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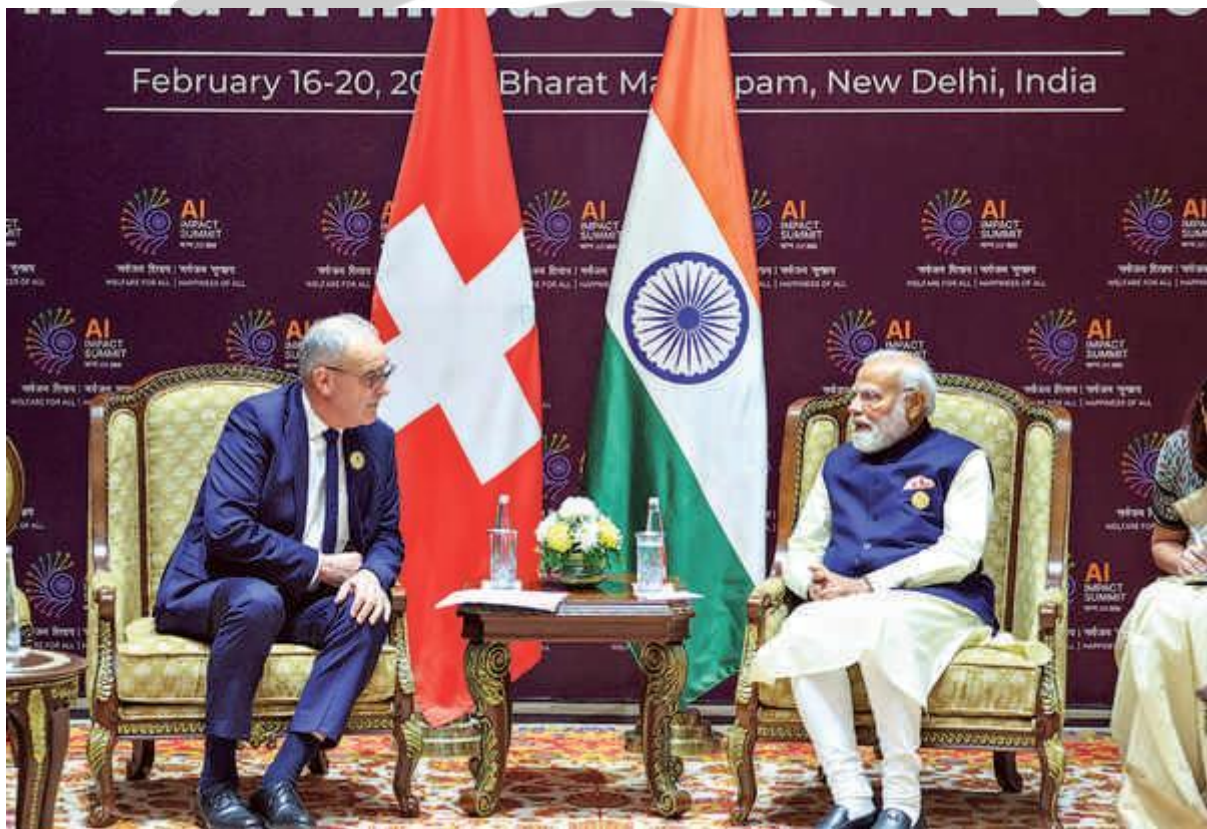
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1. India sees future, not fear, in AI, says Prime Minister at plenary session of summit

Why in the News?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated at the plenary session of the AI Impact Summit that India “sees its future, not fear, in artificial intelligence (AI).” His remarks come amid rapid global advancements in generative AI, rising regulatory debates, and intensifying technological competition between major powers. Notably, his speech was livestreamed in seven Indian languages and English using AI-powered real-time translation, highlighting India’s push for inclusive and multilingual AI adoption.

He also met Swiss President Guy Parmelin on the sidelines of the summit, signalling growing global cooperation in emerging technologies.



Background

Global AI Transformation

Artificial Intelligence has emerged as a transformative technology comparable to the Industrial Revolution or the Internet revolution.

Globally:

- Countries are investing heavily in AI research and semiconductor ecosystems.
- There is growing concern over ethical AI, job displacement, misinformation, and surveillance.
- Regulatory frameworks such as AI governance models are being debated in multilateral forums.

India’s AI Ecosystem

India has been strengthening:

- Semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem
- Data centre infrastructure
- Electronics manufacturing through PLI schemes
- Quantum computing initiatives
- A rapidly expanding start-up ecosystem

Government initiatives include:

- IndiaAI Mission
- National Strategy for AI
- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) model
- BHASHINI (AI-based language translation platform)

The livestream of PM Modi's speech in multiple languages reflects India's ambition to bridge digital divides using AI.

Features

Future, Not Fear" Approach

- India does not see AI as a threat to jobs or sovereignty.
- Instead, it views AI as an engine of growth, innovation, and global leadership.
- Confidence in India's demographic dividend and digital public infrastructure.

Human-Centric AI

The PM emphasised shifting AI:

- From machine-centric to human-centric
- From elite-controlled to democratised
- From exclusionary to inclusive

He stressed that AI must benefit:

- The Global South
- Marginalised communities
- Developing nations

The MANAV Framework

PM Modi proposed the acronym MANAV, focusing on:

- M – Moral and ethical systems
- A – Accountable governance of AI models
- N – National sovereignty over data
- A – Accessible and inclusive AI
- V – Valid and legitimate uses

This blends ethical governance with strategic autonomy.

AI and Strategic Sovereignty

India aims to:

- Build indigenous semiconductor capacity
- Secure national data
- Avoid overdependence on foreign AI models

- Strengthen digital public infrastructure

Challenges

Despite optimism, India faces structural constraints:

Infrastructure Gaps

- Semiconductor fabrication remains nascent.
- Heavy dependence on imported chips.
- High energy demand of AI data centres.

Skill Deficit

- Need for advanced AI research talent.
- Risk of digital divide between urban and rural India.

Ethical & Regulatory Concerns

- Algorithmic bias.
- Misinformation and deepfakes.
- Privacy and surveillance risks.
- Balancing innovation with regulation.

Data Sovereignty vs Global Integration

- Need to protect citizen data.
- Simultaneously, remain integrated with global AI ecosystems.

Global Competition

- US–China AI race.
- Export controls on advanced chips.
- Geopolitical fragmentation of technology supply chains.

Way Forward

Strengthen Semiconductor Ecosystem

- Fast-track fabrication plants.
- Encourage R&D in chip design.
- Deepen global partnerships.

Human-Centric AI Governance

- Institutionalise ethical AI guidelines.
- Align with constitutional values.
- Develop explainable and transparent AI systems.

Democratise AI Access

- Expand AI tools in Indian languages.
- Integrate AI into public service delivery (health, agriculture, education).
- Promote open-source AI models.

Invest in Skill Development

- AI curriculum in universities.

- Upskilling through Digital India initiatives.
- Support AI research clusters.

Lead Global South AI Coalition

- Share digital public infrastructure.
- Advocate equitable AI governance.
- Promote affordable AI for development.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion that India sees "future, not fear" in AI reflects a strategic positioning of India as:

- A technological power
- A voice of the Global South
- A proponent of ethical and inclusive AI

The proposed MANAV framework attempts to combine morality, sovereignty, inclusivity, and accountability in AI governance.

For India, AI is not merely a technological shift—it is framed as a civilisational turning point. The success of this vision will depend on whether India can translate ambition into infrastructure, skills, ethical safeguards, and global leadership.

2. Tehran reenters the global geopolitical spotlight

Why in the News?

Iran has once again returned to the centre of global geopolitics amid renewed tensions over its nuclear programme. After military strikes on Iranian nuclear and air defence sites, the United States under President Donald Trump has simultaneously pursued diplomacy resembling earlier negotiations under Barack Obama. As highlighted in Kabir Taneja's article "Tehran reenters the global geopolitical spotlight", the issue has resurfaced as a critical geopolitical flashpoint with implications for West Asia, great power politics, and India's strategic interests.

Background

The JCPOA and the Iran Nuclear Question

In 2015, Iran and the P5+1 (U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China + Germany) signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Key objectives:

- Limit Iran's uranium enrichment.
- Allow international inspections.
- Ease economic sanctions in return.

Iran, under President Hassan Rouhani and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, maintained that its programme was for civilian use.

However, in 2018, President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the JCPOA, calling it inadequate for American security interests

Renewed Military Action and Diplomacy

- The U.S. and Israel reportedly carried out strikes on Iranian nuclear and air defence sites.

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has consistently viewed a nuclear Iran as an existential threat.
- Talks are reportedly being mediated by Oman in Muscat.
- Simultaneously, the U.S. has increased military deployments in the region. This dual-track strategy—military pressure plus diplomacy—resembles pre-2015 negotiations.

Features of the Current Situation

Trump's "Own JCPOA"?

Despite withdrawing from the 2015 deal, President Trump is now pursuing negotiations similar in spirit to those he once criticised

This suggests:

- Recognition that diplomacy may be unavoidable.
- Limits of coercive military action.
- Strategic recalibration.

Gulf Arab States Oppose Escalation

The Gulf monarchies:

- Have invested heavily in ties with Washington.
- Do not want a regional war.
- Fear retaliation against U.S. bases located in their territories
- Iran has signalled its capacity to retaliate, raising concerns of a wider conflict.



Regional Power Politics

Iran remains central due to:

- Its rivalry with Israel.
- It has ties with non-state actors.

- It's engagement in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon.
- It's evolving relationship with Pakistan and the Taliban.

Internal protests and political consolidation within Iran also affect its external posture.

Challenges

Risk of Military Escalation

- Any miscalculation could trigger a broader West Asian war.
- Energy supply routes (Strait of Hormuz) could be disrupted.

Strategic Uncertainty

- U.S. military build-up increases tensions.
- Unpredictability in leadership decisions creates diplomatic fragility.

Fragmented Global Order

- Russia and China oppose nuclear proliferation but also resist U.S. dominance.
- Europe prefers diplomatic resolution but has limited leverage.

Domestic Instability in Iran

- Internal protests.
- Hardliners vs moderates dynamic.
- Nationalist consolidation after military pressure

The Stakes for India

Energy Security

Iran was once among India's top oil suppliers.

Sanctions disrupted:

- Crude oil imports.
- Banking channels.
- Strategic energy planning.

Connectivity & Chabahar

- India has invested in Chabahar Port for connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- Escalation could jeopardise India's strategic access route, bypassing Pakistan.

3. Strategic Balancing

Iran matters for India because of:

- It's fraught with ties to Pakistan.
- It's pragmatic dealings with the Taliban.
- Influence in Central Asia vis-à-vis Turkish and Pakistani outreach

India must balance:

- Relations with the U.S.
- Ties with Israel.
- Strategic engagement with Iran.

Way Forward

Diplomacy Over Coercion

- A renewed agreement, even if imperfect, is preferable to conflict.

India's Balanced Approach

- Continue multi-alignment.

- Maintain energy diversification.
- Protect Chabahar investments.
- Engage Tehran diplomatically without violating sanctions.

Support Multilateral Frameworks

- Revive a JCPOA-like arrangement.
- Encourage UN-backed inspection regimes.
- Reduce unilateral military actions.

Regional De-escalation

- Gulf states can mediate.
- Oman's role as a neutral facilitator should be strengthened.

Conclusion

Iran's return to the geopolitical spotlight underscores:

- The fragility of nuclear diplomacy.
- The dangers of coercive unilateralism.
- The interconnectedness of West Asian security with global stability.

For India, Iran is not merely an oil supplier but a strategic gateway and political actor. A successful diplomatic resolution would stabilise the region and protect India's long-term interests.

3. SIR in 22 States and U.T.s expected from April: EC

Why in the News?

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has informed Chief Electoral Officers that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the remaining 22 States and Union Territories is expected to begin from April 2026. The move comes as the Commission coordinates the exercise alongside the upcoming Population Census, raising administrative and logistical considerations.

Background: What is Special Intensive Revision (SIR)?

A Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is a comprehensive, door-to-door verification and updating of electoral rolls to:

- Remove duplicate or deceased voters
- Add newly eligible voters
- Correct errors in entries
- Ensure roll integrity before major elections

The last nationwide SIR was conducted between 2002 and 2004. Bihar underwent SIR last year ahead of the Assembly elections, followed by a second phase in 12 States/UTs in October 2025.

States Where SIR Is Underway (Phase II)

Currently undergoing SIR:

- Kerala
- Tamil Nadu
- West Bengal
- Gujarat
- Uttar Pradesh

- Puducherry
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- Chhattisgarh
- Goa
- Lakshadweep
- Madhya Pradesh
- Rajasthan

The process has seen multiple deadline extensions, particularly in Uttar Pradesh.



States & UTs Where SIR Is Expected from April 2026

The remaining 22 include:

- Andhra Pradesh
- Arunachal Pradesh
- Chandigarh
- Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu
- Haryana
- Himachal Pradesh
- Jammu and Kashmir
- Jharkhand
- Karnataka
- Ladakh
- Maharashtra
- Manipur
- Meghalaya
- Mizoram
- Nagaland
- National Capital Territory of Delhi
- Odisha

- Punjab
- Sikkim
- Tripura
- Telangana
- Uttarakhand

Census and SIR: Administrative Overlap

The SIR timeline coincides with the Population Census 2027, whose house-listing phase begins on April 1.

Key issue:

- Around 30 lakh enumerators will be deployed for the Census.
- Booth Level Officers (BLOs) for SIR are largely government school teachers.
- Overlap in manpower may strain administrative capacity.

The ECI is reportedly coordinating with the Registrar-General and Census authorities to stagger deployment of resources.

Key Features of the SIR Exercise

- Mapping with 2002–04 Rolls. Existing electoral rolls will be compared with earlier SIR data to detect duplication and anomalies.
- Door-to-Door Verification BLOs conduct field-level verification.
- Public Hearings: Claims and objections are adjudicated.
- Pre-Revision Work States were instructed in July 2025 to begin preparatory steps.

Challenges

Administrative Burden

- Simultaneous Census and SIR could overburden teachers and field staff.

Political Sensitivity

Electoral roll revisions often trigger:

- Allegations of voter exclusion
- Claims of selective deletions
- Concerns about disenfranchisement

Data Accuracy vs Speed

Balancing:

- Thorough verification
- Timely completion before elections

Federal Coordination

Effective implementation requires:

- State machinery cooperation
- Transparent grievance redressal

Legal Complexities

- Example: Assam opted for a special revision instead of SIR due to National Register of Citizens (NRC) related legal hurdles.

Way Forward

Synchronised Planning

- Coordinate Census and SIR schedules.
- Use staggered deployment of BLOs.

Digital Integration

- Leverage voter portals for online corrections.
- Improve interoperability between electoral and civil registration databases.

Transparency Measures

- Publish draft rolls widely.
- Ensure a robust claims and objections mechanism.

Safeguards Against Exclusion

- Avoid mass deletions without notice.
- Ensure awareness campaigns in rural and marginalised communities.

Independent Monitoring

- Invite civil society oversight.
- Maintain public trust through periodic briefings.

Conclusion

The upcoming SIR in 22 States and UTs marks a significant nationwide electoral housekeeping exercise. Conducted alongside the Census, it presents logistical challenges but also an opportunity to enhance electoral integrity. Ensuring transparency, administrative coordination, and safeguarding voter inclusion will be critical for the credibility of India's democratic process.

4. Bill Gates withdraws from AI Impact Summit keynote address

Why in the News?

Bill Gates withdrew at the last minute from delivering a keynote address at the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. The decision came amid renewed global scrutiny over his past association with Jeffrey Epstein, following the release of additional U.S. Department of Justice files. The Gates Foundation stated that the move was made to ensure that the focus remained on the summit's priorities.

Background

The AI Impact Summit

The summit brought together global leaders and technology executives, including:

- Narendra Modi
- Emmanuel Macron
- Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva
- Sundar Pichai

The Epstein Controversy

Following the release of new Epstein-related documents on January 31 by the U.S. Department of Justice, renewed questions emerged regarding Mr Gates' past interactions with Epstein.

Key points:

- Mr Gates has denied wrongdoing.
- He has expressed regret over meeting Epstein.
- Emails and photographs indicate communication between the two.
- Reports suggest Epstein was consulted on fundraising strategies for the foundation.

The controversy triggered political responses in India, including appeals from Opposition leaders not to allow him to speak at the summit.

Key Developments

Website Confusion

- His name was removed from the summit website list of speakers.
- However, the agenda continued to mention him initially.

Government Response

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT declined to comment on attendance decisions.

Replacement at Summit

- Mr Gates was replaced by Ankur Vohra, President of the Gates Foundation's India and Africa offices.

Continued Engagement

- MMrGates visited Andhra Pradesh and met Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu as scheduled.

Issues at Stake

Reputation and Platforming

When high-profile international figures face controversies:

- Hosting governments must balance diplomatic engagement with reputational considerations.
- Public events risk being overshadowed by unrelated controversies.

Soft Power and Optics

India's AI summit aimed to project:

- Technological leadership
- Ethical AI governance
- Global collaboration

The presence of a controversial figure could have diverted focus from policy discussions.

Philanthropy and Accountability

The case raises broader questions:

- Should past associations affect current philanthropic engagements?
- How should governments assess reputational risk when inviting global leaders?

Challenges

- **Diplomatic Sensitivity**
Avoiding embarrassment while maintaining international partnerships.
- **Political Polarisation**
Domestic opposition scrutiny can amplify controversies.
- **Information Management**
Conflicting public communication can create confusion.
- **Balancing Development Goals**
India continues to partner with the Gates Foundation on health and development initiatives.

Way Forward

Clear Communication Protocols

Governments and event organisers should:

- Provide timely and transparent updates.
- Avoid mixed messaging.

Risk Assessment Framework

Establish criteria for:

- Inviting global personalities.
- Managing reputational risk.

Institutional Focus

Ensure that:

- Events remain policy-centric.
- Personal controversies do not overshadow substantive discussions.

Continued Development Engagement

Maintain cooperation on:

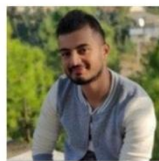
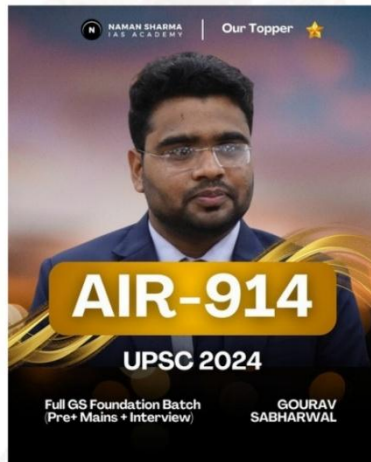
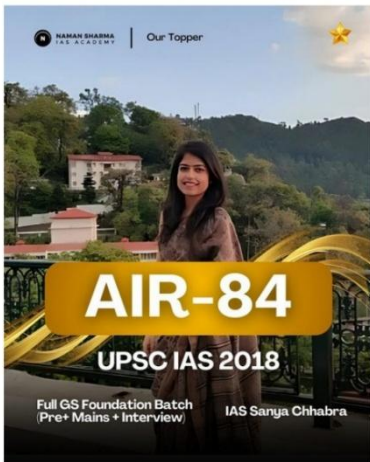
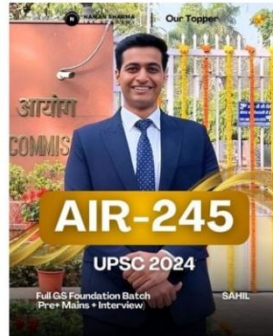
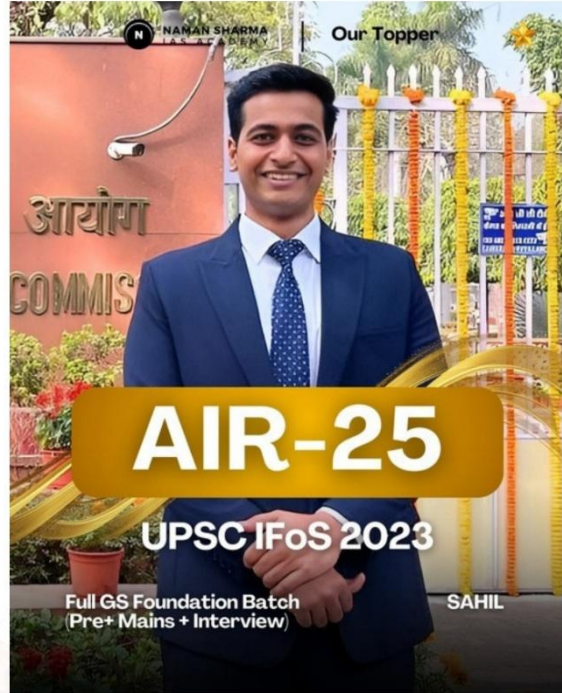
- Health initiatives
- Digital public goods
- AI for development

Conclusion

Bill Gates' withdrawal from the AI Impact Summit underscores the intersection of technology diplomacy, reputation management, and political optics. While the Gates Foundation emphasised continued commitment to India's development goals, the episode reflects the challenges of hosting high-profile global events in an era of heightened scrutiny and rapid information flows.



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