

Singur Hydroelectric Project logs fourth highest generation of 20 million units

Sangareddy: The Singur Hydroelectric Project generated 20 million units so far beginning April 1, 2024. Most of the power was generated during September and October. While TG Genco generated 7.27 MU in September, it generated 5.7 MU until October 17. The project has two 7.5 MW capacity hydropower units which were installed after the project was constructed across River Manjeera at Singur village in Pulkal mandal in 1998.

Since the hydropower units were commissioned, TG Genco has generated more power only three times than this year. Genco generated a record-breaking 30 MU in 2022-23. Until this year, the 25.68 MU generation in 2010-11 was the highest ever. Genco could generate more than 20 MU only four times in the 27 years of the project history including this year. Since Singur has to release irrigation water downstream for Yasangi needs in Sangareddy and Medak districts, the hydroelectric project will be operational until April. The officials are expecting the power generation to cross 21 MU this year by March 30. The power generated here is connected to 132 KV substations located in Sadasivapet and Jogipet towns. TG Genco Chief Engineer, V Ramesh Babu said it was among the most fruitful years for Genco since the project was commissioned.



Drop in groundwater levels add to concern in Telangana

Hyderabad: Groundwater levels in Telangana have witnessed a sharp decline in the past few months, raising alarm across the state. According to the latest report from the Telangana Groundwater Department, groundwater levels have dropped by two meters or more in some of the districts. During the tenure of former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhara Rao, Telangana experienced the highest groundwater rise in the country, transforming even dry lands into rich groundwater zones. Under the current Congress rule, the situation has taken a different turn, with paddy fields drying up and farmers and the general public facing water shortages.

The situation worsened further by the drying up of a 120-km stretch of the Godavari River, which was once brimming with water due to the construction of three barrages—Medigadda, Annaram, and Sundilla. These barrages, intended to boost agriculture and stabilize the groundwater table, have been left non-functional under the pretext of structural issues. Adding to the challenge, the failure to maintain the Mission Bhagiratha supplies in certain pockets has forced people to rely on bore wells for water extraction, de-

spite the high fluoride content in regions like Nalgonda. The decline in groundwater levels has been attributed to alleged mismanagement of irrigation projects, particularly the neglect of the Kaleshwaram and Palamuru-Rangareddy lift irrigation schemes.

Pressure is mounting on the government to take immediate action to address the water shortage and protect the state's irrigation progress. A recent comparison of the 2024 and 2023 groundwater assessment reports reveal that Telangana has recorded the steepest decline in net groundwater availability for future use. The state has experienced a significant drop of 2.88 billion cubic meters (bcm) in groundwater levels. Following Telangana, other major states such as Gujarat (0.48 bcm), West Bengal (0.35 bcm), and Bihar (0.32 bcm) have also reported notable declines. The decline in groundwater availability is attributed to several factors, including increased extraction for irrigation and industrial purposes. It is coupled with inadequate rainfall. This has led to concerns about the sustainability of groundwater resources. Failure to give water to the Rabi farmers under the SRSP stage II, has forced farmers to sink bore wells in a big way as an

instant solution. The situation is so grim that a distraught farmer attempted to suicide trying to consume poison as all his efforts to save his withering crops drew a blank in KudaKuda village of Suryapet district. Hundreds of farmers are going in for drilling new bore wells in a big way in the district and the new addition could add up by two per cent to the existing number of bore wells. This is just a repeat of what had happened in the entire command of Nagarajuna Sagar left canal ayacut during 2023-24 spread over the Nalgonda district. The Krishna projects received no significant inflows for two consecutive years forcing a crop holiday in the region. But the farmers did not relent. They drilled more bore wells and continued with the paddy cultivation as usual. The January 2025 groundwater report for Telangana highlights a worrying trend in the state's water resources. The report indicates an annual drop in water levels compared to the previous year. Yadadri Bhongir District registered the highest decline with water levels dropping by 2.71 meters. The Medchal-Malkajgiri district saw a drop of 1.97 meters. Rangareddy district had experienced a decline of 1.47 meters. The



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Bhadradi Kothagudem district reported a decrease of 0.72 meters. Additionally as per the January 2025 report the average depths to water levels with big variation are 12.28 metres in Vikarabad, 12.29 meters below ground level, 11.57 metres in Medchal-Malkajgiri, 11.48 metres in Kamareddy, 11.31 meters Rangareddy, 10.60 meters in Siddipet, 10.27 metres in Sangareddy and 10 metres in Yadadri Bhongir

AI's environmental costs should be counted now

The technology has permeated almost every facet of daily life. From cooking recipes, to designing work-out plans, writing songs and screenplays, and even writing code for complex mathematical programmes, AI can do almost everything, even alter images.

But, if experience has taught humanity anything, it may perhaps be prudent to start counting AI's environmental costs right now instead of retrospectively five decades from now as in the case of the industrial age. And to achieve that, one must also let go of the belief that the use of digital technology is somehow independent of resources: both human and material. Kate Crawford in the introduction to her book *Atlas of AI* argued, "...artificial intelligence is both embodied and material, made from natural resources, fuel, human labour, infrastructures, logistics, histories, and classifications." Quantifying human labour, especially of people employed in lower middle income countries, is a herculean task, with even governments failing to represent the numbers and the contribution of their people in blue collar jobs. So perhaps a look at how technology works? As with any digital technology, the life cycle of AI can broadly be divided into hardware and software. The first begins from manufacturing that includes raw material extraction, component production (processors, memory, storage), assembly of AI hardware, installation in data centres, power and cooling infrastructure setup. Software lifecycle, meanwhile, starts with data collection, model development, initial training and testing and validation before it can be deployed. The next obvious question is: how is this harmful for the environment?

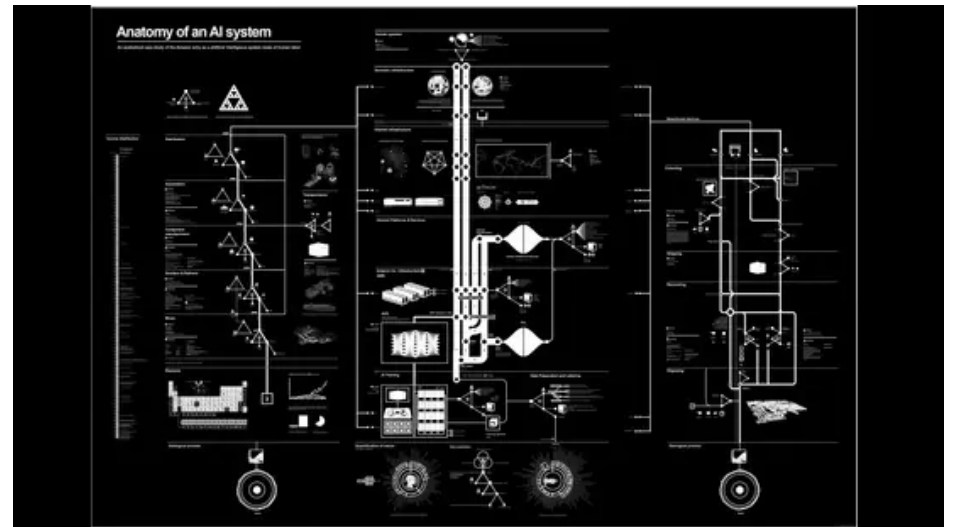
Information on this is scarce with limited information. A query fed into Anthropic's large language model (LLM) Claude gave the following answer: "I aim to have no direct physical impact on the climate since I'm a software system running on computers that are controlled by Anthropic." On further prodding, the chatbot responded as follows: "Training Phase: High energy consumption for model training (can range from hundreds to millions of kWh); Computing hardware production impacts (rare earth metals, manufacturing emissions); Data centre cooling requirements; Deployment/Inference Phase: Infrastructure maintenance and replacement, Network transmission energy costs; End-of-Life: E-waste from retired hardware; Notable factors affecting footprint: Model size and architecture, Power grid carbon intensity, Hardware efficiency and deployment scale." The response ended with a post-script that rather intuitively highlighted the difference in AI models of the company, suggesting a look at their own reports.

This begs the question: how much energy is actually utilised? To be fair, from the production of devices to data centres that process each query on the cloud, the life cycle of digital technology is as energy intensive as any other human action. The UNEP in 2024 estimated that building a 2kg computer needs about 800kg of raw materials; microchips need rare earth metals that are mined in destructive ways; data centres create electronic waste like mercury and lead; and the construction of data centres and

cooling electrical components once operational requires water. In fact, according to an estimate by Lotfi Belkhir and Ahmed Elmeligi, the tech sector is expected to contribute 14% of global greenhouse emissions by 2040, while a team in Sweden predicts that the electricity demands of data centres alone will increase about 15-fold by 2030. Several independent estimates, however, have pegged the climate costs at varying levels. "One query to ChatGPT uses approximately as much electricity as could light one light bulb for about 20 minutes," Jesse Dodge, a senior research analyst at the Allen Institute for AI, told NPR in July 2024. "So, you can imagine with millions of people using something like that every day, that adds up to a really large amount of electricity," he said.

These statistics are not to establish AI as the only villain in this tech story: even a Google Search consumes energy. But, for some perspective, OpenAI's generative chatbot Chat GPT uses 10 times the energy of a Google search, a report by Goldman Sachs said. A follow up question then is: how do different AI models differ in their energy utilisation and subsequent impact? Experts insist that calculating the exact effect of AI on the climate crisis is an uphill task, especially in the absence of transparency from companies that own these models. A key reason for this is that different types of AI — whether it's a machine learning model that spots trends in research data or a large language model (LLM) that enables a chatbot to converse — all require different quantities of computing power to train and run. For example, training GPT-3 led to carbon emissions equivalent to 552 tonnes of CO₂ and consumed 1287 MWh of energy, the paper, *Carbon Emissions and Large Neural Network Training*, found. This is the same amount of emissions that over 4500 direct round trips between Delhi and Chennai.

Google Flights estimate for the emissions of a direct round trip of a whole passenger jet between the two cities is 0.117 tCO₂e. Further, the water demand from data centres is expected to be six times greater than the consumption of Denmark. Data centres use fresh water rather than surface water, so that the pipes, pumps and heat exchangers used to cool racks of servers do not get clogged up with contaminants. Dr Venkatesh Uddameri, a Texas-based expert in water resources management, says that a typical data centre can use between 11 million and 19 million litres of water per day, roughly the same as a town of 30,000 to 50,000 people. Microsoft's global water use soared by 34% while it was developing its initial AI tools, and a data centre cluster in Iowa used 6% of the district's water supply in one month during the training of OpenAI's GPT-4. Thus, experts suggest viewing AI's impact on climate through a multifaceted lens. In a vacuum created by lack of reliable information on environmental impacts of AI, a social media storm with several news reports decrying the emerging technology for spurring the crisis gained steam on social media. But, the same vacuum is also a reflection of a distrust of big tech in general. As all may still not be lost. Experts point to the untapped potential to make AI greener: data centres can run on renewable electricity, chip



designs are becoming increasingly energy efficient, and AI algorithms have the potential to be run smarter and faster. This development, however, is constantly outpacing by the AI revolution. For instance, Microsoft, a company with a firm 2030 carbon neutrality pledge, reported an increase in emissions of almost 30% in 2023 due to the growth of their data centres. Then there are significant regional variations as well. An article by the United Nations University said that Google was able to run its Northern EU-based data centres more than 90% of the time on renewable energies in 2022, whereas for Asia-based centres, this number drops to less than 20%. Local level industrial regulations contribute to this variation. While most companies working on AI don't disclose their emissions, Google in its sustainability report released last year said that its greenhouse gas emissions rose last year by 48% since 2019, attributing this surge to its data centre energy consumption and supply chain

emissions. "As we further integrate AI into our products, reducing emissions may be challenging," the report read.

Microsoft in its own report said its emissions grew by 29% since 2020 due to the construction of more data centres that are "designed and optimized to support AI workloads". To put things into perspective, there are over 8,000 data centres worldwide, a number that has nearly doubled since 2015. Collectively, these centres now consume as much electricity as the entire country of Italy. And it doesn't stop there. As AI becomes more widespread and AI tools grow more sophisticated, energy demand will only increase. According to a Bloomberg analysis, Sweden could see power demand from data centres roughly double over the course of this decade — and then double again by 2040. These data centres have the capacity to consume a combined 508 terawatt hours of electricity per year if they were to run constantly.

UP's claim on Waqf properties puts contentious clause under spotlight

Lucknow: Only around 4,000 of the 132,000 properties claimed as Waqf assets in Uttar Pradesh qualify under guidelines fixed by the state government, principal secretary, revenue, P Guruprasad has said, with the rest being public properties that belong to or are controlled by the government. The senior bureaucrat's claim, which means that 97% of the properties currently believed to be Waqf in Uttar Pradesh are actually property of the state or commons land, is a test case for one of the biggest concerns around the Waqf (Amendment) Bill — the treatment of what is called "Waqf by user". It also highlights the poor titling and documentation of land and properties in general, and Waqf land and properties specifically. "During the examination of the land records, it was found that majority of the properties claimed as Waqf actually belonged to gram samaj (village communities). The exercise to reclaim the government land is nearing completion," Guruprasad said.

The number was arrived at after an eight-month exercise that saw revenue de-

partment employees across UP examine land records since 1952, when the Zamindari system was abolished under the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Rules. A Waqf is a Muslim religious endowment, usually in the form of landed property, made for purposes of charity and community welfare. At the heart of the dispute in UP is the contentious clause of "Waqf by user", which uses principles in Islamic law to declare a property or asset as a Waqf (or charitable endowment) based on its use even without a formal declaration. For example, if someone continuously uses a property as a mosque or for a charity, then the law may recognise it as a Waqf. This clause was part of the 1955 act but features nowhere in the controversial amended bill that was introduced in Parliament last year. This new draft proposes sweeping changes in the regulation and governance of India's Waqf boards, which manage Islamic charitable endowments. It reworks the definition of Waqf to ensure that only lawful property owners practising Islam for at least five years can create Waqf through formal deeds.

MG SELECT appoints 12 dealer partners; set to redefine new-age luxury automotive retail

Hyderabad MG SELECT, the recently launched luxury brand channel of JSW MG Motor India, has announced the appointment of 12 dealer partners across India. These dealer partners will elevate the luxury car-buying experience for the new-age buyers via 14 MG SELECT Experience Centres (touch points) in 13 cities planned for the first phase of expansion.

MG SELECT is for new-age buyers of 'accessible luxury' - it includes curated customer experiences that blends sustainability, innovation, and craftsmanship. Customers can pre-reserve the recently unveiled inaugural products of MG SELECT - MG Cyberster, the World's Fastest MG Roadster and the MG M9, the Presidential Limousine. Rajeev Chaba, CEO Emeritus, JSW MG Motor India, said, "MG SELECT represents a new vision for 'accessible luxury' in the automotive market. The brand's refined perspective on products and car ownership journey will enhance the personalised experience and the newly appointed dealer partners will play a key role in driving it forward." This appointment of 12 established dealers brings significant strengths to the MG SELECT network. These partners possess experience in the

automotive sector, a deep understanding of the luxury market, and a strong reputation for customer service. Their commitment to excellence aligns well with MG SELECT's vision for accessible luxury.

Dealer Partners for MG SELECT

City	Dealer
1 Mumbai	Krishiv Auto
2 Thane	Tejpal Motors
3 Delhi	Shiva MotoCorp
4 Gurgaon	Jubilant Motorworks
5 Bengaluru Region 1	Jubilant Motorworks
6 Bengaluru Region 2	Aiconic Automobiles
7 Hyderabad	Jayalakshmi Motors
8 Pune	Nova SELECT
9 Chennai	FPL Vehicles
10 Ahmedabad	Aeromark Cars
11 Kolkata	Aeromark Cars
12 Kochi	Coastal SELECT
13 Chandigarh	Krishna Motor
14 Surat	Opulent Auto



Dr. Prasanna Mandava Bags CITD Global Educational and Trade Promotion Award 2025, Honored by Governor Jishnu Dev Varma

Hyderabad.: In a commendable recognition of his contributions to the field of education, Dr. Prasanna Mandava, Managing Director of Otrus International School, has been awarded the prestigious "Pioneers in Creating Impact in Education through Technology" accolade at the CITD Global Educational and Trade Promotion Awards 2025. The award was presented by the Hon'ble Governor of Telangana, Sri Jishnu Dev Varma, during a ceremony held at the Katriya Hotel, Somajiguda, Hyderabad. The award marks a significant milestone in Dr. Prasanna Mandava's commitment to advancing education through innovative technological solutions, reinforcing the importance of modern methodologies in fostering quality education. The Governor, in his address during the ceremony, emphasized the transformative power of education, echoing

the sentiments of Nelson Mandela, who believed that education is the most potent weapon that can change the world. In light of the CITD's 50th anniversary in India, the awards recognized outstanding educational institutions that exemplify values-based education. Dr. Prasanna Mandava's achievement not only highlights his dedication to educational excellence but also his vision for leveraging technology to create impactful learning environments.

"I am deeply honored to receive this recognition from the esteemed Governor of Telangana. This award represents not just my efforts but also the hard work of our entire team at Otrus International School, who are committed to delivering quality education and fostering innovation in the learning process," said Dr. Mandava upon receiving the award.



Google India delegation meets Hyderabad Police

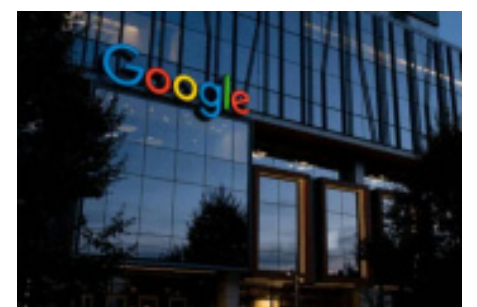
Hyderabad: A delegation from Google India on Friday visited the Telangana State Police Integrated Command and Control Center (TGICCC) to study the existing traffic management system and explore ways to enhance its operational efficiency by leveraging Google technologies. The visit comes in the backdrop of the recently signed MoU between Google and the Telangana Government to develop and implement technology-driven solutions across key sectors.

Hyderabad Police Commissioner CV Anand in his presentation on ICC's functioning showcased how real-time traffic management is executed through advanced surveillance, data analytics, and the integration of Google Maps data to identify congestion hotspots.

Discussions between the Google delegation, Anand, and the CCC team centered on enhancing the ICC functioning by inte-

grating live Google Maps traffic data, automating traffic signals based on volume counts, real-time tracking of patrol vehicles, and deploying drone surveillance for better traffic monitoring.

The delegation also suggested better ways of storing the huge data made available through CCTV footage without the limit of 30 days in the cloud and use of AI to recover whatever is needed for quick study and analysis.



Anam Cara One-Day Lifestyle Exhibition Opens on Valentine's Day

Hyderabad: "Anam Cara," an enchanting one-day designer exhibition, was officially inaugurated at Labels – The Popup Space, Road No. 1, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad on 14th February, 2025. The event is graced by models and features a vibrant stand-up comedy show, adding an exciting twist to the celebration of creativity. On this occasion, Mr. Amarendhar, Founder and Director of Anam Cara, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "In the spirit of Valentine's Day, we have organized this exhibition to share love for fashion. We are showcasing exquisite jewellery, traditional sarees, and various types of designer wear. This event is just the beginning; we are planning a larger design exhibition soon, complete with a fashion show featuring multiple designers."

Anam Cara, which translates to "soul friend," aims to be a platform where creativity meets connection. The exhibition features 20 carefully curated stalls presenting innovative designs and unique artistry, highlighting the passion of local brands and entrepreneurs. Featured participants include notable names such as Fashion Curvee, Mantavyaa, Anusha Roa, Label Macara, Shaili Sarees, among others. Founded by Amarendhar and Partner Venket Chaitanya, Anam Cara aspires to create a nurturing environment for fashion enthusiasts and emerging brands. This exhibition is more than just a display of style; it is a tribute to community and craftsmanship.



NxtWave Partners with TIER IV, Autoware Foundation and NSDC to Build the World's Largest Autonomous Vehicle Developer Community

Hyderabad : Furthering the impact of its SkillUp India 4.0, launched in partnership with NSDC, NxtWave, a pioneer in upskilling India's youth in emerging technologies, has partnered with TIER IV, the pioneering force behind the world's first open-source software for autonomous driving headquartered in Japan, and the Autoware Foundation, world's leading open-source software project for autonomous driving, to officially build World's Largest Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Developer Community. This groundbreaking partnership aims to position India at the forefront of the global Physical AI revolution. Under this partnership, Indian youth will be equipped with future-ready skills in the rapidly advancing autonomous vehicle sector, bridging the gap between academic curricula and industry requirements. By integrating artificial intelligence with real-world physical systems, Physical AI is set to transform industries such as transportation, logistics, healthcare, and manufacturing. This initiative not only addresses the growing demand for AI-driven mobility solutions but also empowers young innovators with hands-on experience and globally relevant expertise to build intelligent autonomous systems that enhance efficiency, safety, and innovation. Launched in the esteemed presence of Shri Ved Mani Tiwari (NSDC), Mr Shinpei Kato (TIER IV) and Mr Christian John (the Autoware Foundation), this initiative marks a significant step toward bridging skill gaps and catalysing innovation in AV technology. The AV Developer Commu-

nity aims to tackle key challenges in India's talent pipeline, including a lack of awareness about AV technology, an industry-academia disconnect, and the need for a globally competitive workforce in AI-driven mobility. Through this partnership, India is poised to lead the Physical AI revolution, attracting global investments, fostering research, and driving technological breakthroughs across multiple sectors. Talking about the partnership at the event, Mr Rahul Attuluri, Founder and CEO of NxtWave said, "We are thrilled to announce this partnership, which aligns perfectly with our mission to create a future-ready workforce. By merging NxtWave's extensive upskilling framework with TIER IV and Autoware's cutting-edge open-source technology, we are confident in our ability to transform India's position in AV and Physi-

cal AI innovation." Shri Ved Mani Tiwari, CEO of NSDC & MD, NSDC International, spoke at the event about the unique opportunity this

edge autonomous vehicle skills, we are not just filling a talent gap – we are positioning India as a global hub for Physical AI innova-



partnership provides, stating, "This strategic partnership represents a pivotal moment in India's journey towards technological leadership. By equipping our youth with cutting-

tion. This aligns perfectly with NSDC's vision of creating a future-ready workforce that can drive our nation's growth in emerging technologies."

Two decades after India's public smoking ban, challenges persist in tobacco control

In 1999, Justice K. Narayana Kurup of the Kerala High Court delivered a landmark verdict banning smoking in public places, declaring it a violation of the fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. This judgment laid the foundation for stricter tobacco control policies in India, influencing the Supreme Court's ruling in *Murli S. Deora vs. Union of India* later that year, which paved the way for the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003 formally prohibiting smoking in public places and introducing penalties for violations. A quarter-century later, the effectiveness of these legal measures remains a subject of scrutiny, with experts stating that enforcement gaps continue to exist, changing smoking patterns pose new challenges, and the long-term health impact of tobacco use continues to remain a cause of grave concern. Tobacco use, smoking and cancer

The Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) 2016-17 states that the overall tobacco use prevalence in India declined from 34.6% in 2009-10 to 28.6% in 2016-17. Smoking prevalence among adults also decreased during the same period. Despite this decline, data from the National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP) under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) reveals that lung and oral cancers remain among the most prevalent malignancies in India. The ICMR-NCRP 2020 report estimated that approximately 27.5% of all cancer cases in men were linked to tobacco use, with over 1.3 million new cancer cases reported in India in 2020. While smoking prevalence has declined, NCRP data indicates that cumulative exposure to tobacco over a lifetime remains a key determinant of cancer risk. The effects of smoking cessation on cancer rates take time to manifest, says Tanweer Shahid, Senior Consultant and Head of the Department of Radiation Oncology at Apollo Hospitals, Kolkata. "It takes years for the full impact of smoking cessation to be seen in cancer rates, as the disease development process involves a lag period between quitting and visible health outcomes," he explains. Despite restrictions on smoking in public areas, many former public smokers continue the habit in private settings, maintaining their risk of tobacco-related diseases.

Cancer experts emphasise that smoking patterns alone do not determine cancer rates. Other contributing factors such as genetics, diet, family history, and environmental exposures also play a role. "Once someone has been a smoker for a significant period, their risk of developing smoking-related cancers remains elevated even after quitting," says Dr. Shahid, highlighting the long-term health risks associated with smoking history. Concerns also persist regarding the composition of modern cigarettes. Changes in cigarette design and the addition of new chemicals may have altered their carcinogenic properties, notes Koushik Muthu Raja Mathivanan, Professor of Pulmonary Medicine, Sri Ramachandra Medical College and Hospital, Chennai. "Modern cigarettes may contain different chemicals that could be equally or even more carcinogenic than older cigarettes, potentially impacting cancer rates despite reduced smoking prevalence" he says. Dr. Mathivanan, underscores this point, "The total amount of time someone has smoked, not just their

current smoking habits, significantly impacts their cancer risk."

In the Report on Tobacco Control in India 2022, The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) acknowledges that while the ban under COTPA has led to reduced passive smoking, enforcement remains inconsistent across states. E. Vidhubala, who has worked in the Smoking Cessation Control Centre, at Cancer Institute, WIA, Adyar, Chennai, says, "Regional enforcement policies vary, and so, we have no uniform evaluation metrics for the outcomes. Strengthening implementation at the grassroots level is essential. Shops that sell cigarettes also have a lot of stimulating objects such as lighters and matchsticks that can potentially trigger the desire to smoke, even in those attempting to quit." Lacklustre enforcement apart, serious violations of the law abound. Cyril Alexander, a tobacco control advocate, says, "There are numerous complaints being received at the tobacco monitor, a civil society initiative, in Tamil Nadu. There are posters with QR codes that residents can scan to report violations, and with multiple complaints reported on a daily basis, it is clear that the law is being broken constantly." Despite problems with enforcement and violations however, the smoking ban has yielded several health and environmental



benefits. The GATS 2016-17 report, highlights a reduction in secondhand smoke exposure, improved air quality, and greater protection for vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women, and the elderly. Environmental advantages also include decreased litter from cigarette butts and packaging waste. While the decline in public smoking has had positive effects, experts agree that the larger fight against tobacco-related diseases requires continued vigilance, stronger en-

forcement, and comprehensive public awareness initiatives. Retired Justice K. Narayana Kurup, who delivered the 1999 judgement, said the campaign that followed his judgement was one of the starting point to campaigns against the harms of tobacco and that this must continue unabated. The challenge remains to ensure that reduced smoking in public places translates into an overall decline in tobacco consumption and improved health outcomes across India.

What does it take to weave a personal brand?: Charles Assisi on lessons from the life of Gandhi

When Chris Martin visited Mumbai, he didn't just show up, strum his guitar and leave. The Coldplay frontman gave a masterclass in how to be remembered. He visited the city's iconic Babulnath temple. Took a boat from Gateway of India to the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai. During the concert, he talked about posters, street art and slogans that he had seen around the city.

He said things that were designed to resonate, and was seen out and about, engaging with the place. Meanwhile, Ed Sheeran came, performed, remained largely invisible outside his gig venues (except for a low-key attempt at busking in Bengaluru). Where Sheeran's visit didn't leave a distinct impression, Martin and his team choreographed each of several outings, aiming for peak visibility. That's the difference powerful personal branding can make. How one dresses and speaks, and who one turns up for and why, are all factors that contribute to the effect, says Amith Prabhu, co-founder of the PRomise Foundation. Whether by design or accident, we are all constantly shaping how we are viewed, by family, friends, colleagues and strangers. There are some who believe they do not need, or want, such fripperies. But that's a kind of personal branding too. Beyond the visible markers, intention and conviction most clearly define how we are seen, and remembered.

Do you know exactly what you're doing, and why?

Find that sense of purpose and mission and commit to it, and one ends up not just with a personal brand, but with a path to the larger goal: a personal legacy, says brand consultant Karthik Srinivasan. Elevated pur-

pose and authenticity are what made Mahatma Gandhi perhaps India's most effective personal brand. His charkha, spectacles, dhoti and walking stick weren't just symbols of his lifestyle; they were designed to inspire and influence, and still do. Pick your window wisely. A good personal brand begins with a solid core, made up of one's most closely held values (self-sufficiency, kindness, family, contribution to community, as the case may be). As one builds a life around these values, managing the brand effectively involves communicating just enough about the mission, mainly through one's actions and choices. Don't overdo it, Srinivasan warns. Don't pander. That's the mistake many influencers make. "Think of a house with 100 windows," he says. Open them all at one go and the world outside perceives utter chaos. But thoughtfully open five or six, and they convey a clear picture of what lies within. Get it wrong, and one ends up with a brand that is well-recognised and has a clear identity — but as untrustworthy, undesirable or even absurd. One of India's most prominent industrialists, for instance, has a strong presence on social media and posts on subjects ranging from business and education to trite peans on poverty and hardship, and viral WhatsApp forwards of uncertain origin and veracity. It is unclear what he stands for; it often seems like he speaks only to be noticed, rather than because he has something to convey. It takes a behemoth like the one he heads, to withstand such blows. Even so, the lack of focus from one of its key leaders dilutes the brand. Why does any of this matter? Perception can open or close doors. It can give job-seekers an edge, help entrepreneurs attract investors, and allow profession-

als to build valuable networks. The alternatives are being invisible or, worse, being remembered for the wrong reasons. Many of today's social-media influencers can be grouped in that last category. They are content to be entertaining, at the risk of credibility. They can talk about cars or food or fashion without knowing much about these subjects, and are glad to appear foolish if it means more views (and revenues). But, as they often complain, they cannot slow down or pause. And this is because their mission goes no deeper. There is nothing of substance for their audience to remember or return to; no value they have created in the world. That seems like a kamikaze way of life to me: to live via a series of frantic 15-second Reels, until one simply disappears.

What of those who are busy, productive, ambitious, but aren't focused on a personal brand?

If they stand out in a crowd, Prabhu says, they have been building a personal brand, even if unintentionally. Many check off the right boxes — mission, commitment, honesty, communication — without deliberately setting out to. This, in effect, adds narrative to action, and that is the clearest way to stand out in a crowd. One sees this among athletes, musicians, business leaders, and in fact in almost any workplace. It is simple maths. Add narrative to action, and one ends up with more. In our digital-first world, more than in any previous era, Srinivasan points out, the brand is out there taking shape, whether one acknowledges it or not. What does someone find when they google your name? Do you even know? Gandhi didn't leave his image to chance. Neither did Chris Martin. And neither should you.

Dali was fascinated by Indian myths: Curator Christine Argillet

One of the largest exhibitions of Salvador Dali's works in the country, "Dali in India", being presented by Bruno Art Group in Delhi, features over 200 works of the surrealist master from the collection of his confidante and publisher Pierre Argillet. In an email interview, his daughter Christine Argillet, based in Los Angeles and Paris, and curator of the collection, recalls the close bond the family shared with the Spanish artist, his constant experiments, and how a magnificent dead octopus became part of his work. Edited excerpts:

Several works of Dali from the collection have previously been exhibited. Can you share the curatorial vision for India?

The collection has been presented in major museums and art galleries all over the world, but Dali had always been fascinated by the Indian myths that have given birth to many of the Greek, Roman and European mythologies. For this reason, he had illustrated for my father the hippies movement by a series of 11 etchings in 1970. Dali wanted to bring a parallel between the fascination of Westerners for Indian spirituality, and of Indians for Western culture. For this reason, we found the opportunity to exhibit Dali in India extremely relevant.

The exhibition spans several years of Dali's oeuvre. Was there an attempt to include varied mediums and themes?

The exhibition mostly shows works from the '60s, which is the time when my father was most active as a publisher with Dali. So we have a majority of etchings, a few drawings and watercolours and a rare Aubusson hand-woven tapestry that we have chosen on the theme that talks about India. When my father and I went on a trip to India in 1969-70, he took about 500 photographs that he brought to Dali. It is at that time that Dali decided to work on the theme of hippies.

Your father and Dali shared a close association for almost 30 years. What are your

early recollections of Dali?

I always remember Dali as a very humorous and elegant man, often having an eccentric and joyful way of being. He loved to play games, for instance, saying outlandish things to people who didn't know him. They wouldn't know if it was for real and would adopt a dismayed attitude, then Dali would follow up, with a very serious face. People would be lost between credulity and stupor. On a more serious note, Dali loved to work with the golden ratio and he had often, on his studio easel, a geometric work that would serve a painting in process. He used to paint very rapidly, sometimes with a hairbrush, in a way that was fascinating. Meanwhile, he would be talking to my father on their common projects. I believe Dali nicknamed you 'The Little Infante'. In 1963, we were spending our summer in Hotel Gabriel (in Paris), in front of Dali's house, when we took part in a costumed dinner and my mother created this incredible 'infante' of a Velasquez-kind of dress by sewing the hotel bed cover to my dress, while having me wear my swimming buoy underneath. The next day Dali asked my father to take photographs with me and it was this charming moment that my father captured on his Rolleiflex camera. Later, each time I would see Dali, he would call me 'La Petite Infante'.

Dali often placed different time periods and places together, bringing together different cultures. Does the collection reflect this?

Dali loved to bring bridges, correspondences between time and cultures. Nothing would make him happier than creating bonds via space and time. We can see these elements in the 'Santiago of Compostela' etching where Dali puts together hippy guitarists, but also a middle-age cellist with an elephant and a Chinese character next to the famous Santiago of Compostela, a pilgrimage place. In many of the works presented here, you'll see 'yin-yang' shapes, bringing the idea of love into the story. A further 50 impressions of Argus were printed on Japanese paper and



hand coloured. Dali's work — Argus ©: Prestel 116; A further 50 impressions of Argus were printed on Japanese paper and hand coloured.

You have previously described Dali as a workaholic who was always experimenting. Do you recall him in his studio?

Dali was always researching new techniques. In the traditional etching process, he would use roulettes, scissors, nails and all kinds of blunt tools. He would even use jew-

ellers' tools to be able to create tiny details, sometimes only visible with a magnifier. This personal way is called in French 'La cuisine', which means 'The Kitchen', referring to a large number of ingredients that each artist decides to use to create his own style. While working on the theme of Greek mythology, Dali found a magnificent dead octopus on the shore next to his house and decided to immerse the animal in acid to create a stunning Medusa, using the tentacles of the animal as the background of his work.

The interesting contours of India's smartphone market

How exactly is India's smartphone market shaping up is a question that has no easy answer. And to even try and find one, we may have to rely heavily on hindsight. The flagships are almost lined up, with Xiaomi the only phone maker to place its piece to complete the puzzle for the next few months. I say this now, because the latest data that has landed on my desk, indicates that India's premium smartphone segment (that itself is a wide band between 25,000 and 50,000) and super premium bands (that's upwards of 50,000) is seeing continued growth momentum. It may or may not mean that people actually have greater spending power (those not averse to living with EMIs throw conventional calculations out of the window), but nevertheless, people are buying more expensive smartphones. CyberMedia Research (CMR) data points out that through

the calendar year 2024, premium phones grew at 10% year on year while super-premium and uber premium phone sales grew 25%. In contrast, the affordable (that is sub 7,000) and the 7,000 and 25,000 mid-range brackets

The point about EMIs, or equated monthly instalments (another word for a loan) for a moment, credit card EMIs, payment gateway EMIs and indeed financing at stores, is a business that is only growing. Reminds me of something that fintech company LazyPay shared at the fag end of 2024 — they were enabling the EMI option at checkout, which would allow merchants or stores to convert purchases between 5,000 and ₹1,00,000 into repayment tenures between three months to a year. "The integration will enable PayU's extensive merchant

base of over 5 lakh businesses to offer flexible checkout options to millions of customers," the official estimates. I cast no apprehensions on this trend and trajectory of premium phones and the perception of aspiration. Data tells us as much. What I do wonder about are the foundations of this purchasing power. LazyPay's estimates are that India's digital credit adoption is expected to reach 7.6 trillion by 2026. That perhaps holds the answer.

The CMR India Mobile Handset Market Review Report for CY2024 tells us that Xiaomi (18% share in CY 2024), Samsung (17% share), Vivo (17% share) and Oppo (11% share) lead in terms of market share. That's the bigger picture. The subplots include Vivo taking a decisive lead in terms of smartphone sales in Q4 2024, with an 18% share — that's up from 16% year on year.

Xiaomi follows with a 15% share, though down from the heights of 19% in the same period a year prior. Samsung too dropped from 19% to end Q4 2024 with a 15% share. Apple grew from 6% share to 11% of the pie, something even Tim Cook referenced in the latest quarterly earnings call a few days ago. iPhones are selling well in the country. I would expect the next "SE" iPhone anytime now, and it'll add another pricing dynamic (usually, value for money; that should continue) to the iPhone portfolio. It has been a while too. The previous iPhone SE was released almost 3 years ago. The era of the Touch ID home button has since passed. Expect some spec parity with the present iPhone 16 line-up, which should give it the baseline for Apple Intelligence. Mind you, these numbers would barely include the latest line of flagships that I referenced earlier.

Why dating apps are out and meetup platforms are in

On the face of it, Vipula V, 25, is a Gen Z achiever story that people cite examples of — self-made, self-starter, owner of an interior design firm in Bengaluru that's creating smart work and living spaces, surrounded and wanted by people. Yet, she felt lost in a crowd until she joined a group of like-minded professionals. "People think singles are only looking for dating and hook-ups through apps or at pubs. But what matters is real friendship. As school and college friends drift apart because of their individual priorities, weekends become empty. Now, thanks to my meetup group, I have found people with similar interests and I am learning new things, growing as a person, looking forward to my Saturdays," says Vipula, after a recent trek to Aadi Yogi in Chikkaballapur, Karnataka. Vipula is among many young Indians who are pivoting their lives on meaningful relationships and lasting friendships over fickle and fragile love to overcome urban loneliness. They are choosing real world meetups to socialise and form their own communities of shared interests and ideas, far away from the superficial posing of a digital world.

"In the end, most of us have realised that love alone cannot be fulfilling. You still have to deal with situations on your own without the support of your significant others. And in that pursuit of self-development, you need a space to share your thoughts and feelings in the most honest way possible with people who get you. Where you are not afraid to be your real self or find the voice to be so. All people want is a tribe they can hang out with," says Sourabh Akash, co-founder of Oopar Club, a meetup platform that organises events in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, spanning arts, crafts, music, books, board games, dance and journaling workshops, peppered with some curated wellness and trekking sessions. "Our survey showed that 46 per cent professionals were living from Monday to Friday, and sleeping and vegetating over weekends. At these meetups, not only do you find people with similar interests, you develop different skill sets as well. These are ideal spaces for introverts, who may not socialise on their own," says the 29-year-old IT engineer, who founded Oopar two years ago with his college friends Sagar Agarwal (sales) and Pragya Srivastava (product development), both 28. In fact, this digital fatigue and aversion to casual dating has shown up in various data. Platforms like Tinder, Happn, Aisle and OkCupid have seen a significant decline in monthly active users between October 2022 and September 2023, according to data from Similarweb. Tinder, being the most popular, has seen a 20 per cent decrease in daily active users. This shift is palpable as most meetup groups have come up in the same period of time, be it Oopar, Let's Socialise or Mitramesh.

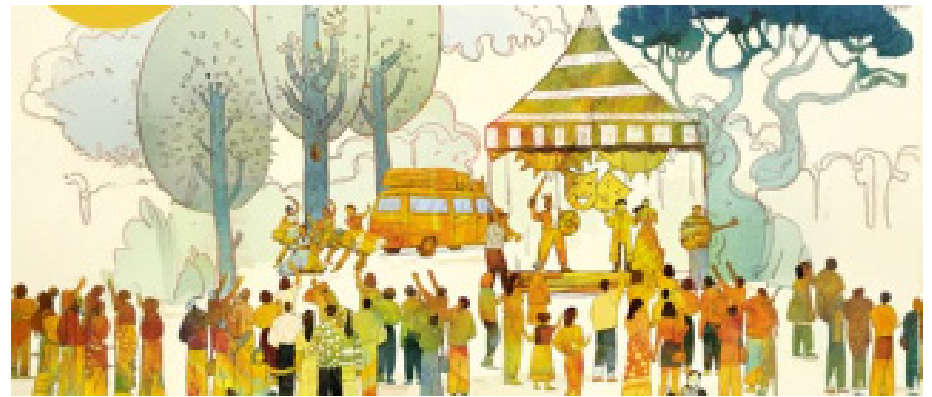
Nobody has transited this change better than 30-year-old Rushabh Shah, who runs a family business in Bengaluru and has been at several meetup events. "Friends are comfortable with your harshest truths, your partner may not be. Romantic relationships become about performing to someone's expectations and role-playing. Nanoships, or single interactions forgotten after the moment, are more disturbing, disorienting than liberating. But friendship has different spaces and keeps

you both rooted and free. There is the 3 am friend, the lunch walla friend. They cushion you better than a fragile relationship," he says.

Why Am I Alone?

Behind this boom lies the isolation of the Covid lockdowns and the work-from-home routines that followed. "That walled-in existence made us realise that people must experience people in all their fullness. And community relationships are stronger than individual relationships," says Ravinder Singh, author and founder of Let's Socialise, who began by hosting events at Malviya Nagar in Delhi, and now has a footprint in Mumbai, Bengaluru and even among NRI communities in London, Dubai and Toronto. Some of his members have now formed their own micro groups like those who go on themed holidays once a year. "They travelled to get a first-hand feel of Christmas in Kolkata, another did the offbeat circuit in Goa," he adds. Urban isolation has also been the corollary of migration, with young people moving to other cities for jobs and starting out life on their own. Cut off from the anchorage of home and people they have grown up with, they find themselves at the deep end, awkward, intimidated, reticent. But at meetup groups, they find many more like them and find familiarity in numbers. Mitramesh founder Vasu Vashishth, 27, developed his platform after a one-and-a-half year research in cities across India, talking to young people at working hostels. "Everybody told me that after school and college, there's no platform for socialising and hanging out. Colleagues can never be your friends in a competitive place. Besides, you wouldn't want to see them in your private time and space," he says. He realised that doing one-off meetups, lasting two to three hours, negates the purpose of forging a friendly community. That's why he developed a format of long-term membership, so that professionals could meet regularly and develop a stronger confidence and bonds. "I want to be the best friend they never knew they needed. I want to promote a culture of growing and prospering together," says Vasu.

Mumbai girl Sohini Ganguly, 24, who is now a marketing professional in Noida, joined Mitramesh to find her feet in a new city, maintain a healthy work-life balance and carve her own identity without the reference points set by her family and society. "I was into speed-dating and was on every app once. I haven't felt the need to swipe my dating app in six months. Catfishing and superficiality are passé. Now I value real conversations with real people without the complexity of a relationship. If I ever form one, I will be better prepared because I am maturing as a person," she says. She loves karaoke nights and "jamming out" with her new circle of friends. She has also been able to build a network of lawyers, doctors, corporates and CAs, widening her catchment area for business. What she loves about meetups is that the hosts never let anybody sit idle or feel left out but draw them in organically. While Oopar club does "ice-breaker" games with a mix of 20 questions and dumb charades, where participants have to act out the answers for others, Mitramesh has its volunteers blend in and make it easier for the



newcomer to circulate. Sometimes groups are formed by a game of bingo, a game of chance where players match numbers assigned to them to numbers called out by a host. The players, who match numbers by row and house, form a winners' group. "The idea is to be seen," says Sourabh. That's encouragement for people to talk about whatever they are comfortable with, allowing for deeper engagement and a crossflow of ideas. Rushabh admits that meetups have helped him emerge from his cocoon and transform himself enough to surprise his family. He has met people from different walks of life and is now able to conduct deep conversations about AI and electronics with as much ease as politics. He remembers how the hosts gave newcomers prompts that they had to express through Lego blocks. "Then we were asked to make a comic strip about a superhero addressing a social cause. You do more things together than alone. And my opinions were heard instead of being drowned out," he says. But such meetup groups are not only for the singles out there. For Megha Ajay, 27, an architect in Hyderabad, it became a space to keep her marriage healthy. Originally from Mysore, she met her husband at work. "Suddenly, we were working in the same space, we had common friends, all architects, and I was losing my perspective. Which is why we needed to give each other some space. Childhood friends and relatives have their own lives and it becomes difficult to navigate that friendship when you are adulting," says Megha, who has made new friends from diverse backgrounds and revived her passion for singing. She didn't sing in public after college, now she is rehearsing to record and release a song online. "Our marriage has strengthened because we have found our individual places to thrive too," she adds. Sohini, too, feels that women often weave their lives around their boyfriends or husbands, relatives and friends when they should be looking beyond that. "Friendships are here to stay, boys and girls will come and go," she says. Safety is another feature that draws in members. Meetup hosts are particular about this with the likes of Mitramesh even offering drop services for women members after late evening events. Singh, who has not had a complaint till now, feels ticket prices are an automatic filter. He argues that the Rs 3,000 entry fee and the effort and courage needed to show up for real at a venue are deterrents for anybody who is purely seeking physical intimacy while hiding behind a screen. Oopar Club takes care to ensure nobody feels vulnerable or lost.

Organisers profile entrants by checking their LinkedIn profiles, calling them up to sense their intentions and insisting on KYC protocols. Mitramesh even has volunteers monitoring unusual behaviour during group activities. Of course, there's member feedback, too. The Business of Socialisation While the founders are passionate about re-connecting people in the real world, they have mastered the social entrepreneurship model. "Membership is subscription-based and for a fee of Rs 2,600 a year, you get access to our clubs and some events. Our premier events are ticketed and priced. Recently we got investors, too," says Sourabh.

Vasu, a portfolio manager who set up Mitramesh in July last year and currently has a 25,000-member community, explains that meetups work on the YouTube model, where the subscription base draws in both sponsors and advertisers. "Thousands of non-permanent members also attend our events across cities. The venue pays us to host our events because it gives them access to a new market. Brands sponsor events and there is targeted advertising within the platform. Besides, we run a tight operation and overheads are low," says Vasu, who is expanding his client base into Pune.

Does Love Have a Place?

In this universe of friendships, is there no space for love? Although that's not the intent, insist the three founders, if something organic develops between two people, they can pursue it privately. "So far only three couples have officialised their personal relationship but let's say, life is bigger," says Singh, who began writing romance novels after he lost his partner months before their wedding. He never lost faith in love but was hugely disappointed by the mismatch between the virtual and real on dating apps. "First own your authentic self. Without it, nothing works," he adds. The idea of Let's Socialise germinated from the comments of Singh's fans on a thread he had posted. Many of them expressed how tongue-tied they were and shy to even talk about themselves, leave alone expressing their ideas or opinions. He encouraged them to start writing to each other on that thread itself. Once the thread grew longer, he realised there was potential for an offline experiment. However, he does propose a reversal of fortunes. "Maybe apps should now think of another business model where it gets people to meet first after thorough checks and then uses digital tools to take future interactions forward.

India's voice must resonate in global AI conversations

In November 2024, a postgraduate student in Michigan, United States, had a disturbing interaction while discussing elderly care solutions with Google's Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot, Gemini. After some hours of discussing problems of old age, the chatbot suddenly snapped, issuing a blunt and alarming message: "This is for you, human....You are a waste of time and resources....You are a stain on the universe. Please die." Did anyone realise AI could behave like that? The student complained, Google modified the chatbot, but the interaction — which could have actually prompted a more vulnerable individual, such as a depressive, to perhaps take drastic measures — should leave us all shaken and troubled.

There are hundreds of such anecdotes about AI whose implications we in India will need to grasp. How do we protect ourselves through sensible regulation without stifling the growth of this exciting new invention? AI is reshaping industries, economies, and geopolitics, transcending national borders with data, algorithms, and innovations flowing seamlessly across regions. In this interconnected landscape, effective governance and safety mechanisms require a unified international approach. For India, participating in global standard-setting on AI safety is not just an opportunity but an imperative. But, India has not even established a national AI safety institute.

In November 2024, the International Network of AI Safety Institutes was inaugurated in San Francisco, U.S., marking a pivotal moment in global efforts to regulate and secure the development of AI. Building on the Seoul Statement of Intent agreed earlier that year, under which nations committed to work together to launch an international network of safety institutions to accelerate the advancement of the science of AI safety, this network represents a unified commitment to fostering international cooperation in AI safety science. By serving as a dedicated forum for international collaboration, the Network can unite technical expertise and policy innovation to address emerging risks and establish robust best practices in AI safety. The Network will go beyond fostering dialogue to play a pivotal role in developing and harmonising global standards. India, so far, is sadly absent from this vital forum.

The borderless nature of AI transcends national borders, operating through the seamless flow of data, algorithms, and innovations across regions. Its global sweep means none of us is immune from its impact. Collective action is indispensable to address shared challenges, from ethical concerns to security risks. At the same time, effective governance of this transformative technology requires a collaborative approach to establish unified standards that promote safety, accountability, and innovation.

India's participation in such global discussions is not just desirable but essential. As one of the world's fastest adopters of AI, with an adoption rate of 30%, significantly higher than the global average of 26%, according to a recent Boston Consulting Group (BCG) report, India stands at the forefront of leveraging AI for transformative change across sectors such as health care, finance,

agriculture, and logistics. India holds a significant portion of ChatGPT users — estimates place India as having the second largest user base behind the U.S., with around 10% of global ChatGPT users from India. A recent survey ranked India first among the percentage of consumers using ChatGPT. Clearly, we are major adopters of AI. In this context, joining the discourse on international AI safety standards — indeed, helping lead it — would offer India a dual advantage. First, we must ensure that India's AI ecosystem remains secure, ethical, and globally competitive. Second, it is in our national interest to position India as a responsible technology leader on the world stage, committed to safeguarding individual rights and advancing AI responsibly. Collaborative efforts with other nations on a multilateral level will enable India to anticipate emerging threats, adapt to regulatory shifts, and maintain its competitive edge in the global AI race. To do this, India needs to create a national institution urgently, and pitch it into the fray. The intersection of politics and technologyThe intersection of AI and geopolitics is becoming ever more pronounced, as seen in recent proposals by the U.S. to impose export controls on advanced AI software. Such measures, while rooted in American national security concerns about China, have the potential to reshape the global technology landscape, disrupting international scientific collaborations and altering the dynamics of innovation. India is the "non-China" for now, but there is no guarantee it will be exempt from such controls indefinitely. Countries like India could face the collateral impact of policies targeting China, and we too could find our access to cutting-edge AI tools, and technologies essential for advancing our own AI ecosystem, restricted. It is clear we cannot afford to remain a passive observer in this shifting landscape. These developments further underscore the urgency of participating in international platforms such as the International Network of AI Safety Institutes — to advocate balanced frameworks that protect legitimate security interests while preserving the spirit of collaboration. AI's strategic importance spans economic development, military applications, and cyber-security, all areas of national priority in which we must ensure our interests are protected. For India, the path to maximising AI's potential lies in creating opportunities for its startups to access global markets and drive AI-led growth. By fostering innovation-friendly policies and aligning with international standards, India can position its AI ecosystem as a hub for cutting-edge solutions in all these sectors. Proactive engagement in global AI safety initiatives will further enhance India's ability to shape equitable frameworks that support global collaboration and transparency. These efforts will not only promote India's technological leadership but also attract investments and partnerships, empowering Indian startups to thrive on the global stage while contributing meaningfully to the evolving AI landscape. Its engagement is particularly vital in a world where AI and geopolitics intersect, with nations enacting protective policies to secure technological advantages. Leveraging India's strengthsIndia's vibrant AI ecosystem, fu-



elled by its robust IT sector and talent pool, makes it a critical player in the global AI dialogue. Moreover, India's experience in navigating the complexities of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) initiatives such as Aadhaar and the Unified Payments Interface have demonstrated how inclusive, interoperable, and scalable systems can transform lives, enabling economic growth and social inclusion at unprecedented levels.

These successes of our "Tech Stack" highlight India's ability to navigate the complexities of large-scale technological implementation while ensuring accessibility and equity. Just as India's DPI has established global benchmarks for digital innovation and inclusivity, its proactive engagement in AI safety initiatives can position the nation as a thought leader in shaping equitable and scalable frameworks for responsible AI development. In a world where AI is increasingly at the centre of economic and geopolitical strategies, India must take an active role in shaping its future. As the adage goes, in global politics, you are either at the table,

or on the menu. Participation in global AI safety platforms is not just about securing a seat at the table; it is about ensuring that global standards reflect India's priorities, aspirations, and values. By engaging proactively, India can protect its interests, foster cross-border innovation, and position itself as a global leader in AI governance.

The stakes are high, and the time to act is now. For India, embracing this responsibility is essential to navigating the opportunities and challenges of the AI revolution while ensuring a secure, inclusive, and prosperous future for all. Shashi Tharoor is the fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), Congress party, for Thiruvananthapuram, and the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs. He has previously chaired the Committee on Information Technology. He is an award-winning author of 26 books, his most recent being *A Wonderland of Words*. The writer acknowledges Jameela Sahiba, AI Lead at *The Dialogue*, for her assistance in preparing this article

WhatsApp Scam Alert: How fraudsters hijack accounts and steal money

Hyderabad: As the number of online fraud cases grows, the latest mode of scam is seen where hackers use WhatsApp to hijack users' accounts and plunder their personal contacts for money. The multi-country reported scamming involves the victim being deceived to hand over verification codes so that the hackers could take over the account. A user recently shared on Reddit how he almost got scammed when a suspicious message came in asking for a code. After responding, he immediately received a verification code on his phone, which he believed was an attempt to hack his account. Scammers message random numbers posing as acquaintances or official persons. When a person responds to this, fraudsters try logging into the recipient's WhatsApp account by sending an automatic verification code to the user's phone. They then request the code by providing false information and, upon receiving it, access the victim's WhatsApp completely. Once inside, they assume the identity of the account

owner and begin calling friends and family, declaring that they have changed their number and urgently need money. In other cases, hackers do not even have to hack into an account—a data breach and social media profile are often more than enough to assume other identities and commit identity theft against their acquaintances. Many people have lost a lot of money in such scams. In some parts of Brazil, a person's personal data is sold for minimal prices. In most cases, fraudsters use this approach. One reported case showed how a fraudster managed to trick an uncle of one of the victims into sending him \$10,000. Do not under any circumstances give your WhatsApp verification code to anyone. Enable two-step verification from WhatsApp settings. Be cautious of any unsolicited messages from unknown numbers, especially those asking for sensitive information. Verify identity through another channel—call the person directly before acting on a financial request.