

EDITORIAL

Protect children in difficult situations

Most of you are lucky enough to have a home to live in with your parents, who take care of your needs, you go to school and look forward to higher education, are taken to a doctor when you fall sick even with cough or cold, and have all other facilities a comfortable bed to sleep in and watch TV and play games. You don't have to worry about your next meal as you know your mum will make something you like or you can ask her to make something special. However, unfortunately, all children are not as lucky. You must have heard and even seen young children working in homes, workshops and hotels, and some even begging for food and money; they often have nowhere to sleep or play except on the roadsides. It is sad and may come as a shock to some of you that sometimes children are even kidnapped and maimed, and forced to beg on the streets. And to add to the horror of it all, in some countries that are engaged in ongoing conflicts children are also recruited as child soldiers to fight alongside older people. In conflict areas, even those who are not forced to fight feel the impact of war badly as they often have to miss school, or may even lose a parent or a loved one. When children are caught in difficult situations, they have no chance that their rights would be fulfilled. In fact, most are not even aware that they have any rights. They wake up in the morning and, often without breakfast or just a cup of tea, rush to their place of work so as not to be scolded by their employer. It is sad that when children are forced to work due to their circumstances. People often mistreat them, forgetting that they are children, are weak and more liable to make mistakes. They should not, under any circumstances, be expected to work like adults. These child labourers often want to go to school, but their circumstances do not allow them. They dream of wearing a smart uniform and bag in hand go to school as they see other children do, but their dreams remain unfulfilled. They often are not taken to a doctor unless they are seriously ill, as their parents can't afford to do so. While living on the streets or in shanty houses, they are more liable to accidents and harm.

DISCLAIMER

"Jammu Bulletin" does not take responsibility for the contents of the advertisements (Display/ Classified) carried in this newspaper. The paper does not endorse the same. Readers are requested to verify the contents on their own before acting there upon.

Edited, Printed, Published and owned by
Ankush Mahajan
Published at Plot No. 4A, 1st Floor, Set or-3,
Surya Chowk, Channi Himmat Jammu (J&K)
Printed at JK Printing and Publications,
Sunjwan, Jammu (Tawi).
E-mail: jammubulletin@gmail.com
All disputes are subject to the exclusive
jurisdiction of competent courts and
forums in Jammu only.

Medical tourism: India as global healing hub

BY
R K SINHA

With its unique offerings and competitive advantages, the country is poised to become a global leader in medical tourism, attracting patients from across the globe

Recently, Britain's King Charles visited India on a private trip with his wife, Queen Camilla. During their three-day stay, they stayed at a modern holistic health centre near Bengaluru, where they participated in yoga, meditation sessions, and yoga therapy.

This illustrates that even global elites, from ordinary patients to royalty, are realising the benefits of seeking treatment from India's modern doctors and traditional healing methods to maintain good health and youthfulness. In recent years, India has become a preferred destination for patients seeking treatment for heart diseases, bone disorders, kidney and liver transplants, dental care, cancer and even conditions deemed incurable. Patients are coming not only from South Asian countries but also from Africa, Central Asia, Gulf nations, and even Western countries in the millions every year.

Alongside affordable

and successful modern medical treatments, traditional Indian healing methods such as Ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy, dietetics, and millet-based therapies are gaining popularity among foreign patients. For instance, the daughter of Kenya's former Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, regained her vision after receiving treatment at Sreedhareyam Ayurvedic Eye Hospital in Ernakulam, Kerala.

This success led to a significant rise in patients from East Africa seeking Ayurvedic treatments in India. During my frequent travels to Dehradun, I often encounter foreign tourists—men and women of all ages and professions—on flights and trains. Many of them are headed to ashrams or health centres in places like Haridwar, Rishikesh and Dehradun for stays ranging from two weeks to three months.

Their length of stay and the cost—often equivalent to or exceeding luxury five-star hotel rates—depend on the severity of their condition and the treatment required. In addition to traditional treatments, modern hospitals in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chandigarh are drawing a large number of international patients seeking cosmetic procedures to enhance their appearance. Plastic surgeons report seeing dozens of foreign patients each month for

treatments such as burn injury repair, hair transplants, and skin-tightening procedures. This trend represents a golden opportunity for India to attract more foreign patients. Medical tourism not only earns valuable foreign exchange but also supports local economies, as patients often arrive with caretakers who stay in hotels for weeks or months.

Indian expatriates living abroad are also increasingly returning to India for affordable and high-quality medical care. India's edge lies in offering top-tier pre-and post-surgical care at a fraction of the cost of similar services in Europe or the US. Cosmetic surgeons in India treat patients seeking procedures like fat reduction and skin tightening, as ageing and environmental factors accelerate skin issues. With growing awareness of beauty treatments, both men and women are increasingly opting for cosmetic and surgical solutions.

Globally, millions of cosmetic surgeries are performed annually, with the US being a leader in this sector. While initially popular among women, plastic surgery is now equally common among men. Broadly, plastic surgery can be divided into two categories: cosmetic surgery, which enhances appearance, and reconstructive surgery, which repairs damage from injuries, illnesses, or birth



defects. India, with its highly qualified medical professionals, advanced equipment, and cost-effective treatments, is well-positioned to take a giant leap in medical tourism.

Treatment costs in India are about one-fourth of those in the US, without compromising on quality. If India strategically strengthens this sector, patients will increasingly choose India over competitors like Thailand, Singapore, China, and Japan, which are also vying for medical tourists. Medical tourism is a multi-billion-dollar industry globally. To secure a larger share, India must develop internationally accredited

hospitals and clinics, provide specialised care in fields like cardiology, oncology, orthopaedics, and transplantation, and embrace telemedicine and digital healthcare services. India's millet-based therapies also offer a unique edge. Padma Shri awardee Dr Khadar Vali claims that millet can cure even the most severe illnesses within six weeks to six months without any medication. Such unique approaches, along with robust policy support from the government, can further elevate India's medical tourism potential.

Marketing campaigns, patient-centric packages, visa facilitation, language translation services and accommo-

modation arrangements can make India a more attractive destination for international patients. The figures speak for themselves—14 lakh foreign patients came to India for treatment in 2022.

To meet the ambitious target of attracting 1 crore international patients annually by 2030, India must ensure world-class healthcare services and develop specific areas of expertise. With proper planning and execution, India can establish itself as a global hub for medical tourism.

(The writer is a former member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha and a columnist; views are personal)

**** AI and income inequality ****

BY
JADHAV
CHAKRADHAR,
ARUN KUMAR
BAIRWA

The benefits of AI will reach broad segments of society only if access is equitable

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has sparked a global debate: will AI foster more equitable economic opportunities or exacerbate income inequality? While AI promises gains in productivity and efficiency, its impact on the global economy is uncertain and complex. This article examines AI's role in shaping income inequality through occupational displacement, economic polarisation and access barriers, questioning whether its ultimate influence will promote or undermine economic equity.

Inequality Challenge

Income inequality within countries has steadily increased, with the gap between the average incomes of the top 10% and the bottom 50% nearly doubling — from 10 to 18 times — between 1980 and 2020. Factors such as hyper-globalisation, technological shifts and resource disparities have driven this trend, creating a new economic divide that AI could deepen. Historically, technology has concentrated wealth among those with the means to control and leverage it.

However, AI's potential scope extends beyond routine tasks,

disrupting roles in finance, law, medicine, journalism and various low- to medium-skilled sectors. This broad reach could drive inclusive growth by creating jobs and expanding economic participation, or it could exacerbate disparities by concentrating high-paying roles and AI-driven benefits within a small elite, reinforcing a hierarchical economy grounded in technological ownership and expertise.

Double-Edged Sword

Automation, a major factor in AI-driven inequality, enables AI systems to handle increasingly complex tasks traditionally performed by humans — from data analysis and customer service to diagnostics and creative content generation. While automation enhances corporate efficiency and profit, it also reduces demand for certain human roles, particularly in routine, low- and medium-skilled jobs. This shift could drive workers toward lower-paying, less secure service-sector roles or, worst cases, force them out of the workforce.

Industries such as transportation, retail and manufacturing are already experiencing the impact of AI-driven automation, with machines and algorithms gradually replacing human labour. Studies indicate that millions of jobs could be at risk, disproportionately affecting those with limited resources or specialised skills. This displacement challenges workers to find roles that align with their abilities and pay expectations, while high-tech fields like AI development and data science demand specialised training that is

inaccessible to much of the workforce.

Wealth and Power

The growing AI economy increasingly centralises wealth and influence among a small group of individuals and companies who control these technologies. Financial gains from AI predominantly benefit technology owners, corporate executives and a select group of skilled professionals, potentially establishing an economic hierarchy where high-tech opportunities are limited to the well-resourced while the rest face stagnant or declining incomes.

This division restricts economic mobility, with income growth benefiting those at the top. Individuals without access to AI skills face significant challenges in securing well-paying jobs, as high-tech roles often demand specialised knowledge and resources that many lack. This could create a self-perpetuating cycle, where those equipped to adapt to the AI economy thrive while others are left behind.

An alternative perspective suggests AI's potential to enhance access to resources and opportunities. Just as the internet and mobile technology democratised information and communication, AI could broaden access to education, skills training, financial services, and healthcare. By making these resources more accessible and affordable, AI could help bridge divides previously defined by income and location. For example, AI-driven educational tools can bring quality education to underserved communities, offering

opportunities once limited to wealthier groups.

Financial gains from AI benefit a select group of skilled professionals, establishing an economic hierarchy where high-tech opportunities are limited to the well-resourced.

Yet, the benefits of AI will reach broad segments of society only if access is equitable. Without proactive measures, there is a risk that AI advantages will continue to favour those with technological resources and expertise. If governments, businesses and institutions ensure that AI-driven tools and services reach lower-income and marginalised communities, AI could reduce rather than exacerbate certain inequalities. However, this scenario requires concerted policy action and a commitment to inclusivity.

Addressing Inequality

To mitigate AI-driven inequality, inclusive policies fostering equitable economic growth are essential. Several strategic approaches could support this goal. Both public and private sectors should invest in reskilling programmes that help workers transition into high-value roles by building skills in demand, particularly in tech and AI-related fields. Companies benefiting from AI efficiencies could be incentivised or encouraged to contribute to these initiatives.

Counties must prepare future generations for the AI economy, and schools and institutions should prioritise STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education, digital literacy and adaptability skills.

Fostering problem-solving, creativity and technical proficiency is essential for navigating an increasingly AI-driven world.

Indian Context

India's case is particularly noteworthy given its distinct economic structure and demographic profile. With a large, young workforce and a reliance on labour-intensive industries, India is poised to experience AI's impact across multiple sectors. Millions of Indians work in jobs vulnerable to automation, such as call centres, manufacturing and agriculture. For these workers, AI could result in substantial job loss and increased poverty, particularly in lower-income and rural areas. Moreover, India's limited ICT skills, particularly among marginalised communities, could worsen income inequality as AI technology advances. A recent study by Chakradhar and PK Choudhary (2024) highlights a severe disparity in computer literacy between Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes compared to upper castes in India. This digital divide leaves lower-income groups unprepared for AI-related opportunities, especially in rural areas, where ICT skills are notably deficient. Without equitable access to digital education and infrastructure, India's AI-driven economic growth risks reinforcing existing social inequalities, particularly affecting lower-caste and rural populations. At the same time, India's expanding tech sector could drive high-value job creation in urban centres. Policymakers face the

challenge of balancing AI-driven growth with protections for vulnerable populations. Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) could be instrumental in reskilling and upskilling workers, helping them transition into AI-aligned roles. Targeted rural development projects could further promote equitable AI benefits across the country.

Will AI ultimately widen income inequality? The answer depends on how we deploy, regulate and provide access to AI technologies. While AI offers the potential for democratising opportunities and enhancing economic productivity, it also risks deepening existing inequalities by concentrating wealth and power. Without proactive measures, AI may contribute to a more polarised society, restricting economic mobility for the majority. However, with thoughtful, inclusive policies, there is a path toward an AI-driven economy that broadly benefits society. The question of whether AI will expand or narrow income inequality hinges on choices that policymakers, businesses, and communities must urgently confront. AI's legacy will depend on our collective commitment to fostering a fair and inclusive future.

(Jadhav Chakradhar is Assistant Professor, Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), Hyderabad. Arun Kumar Bairwa is Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Amritsar)