: In a widely anticipated move, the Tata Group-owned Air India has introduced a new "Basic" fare category for Economy Class passengers on select domestic routes.

While the Basic fare category includes a 15 kg checked baggage allowance, seven kg cabin baggage allowance and complimentary beverage

service (tea/coffee), the complimentary meals are excluded.

Air India said that the Basic fare, currently trialled on select domestic routes, is entirely optional and travellers continue to have the choice of booking across Air India's existing fare families - Value, Classic and Flex - each of which (Cont. on page - 2)

SalamAir wants to set up base in Goa, Navi Mumbai

MUSCAT: Oman's national budget airline SalamAir is exploring new destinations in India and plans to set up a base in Salalah to expand operations in the South of Oman.

Adrian Hamilton-Manns, CEO of SalamAir said: "We will be looking at Goa in Western India besides the Navi Mumbai as it will give us more frequency into the Mumbai region. We are still governed by the bilateral agreement and that's being worked on with civil aviation authorities to increase frequency



so we can add more destinations. We'd like to go to more different destinations like Nepal and Kolkata.

The CEO said that while the airline would like to have more destinations in India, such as Hyderabad, Nagpur and Guwahati, (Cont. on page - 2)

Dr Mukesh Batra honoured with Skål Asia Personality award

MUMBAI: Padma Shri Dr Mukesh Batra was honored with the Skål Asia Area Personality of the Year 2026. This prestigious award was presented to him at the 55th Skål International Asia Congress held in Macau.

Dr Batra is currently the president of Skål International Mumbai South. Dr Batra is the pioneer of modern homeopathy

in India and the founder of Dr Batra's Healthcare, the world's largest chain of homeopathic clinics.



A leading homoeopath with 50 years of experience, Dr Batra feels that chronic stress, nutritional gaps, poor sleep and modern lifestyles are affecting the health of the people. He blames the toxic atmosphere for this condition rather than bacteria and viruses. Dr Batra marks the milestone with Toxic his 11th book.

(GLIMPSES ON PAGE 7)



And now to Europe

Europe is passing through an unprecedented aging crisis. Across the continent, falling birth rates and rapidly aging populations are creating massive labour shortages that threaten economic stability, healthcare problems and industrial productivity while India is smoothly sailing through its own unique demographic phase, boasting the world's largest youth population with over 65pc of its citizens under the age of 35. The European Union's labour market is under severe strain. According to Eurostat data, the working-age population in the EU is projected to shrink by millions over the coming decades, while the dependency ratio continues to climb.

This stark contrast presents a compelling economic synergy, raising a critical question: Can India effectively supply the manpower that Europe desperately needs? But, Europe is not Gulf. Europe needs well trained workforce. While India possesses the raw numbers to fill Europe's demographic deficits, transforming this potential into a seamless labour supply chain requires overcoming significant structural, linguistic and regulatory barriers. Germany, Italy and several Central European nations are already experiencing acute deficits in highly skilled sectors like Information Technology, engineering and healthcare, as well as essential service sectors like hospitality, logistics and eldercare. To maintain its global competitiveness and sustain its social welfare systems, Europe cannot rely solely on internal automation or shifting retirement ages; it must aggressively source external talent.

India stands out as the most logical partner to address this deficit. The country adds about 12 million people to its workforce annually. This demographic dividend means India has a surplus of both white-collar professionals – such as software developers, doctors and financial analysts – and blue-collar or grey-collar workers, including construction specialists, nurses and hospitality staff. Furthermore, India's education system produces millions of English-speaking graduates every year, giving Indian labour a distinct communication advantage in the global market over competitors from other regions.

While the US (with rigid visa regimes) used to be the default destination, the EU has emerged as an attractive alternative by offering important benefits. True, financial savings might not match the US, but Europe provides superior job security, healthcare and an improved work-life balance. Countries such as Germany and the Netherlands offer high-quality, low-cost higher education, leading Indians to account for the highest share (20.8pc) of EU student residence permit.

Despite the clear alignment of supply and demand, India cannot automatically fill Europe's talent gap without addressing several entrenched challenges. While English proficiency is high among India's elite white-collar professionals, it is not so among vocational and blue-collar workers. Furthermore, many European nations, such as Germany, France and Japan require proficiency in their native languages.

Additionally, Indian vocational certifications do not always align with strict European industry standards, necessitating extensive retraining. Historically, European immigration policies have been fragmented, bureaucratic and cautious. Obtaining work visas, navigating complex point-based systems and securing the mutual recognition of professional qualifications remain slow and cumbersome processes for Indian applicants.

As is known, immigration is a highly sensitive political issue within the EU. Balancing the economic need for foreign labour with domestic political pressures regarding cultural integration and border control often leads to hesitant policy implementation. The Union government is taking several actionable steps to increase safe and regulated labour mobility to Europe. Both sides must treat human capital as a shared strategic asset.



SalamAir wants to set up base...

(Cont. from page - 1) besides the already mentioned Navi Mumbai and Goa, the first step will be to increase frequencies on the routes currently served by the airline.

Manns said that for the growth of passenger traffic through Muscat Airport, one needs to be more aggressive and that falls on the airlines to do that. So we are still struggling. "We've got 33pc of our fleet still grounded because there are no engines. We will add three more aircraft this year to take our fleet to 18. Once the aircraft comes back with engines, then you'll see a lot of growth. And obviously, India is a powerhouse of growth for us.

So it would be something and it's a market that's well used to low-cost travel, so it fits really well in our business strategy." The new routes will be launched as per the plan, which includes Vien-

AI's basic fare category offers extra...

(Cont. from page - 1) includes complimentary meals and a range of bundled benefits at progressively higher price points.

The introduction of Basic fare simply adds another layer of choice, particularly for price-conscious travellers who prefer a more unbundled offering, added the full-service carrier.

It was widely reported that to cut costs amid surging losses, Air India will axe the complimentary meal service and make it optional. The move comes in the backdrop of curtailed domestic and internation-

Foreign employers must rethink...

(Cont. from page - 1) realities of the labour market. Competitive salaries, better working conditions, improved accommodation and stronger career prospects will increasingly determine recruitment success. The era when foreign jobs automatically attracted India's best blue-collar talent is fading. In today's market, skilled workers have more choices than

na (Austria) on June 24, Medan (Indonesia) on July 12, Kigali (Rwanda) on July 21 and Mogadishu in Sept. "The only one that's not on track that we announced is Damascus, purely because we just don't know the security situation." The CEO added: "Everyone's been travelling. The hard thing is that the fuel prices have increased and the fares have to increase. Lower fares will encourage more people to travel again. But from our perspective, we've actually been quite insulated from the Gulf sit-

uation. We lost services to Iraq and Iran, but we are not heavily reliant on the Western side. We've closed Doha, and we do fly to Bahrain and Dubai. We're not in those markets. So it hasn't affected us."

He added, high fares forced to increase the fares, but you don't fully recover. And obviously, so a lot of the people who bought flights in March, April and May already purchased them at a lower price when fuel was at \$95 a barrel. So you can't recover everything and it will impact us.

Navi Mumbai Airport to go international on July 15

MUMBAI: The Adani Group-owned Navi Mumbai airport is expected to start international operations from the greenfield facility from July 15.

Along with international passenger flights, the Navi Mumbai airport will also commence international

freighter operations. The Adani Group-owned airport, the second airport in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, had commenced domestic flight services from Dec last year. "On July 15, we are starting with freighters and we expect to start international (Cont. on page - 6)

al operations as higher jet fuel prices, falling rupee and airspace closures continue to wreak havoc on the profitability of India's aviation sector.

Air India last month had announced that it has temporarily reduced its international flight capacity by approximately 27pc cutting around 145 weekly flights between June and August. The carrier also reduced up to 22pc of its domestic flights in an effort to cut costs. Singapore Airlines' annual financial statement revealed that Air India's losses stood at about \$2.8

billion last financial year (FY26), its biggest annual loss since the airline was taken over by the Tatas in 2022.

Air India said that by unbundling certain services, it is enabling price-conscious travellers to pay only for what they need, while preserving full-service offerings for those who value an all-inclusive experience.

The Basic fare is currently available on select domestic routes and Air India will assess customer response and feedback during the pilot phase to guide decisions on the future of the offering.

Travellers booked on Basic fares will have the flexibility to pre-purchase meals up to 24 hours before departure, with options including vegetarian, non-Vegetarian, Jain and diabetic meals. In the event of a schedule change or reaccommodation, pre-purchased meals will be automatically transferred to the new flight, or fully refunded if unavailable for any reason.

LIPSYNCH

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US-Iran MoU signed electronically, formal Geneva ceremony on June 19

TEHRAN: In a major diplomatic development, Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei confirmed that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the US and Iran has been finalised and signed electronically by both sides, marking a significant step toward easing long-standing tensions.

The agreement, reached after intense negotiations, is expected to move into its next phase with a formal signing ceremony scheduled to take place on June 19 in Geneva, where

representatives from both countries are likely to officially endorse the deal.

The MoU is being seen as a possible turning point in US-Iran relations, with hopes that it could open the door for wider discussions on regional stability, economic co-operation, sanctions-related issues, and nuclear concerns.

The development comes at a critical time for the global economy, with energy markets closely watching West Asia for signs of stability. Diplo-



mat and analysts say the success of the agreement will depend on mutual trust, implementation, and continued dialogue.

If successfully carried forward, the Geneva signing could mark a shift from confrontation to diplomacy and offer a renewed opportunity for peace and stability in the region.

FOREX RATES
As on 18th June 2026 (In rupees)

Currency	Bill Buy	Bill Sell
US Dollar	93.8	95.05
British Pound	125.94	127.75
Euro	108.57	110.88
Japanese Yen	58.51	59.44
Swiss Franc (CHF)	117.9	120.48
Canadian Dollar	66.71	68.22
Australian Dollar	66.05	67.49
Norwegian Krone	9.79	10.08
Swedish Krona	9.92	10.2
New Zealand Dollar	54.38	55.6
Hong Kong Dollar	11.82	12.19
Kuwaiti Dinar	313.381	294.98
Singapore Dollar	72.86	74.52
Saudi Arabian Riyal	24.67	25.45
U A E Dirham	25.27	26

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GULF FAQS

Is a verbal termination legal?

I was verbally informed in May that my employment had been terminated. However, despite my requests, I have not received a termination letter or any written confirmation of my employment status. I emailed the employer seeking clarification but have received no response for more than a week. Additionally, my final salary remains unpaid, along with two months of commission. Does a verbal termination have legal standing without a written letter in UAE?

Losing your job is stressful enough but being let go verbally, with no letter to show for it, creates a whole other set of problems. Under UAE Labour Law, termination notice must be given in writing, meaning an employee must be given a written letter. Does a verbal termination have legal standing without a written letter?

According to Ludmila Yamalova, Founder and Managing Partner of HPL Yamalova & Plewka FZCO, a verbal termination alone is generally not enough. "The UAE Labour Law requires termination notice to be given in writing. Under Article 43 of Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021, the terminating party must notify the other "in writing." A purely verbal termination does not

meet this requirement," Yamalova said.

The burden of proving that a termination took place also falls on the employer. "An employee's end-of-service entitlements are determined as of the date of termination and it is the employer who must prove what that date is," she said. Without such proof, the employee can argue that their employment is still ongoing.

A verbal termination can carry more weight if either party follows it up in writing. However, Yamalova cautions that emails sent by the employee chasing a response are not enough on their own. "If the company does not acknowledge those emails, the silence can actually be used by the employee as proof that no termination was ever intended."

The situation changes if the employee themselves confirms in writing that they were verbally terminated and then stops coming to work. "Under certain circumstances, a court may construe this as a valid termination --- the written follow-up shows the employee's acknowledgement, and their decision not to return to the office is them acting on it."

A verbal termination by the employer, on its own, is usually not enough. In



fact, the UAE Labour Law requires termination notice to be given in writing. Specifically, under Article 43 of Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 on the Regulation of Labour Relations, the party terminating the contract must notify the other party "in writing." A purely verbal termination therefore does not meet the statutory form.

What can an employee do if their employer refuses to confirm their employment status in writing? According to Yamalova, employees have several options depending on what they ultimately want to achieve.

1) Keep showing up to work: If the employee wants to protect their rights, they can continue coming into

the office as normal until the employer confirms their status in writing. On that basis, they can claim entitlement to end-of-service benefits throughout that period.

2) If the employer blocks access to the workplace The same logic applies even if the employer physically or otherwise prevents the employee from coming in. The absence of a written termination can still be used as evidence that

3) "The employer's refusal to let the employee come in and perform work is not proof that the employee is no longer employed, the company may simply not want them to work. The burden remains on the company to prove it terminated

the employee. Without that proof, the employment may be viewed as still active."

3. If the employee wants to leave Where the employee wants to move on, the burden shifts to them to establish that a verbal termination did take place. Written follow-up becomes essential here.

"Multiple follow-ups by the employee requesting confirmation, especially if the employer fails to respond would help establish that the termination was real and that the employee did not simply abandon their job."

Can employer file absconding report?

Technically yes, but Yamalova explains it is unlikely to hold up. "To make the absconding report stick, the employer needs to show more than mere absence. It should have evidence that it asked the employee to return and they refused, or that the employee was completely unreachable. This matters because the seven-day window exists precisely to give the employee a chance to account for their absence and a legitimate reason defeats the report."

The legal basis is Article 44(8) of Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021, which treats unexplained absence of more than seven consecutive days as potential grounds for the employer to act.

There is also an important procedural point: an absconding report generally cannot be filed if the employee already has an active labour complaint or lawsuit pending against the employer, under Ministerial Resolution No. 47 of 2022.

Employers should also be aware of the risks of filing falsely. "Abandonment reports are used far more cautiously now than in the past.

A false report can result in fines of between Dh5,000 and Dh10,000 from GDRFA Dubai, suspension of the employer's file, which blocks further sponsorship until resolved and potential liability for false reporting beyond the labour-law penalties."

Can non-compete clause apply outside UAE?

I resigned from my old company five months ago. I had signed a non-compete and non-disclosure agreement with that company for two years. I was surprised when the company filed a lawsuit against me seeking compensation for losses incurred due to my alleged breach of the non-compete agreement, based on the claim that I attended a meeting outside the UAE with a competitor, where I was introduced as the CEO of that company. My question is, do they have the right in their case?

According to Article (10) of Federal Decree Law No. 33 of 2021 If the work assigned to the worker allows

him to gain knowledge of the employer's clients or have access to its work secrets, the employer may require that the worker, under the employment contract, shall not, after the expiry of the contract, compete with the employer or be engaged in any competing project in the same sector, provided that the requirement is specified in terms of time, place and type of work, to the extent necessary to protect legitimate business interests. The non-competition period shall not be more than two years from the expiry date of the contract.

For a non-compete agreement between an employee and an employer to be valid, the prohibition

of competition should be relative, meaning it should be restricted by time, place, type of work and only to the extent that it achieves a legitimate interest for the employer.

An absolute prohibition of competition completely disregards the worker's freedom. Therefore, if the meeting happened outside the UAE, then the non-compete condition loses its validity requirements and is void because it is not permissible for it to extend to another country. Moreover, the company is obligated to provide evidence and specify what secrets you revealed, along with the harm it claims to have suffered as a result of the alleged non-competition.

Delhi-NCR gets second aviation hub as IndiGo starts Noida operations

NEW DELHI: IndiGo on Monday became the first airline to commence commercial flight operations from the newly inaugurated Noida International Airport (NIA) at Jewar in UP, marking a significant milestone for the National Capital Region's aviation infrastructure.

The airline's first arrival at the airport came from Lucknow, followed shortly by the inaugural departure to Bengaluru, formally launching passenger services from the greenfield airport.

With the start of operations, IndiGo will connect Noida International Airport directly to more than 16 destinations across India. The network will also facilitate several one-stop connections between smaller cities and major urban centres, strengthening re-

gional connectivity and improving travel options for passengers.

The new routes are expected to enhance access between tier-II and tier-III cities and key metropolitan markets, reducing travel times and expanding air connectivity for business and leisure travellers alike. Alok Singh, Chief Strategy Officer, IndiGo, said the launch represented an important moment for Indian aviation, with Delhi-NCR joining a small group of global metropolitan regions served by multiple commercial airports.

Located along the Yamuna Expressway, Noida International Airport is expected to play a key role in easing capacity constraints in the Delhi-NCR region while emerging as an im-

portant aviation, logistics and economic hub.

Christoph Schnellmann, Vice Chairman of Noida International Airport, said IndiGo's entry marked the beginning of regular passenger operations at the

airport and would provide travellers with greater flexibility and convenience from the outset.

He added that the airport operator would work closely with the airline to deliver a seamless passen-



ger experience while supporting growth in aviation, trade and tourism across northern India.

The airport's first phase has been developed with the capacity to handle approximately 12 million passengers annually. The operational infrastructure includes a runway, an integrated passenger terminal and an air traffic control tower.

The commencement of services is expected to further strengthen connectivity in the region and support the growing demand for air travel in one of India's fastest-expanding economic corridors.

FARM EXPORTS HIT \$53BN

India's mango exports reach 45 countries

NEW DELHI: The rise in mango exports comes amid strong growth in India's agricultural and processed food exports, which reached \$53 billion in the last financial year.

India's mango exports have expanded to more than 45 countries this season, with shipments to the US already surpassing last year's full-season volumes nearly a month before the season concludes, APEDA Chairman Abhishek Dev said.

Dev said exports to the US, the world's largest

mango importer, are on track to grow by more than 30pc this season based on current trends. To sustain this momentum, the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has launched mango promotion campaigns across major US cities, which includes Seattle, Los Angeles, Washington, New York and Atlanta.

Furthermore, the push extends beyond the US as well, with promotional events held in nearly 20 countries this year, including the Czech Republic, Malaysia, Spain, the UAE and Oman. Dev said he expects India's overall mango exports to double over the next one to two

years on the back of this expanded outreach.

The rise in mango exports comes amid strong growth in India's agricultural and processed food exports, which reached \$53 billion in the last financial year. This has helped India maintain its position among the world's top 10 agricultural exporters despite competition from countries such as the US, Brazil, China and members of the EU. Dev said India's export basket has also become more diversified over the years. The number of products exported has increased from around 280 a decade ago to nearly 500 today, out of a possible 790 products listed under APEDA's schedule.

Singapore urged to invest in Andhra

SINGAPORE: Highlighting the investor-friendly policies, abundant resources and world-class infrastructure, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has urged Singapore industrialists to make Andhra Pradesh their preferred investment destination.

Addressing the CII Partnership Summit Roadshow in Singapore ahead of the upcoming Partnership

Summit in Visakhapatnam, the chief minister described AP as a model state for investments and economic growth. He said AP enjoys a long-standing and productive relationship with Singapore. He recalled Singapore's contribution to the development of Hyderabad earlier, and its pivotal role in preparing the master plan for Amaravati after the bifurcation of AP.

Mumbai Port Authority handles...

(Cont. from page - 1) has strengthened further with the commissioning of the Mumbai International Cruise Terminal, currently the country's largest cruise terminal.

The facility, spread across more than 4.15 lakh sq ft, has the capacity to handle up to 10 lakh passengers annually and process up to 10,000 passengers a day. Cruise vessels with a carrying capacity of up to 4,500 passengers can be accommodated at the terminal.

Industry experts believe the terminal provides Mumbai with the

infrastructure required to emerge as a major cruise hub on the western coast and support the Centre's ambitious cruise tourism targets. The government's Cruise Bharat Mission, launched from Mumbai, aims to significantly increase cruise traffic, destinations, terminals and passenger volumes over the coming years. At the ASEAN-India Cruise Dialogue held in June 2025, Union Minister Shipping Sarbananda Sonowal had stated that India aims to develop 5,000 km of navigable waterways and tar-

get one million cruise passengers by 2029 under the Sagarmala programme.

Mumbai Port Authority officials said operational reforms have also improved the ease of doing business for cruise operators. These include revised standard operating procedures, guaranteed berthing facilities, removal of ousting charges, digital customs processing, QR code-based immigration clearance, concessional tariff support and extension of cabotage relaxation for passenger vessels until February 2029.

Navi Mumbai Airport to...

(Cont. from page - 2) pect the freighters to ramp up to almost 18 weekly flights.

Good news is also that there is movement on the passenger side and hopefully on July 15 international passenger flights will also start," Navi Mumbai International Airport Ltd (NMIAL) CEO BVJK Sharma, told reporters on the sidelines.

Sharma further noted that both "Air India Express and IndiGo are going to operate international flights from Navi Mumbai."

Member (Customs), a senior official within the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), reviewed the readiness of the airport (for international operations) and relevant notifications have been promulgated, he said.

GLIMPSES OF DR MUKESH BATRA HONOURED WITH SKAL AWARD

