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Mr Nitin Desai is a distinguished economist and a well-known voice in public policy fora nationally and internationally, especially in the sustainable development sector. He was in the Planning Commission (1973-88) and later served as the Chief Economic Adviser and Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, in the Ministry of Finance (1988-90). He also served as Senior Economic Adviser for the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) where he introduced the concept of sustainable development.

He was the Under Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs in the UN, where his major contributions included the organization of a series of global summits, notably the Rio Earth Summit (1992), the Copenhagen Social Development Summit (1995), the Monterrey Finance and Development Summit (2002) and the Johannesburg Sustainable Development Summit (2002). He oversaw the creation of the Commission on Sustainable Development in the UN, and was the first Under Secretary General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.