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Public Resources are used to create AI Wealth.

Should the Public Get a Share?

By Nivedita Pandey

On Independence Day, PM Modi announced AI-skills training for one crore young Indians. He identified AI, data centres, quantum computing, and robotics among emerging technologies in which India should build leadership. This is strongly tied to Viksit Bharat 2047, India's developed-nation roadmap.

Globally, governments and companies are pouring unprecedented resources into AI R&D and commercialisation. Gartner estimates that worldwide AI spending across infrastructure, software, and services will reach US$2.59 trillion in 2026.

But this wave of AI-led transformation raises a question that is hard to brush under the carpet: who will own the gains, and who will bear the costs?AI is not built in isolation. Large AI models are built using vast bodies of human-created material accumulated over decades-including books, research papers, software code, images and other digital content, including public domain and copyrighted material, without the original creators necessarily being compensated for its use in AI training.

Governments also contribute through publicly funded universities, research institutions, digital public infrastructure and taxpayer-funded datasets. If AI companies generate enormous profits using this collective foundation often funded by public and taxpayer money, should all the rewards flow only to a handful of investors?Global approaches to answering this question differ.

Singapore is not treating AI as a private-sector story alone. It is building national capability: committing more than S$1 billion to public AI research between 2025-2030. The Singapore government has made significant investmentstowardsmaking citizens, universities, start-ups, and public institutions globally competitive in the AI economy.

It has also emerged as an early adopter of AI in government operations and public-service delivery workflows, including through Pair, its internal productivity assistant for civil servants. In June 2026, US Senator Bernie Sanders introduced the American AI Sovereign Wealth Fund Act. Under the bill, qualifying AI companies would make a one-time issuance of new shares sufficient for the US Treasury to hold 50% of all outstanding equity immediately after issuance; these holdings would form the publicsovereign wealth fund.The bill authorises annual appropriations equal to 5% of the fund's average market value, after administrative costs, for direct payments and other public purposes determined by Congress, towards the benefit of American citizens.

This bill may not pass in its present form. Still, its core argument is difficult to ignore: if AI creates extraordinary wealth from public research, shared human knowledge and public infrastructure, should the rewards flow only to a handful of shareholders?

The UK has committed up to £2bn through 2030 to build a public compute ecosystem, including more than £1bn to expand its AI Research Resource 20 times.The EU'sInvestAI aims to mobilise €200bn, including support for up to seven AI gigafactories.Neither is an ownership model of the kind Sanders proposes. But both recognise that AI infrastructure is too important to national strength to leave entirely to private companies.India's Aadhaar and UPI show that India can build public digital infrastructure at scale.

The IndiaAI Mission, backed by Rs. 10,372 crore over five years,extends the DPI legacy into AI.The next step is to turn AI access into shared value. That means better public services, AI capability in universities and public institutions beyond a few elite campuses; quality jobs and investment across states; and genuine opportunities for start-ups beyond the largest cities. It also means guarding against public data, subsidised computing and government procurement becoming an opaque subsidy for a small circle of firms.AI's physical infrastructure matters too.

Data centres require land, electricity and, depending on their cooling systems, water. In regions facing power or water stress, these demands must be measured and disclosed. Companies receiving public land, grid access, water allocations or incentives should report resource use and deliver tangible benefits to host communities.Public support should not mean public risk and private reward. India should therefore establish clear public-value conditions for publicly supported AI: transparent access rules for public compute and datasets, measurable service outcomes, regional inclusion, and fair sharing of benefits where public resources and assets create exceptional private value. This is not an argument against private enterprise. India needs investment, competition and innovation. But when public resources help generate private AI wealth, the public deserves a transparent, durable and meaningful return.

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People Don't Quit Jobs. They Quit Bad Leaders

Anita Shekhar

Every Exit letter tells a story, but not every story is about a better salary or a bright career opportunity. Many are quite tears for respite from workplaces that have become emotionally exhausting. Behind every employee who quietly clears a desk or logs out for the last time is often a journey marked by mental burn, disgrace, and the progressive decline of self-esteem. Today's talent pool is facing a crisis that rarely appears in annual reports but is increasingly reflected in rising resignation rates. Employees are not walking away from hard work they are walking away from toxic work cultures and leaders who fail to recognize that honor and compassion are as important as output goals.A hostile work environment does not begin with one dramatic incident. It develops slowly through constant criticism, bias, office politics, public humiliation, unrealistic expectations, and a culture where appreciation is scarce but blame is plentiful. Employees begin to doubt themselves, second-guess every decision, and carry an invisible burden that grows heavier with each passing day. At the centre of this crisis lies poor and weak leadership. A good leader inspires confidence, encourages innovation, and helps people grow. A poor leader, however, creates an atmosphere of fear where employees remain silent, afraid to ask questions, share ideas, or admit mistakes. Instead of feeling valued, they feel replaceable.Their achievements go unnoticed, while their shortcomings are magnified.The repercussions extend far beyond office walls.

Workplace toxicity follows employees home, affecting their sleep, relationships, and emotional well-being. Many experience anxiety, burnout, and depression without ever speaking openly about it. Smiles become forced, confidence fades, and the enthusiasm that once drove their careers slowly disappears. For many, resigning is not an act of ambition but an act of survival.Young professionals are among the hardest hit. Entering the workforce with dreams and determination, they often encounter environments that reward silence over creativity and obedience over talent.

Repeated disrespect and constant pressure leave many questioning their abilities, even though the real problem lies not within them but within the culture they are expected to endure. The issue cuts across every profession. Corporate offices, educational institutions, hospitals, media organisations, and government departments are not immune.

Wherever fear replaces trust and authority overshadows compassion, employees pay the price with their mental health.Adding to the burden is the growing expectation of being available around the clock. Emails after office hours, weekend meetings, and endless digital connectivity have blurred the line between work and personal life, leaving little room for rest or recovery.Creating healthier workplaces requires more than motivational speeches or wellness campaigns.

It demands leaders who listen with empathy, communicate with honesty, appreciate genuine effort, and treat employees with fairness and dignity. Organisations that prioritise mental well-being not only retain talent but also build stronger, more productive teams.In the end, people do not simply leave jobs they leave environments that make them feel invisible, unheard, and emotionally drained. A workplace should nurture potential, not diminish it. Until organisations understand that leadership is measured by humanity as much as authority, the silent exodus of talented employees will continue, one resignation letter at a time.

The Bamboo, the Pen and a Life of Purpose

By Antara Mohan

Some podcast conversations end when the cameras are switched off. Others stay with you. My conversation with Deepakji was one of those.What struck me first was how kind he was. He was warm, affectionate and completely unassuming.

He smiled through almost the entire conversation. At one point, he even ordered pizza for all of us. It was a small gesture, but I remember it because it summed him up. Here was someone who has achieved so much, yet there was no sense of distance about him.His family came to Kolkata from Rajasthan, his father built Linc from humble beginnings, and Deepakji eventually joined the business and spent decades taking it forward. Today, Linc is one of India's best-known writing-instrument companies. But after speaking to him, I became much more interested in the journey behind those achievements.

At one point, Deepakji told us about the Japanese bamboo tree. You plant it, water it and wait. For a long time, you see almost nothing. But underneath the soil, the roots are growing. Then, when the time is right, the bamboo suddenly shoots up.I loved that example because it reminded me so much of what the Gita teaches us. We are always looking for results. Deepakji's belief is much simpler: keep working. Just because you cannot see something happening does not mean that nothing is happening.The more I looked into his work afterwards, the more I realised that this was how he has lived.

Take Linc's initiatives in schools. Write-O-Values was not simply about getting children to write with a Linc pen. Students practised their handwriting while writing passages based on moral values. Spellinc similarly took the humble pen into schools through a spelling initiative. I found that lovely because the product became secondary.

The pen was being used to encourage learning and values.Then there is Pentonic, which became a major success for Linc. What impressed me was his willingness to keep innovating and believing in something new.

I also admired Deepakji's belief in Swatantra Bharat. He believes in building in India and promoting Indian capability. Even if something can be imported more easily, his instinct is to ask what we can make ourselves.

There is a quiet patriotism in that which I found moving. It is not about slogans. It is about doing the work.The same thought extends to his people. Linc has employed hundreds of women at its facilities, giving them opportunities to become financially independent and self-sufficient. For Deepakji, building a business seems to go hand in hand with creating opportunities for others.

And somewhere towards the end of our conversation, I found myself thinking about the shayari he had shared: "Jute phate pehen kar aasman par chadhe the,Sapne hamesha hamare aukaat se bade the."We climbed towards the sky wearing torn shoes; our dreams were always bigger than our circumstances.I think that is what I will remember most about Deepakji. Not just Linc or Pentonic, but the man who sat across from us smiling, ordered pizza for everyone, and still believes that the answer is simply to keep working. I went there to interview Deepakji.

I came back having learnt from him.And perhaps that is the greatest compliment I can give him.Keep working. Keep believing. The bamboo will grow.

THE BIRD'S EYE AND THE BLIND SPOT: WHAT AILS INDIA'S CONSUMER COMMISSIONS

Prof. Dr. Ashok R Patil
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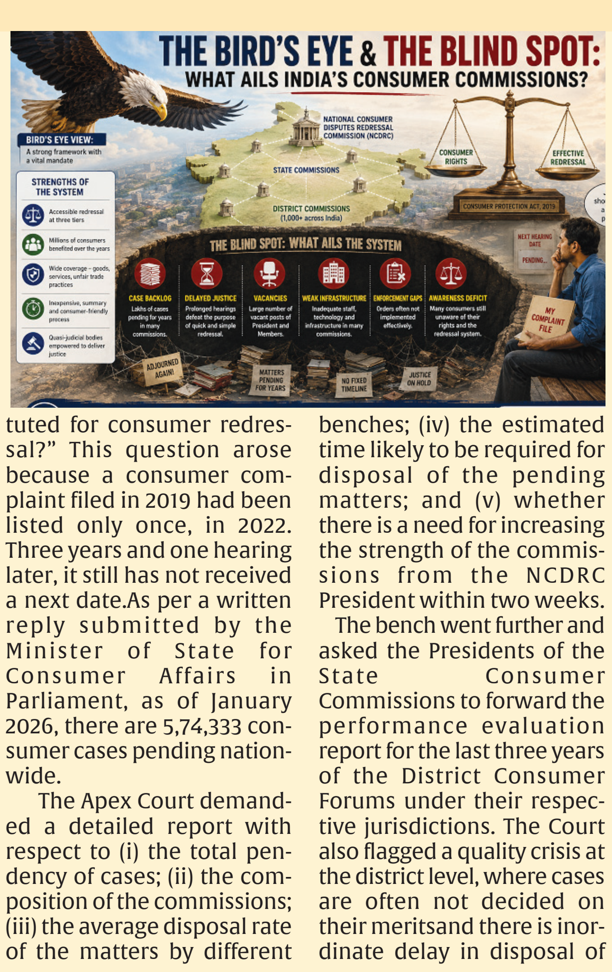

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On 13th August 2026, while hearing the letter petition dated 30th September 2021 (Writ Petition (C) No. 1144 of 2021) relating to the pay and allowances of the Presidents and Members of the Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions in the State of Uttar Pradesh, the Supreme Court of India raised the question: Why do India's consumer commissions increasingly resemble the very courts they were created to replace?

The question reminds one of a quote that Nani Palkhivala once wrote: "The law's delay is not merely inconvenient; it is often a denial of justice masquerading as its administration". AlthoughPalkhivala wrote about courts, the Supreme Court of Indiaisquestioning the functioning of the consumer commissions.

Justice Surya Kant, Supreme Court of India, put it bluntly: "If this is the performance, then what kind of special expert forum have we constituted for consumer redressal?" This question arose because a consumer complaint filed in 2019 had been listed only once, in 2022. Three years and one hearing later, it still has not received a next date.As per a written reply submitted by the Minister of State for Consumer Affairs in Parliament, as of January 2026, there are 5,74,333 consumer cases pending nationwide.

The Apex Court demanded a detailed report with respect to (i) the total pendency of cases; (ii) the composition of the commissions; (iii) the average disposal rate of the matters by different benches; (iv) the estimated time likely to be required for disposal of the pending matters; and (v) whether there is a need for increasing the strength of the commissions from the NCDRC President within two weeks.

The bench went further and asked the Presidents of the State Consumer Commissions to forward the performance evaluation report for the last three years of the District Consumer Forums under their respective jurisdictions. The Court also flagged a quality crisis at the district level, where cases are often not decided on their meritsand there is inordinate delay in disposal of pending matters, especially when, in some cases, hearings are not taking place for year.

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 promised faster resolution and a wider ambit of work, but the 2019 Act's reforms exist largely on paper. On the ground, the consumer remains where they always were, still hoping for another date.Consumer commissions were designed to be specialized, accessible, speedy quasi-judicial bodies, deliberately different from regular courts.

Over time, these forums, which were especially made to be different, have now become exactly what they were meant to replace. They are slow. They are overburdened. They have lost the public's trust.The problem may therefore be less about the professional identity of individual members and more about the institutional culture in which consumer disputes are handled. When procedures, case-management practices and expectations are inherited from conventional adjudication, a forum intended to provide summary and accessible redress can gradually take on the characteristics of ordinary litigation.

In the Mahabharata, Guru Dronacharya, pointing to a tree, asked his disciples what they see. Someone mentioned a leaf, another a bird, another a tree, a branch, the sky, but only Arjuna said that he saw only the bird's eye and nothing else. However, by contrast, consumer commissions risk the opposite problem: the institution sees vacancies, jurisdiction, procedure, infrastructure, and compliance, while the consumer waiting for relief disappears from view.The outcome of such a perception is a system that is neither fish nor fowl. It has the formalities of a court without the working machinery.

It lacks the infrastructure to deliver on its promises. The consumer who walks into a district forum to avoid the courtroom chaos now hustles and still waits for years, with no room for justice.The apex court identified certain problems concerning the slow disposal rate of cases and poor performance of the National Consumer Commissions.

However, it made it very clear that solving the infrastructure and capacity gaps alone would not solve the problems. It requires a sense of accountability, which raises an important question:If consumer commissions werespecifically designed to be different from courts, why have they become regular courts? The answer to this lies in the way things are done, the procedures deeply rooted in the people within the institution. The people in the system are most likely to be retired judges, advocates and bureaucrats, and they tend to share the same work attitude in these commissions.

The Act gave the new system with a different mandate, but it did not change the system's culturally embedded elements, which clearly result in a system whose structure sounds great but is culturally obsolete and produces incorrect outputs.

The Apex Court has also suggested addressing these concerns by allowing States with fewer than 1,000 pending cases to abolish District Commissions and transfer their functions to serving judicial officers. However, structural interventions alone may not resolve what is fundamentally an institutional and procedural problem.

The deeper issue lies in how consumer disputes are processed. Consumer commissions do not merely need more judges; they require strict, time-bound mechanisms for casedisposal, a distinct procedural mandate and set of rules, robust performance evaluation of their members, specialised training to enhance the quality and efficiency of adjudication, and a clear institutional commitment to prioritising consumer disputes.

Unless these reforms accompany changes in infrastructure and appointments, the system risks reproducing the very procedural delays and institutional practices it was designed to overcome. Until the system learns to view the consumer as the bird's-eye, as Arjun saw it, i.e., at the centre of its institutional design, procedural reform alone will not be enough.

The question is not merely how many members are appointed or how many cases are pending. It is whether the system can deliver what it was created to provide: accessible, efficient and effective consumer redress.