

MIDDLE EAST AND ENERGY NEEDS

Middle-East has always been volatile. For one or the other reason states or religions at times are always at war there. Though the region is mainly a desert, the Mother Nature has blessed it with huge deposits of oil. Also, the crude was the reason for prosperity, and progress of the region. India had always sensed the uncertainties of depending too much on the region for fuel supplies and diversified its imports well in time. Any trouble in any part of the world and the prices of crude suddenly touch the sky. This time when West Asia is again in the grip of a war, prices of oil are sure to go high. India is safe as it can buy crude from Russia to beef up its stocks. In the long run, India had decided to go for unconventional resources to light up the country.

GULF WAR

There is little that India, or, for that matter any the country could do for the Middle East. However, India finds itself in a bind. After Vikram Misri, foreign secretary signed the condolence book at the Iranian Embassy in Delhi, India made its stand clear. It stood with the people and the nation of Iran in their grieving; This is new India stands tall with neighbours and supports them in the crisis. However, on a more practical level Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for ending the war which is not in any country's interests. He asked the warring countries to start negotiations." The entire fight is not for territory control but for the Oil that is yet to be fully researched. India has legitimate concerns about its students, businessmen and others. But most importantly, it seeks bringing the warring nations to realize.

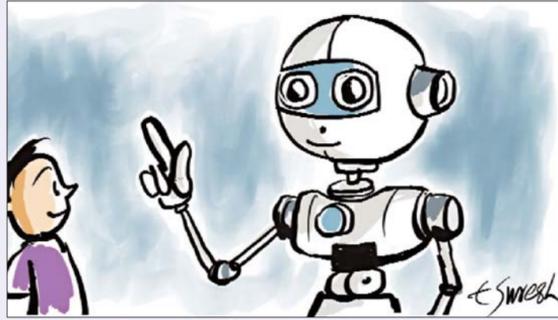
The universalisation of AI

JS Rajput

The India AI Impact Summit, held from February 16-21, 2026, attracted considerable attention not only within the nation but also internationally. It has inspired numerous young people, entrepreneurs, multinationals and, expectedly, the doyens of the world of commerce and business. The event enhanced India's global reputation as a lead nation, not only in accepting and utilising new knowledge, but also in its resolve to play a leadership role in creating new knowledge. It has adequate manpower imbued with scientific temper and dedicated to the 'search for Truth'!

Top experts gathered for the event were busy envisioning the implications of rapidly expanding new horizons after the arrival of AI, and these deserve incisive 360° scrutiny. Clearly, AI and its allotropes would have a comprehensive impact on every aspect of human life. The churning so generated has already begun to pose not only encouraging possibilities ahead but also the issues of considerable concern emerging before the learners, parents, societies and the nations. It has serious implications for international collaboration, which would become more demanding in the years ahead.

On the sidelines, the Summit also witnessed how a 'Robot Dog' - purchased from the market, but displayed and claimed as conceptualised, tested and produced by a private deemed university emerged as an embarrassing aspect in an otherwise inspiring environment. For anyone familiar with quality concerns, it would be agonising to wish it away as one of the glitches that creep into such major international gatherings. It would be imprudent on the part of the higher education system not to treat it as an eye-opener, particularly for all those entrusted with preparing the generations ahead in schools, colleges and universities. Unfortunately, this aspect did not receive the attention it deserved in the media, and learned articulations on it. The Robot Dog has educated us on the decline in the moral and ethical fibre, and also the need to scrutinise the scenario in terms of quality and



excellence in education, and particularly higher education.

According to a tentative estimate, India has around 1.1-1.2 billion mobile phones, and almost the same number of literate people, estimating roughly at a literacy rate of 80%. The universalisation of education is yet a distant dream, but the rise of the mobiles from around a mere one million only in 2001-02 to their universalisation indicates the pace of change that is the major characteristic of the 21st century. The mobile phone has successfully integrated itself as a necessary component of every individual's life. Consequently, the fascination now is no longer for the mobile phone, but for AI, chatbots, new gadgets, and much more! Just recall how the mere availability of a mobile phone and Wi-Fi transformed the entire learning scenario, the social scenario, and much more! As the mobile phone made its presence felt, children got glued to it! Serious concerns were expressed on various counts by concerned parents on how damaging its impact would be on their studies -- and more than that, on their growing up. COVID-19 changed it all just upside-down! Online teaching became a great support to ensure the continuity of the process of education and studies in tough times. Parental attitudes changed drastically! Scolding and frowning over too much time being spent with the mobile phone was replaced by coaxing children to spend more time on mobile studies! One had personally observed how society took it upon itself to come forward and to assist the children who needed the gadget support.

As AI gets 'universalised', the workstation scenario would again change drastically, and sharing will remain necessary even in the emerging context. Institutional collaboration would become much more

secretariat to make any appointment, even against the posts that are already sanctioned to the university! Most of these universities are starved of resources, both of infrastructure and personnel. Autonomy - exceptions apart - stands reduced to a cypher. About the private 'deemed universities', less said the better. The minority institutions established under the constitutional provisions are practically 'islands in isolation', they manage things in their own way.

If the universalisation of AI is to be achieved without depriving a sizeable number of young persons in higher education, even the school teachers have to be in a position on a regular basis, and in the right teacher-taught ratio! One of the disturbing aspects that directly and adversely impacts the quality is the decline in the credibility of the regulatory bodies across the board. Universities are the places where morals, ethics, values, national ethos, respect for diversity and much more are learned, apart from the prescribed syllabi! This just cannot be ignored! All these aspects are being mentioned as significant tangible pedagogical changes are already taking place at each stage, and at an unprecedented pace. Whatever is accepted in the policy must be put into practice in full and at the earliest. There are issues of equity and inclusion that just cannot be addressed if the gap in the quality of education imparted in institutions of higher education remains too glaringly disturbing! A nation that has created IISc, IITs, IIMs, just can't afford universities that may not have even a regularly appointed faculty of a couple of academics!

There are several other implications that could impact the employment scenario, social context, and aspects related to socio-cultural implications. The central government, through its various bodies and institutions, launched several varied encouraging programmes for orienting and re-orienting academics, which have created positive impacts, but institutions need an adequate number of academics also to ensure quality, innovations and excellence. Much more activity in the duration sector needs to become visible in the months and years ahead.

AMIDST DRONES AND MISSILES IN DUBAI

ASHA IYER KUMAR

Dubai isn't new to booms. It is a place of celebrations throughout the year. Fireworks light up the skies in different parts for seasonal reasons, which, as residents, we sometimes are not even privy to. The soft rolls of thunder that accompany the pyrotechnics are hemmed into the aerial fabric of the city, and we have adopted them as a grand gesture of invitation to a life of plenitude and pride. It's also a booming city, given how it has grown from being swaths of sand-laden emptiness to a haven of all good things money can buy. Then, one afternoon, all of a sudden, amidst the calm of holy Ramadan, the booms that usually marked gaiety swivelled and took a bizarre turn. It was something that the city or its residents hadn't anticipated in their wildest dreams. The echoes of the new bangs had a sinister implication. It had a different backstory. As the day wore on and the sun began to set, I heard the noise again - unmistakably menacing. In the sky overhead, I saw the remains of three intercepted missiles or drones falling in a pretty, fiery arc. Against the thickening dusk, the spectacle seemed fantastic, and at the same time, scary. War



was at our doorstep, in a place that is synonymous with safety and sanctuary from many evils of the world. Neutrality shouldn't breed enmity, right? Wrong. In a world where politics has no fixed patterns, power has no conscience, the calculus of war and peace can get disfigured. Collateral damage and causality become commonplace. The UAE, along with other Gulf nations, fell victim to the side effects of a greater power game with ambiguous aims. To us, who lived cosy, cocooned lives, it was a sober reminder - nothing can be taken for

granted. Especially, peace. Yet, despite all the chaos that the news channels with their stomach-churning exaggerations created and the initial wave of alarm that consumed us, there was an underlying sense of calm when we were repeatedly informed that the nation was on the job of keeping us safe. When enquiries from across the world flooded our phones, we replied with equanimity, "We are safe. Please don't worry."

What was stark was that no expat resident believed that the scenario was as bad as the Gulf War of 1990-91 and contemplated fleeing. They knew this was a clumsy phase, and they had to stay put until it passed. It's hard to explain what instilled such unflinching trust in the government - which it would keep us out of harm's way. We were just convinced they

would. While the recurring booms in the sky kept reminding us that we were being indiscriminately pounded, we were also constantly reassured that we were being protected. It's perhaps the way we have been treated here or the way we found that this place spared us what the rest of the world constantly felt in their gut - fear. Of everyday intrusions, intimidation and criminality.

This war was an aberration. As I write this, life goes on, undisturbed. There is palpable caution, but not panic. This is not how a city facing an onslaught might typically look or behave. There are several takes on what this could do to the morale of Dubai - people voicing concern about its image as an insulated city taking a beating, or the cost of the air defence causing financial strain - but if there is one thing that this semblance of war hasn't and cannot do is steal the confidence of its citizens and residents from its leadership. In the end, it's about how a nation makes its people feel. The bond between the two is like a marriage where not everything is perfect, where small grievances might be routine, but the benefits and comforts outweigh the little annoyances, where the reasons to stay and love overshadow the rest.

The power of saying thank you at work

AK Sharma

With every second that goes by, the world seems to be remarkably evolving. From dynamites to drones, from record-keeping books to excel sheets, and to the present grandeur of Artificial Intelligence - human life has endured a significant amount of change and transformation unlike any other species. While we are embracing technology more than ever, we are also quietly slipping into a trance of being overindulged in the so-called rat race or the hustle culture. The question is no longer who is the fittest of all, but who is the smartest, tech-savviest, and most future-ready of all.

In this constant race of being a step forward, the individual hustle or in the majority of the situation the individual struggle has amplified to the point where it has taken a toll on the

physical and mental peace of working professionals across industries. Gone are the days when getting a degree could secure a job until retirement, because now it's not only about degrees, but internships, skill sets, additional certificate courses, and continuous upgradation of the professional self, all while keeping the third eye focused on geopolitics, stock market, rising costs, and the fear of artificial intelligence taking jobs.

The impact is such that the World Health Organisation (WHO) & International Labour Organisation Study on Long Working Hours found 745,000 annual deaths because of heart disease and strokes are linked to long working hours.

Whereas the Gallup - State of the Global Workplace Report points to 86% of employees struggling or suffering in its India findings. In another



study called the Workplace Burnout Report, conducted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) & Boston Consulting Group, 58% of Indian professionals have experienced burnout due to constant work demands; this number is 10% more than the global average.

With such staggering numbers, one ponders the long-term repercussions and what to do to find remedies for an exhaustive working population.

In such an environment, employee appreciation becomes essential and more than a ceremonial gesture. The art of recognition and praise, a balanced and flexible workplace, are essentially the driving forces behind tackling the exhausted workforce. These generous acts of appreciation, recognition of efforts, praise of well-executed tasks,

and empathy during difficult times cement a deeper connection between employees and the organisation, boosting morale and confidence in an environment where employees believe that they are not resources but people driving progress.

Mary Kay Ash, the founder of Mary Kay Inc., summed up well when she said, "There are two things people want more than sex and money - recognition and praise", which is why on this Employee Appreciation Day, celebrated on the first Friday of March - companies should take pride in their employees, appreciate them, and ensure their well-being; for every profit accomplished there stands employees whose efforts sustain the companies. A gesture of appreciation may be small, but it fosters belief and comfort, boosting morale - something missing in this remarkably evolving world.