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Is India really “behind” in AI on the global stage, or are we measuring the wrong things?

At Davos, [Ashwini Vaishnaw](#) made a claim that India is not in the second league of AI nations. It is firmly in the first.

His argument is refreshingly practical. AI power is not about who builds the biggest model. It is about who creates real ROI at scale.

AI has five layers. Applications, models, chips, infrastructure, and energy. India is working across all five.

At the application layer, India’s strength is clear. Understanding enterprises, solving real problems, and deploying AI where value is visible. That is where productivity gains happen. Not in flashy demos, but in day to day business workflows.

At the model layer, the focus is sharp. 95 percent of real world use cases do not need trillion parameter models. India is building a bouquet of 20 to 50 billion parameter models that are already deployed across sectors. Local, affordable, and good enough to deliver results.

Compute is often seen as a bottleneck. India addressed it structurally. A public private partnership has empanelled over 38,000 GPUs as a shared national resource. Students, startups, and researchers can access compute at nearly one third the global cost.

Then comes governance. Instead of regulation on paper alone, India is pushing a techno legal approach. Tools to detect deepfakes, mitigate bias, and enable proper unlearning before deployment. Regulation through code, not just clauses.

Perhaps the most controversial take was on geopolitics. Does owning the largest AI model give geopolitical power? Vaishnaw thinks not. In fact, he suggests that over investment in massive models without ROI may lead to economic stress.

India's strategy bets on diffusion over dominance. Adoption over admiration. ROI over hype.

So here is the uncomfortable question: In the AI era, will nations win by building the biggest models, or by making AI boring, affordable, and everywhere?

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Ashwini Vaishnaw
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India is working on all 5 layers of the AI architecture: application, model, chip, infra and energy. We are building the foundation for global AI services.

World Economic Forum, Davos



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