INDAIA: How To Lead The Coming Tech Revolution

Startups, techies, industry acceptance, government backing: the elements are all there. India, which just hosted a global AI meet, will simply have to build on them

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The India-hosted Global Partnership on AI concluded yesterday. Here is a heart-warming story on this new tech. Deep in the densely forested heartlands of India, at the border of Maharashtra and Telangana, an innovative Indian startup is weaving a tale of transformation. UdyogYantra, a New Delhi based venture is quietly revolutionising nutrition in Etapalli, a remote block in Gadchiroli district.

Food for thought | A pilot project started in one school in the block has an AI-enabled machine built by the startup. It takes photographs of young children with their plate of mid-day meals. Without any human intervention, the machine assesses the quality of the food in line with the specific nutritional requirements of the child. This has helped the district administration identify not only malnourished children but also critical nutrients lacking from meals, as well as quantity and quality issues.

Grassroots reach | This is just one stellar example of how the benefits of cutting-edge AI are reaching grassroots. Through the AI-powered Bhashini application, GOI is helping citizens access digital services in over 121 Indian languages. The PM KISAN scheme now has an AI chat-bot, which will be available in 22 languages and will assist and empower farmers.

Opportunity, not threat | The world is gripped by anxiety around AI disrupting the job market as it stands. India, given its success in taking technology to the last mile, can turn this into an opportunity. AI can reshape India's economic landscape. We have the richest demographic dividend and the highest penetration of AI talent in the world. India's workforce must be equipped with the right skills to ride and rise with the AI wave.

AI-economy | AI is predicted to contribute nearly a trillion dollars to India's economy by 2035. In the near term, it is poised to inject approximately \$450-500 billion into the nation's GDP by 2025, representing a significant 10% of India's goal of achieving a \$5 trillion GDP.

New job market | In a recent survey covering over a thousand Indian employers, an astounding 85% of organisations predict that AI will generate new job opportunities in the next 1-5 years, and enhance the quality of jobs. Additionally, 77% of employers believe AI will boost job security and career development. This sentiment is shared by the workforce, with job seekers expecting AI to increase work efficiency, aid in skill development, enable complex problem-solving, and prioritise employment based on skills over experience.

Roles of the future | As India Inc deploys AI, India will need more AI experts. Roles such as data scientists, machine learning engineers, AI researchers, and algorithm developers will become the jewels of the job market. The emergence of 'prompt engineers', a term that was virtually non-existent a few years ago, is a great example of new jobs. These experts, adept at harnessing the potential of Large Language Models, have rapidly ascended to become highly sought-after professionals in today's job market.

Boost upskilling and reskilling | A study by ServiceNow and Pearson forecasts that by 2027, a remarkable 16.2 million workers in India will be reskilling and upskilling to keep pace with technology. The study highlights that this technological wave is anticipated to generate over 4.7 million new technology jobs. It is crucial to recognise that the transformative influence of AI extends far beyond the technology sector, equalising opportunities across various fields like healthcare, education, manufacturing, retail and banking.

Indian AI pioneers | AI-focused entrepreneurship is the other growth area. From just 18 AI-centric startups in 2021, there are 60-plus generative AI startups in India in 2023. Millions of dollars of investment have flown in. Dehaat is providing agricultural finance solutions to farmers. Artpark is a not-for-profit driving technology milestones in AI and robotics for social good. Atom360 is working to make healthcare affordable and accessible to all.

A revolution India can lead | In the 18th century, India missed a major opportunity to lead the era of innovation following the first Industrial Revolution. However, this time we are better prepared to be at the helm of the approaching revolution. India has the capability to become the world's premier incubator for exceptionally skilled AI workers.

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