

Democratic AI

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The sight of a long line of tail-lights as I descended the flyover left me with a sinking feeling- it was 8 am on a rain-soaked morning and the tail lights could only mean that there was a traffic jam. I assumed it was a truck or a light goods vehicle which regularly has a breakdown and blocks a lane on the highway. But this was different. I was lucky since the jam took only about 25 minutes to clear while on the way back, I noticed that the jam was extending for more than 10 kilometers.

Delhi Police had blocked the road leading from the airport to Central Delhi because some VIPs were to travel. This was a regular phenomenon on this road. Except this time the VIPs were the new global royalty- the bosses of AI companies who had come for the AI Summit being held in Delhi. All the major roads leading from the airport as well as various hotels to the venue had been restricted though some of them more than others. This of course led to major traffic snarls throughout the city since the traffic was diverted to other roads which became clogged as a result.

The tech bosses no doubt would have been impressed with the wide though empty roads and the flawless arrangement made by Delhi Police in controlling the notoriously unruly traffic (not to speak of stray cattle) on Delhi roads. They would also have noticed freshly painted roundabouts and, in Lutyen's Delhi, thousands of tulips blooming in meticulously manicured lawns. And what is more, there was little talk of the noxious air in Delhi, thanks primarily to the weather and the unseasonal rains.

However, they too would have got a reality check on reaching the venue. Here there was the usual chaos with which we are all too familiar. Tens of thousands of visitors jostling to get inside, long queues at the security checks, no clear directions, and worse, for a Summit on Technology, technologies which didn't quite measure up to expectations.

As per the newspaper reports, the first day of the Summit was an organizational disaster. There was total confusion at the entrances, no proper arrangement for safe-keeping of personal belongings and inadequate access to food and water. What is ironical, as per the reports, there was patchy mobile connectivity and even our world-

beating UPI technology could not be used to pay at the venue and only cash could be used.

A friend who runs an AI startup in Bangalore told me that his company had put up a booth at the Summit where they were displaying their products when all of a sudden they were told to leave the venue because there was an unplanned VIP visit. They were not allowed to take their belongings and were made to wait for several hours before they were allowed to come back. Imagine their horror on returning when they found that their booth had been wiped clean and all their belongings had been stolen.

The three core principals or Sutras of the AI summit are People, Planet and Progress. The idea is to democratize AI that is make AI more inclusive. These noble thoughts would no doubt be comforting to the hapless commuter on the DTC bus whose bus was stuck in the jam and who then also had to walk a long distance to her workplace just so that the tech royalty could be given access to traffic free roads.

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