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THE GREAT INTEGRATION

Technology, Talent, and Transformation in Asia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Great Integration

The SpeakIn Asia Dialogues Forum convened in New Delhi bringing together 12 senior leaders from across India's most strategically important sectors — investment & private equity, quick service restaurants, manufacturing, media, telecom, cybersecurity, legal services, and enterprise technology. With SpeakIn's founder Deepshikha Kumar Anand leading the conversation and Gaurav Dalmia of Dalmia Group as Chief Guest, the forum took on a distinctive character: part boardroom strategy session, part generational wisdom exchange, and part honest reckoning with what the AI era demands of leaders, organisations, and institutions alike.

New Delhi, as India's political and policy capital, brings a unique lens to the technology conversation. Unlike Bengaluru's engineering culture or Mumbai's financial services orientation, Delhi's strength lies in the intersection of regulation and innovation, media and narrative, and the kind of long-cycle strategic thinking that defines its largest enterprises. The leaders assembled here have each navigated decades of disruption — and arrived at a shared conviction: AI is not the disruption. How organisations respond to it is.

12 Senior Leaders	8 Industry Verticals	30% AI Efficiency Gain	40+ Countries — Global Reach	1955 AI's True Origin Year
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FIVE DEFINING IDEAS FROM THE FORUM

- Business strategy, technology strategy, and talent strategy must be designed as one system, not three separate workstreams.
- AI is most powerful when it 'disappears' into daily work rather than sitting visibly on top of it.
- The real measure of AI success is Strategic ROI — talent attractiveness, competitive moats, and decade-long survival — not just operational efficiency.
- Empathy, intellectual humility, and critical thinking are becoming the scarcest and most valuable human competencies.
- The greatest risk, as a Bankers Trust advertisement once put it, is taking no risk at all.

FORUM CONTEXT

New Delhi: India's Policy Capital Meets the AI Agenda

New Delhi is not typically the first city named in conversations about India's technology future. Yet it is perhaps the most consequential. As the seat of India's regulatory architecture — the policies that govern data, AI, fintech, telecom, and media — decisions made in Delhi shape the operating environment for every technology investment in the country. The leaders assembled for this forum understand this dynamic intimately.

\$370B+ Delhi-NCR GDP	15K+ Tech Startups in NCR	#2 GCC Hub — after Bengaluru	Policy AI Regulatory Hub: MEITY, TRAI & SEBI
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A Unique Strategic Lens

The Delhi forum was distinguished by the depth and range of strategic perspective on display. Gaurav Dalmia brought a 40-year investment lens spanning the Dalmia Group's evolution from industrial conglomerate to private equity powerhouse. Prof. (Dr.) Padmakumar Nair brought the academic counterpoint — a university that is building India's AI infrastructure from the inside out, with an NVIDIA-partnered data centre and an in-house Large Language Model. Between them sat CXOs from QSR, manufacturing, media, legal services, and telecom — each navigating the same fundamental question from a different vantage point: what does it mean to be strategically ready for the AI era?

Tarun Anand of Jakson Group distilled the answer with characteristic precision: AI is not a new concept — it dates to 1955. What has changed is the data. And what that change demands of leaders is equally clear: the ability to unlearn and re-learn faster than the technology itself evolves.

THEME 1

Four Decades of Learning: What History Teaches About AI Disruption

The forum's most expansive perspective came from Chief Guest Gaurav Dalmia, who traced lessons from four decades of business and investment experience — a journey from the 1980s' era of ambition and GE management philosophy to the 2020s' concept of anti-fragility. His synthesis: every generation believes its moment of disruption is uniquely threatening. Every generation is proven wrong — not because the disruption wasn't real, but because organisations that adapt with intent grow stronger, not weaker.

The 1980s: Ambition, GE, and the Risk of Taking No Risk

Dalmia opened with a Bankers Trust advertisement that has stayed with him for four decades: 'The greatest risk of all is taking no risk at all.' In the era of GE's Jack Welch dominance, the mantra was to be number one or number two in every niche, or exit. Good management was recognised as a product in itself. These principles remain as relevant to AI strategy today as they were to industrial strategy then.



"The greatest risk of all is taking no risk at all. Good management is a product in itself. I learned both ambition and humility from the rise and fall of GE."

Gaurav Dalmia — Chairman, Dalmia Group of Holdings | Chief Guest

The 1990s: From Domain Expertise to Team Management

The 1990s brought a fundamental shift in what made leaders successful: the premium moved from domain expertise to team management. Dalmia also introduced the SOAR framework — Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results — as a more productive alternative to the SWOT analysis, focusing energy on overcoming constraints rather than cataloguing them. His observation that niches are often bigger and more profitable than they appear — citing Google and Chobani Greek yogurt as examples — is a direct lesson for AI-era strategy: the application layer, not the infrastructure layer, creates the most durable value.

The 2020s: Anti-Fragility and the AI Infrastructure Caution

Dalmia's 2020s insight was his most provocative for the room: he pushed back against the consensus view that AI infrastructure — data centres, compute, connectivity — is a safe investment category. His analogy was sharp: the telecom capex boom of the early 2000s saw infrastructure providers lose while the application verticals (Google, Amazon) created the overwhelming majority of wealth. The same dynamic, he argued, will likely play out in the AI era. The winners will be those who build extraordinary applications on top of the infrastructure, not those who build the infrastructure itself.



“AI infrastructure, like data centres, is being treated as a safe bet — but remember the telecom capex boom of the early 2000s. The infrastructure providers did not create the wealth. Google did. The verticals always create more value than the rails.”

Gaurav Dalmia — Chairman, Dalmia Group of Holdings | Chief Guest

DALMIA'S DECADE FRAMEWORK — KEY LESSONS FOR AI-ERA LEADERS

- 1980s: The greatest risk is taking no risk. Be No.1 or No.2 in your niche — or exit. Good management is a product.
- 1990s: Shift from SWOT to SOAR. Intent comes first, resources follow. Team management supersedes domain expertise.
- 2000s: Bill Gates was right — overestimate 2-year change, underestimate 10-year change. Go big or go home.
- 2010s: Life is not a blind taste test. Subjectivity matters. Success is an internal feeling — not an external metric.
- 2020s: Anti-fragility over resilience — get stronger under pressure. Application layer beats infrastructure in value creation.

THEME 2

The Trinity of Strategy: Business, Technology & Talent as One System

The forum's most actionable consensus emerged around a deceptively straightforward proposition: organisations fail at AI not because the technology is wrong, but because they treat their business strategy, technology strategy, and talent strategy as separate workstreams. Anurag Jain of KFC–Yum! Brands articulated this with the directness of someone who has implemented it at scale: the three strategies must not just align — they must be designed together from the outset.



“For organisations to withstand disruption and remain successful, their business strategy, technology strategy, and talent strategy must go hand-in-hand. Technology is most effective when it disappears into day-to-day work. Data integration is crucial — many organisations stall due to a lack of data maturity.”

Anurag Jain — Chief Digital & Technology Officer, KFC India — Yum! Brands

Strategic ROI: The Measure That Matters Most

Jain's distinction between operational ROI and strategic ROI was the forum's most commercially important insight. Operational ROI — cost efficiency, speed, automation of repetitive tasks — is measurable and immediate. But strategic ROI — the ability to attract the best talent because you are a technologically ambitious organisation, the ability to build competitive moats that take years to replicate, and the ability to genuinely survive the next decade — is the ROI that determines whether an organisation is still relevant in 2035.

Technology That Disappears

His second insight was equally powerful: the best technology integrations are invisible. When a service advisor's CRM auto-populates with customer context before a call, when a KFC kitchen display system optimises order sequencing without anyone consciously managing it, when a bank's credit algorithm assesses a loan application in the background — in each case, technology has dissolved into the process. The organisations still deploying AI as a visible overlay on existing workflows have not yet achieved real integration.



“AI and machine learning need to be positioned in terms of design patterns — not just as a chatbot wrapper around a business, but deeply embedded in the architecture. The positioning of AI is the real design challenge.”

Gaurav Joshi — Chief Technology Officer, Vserv Infosystems

Data Maturity: The Hidden Bottleneck

Both Jain and Tarun Anand of Jakson Group identified data maturity as the silent killer of AI ambitions. Organisations invest in generative AI tools only to discover their data is fragmented across legacy systems, inconsistently structured, and contextually impoverished. Jakson's response was to build a centralised data strategy first — pulling all data into a single system so that leadership can ask meaningful strategic questions using GenAI, rather than running pilots on data islands.



“AI is not a new term — it's been around since 1955. What has changed is the data. Our strategy is product-based: embedding GenAI into processes to accelerate them and cut down human time, which is then reinvested in more productive work. View AI as a junior partner. The goal is human plus machine, not human versus machine.”

Tarun Anand — Group Chief Information Officer, Jakson Group

T H E M E 3

The Three Goals of Education in the Age of AI

Prof. (Dr.) Padmakumar Nair's contribution to the forum transcended the typical academic-industry conversation. Rather than positioning Thapar Institute as a talent supplier to corporate India, he framed education as the response to a deeper question: what does it mean to be human in a world where AI can abstract patterns from vast datasets faster than any person?



“Previous technological changes replaced jobs needing power and speed, then precision and repetition. Now AI and big data are replacing jobs that require abstracting simple rules from very large sets of data. The future belongs to those who can abstract simple rules from very small sets of data in ethically challenging, cognitively complex situations.”

Dr. Padmakumar Nair, Vice Chancellor, Thapar Institute of Engineering & Technology

01 Self-Knowing

Understanding oneself deeply — one's strengths, values, cognitive style, and ethical compass. AI can simulate empathy; it cannot provide genuine self-awareness. This is the foundation of irreplaceable human leadership.

02 Intellectual Humility

The starting point of critical thinking — acknowledging the boundaries of one's knowledge. In the AI era, knowing what you don't know is more valuable than knowing what you do. Overconfidence is the first casualty of every AI failure.

03 Empathy-Driven Excellence

Seeking excellence driven by empathy — 'the mother of excellence.' Personalised communication, ethical decision-making, and genuine human connection remain irreducibly human and increasingly scarce.

Thapar's Infrastructure for the AI-Ready Graduate

Prof. Nair backed his philosophical framework with a formidable technical infrastructure: an NVIDIA-partnered on-campus data centre (one of only three globally in universities, and the only one in India), 15,000 students trained on NVIDIA technologies, an in-house Large Language Model built and maintained in-house, partnerships with Volvo for intelligent automotive systems, NXP for chip design, and an AACSB-accredited management school placing Thapar in the top 6% of business schools globally. This is not a university waiting to be relevant to the AI era — it is one actively building it from within.

T H E M E 4

New Frontiers: Media, Legal & Enterprise Sectors Meet AI

Three sectors at the table — media, legal services, and enterprise technology — each brought a distinctively different relationship with AI adoption. Together, they illustrated a truth that runs through the entire forum: every sector believes it is uniquely resistant to AI disruption, and every sector is being proven wrong in its own way.

Media: Good Journalists Are Irreplaceable, Bad Ones Are Not

PTI's Barun Jha articulated the media sector's AI reality with unusual candour. Journalists who file press releases verbatim or spend their time correcting grammar are already being replaced. GDP data reporting, earnings announcements, cricket scorecards — these have been automated. But the journalist who investigates, analyses, contextualises, and finds the human story within the data? That role is not just safe, it is more valuable than ever. The AI era is an accelerated meritocracy for media: quality of thinking, not volume of output, is now the distinguishing variable.



"Bad workers who only report press releases, or are just correcting grammar, will lose their jobs. But good people involved in analysis and thinking won't lose their jobs in India. AI is already reporting GDP data. The deeper story always needs a human being."

Barun Jha — National Editor, Press Trust of India (PTI)

Legal: Bottom-Up Adoption and the Changing Pyramid

Khaitan & Co's Rohit Shukla brought the legal profession's particular form of AI resistance into sharp relief. Lawyers, trained to minimise risk, are among the most sceptical adopters of any new technology. His firm's response was not to mandate adoption from the top, but to run weekend hackathons where lawyers co-developed solutions alongside technologists. The result: tools that lawyers actually use because they helped build them. His prediction of the changing pyramid structure — where AI-handled work compresses the entry-level funnel — mirrors exactly what was identified at the Pune forum edition, and carries an urgent implication: academia and industry must together redesign what legal education produces.



"The most important thing is knowing your client's client. Bottom-up adoption wins — hackathons where lawyers jointly develop solutions with technologists over a weekend. The changing pyramid structure of the profession requires academia and industry to work together urgently."

Rohit Shukla — Executive Director & Chief Digital Officer, Khaitan & Co

iTV Network: Building for India, Not Imitating the West

Akshansh Yadav of iTV Network raised one of the forum's most strategically important points: India's AI opportunity lies in building for India's 1.4 billion users, not in replicating products designed for US or European markets. His 'Legally Speaking' product — a free AI-powered legal query tool that enables citizens to create rent agreements or obtain FIR copies without brokers or police intermediaries — is a precise example of what India-first AI looks like in practice. This is the application layer creating direct social and economic value that Dalmia's investment framework predicts will define the AI era's real winners.



"We are focused on harnessing the power of AI for the Indian market — not imitating products from the US and Europe. Our 'Legally Speaking' product uses AI to answer legal queries, helping citizens create rent agreements or get FIR copies without relying on brokers or police stations."

Akshansh Yadav — Chief Executive Officer (ITV Digital), iTV Network

THEME 5

Unlearn to Relearn: Staying Relevant in the AI Decade

The forum's most personally resonant theme was the one that cut across every sector and every level of seniority: the challenge of staying relevant when the underlying technology of your profession is changing faster than any individual can track. This is not a problem unique to the AI era — but the AI era has made it existential rather than aspirational.

The Junior Developer Who Built in 15 Days

Tarun Anand illustrated the disruption of the unlearn-relearn imperative with a story that crystallised the forum's central tension. A very junior user in his organisation developed a complete tender costing application using AI tools in just 15 days at a fraction of the traditional cost. This is not a story about junior talent being empowered — though it is that. It is a story about what organisations must do when the barrier between idea and execution has collapsed: every person in the organisation, at every level, must be capable of building with AI.



"The biggest challenge in my three decades in technology has been staying relevant. The most important skill is the ability to unlearn and then learn faster. As AI takes over tactical roles, human skills like empathy, ethics, and critical thinking will become the main focus."

Tarun Anand — Group Chief Information Officer, Jakson Group

Security Cannot Be an Afterthought

Comviva's Rajeev Jha injected the forum's most urgent cautionary note. As AI agent platforms proliferate and mobile user data becomes increasingly central to every digital service, the security architecture must evolve in lockstep. In the telecom sector, handling the personal data of hundreds of millions of mobile users, the negative side of AI — adversarial attacks, data poisoning, agent manipulation — requires every leader and developer to be security-aware, not just the CISO. Third-party audits and outside perspectives are essential precisely because internal teams develop blind spots.

"Everyone in the company — from leaders to developers — must be aware of the risks of technology. Given the boom of AI, we must handle the negative side with the same energy we bring to the positive. We are in the telecommunication sector handling mobile user data for millions of people. We must be very cautious when designing agent platforms — and we leverage third-party vendors deliberately to bring an outsider's view and identify what we cannot see ourselves."

— Rajeev Jha — Chief Information Security Officer, Comviva

THE UNLEARN-RELEARN IMPERATIVE — WHAT ORGANISATIONS ARE DOING

- Jakson Group: Central data strategy first — single source of truth enabling leadership to ask strategic questions with GenAI.
- Shriram Automall: 30% efficiency improvement by systematically targeting AI at established bottlenecks since 2021.
- Vardhman Yarns: Technology backbone spanning 40+ countries aligned to agility and customer delight, not just cost reduction.
- KFC–Yum! Brands: Technology strategy co-designed with talent and business strategy from day one — the Trinity in practice.
- Khaitan & Co: Weekend hackathons creating bottom-up lawyer-technology co-creation rather than top-down mandates.
- Comviva: Third-party audits and external perspectives to identify internal AI security blind spots.

CONCLUSION

Delhi's Strategic Imperative

The Asia Dialogues Forum in New Delhi concluded with a quality of reflection that matched the depth of experience around the table. Gaurav Dalmia's four decades of investment wisdom, Prof. (Dr.) Padmakumar Nair's three goals for education, Tarun Anand's thirty-year technology journey, and the real-world AI deployments from QSR to legal services to media — together they painted a portrait of an economy that is not waiting for the AI era to arrive. It is already in it.

The Delhi forum added a dimension to the national conversation that the other cities could not: the long view. Delhi's leaders have seen India transform from a license-raj economy to the world's third-largest by purchasing power parity. They have navigated the 1991 liberalisation, the 2008 financial crisis, demonetisation, and COVID. Their conviction that AI is navigable — that careers survive through continuous learning, that organisations win by integrating rather than adding technology, that the application layer creates more value than the infrastructure — is not optimism. It is evidence-based.

The most memorable formulation of the day came from a 1980s advertisement quoted by Gaurav Dalmia and validated by everyone in the room: 'The greatest risk of all is taking no risk at all.' In the AI era, the organisations and individuals who will look back on 2026 as their inflection point are those who chose to act now — with intent, with strategy, and with the humility to know that what they build in the next two years will be surpassed by what they must build in the ten years after.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES FOR ORGANISATIONS

- Design the Trinity together: business, technology, and talent strategies must be co-designed from the outset, not aligned retrospectively.
- Pursue Strategic ROI: measure AI's success by talent attractiveness, competitive moats, and decade-long survival — not just cost savings.
- Make technology invisible: real integration means AI embedded in process, not layered on top of it.
- Invest in data maturity first: no AI strategy succeeds on fragmented, contextually impoverished data.
- Build for India, not for the West: India's 1.4B users represent an AI application opportunity with no global precedent.
- Cultivate empathy, intellectual humility, and critical thinking: these are the competencies AI cannot replicate and organisations must deliberately develop.
- Security must be systemic: every person in the organisation — not just the CISO — must own AI risk awareness.

FORUM PARTICIPANTS

New Delhi Edition — 2026

Participant	Title	Organisation
Gaurav Dalmia	Chairman	Dalmia Group of Holdings
Prof. (Dr.) Padmakumar Nair	Vice Chancellor	Thapar Institute of Engineering & Technology
Anurag Jain	Chief Digital & Technology Officer	KFC India — Yum! Brands
Gaurav Joshi	Chief Technology Officer	Vserv Infosystems
Ajay Kumar Dhir	Chief Information & Digital Officer	Vardhman Yarns & Threads
Akshansh Yadav	Chief Executive Officer (ITV Digital)	iTV Network
Barun Jha	Joint Editor	Press Trust of India (PTI)
Manish Panjwani	Chief Technology Officer	Shriram Automall
Rajeev Jha	Chief Information Security Officer	Comviva
Rohit Shukla	Exec. Director & Chief Digital Officer	Khaitan & Co
Tarun Anand	Group Chief Information Officer	Jakson Group
Deepshikha Kumar Anand	Founder & Moderator	SpeakIn

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About the Asia Dialogues Forum & SpeakIn

Thapar Institute of Engineering & Technology served as the Knowledge Partner for the Asia Dialogues Forum New Delhi Edition 2026. TIET's participation reflects its ongoing commitment to bridging academic insight with industry transformation — and its role as the institution actively building India's AI-ready talent infrastructure from within.

Asia Dialogues Forum

Asia Dialogues Forum is a curated platform bringing together Asia's top 1% of leaders from business, bureaucracy, academia, and media. Through invitation-only roundtables across 13 events in 8 cities, the forum creates high-trust environments for substantive dialogue on technology, talent, policy, and transformation.

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