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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Stage is Set — India's Live Events Economy and the Promise of the Creative Sector

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India's creative economy — live events, music, film, sports — is growing rapidly. What policy framework is needed to unlock its full potential? How does it connect to India's employment challenge and soft power?"

When the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting announced the Live Events Development Cell (LEDC) in January 2026, it was acknowledging something that economists and cultural industry watchers have long argued: India's creative economy is no longer a sideshow to manufacturing and IT. At ₹20,861 crore and growing at 18% annually, India's organised live events sector alone is a significant economic force — and the LEDC represents the first serious attempt to treat it as such.

THE CREATIVE ECONOMY — SCOPE AND SCALE

The **creative economy** encompasses industries that generate value from creativity, culture, and intellectual property. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) defines it broadly to include:

Creative industries: Film, music, performing arts, visual arts, fashion, design, architecture

Cultural tourism: Heritage tourism, festivals, pilgrimage circuits

Media and entertainment: Broadcasting, publishing, digital content

Sports: Events, broadcasting rights, merchandising

India's creative economy scale:

Film: India is the world's largest film producer by number of films (~1,800+ films annually); Bollywood exports content across South Asia, Middle East, and diaspora markets

Music: India's recorded music market is ~\$230 million (2024); streaming-driven growth; Bollywood and regional music

Live events: ₹20,861 crore organised market (2024); growing 15-18% annually

Gaming: India's gaming sector is ~\$3.1 billion (2023); 500+ million gamers

OTT: India has 40+ OTT platforms; ~100 million paid subscribers; largest content producer outside USA

Employment scale: The broader creative and cultural sector employs an estimated **7-10 million people** in India. This is comparable to the textile manufacturing sector.

THE LIVE EVENTS SECTOR — WHY IT MATTERS

Live events — concerts, sports events, theatre, festivals, comedy shows — are economically distinct from other creative industries because they are **non-tradeable**: they are consumed in person, in specific locations, generating local economic multiplier effects.

The multiplier effect: A large live event (a major music festival, an IPL match, an international concert) generates:

Direct spending: Ticket sales, merchandise, food and beverage at venue

Indirect spending: Hotels, transport, restaurants, local retail in the host city

Induced effects: Jobs created by the direct and indirect spending

According to LEDC data, a single large event generates **15,000+ direct and indirect jobs**. For Tier 2 and 3 cities — where the growth is fastest (Visakhapatnam +490%, Vadodara +230%) — live events are a significant economic development tool, not merely entertainment.

The Tier 2/3 revolution: India's live events market is no longer confined to Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru. The combination of rising disposable incomes, improved infrastructure (better airports, hotels), and the Instagram economy (where attending events is social currency) is creating a new geography of entertainment spending. Visakhapatnam's 490% growth in entertainment consumption is the most dramatic example — reflecting both Andhra Pradesh's economic rise and the city's emerging status as a destination.

THE POLICY GAPS LEDC MUST ADDRESS

The live events sector has operated without adequate policy support for decades. The LEDC is designed to be a single-window mechanism, but it must address several structural gaps:

1. Music rights and licensing complexity: A live event in India requires licences from the Performing Rights Society of India (IPRS), PPL India (Phonographic Performance Limited), and venue owners. The process is fragmented, expensive, and not standardised. The LEDC is supposed to coordinate with music rights societies — how effectively it does so will determine whether licensing becomes simpler or remains a barrier.

2. Regulatory fragmentation: A large event (10,000+ attendees) requires clearances from local police, fire department, municipal authority, noise pollution board, and electricity department. Different states have different rules. There is no national standard. The LEDC's single-window function is most valuable here.

3. Taxation: GST on live event tickets ranges from 18% to 28% — among the highest entertainment taxes globally. High tax rates constrain ticket affordability, reducing the audience for live events and making India uncompetitive as a destination for international tours. India has consistently missed on major international concert tours (Taylor Swift, BTS, Coldplay) because the economics do not work.

4. Venue infrastructure: India's dedicated live event infrastructure — purpose-built arenas with modern sound, lighting, and staging — is concentrated in a handful of cities. Outside Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru, most events are held in improvised venues (stadiums, open grounds, heritage sites) with inadequate infrastructure.

5. Artist visa facilitation: International artists face bureaucratic delays in obtaining visas and work permits for India. This discourages multi-city tours and reinforces India's reputation as a difficult market.

THE SOFT POWER DIMENSION

India's creative economy is also a soft power instrument. Bollywood has long been India's most effective cultural export — more people in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia know India through its films than through any other medium. The live events sector extends this soft power:

Yoga and Indian classical arts: Global yoga industry is ~\$180 billion. India's classical dance, music, and yoga are premium cultural exports — from international yoga festivals to classical music performances at UNESCO venues

Indian festivals abroad: Diwali in London's Trafalgar Square, Holi in New York's Times Square — these are brand moments for India

Diaspora engagement: Live events by Indian artists touring the US, UK, Australia, and UAE are the primary cultural connection for the Indian diaspora (~35 million strong)

The LEDC should think beyond domestic economic value to India's creative soft power potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

GST rationalisation: Reduce GST on live event tickets below 10,000 capacity to 12%; maintain 18% for large premium events. This expands the market.

National event facilitation platform: A digital platform where event organisers apply for all clearances simultaneously; LEDC coordinates across departments

Arena infrastructure fund: PPP scheme to build 10 world-class arena venues (20,000+ capacity) in Tier 1 cities and 20 smaller venues (5,000 capacity) in Tier 2 cities within 5 years

International artist visa fast-track: 15-day guaranteed processing for international performing artists, with a single online application

Intellectual property reform: Simplify music licensing by moving toward a single blanket licence covering both composition and performance rights (as exists in the USA with ASCAP/BMI/SESAC)

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

LIVE EVENTS DEVELOPMENT CELL (LEDC):

Ministry: Information and Broadcasting (MIB); Minister: Ashwini Vaishnaw
 India live events market (organised): Rs 20,861 crore (2024); growing at 15%
 Projected: 18% CAGR; expected to be among global leaders by 2030
 Employment: 10 million+ direct/indirect; 15,000+ per large event
 Tier 2/3 growth: Visakhapatnam +490%, Vadodara +230%, Shillong +213%, Guwahati +188%
 Live entertainment consumption: +17%; theatre attendance: +45%; inter-city travel for events: +18%

INDIA'S CREATIVE ECONOMY:

Film: World's largest by volume (~1,800+ films/year); Bollywood exports reach 50+ countries
 Music: ~\$230 million recorded music market; India 14th largest global music market
 OTT: 40+ platforms; ~100 million paid subscribers; India 3rd largest streaming market
 Gaming: ~\$3.1 billion market (2023); 500+ million gamers
 Creative sector employment: ~7-10 million (estimate)

CREATIVE ECONOMY — GLOBAL CONTEXT:

UNCTAD Creative Economy Outlook 2022: Global creative exports ~\$1 trillion annually
 South Korea's hallyu (Korean Wave): ~\$12 billion annual cultural export (K-pop, K-drama); soft power model
 UK Creative Industries: ~£116 billion GVA; 2.3 million employees

MUSIC RIGHTS BODIES IN INDIA:

IPRS: Indian Performing Right Society — administers copyright for composers and lyricists
 PPL India: Phonographic Performance Limited — administers rights for record labels
 Issue: Two separate licences required for live performances; process not standardised

GST ON ENTERTAINMENT:

Live concerts/theatre: 18% GST (events with tickets below Rs 250 may be exempt)
 Cinema: 12% GST (tickets below Rs 100) and 18% (above Rs 100)
 Amusement parks: 28% GST
 Comparison: USA has no federal entertainment tax; UK entertainment VAT: 0% on live performances

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Coldplay India Tour (2025): highest-grossing India concert series; ~4 lakh tickets; showed demand for world-class live events
 IPL (Indian Premier League): world's richest cricket tournament; ~Rs 20,000 crore season revenue; broadcast rights Rs 48,390 crore (2023-27)
 India's Diwali in UK: London's largest Diwali celebration (Trafalgar Square) attracts 60,000+ annually
 Prasar Bharati: public broadcaster; AIR + Doordarshan; mandate includes cultural promotion and minority language broadcasts

Sources: Mint, Ministry of I&B, PIB, FICCI-EY Media Report

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