

Bill Gates' AI warning: India must act before disruption begins

India will have to leverage its strengths in key domains to ensure that its economy and society are not ravaged by AI



Microsoft co founder Bill Gates (Photo: Reuters)

[Hindol Sengupta](#) Aug 28, 2026

In a widely discussed essay published on August 26, 2026, Bill Gates warns that the world is entering “one of the most turbulent times in human history” as artificial intelligence reshapes work, education, security and human relationships — with no coherent plan to manage the transition. For India, this diagnosis is both a call to action and a caution: the same forces that could make AI “the greatest equaliser ever invented” also risk making it “the worst source of injustice”, depending on policy choices made now.

Gates's nearly 6,000-word essay, titled ‘The turbulent AI era is here. The choices we make now are critical’, argues that AI is already crossing danger thresholds that the industry itself once said should trigger a pause: mass job displacement, powerful cyber and biological capabilities, emotional

dependence on machines, and erosion of human control. He identifies three principal risks.

AI will substitute for human cognition in law, medicine, customer service, software and manufacturing, hitting entry- and mid-level roles hardest and potentially creating structural unemployment that does not self-correct. AI-enabled fraud, deepfakes, cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, and even biotech misuse will scale faster than defensive capacities. AI companions and over-reliance on AI tutors could stunt emotional and cognitive development and replace human relationships, especially for young people. Alongside these risks, Gates stresses AI's transformative potential in healthcare, education, agriculture, mental health access and government service delivery — areas where India already faces acute capacity constraints.

India's opportunity lies in leveraging AI to compress decades of development into years, particularly in sectors where the scarcity of skilled professionals is a binding constraint. Gates notes that AI diagnostic tools are already deployed in nearly 2,000 US hospitals; similar systems could extend specialist-level triage to India's primary health centres, reducing mortality from treatable conditions and easing the burden on overworked doctors. For a country with a low doctor-to-population ratio and vast rural-urban disparities, AI-assisted screening for TB, diabetic retinopathy, cervical cancer and maternal risk could be transformative.

AI tutors that preserve “productive struggle” rather than simply supplying answers could help India address learning deficits revealed by national assessments, while also enabling personalised upskilling for a young workforce facing rapid technological change. In a system where teacher shortages and large class sizes are endemic, AI can act as a force multiplier — if designed to augment, not replace, human instruction.

Gates highlights AI's potential to give small farmers in low-income countries access to advice on weather, seeds, soil and pests that currently only wealthier farmers receive. For India's millions of small and marginal farmers, such tools

could improve yields, reduce input waste and enhance climate resilience, directly supporting food security and rural incomes.

AI can streamline enrolment and verification for health insurance, food subsidies and welfare schemes, reducing leakage and exclusion errors that have long plagued India's social protection architecture. Given India's existing digital public infrastructure (Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker), AI could further lower transaction costs and improve last-mile delivery.

In each of these domains, AI functions as a development accelerant, allowing India to do more with existing fiscal and human resources. Yet Gates's warnings map uncomfortably well onto India's structural realities. India's demographic dividend depends on absorbing millions of young jobseekers annually into formal employment. If AI erodes entry-level roles in IT services, back-office operations, customer support, basic coding, paralegal work and radiology, the "first rung" of the career ladder could vanish before many climb it. Unlike cyclical downturns, this displacement may not reverse with growth, risking a generation of underemployed graduates. With a large informal sector and limited unemployment insurance, India lacks the automatic stabilisers Gates implicitly assumes.

Structural AI-driven job loss could translate quickly into household distress, social unrest and political pressure for short-term fixes rather than strategic adaptation. India's experience with deepfakes, coordinated disinformation and financial fraud suggests AI will amplify existing vulnerabilities. Criminals with limited skills could target individuals, firms and even government systems at unprecedented scale, as Gates warns. In an electoral democracy with intense information warfare, AI-generated content could further erode trust in institutions. With high smartphone penetration and heavy social media use among Indian youth, AI companions and hyper-personalised content risk deepening isolation, anxiety and attention fragmentation. In a context where mental health services are scarce, technology-induced harms could outpace the capacity to respond.

Gates's central claim is that the outcome is not technologically determined but politically chosen: AI will be an equaliser or an engine of injustice depending on governance. For India, this implies several priorities. Gates proposes a "Human Reserved" category of jobs closed to machines, potentially up to 40 per cent of roles, to preserve human-to-human interaction in care, education and public services. India could adapt this by mandating human presence in frontline health, schooling, policing and welfare delivery, using AI as backend support rather than front-end replacement. Gates suggests taxing AI tokens or robots akin to payroll taxes to fund retraining and social protection. India could explore levies on high-value AI deployments or data-intensive platforms, channelling revenues into lifelong learning, vocational transitions and regional development in AI-exposed sectors.

Gates calls for new national bodies and international institutions to coordinate AI policy, given the cross-border nature of the risks. India's existing AI mission and sectoral regulators could be strengthened into a coherent architecture that balances innovation with safeguards, while engaging in global norm-setting to avoid a race to the bottom.

Policies could limit AI companions in schools, require transparency in AI tutoring systems, and invest in human-centric pedagogy that uses AI to enhance, not substitute for, teacher-student interaction. Gates's essay is a mirror for India's AI moment: it shows both the scale of opportunity and the depth of danger. If India treats AI as a strategic public good – embedding it in health, education, agriculture and governance while protecting human roles and relationships – it can harness the technology to narrow inequalities and accelerate development.

If, however, it allows market forces alone to dictate adoption, AI could entrench existing disparities, displace the very youth who are supposed to drive growth, and amplify misinformation and insecurity. The difference between these futures will be determined not by the technology itself, but by the clarity and courage of India's policy choices in the next few years.

(Hindol Sengupta is Professor of International Relations at O. P. Jindal Global University. Views expressed in the above piece are personal and solely that of the author. They do not necessarily reflect Firstpost's views.)