

Artificial Intelligence is the next big threat to job creation

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WeiQi is a 2500-year-old board game from China. In English, the game is called Go. Played on a large square board, with 19*19 squares (chess is 8*8), Go is a two-player game of strategy. Each player tries to win by encircling the other. Given the number of squares and moves, it is believed that there are more moves than atoms in the known universe. The game is complex, and it takes great skill to master. It is played at the international level with the same zeal as chess. It was recently in the news: the number one ranked Grandmaster in the world, Ke Jie lost narrowly, in a match held in China in May. The winner was not human, but Google's AI system AlphaGo. Ke in a post-match statement referred to the AI as the 'God of Go'. The

kind of game that the AI played was considered highly evolved, what humans may be able to play in the future. Google said it will retire the programme, and use the learnings to apply it to other areas that impact humanity.

While human players of Go heave a collective sigh of relief at the retiring of the top-ranked player in the world, AlphaGo, the rest of humanity, especially governments and policy makers, need to wake up to the level of sophistication in Artificial Intelligence, and plan for its impact on employment. A recent academic paper by scholars at Yale University and Oxford University asked a simple question, "When will AI exceed Human Performance?" They conducted a survey among 352 of the top academics and practitioners who work in the area of Artificial Intelligence.



According to the survey results, experts predicted that from 2016, it would take 15 years for AI to exceed human performance in retail sales; 12 years to be the best truck drivers; A dozen or so years to generate a chart topping pop song; about 7 years to exceed human

performance as a tele-banking operator; about 12 years to fold laundry, and six years to beat us at Angry Birds.

While this is great as far as the pushing of frontiers of technology is concerned, it is not very good news for most people, many

who are either unskilled, poorly skilled, or have skills that are going to become obsolete in the near future. While there is the possibility of new jobs in the future, unless policy makers, academia, and industry sit together and discuss what kind of jobs will there be, and the kind of skills that will be needed to perform those jobs, we are looking at an era where most people will be sitting at home, with not too much to do.

As the Modi Government completes its third year in power, it needs to call for an all-hands-on-deck meeting, on an issue that is very real. What kind of skills should India be planning to ensure that a large chunk of India, under the age of 35, is gainfully employed? What are the future areas in which capacities can be built, and how do academics from

primary school get geared towards meeting the needs the India of tomorrow? These are questions, to which the nation really needs an answer.

Currently, a section of the academia, that throws light on our glorious past, receives a lot of attention. And, while that may be important in its place, it is as critical to throw light on the future. India capitalised on the information technology revolution, that saw us moving from a poor nation to being a force to be reckoned with. It now needs to focus on being at the forefront of the Artificial Intelligence revolution. And, the time to build for a future with new jobs is now.

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