

Modi asks global tech CEOs to be part of India story, and they say, 'Yes, sure'

This Amid US Trust In Tie-Ups With India Powered Partly By PIO CEOs

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: He once joked that the first word children in India utter is AI (mother in some Indian languages). He later wisecracked that AI means artificial intelligence for the world, but for him, it also meant American-Indian spirit. All kidding aside, PM Modi offered a full-spectrum embrace of the rapidly evolving field, saying it could address many issues in another AI — 'Aspirational India' — despite apprehensions in some quarters that it could dampen job creation in a country with a massive unemployment problem.

In a meeting Sunday in New York with 15 corporate titans, including AI leaders Jensen Huang of nVidia and Sundar Pichai of Alphabet/Google, Modi displayed immense enthusiasm and little hesitation in embracing the evolving technology landscape during what his office called a 'deep dive' into the subject. Asserting that India's policy is to promote 'AI for all',

underpinned by its ethical and responsible use, he invited tech companies to take advantage of India's growth story for collaboration to co-develop, co-design and co-produce in India for the world.

The PM's pitch impressed the CEOs, including nVidia honcho Huang, who has powered the company towards the USD 3 trillion club (behind only Apple and Microsoft), and who emerged from the meeting saying, "Modi is an incredible student. Every time I meet him, he wants to learn more about technology." Talking up nVidia's already significant collaborations in India, Huang pledged more, gushing: "AI really democratizes computing, and this is India's moment."

Google's Sundar Pichai, hot on the heels of nVidia for AI leadership, likewise spoke of taking up Modi's challenge of doing more in terms of AI to benefit the people of India. "He challenged us to think about applications in healthcare, education, agriculture, and he's also thinking about



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the infrastructure of India, be it data centres, power, energy and investing to make sure India can transition. We are robustly investing in AI in India, and we look forward to doing more," he said.

While CEOs of major pharma & biotech companies, including Eli Lilly, Bristol Myers Squibb, Moderna, and Biogen, attended the meet, AI and its leap into India hogged the limelight at a time Washington is getting increasingly leery of technology transfer, while at the same time trying to make an India exception.

David Ricks, CEO, Eli Lilly, said the pharma company plans to grow its already large research-based centre in India. "More importantly, the

products we make, particularly for common conditions like obesity, diabetes which inflict so many Indians — we will be bringing to this market at scale, partnering with other Indian firms, with producers in India and helping people with healthier life in India... It is an exciting moment to work with India," he said.

Praising Modi's leadership, Accenture CEO Julie Sweet said: "I was very excited to hear about the commitment of so many other companies like Accenture to continue to grow our business in India and to have our individuals in India serve the globe." Expressing enthusiasm about India's growing technology and manufacturing potential,

HP Inc CEO Enrique Lores said: "We're clearly appreciative for the PM to learn and understand what we need to continue to expand in India. We just announced that we are expanding our manufacturing capabilities in India."

While US academia and tech companies are rapidly dialing down on collaboration with China and inflow of Chinese students in advanced tech studies in the US is dwindling, India is enjoying an extended honeymoon, although it is hard to say how long this will last. At the Quad summit over the weekend, New Delhi found itself buttonholed into a de facto security alliance against a Beijing-led axis, even as the situation on the border with China appears to be de-escalating.

US trust in tie-ups with India is powered partly by the many Indian-Americans heading US tech companies. At least three attended the meeting with Modi — Google's Pichai, IBM's Arvind Krishna and Adobe's Shantanu Narayen. At the meet, Modi assured business leaders of India's 'deep commitment' to protection of intellectual property, a constant bugaboo for the US administrations.