

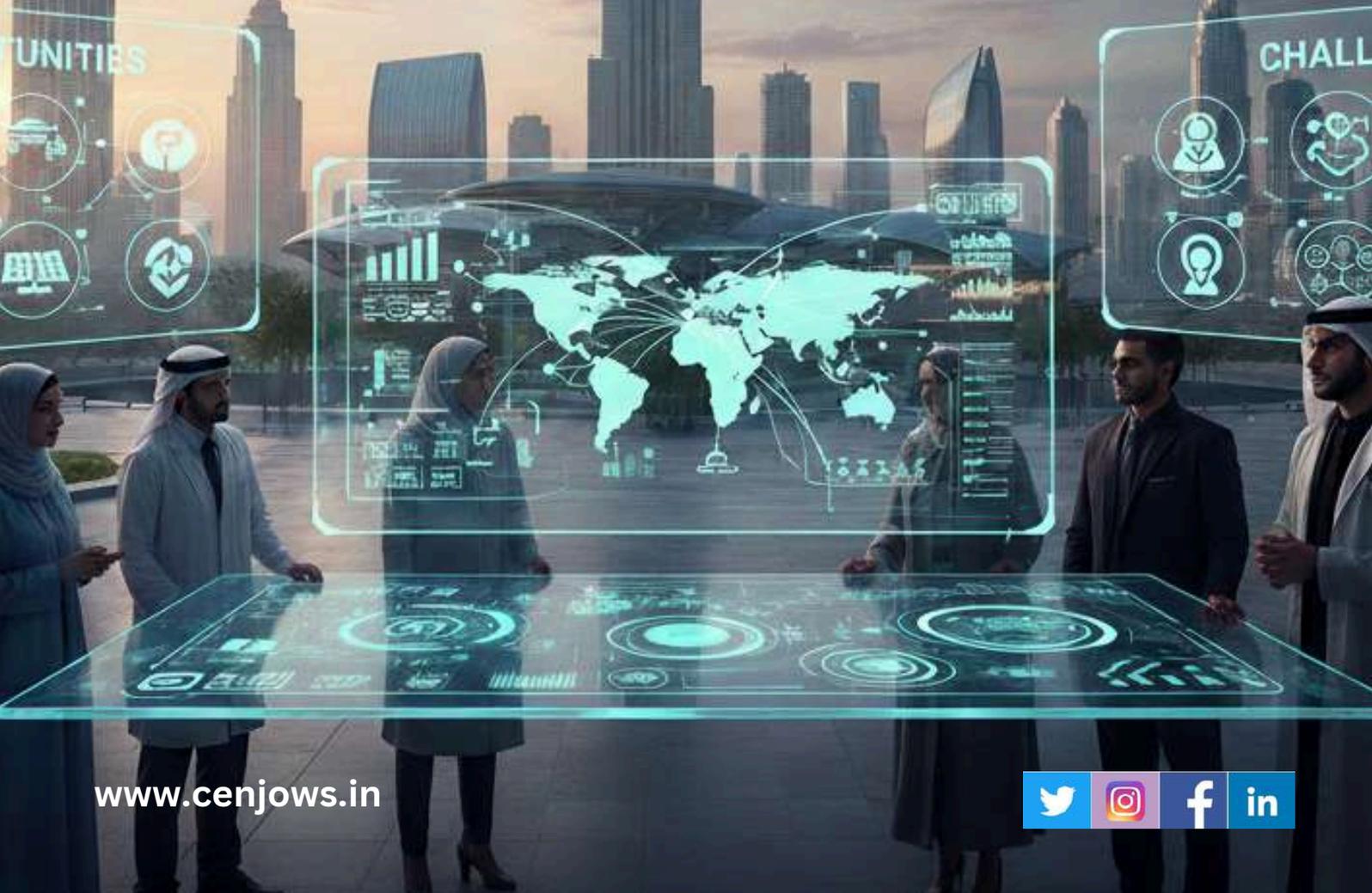


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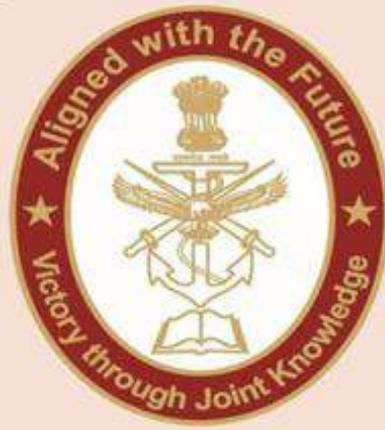
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INDIA-UAE COOPERATION IN EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Introduction

Emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, etc., are redefining the international system not only through socio-economic advancement but also by reshaping the boundaries of the global geopolitical landscape. The race to lead the AI ecosystem has intensified across the globe with nation-states establishing cross-border partnerships through bilateral, minilateral, or multilateral initiatives, and India-UAE is no exception. In the past decade, the UAE has emerged as a major pillar of India's outreach to the West Asian region. Moving beyond the traditional cooperation areas of trade, oil, and remittances, both nations have made concerted efforts to identify new avenues of collaboration and make the partnership future-oriented and multi-dimensional in nature. Political willingness, shared regional concerns, and personal rapport between the top leadership have reinvigorated the bilateral ties. Since 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made seven visits to the UAE, and the UAE's President Sheikh Mohammed bin-Zayed Al-Nahyan (MBZ) has visited India five times, with the most recent visit in January 2026. This visit lasted for only three hours, underscoring the depth and

maturity of India-UAE relations “*beyond the formalities of diplomatic maneuvering and protocol.*”ⁱ A major highlight of MBZ’s latest visit was agreements signed and announcements made in sectors such as the space industry, digital innovation, supercomputing technologies, and data embassies.ⁱⁱ With technology becoming the core of the bilateral ties, it is necessary to understand the opportunities and challenges involved in the realm, particularly from the perspective of India’s national interests.

Pillars of Cooperation in Emerging Technologies and Opportunities for India

Both India and the UAE have established themselves as major innovation and entrepreneurship hubs of the 21st century, driven by strong policy support, targeted investments, and an aspiration to develop indigenous solutions to the emerging problems. Projects like Startup India, Make in India, and Digital India have helped New Delhi’s technological ambitions increase by leaps and bounds, giving tangible results. With over two lakh startups recognised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, India has emerged as the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, India’s IT industry revenue has more than doubled in the past decade, from US\$118 billion in FY-2015 to US\$283 billion in FY-2025.^{iv} Similarly, the UAE’s vibrant digital ecosystem has more than 5,600 active startups, and over 550 fintech companies,^v accelerating its non-oil economy and economic diversification goals. As India aims to develop its digital economy to US\$1 trillion by 2030^{vi} and the UAE aspires to increase the digital sector’s contribution to more than 20% of its GDP by 2031,^{vii} the shared aspirations and complementarities have helped foster a sustainable partnership between the two countries at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

At the bilateral level, for the first time in February 2022, a vision statement titled ‘*Advancing the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership: New Frontiers, New Milestones*’ identified critical technologies as one of the main pillars of cooperation.^{viii} Since then, both countries have signed various agreements in the field of fintech, agri-tech, healthcare, clean energy, climate technology, and the space sector. A major initiative in this regard has been the establishment of the UAE-India Startup Series by the UAE-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) Council. Its primary aim is to provide a soft landing to select Indian startups for “expansion into the international markets through incubation and ecosystem integration,”^{ix} by providing

access to the UAE-based innovation hubs and free trade zones. To further accelerate the digital cooperation, an agreement was signed in November 2025 between Hub71, Abu Dhabi's leading tech ecosystem, and the UAE-India CEPA Council to facilitate "investment access and market entry routes for startups."^x These agreements have opened up a large market in the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region for emerging Indian startups, with increased opportunities for funding and scaling at the global level.

At the multilateral level, both countries are also cooperating under the I2U2 (India, Israel, the United States, the United Arab Emirates) grouping in areas such as energy, space, and technology, among others. In September 2023, an MoU was signed between the UAE-India Business Council, the US-UAE Business Council, the UAE-Israel Business Council and the US Office of the Under Secretary for Economic Growth, which established the I2U2 Private Enterprise Partnership.^{xi} This public-private partnership aimed to mobilize the "private sectors within the I2U2 countries to identify, explore, and participate in specific projects,"^{xii} with a focus on key sectors, namely, technology, health, energy, space, transportation, and food security. Besides, under the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), both countries are also working on the two key sub-components, namely, the Digital Infrastructure or Data Corridor and the Green Energy Corridor.

With this context, the following section explains the India-UAE technological cooperation in three sectors, namely, fintech and digital innovation, space technology, and green energy, along with the geoeconomic and geostrategic advantages that this cooperation holds for New Delhi.

Space Technology

Both India and the UAE are key players in the space sector, and both bring to the table their unique specialties. India has decades of experience in the sector and comes with high-precision, cost-efficient technologies and strong institutional mechanisms. On the other hand, to transform its oil-based economy into a knowledge-based economy, the UAE has invested heavily in its space research and development ecosystem. Organisations like the Emirates Institution for Advanced Science & Technology and Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre have acted as a catalyst in making the country

a prominent regional leader in the sector.^{xiii} The UAE has become the first Arab country to launch the Mars Mission and the second country after India to enter the Mars Orbit on its first attempt.

Complementary ambitions to become dominant space powers and shared views against the weaponisation of outer space have provided an impetus for the India-UAE partnership in space technologies. Formally, space diplomacy between the two countries kicked off in 2016, when the UAE Space Agency (UAESA) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) signed an MoU with the aim of 'exploration and use of Outer space for peaceful purposes.'^{xiv} Just after one year of signing the agreement, ISRO launched the UAE's first nanosatellite, Nayif-1, using the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C37), highlighting the enhanced mutual trust between the two countries.^{xv} A breakthrough in space technology cooperation happened when a Chennai-based company, ST Advanced Composites (STAC), manufactured and supplied the structural components of the UAE's first-ever lunar rover, 'Rashid.' Along with giving a boost to the bilateral ties, this partnership also enhanced the "*spirit of India's Make in India movement in the aerospace industry.*"^{xvi}

The growing synergy and mutual trust between the two countries in this sphere hold many opportunities for India. New Delhi can explore the co-development of satellite systems useful for addressing mutual challenges in agriculture, urban planning, disaster management, logistics, transportation, and maritime security, among others. Besides, the UAE's global hotspot cities like Dubai and Abu Dhabi, equipped with cutting-edge infrastructure, provide an enabling environment to the emerging Indian private space sector for growth and exposure at the global level. Companies like Agnikul, Pixxel, and Skyroot have already established their base in Dubai. The recent letter of intent signed between the UAESA and the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) are a major step in this regard. It has identified areas like 'setting up new launch complexes, satellite fabrication facilities, joint missions, space academy, and training centers,'^{xvii} which will help in developing an integrated space ecosystem and the commercialisation of private space companies.

Digital Innovation and FinTech

Cooperation in the fintech sector is one of the new avenues of cooperation that has revolutionised the partnership between New Delhi and Abu Dhabi, making it future-oriented and compatible with the new realities of the 21st century. In August 2019, India's RuPay Card made its inroad in the UAE banking market^{xxviii} and in February 2024, the Instant Payment Platforms (IIPs) of both countries, India's UPI and the UAE's AANI, were interlinked,^{xxix} facilitating seamless, safe, and faster cross-border transactions. Besides, both countries have also interlinked their national domestic card schemes, RuPay (Indian) and JAYWAN (Emirati) cards. It is interesting to highlight that the JAYWAN card has been built on the RuPay card stack, and the NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL) has guided the Al Etihad Payments (AEP) in implementing and operationalizing it in the UAE.^{xx} This decision has helped in synergising the digital ecosystem between the two countries, making it easy for 4.3 million Indian diaspora to send remittances in real-time, for tourists to make payments, and for investors to do business by reducing cost and strengthening financial connectivity. Furthermore, in March 2023, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates (CBUAE), signed an MoU to "explore interoperability between the Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) of CBUAE and RBI."^{xxi} Linking CBDCs will also lower the transaction costs for investments and trade payments by reducing the excessive reliance on intermediaries like the international SWIFT system.^{xxii}

To further boost the digital interoperability, both countries have launched the India-UAE Virtual Trade Corridor (VTC) in September 2024. The corridor forms an integral part of the IMEC and operates using the Mater Application for International Trade and Regulatory Interface (MAITRI) platform.^{xxiii} It aims to tackle a critical bottleneck in trade cooperation, that is, long administrative approval processes by reducing paperwork and integrating customs and regulatory frameworks.^{xxiv} However, the January 2026 visit of the UAE President, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, to New Delhi can be regarded as an inflection point in expanding digital diplomacy between the two countries. The following table explains the same: -

Announcements	Aim	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To Establish a Supercomputing Cluster in India 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The announcement aims to set up a supercomputing cluster in India through collaboration between the G-42 (a UAE-based company) and C-DAC India. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will help both public and private sectors in research & innovation, and application development. Can further deepen the cooperation in AI and big data analytics. Will strengthen India's position as a global hub for digital innovation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To set up offices of the UAE companies in the GIFT City, Gujarat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dubai-based global giant DP World and the First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB) will establish their branches in the GIFT City, Gujarat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will strengthen digital integration. Will deepen trade and investment cooperation by improving the ease of doing business through regulatory integration. Will enhance the GIFT City's role as a global digital services hub.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To Establish Digital Embassies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The announcement aims to explore the possibility of establishing digital or data embassies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will improve digital trust by enhancing cross-border data security and sovereignty.

	between the two countries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can accelerate partnership in cyber diplomacy and digital governance.
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Table 1.1: Expansion of India-UAE Digital Cooperation (January 2026 Visit of Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to India) **Source:** Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.^{xxv}

For New Delhi, the deepened digital integration will not only enhance the global competitiveness of startups and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) but also facilitate the growth of Indian exporters in the WANA market, particularly in the light of increasing US tariff diplomacy.

Green Energy Technology

Cooperation in the green energy sector has become one of the defining features of the India-UAE multidimensional partnership. Both countries are facilitating each other's energy transition and low-carbon growth through various bilateral and multilateral projects in solar, wind, nuclear energy, and green hydrogen. Moving beyond the traditional phase of buyer and seller of hydrocarbons, the first MoU on renewable energy cooperation was signed by the two nations in January 2014. Since then, both countries have significantly expanded the scope and scale of engagement in the clean energy sector. For instance, under the I2U2 grouping, the UAE has invested US\$330 million in establishing a 300 MW hybrid solar and wind power project in Dwarka, Gujarat.^{xxvi} Besides, in October 2024, Emirates signed an MoU with the Rajasthan government and pledged to invest ₹3 lakh crore to set up hybrid energy projects of 60GW capacity in the western districts of the state.^{xxvii}

A breakthrough in the clean tech cooperation happened in September 2024, when the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited and the Emirates Nuclear Energy Company signed an MoU to cooperate in civil nuclear energy. The agreement focused on "sharing of operational expertise, human resource development, the provision of nuclear consulting services,"^{xxviii} among others. Through the agreement, India is providing technical assistance to the UAE in operationalizing its first nuclear power

plant in Abu Dhabi. This collaboration brings a critical opportunity for New Delhi to leverage its nuclear expertise and promote the domestically developed pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs) globally.^{xxix}

Coming to the green hydrogen cooperation, India’s Green Hydrogen Mission and the UAE’s National Hydrogen Strategy exhibit various complementarities. Both nations want to position themselves as top players in the green hydrogen global supply chain by enhancing production and export capacity. As the table below highlights, in terms of levelized cost of hydrogen (LCoH), both New Delhi and Abu Dhabi already lead with US\$2.7/kg LCoH and US\$3.2/kg LCoH, respectively, and are projected to further decrease to US\$1.7/kg LCoH for the UAE and US\$1.8/kg LCoH for India by 2030.

Country	LCOH (US\$/kg, 2023)	LCOH (US\$/kg, 2030)
UAE	2.7	1.7
India	3.2	1.8
Saudi Arabia	2.9	1.8
Chile	3.4	2.1
Chinese Mainland	3.1	2.4
Egypt	3.8	2.3
United States	3.9	2.5
Australia	4.5	2.7
Argentina	5.2	3.1
United Kingdom	5.0	3.5

Table 1.2: Green Hydrogen Price at Production Location **Source:** Alvarez & Marsal.^{xxx}

This cost-competitiveness is a key enabler for New Delhi to decarbonise its carbon-heavy industries like steel, cement, fertilisers, etc. and enhance its export to the markets that are moving towards low-carbon products, such as Japan, the European Union, and South Korea. Furthermore, New Delhi can also leverage the vast investment capacity and technological expertise of the UAE and accelerate its move towards achieving the 5 million metric ton (MMT) green hydrogen production target by 2030.^{xxxi}

Challenges

The following are the three main challenges that above mentioned sectors face:

- **Structural and Regulatory Gaps in the Space Sector:** Despite the signing of various MoUs by the two nations, a critical gap still exists in the space sector cooperation. The difference in the governance models and regulatory procedures of both countries presents a major obstacle to the fast implementation of jointly initiated projects and private sector integration.
- **Constraints related to Finance and Infrastructure in the Green Tech Sector:** Green tech partnerships between India and the UAE are affected by various challenges such as high capital requirements, constraints in grid connectivity, and delays in land acquisition, among others. Finding solutions to these bottlenecks is very crucial for rapidly scaling the joint missions, especially in the strategic green hydrogen sector.
- **Concerns related to Cybersecurity in the FinTech Sector:** The increasing reliance on cyber technologies simultaneously increases the chances of cyberfraud. Data suggests that there was a 15% surge in cyberattacks in the Indian financial sector in 2025, while the scheduled commercial banks recorded around 248 cases of data breach.^{xxxii} Besides, the UAE also faces around 200,000 cyberattacks on a daily basis.

Recommendations

- **Creation of a Joint Space Tech Research and Development Hub (STRD):** Both countries can work towards the establishment of a joint STRD hub, which will help in bringing all the relevant stakeholders together, such as governmental institutions, private partners, and academia, therefore, reducing the structural gap. On the other side, it will also facilitate the joint development and design of satellite and launch systems.
- **Joint Cybersecurity Council in the FinTech sector:** To secure the integrated digital ecosystems from potential cyberattacks, creating a cybersecurity council will equip both nations with advanced technologies necessary for thwarting cyber risks through real-time intelligence sharing, threat analysis, and coordinated response.
- **Conducting Exchange Programs for Joint Skill Development:** To further deepen the cooperation in the digital sector, both countries can work towards bringing together the experts, engineers, scientists, and students through skill

development programs. This will help in bridging the talent gaps while creating an integrated human resource pool.

Conclusion

As the above discussion highlights, both India and the UAE have made tremendous progress in developing their own AI ecosystems. A forward-looking and solution-oriented approach will help them in achieving their ambitious goals of becoming global hubs in the emerging technologies sector. Together, they possess the capability to develop a model partnership and help the Global South in reducing its dependence on Western powers for technology transfer. As India's ambassador to the UAE, Dr. Deepak Mittal has said, *"the India-UAE relationship is no longer defined by geography; it is defined by closeness of purpose and unity of vision. This partnership is about more than economics or strategy. It is about believing in each other, nations growing together, and futures being shaped jointly."*^{xxxiii}

DISCLAIMER

The paper is the author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS, the Defence forces, or the Government of India. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished, and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

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