

Paris AI summit: India's lead role in defining sovereignty and cooperation in digital era

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As artificial intelligence is shaping a new era of political and technological competition, influencing global power structures and redefining territoriality, its governance becomes a critical issue; nations must balance technological sovereignty with international cooperation to ensure equitable, ethical, and secure AI development



French President Emmanuel Macron, right, shakes hands with Prime Minister Narendra Modi after addressing the audience in a closing speech at the Grand Palais during the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in Paris, on February 11, 2025 | Photo- AP

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping global political, economic, and social landscapes. AI is not politically neutral; like other transformative technologies such as nuclear energy, space exploration, and radar, its applications extend beyond civil use to influence military, governance, and economic power structures.

The Artificial Intelligence Action Summit, attended by global leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Emmanuel Macron, and Vice President JD Vence, highlighted key concerns about infrastructure, responsible use, and the growing competition in AI development between global superpowers. India is co-chairing the summit with France this year and seeks to represent the interests of the Global South.

Simply stated, technology has always played a significant role in shaping geopolitical power structures. AI, as an emerging technology, poses unique challenges due to its integration across multiple sectors, including defence, economy, and governance. Under international law, issues surrounding AI have focused on jurisdictional challenges as AI systems operate across borders, raising issues of jurisdiction and applicable law. Consequently, state responsibility comes into the picture as to how international laws address state accountability for AI-driven actions, and finally the role of AI in border surveillance, immigration control, and cybersecurity governance.

In this light, the summit discussions emphasised themes such as greater access to AI infrastructure to ensure inclusion, which addresses the digital divide to ensure equitable AI development, and responsible use of AI to mitigate risks related to misinformation, bias, and ethical dilemmas in AI deployment. At the same time, the summit also focuses on utilising AI for public interest, including social development, governance, and enhanced service delivery, fostering AI ecosystems that promote inclusivity and environmental sustainability. Lastly, to ensure regulatory frameworks that align with ethical standards and public trust.

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One of the critical themes raised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the summit was technological sovereignty. With Chinese DeepSeek AI rapidly expanding in the market and the United States competing fiercely in this domain, technological sovereignty has become a crucial aspect of national security and economic independence.

Historically, the concept of territoriality has traditionally been linked to the control of physical spaces by nations or individuals. However, globalisation, technological advancements, and shifting political dynamics have transformed this notion. The movement of people, businesses, and ideas across borders has blurred traditional territorial boundaries, making sovereignty more complex, which has led to concerns over regulation, cybersecurity, and data privacy. All this is accompanied by multi-territorial identities exacerbated by migration, refugee crises, and transnational communities that have challenged the rigid concept of national identity, leading to fluid and overlapping territorial affiliations.

A significant aspect of the evolving territorial debate is data sovereignty, which refers to the governance of data according to the laws of the country or region where it is collected or stored. As data becomes an essential resource for governments and businesses, its control has become a geopolitical issue, especially with the advent of AI technology. Data sovereignty ensures that nations have control over their digital assets, addressing privacy, security, and regulatory concerns. As different countries have varying standards for data privacy and security, leading to fragmented global data governance frameworks that impact international trade and digital services.

Going forward, as artificial intelligence is shaping a new era of political and technological competition, influencing global power structures and redefining territoriality, its governance becomes a critical issue; nations must balance technological sovereignty with international cooperation to ensure equitable, ethical, and secure AI development. Moreover, the evolving nature of territoriality, driven by digital transformations and data governance, demands adaptive policies that address the challenges of a borderless digital world.

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