CIO Association

CIOA CHRONICLES

Welcome to this month's issue of CIOA Chronicles.

There is a palpable buzz in the air.

Over the past few weeks, conversations across boardrooms, corridors, and industry forums have increasingly converged around one theme - **Artificial Intelligence moving from curiosity to consequence.**

With the **India AI Impact Summit** around the corner next week (16th to 20th February 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi), that energy has only intensified. For India's CIO community, this is not just another industry event. It reflects a larger shift from experimentation to execution, from pilots to production, and from isolated use cases to enterprise-wide, in fact, nation-wide transformation.

What makes this moment particularly significant is the scale at which AI ambition is colliding with real-world questions like how do we build infrastructure that can support AI at scale, how do we govern responsibly while moving fast, how do we balance innovation with risk, talent readiness, and data sovereignty?

These are no longer theoretical debates, they are every day operating priorities for CIOs.

In this edition, we capture perspectives that help decode this transition. From pragmatic AI adoption models for SMEs, to leadership frameworks for digital transformation, to signals emerging from global forums like World Economic Forum - the narratives reflect a community preparing not just to adopt AI, but to industrialize it responsibly.

The past two months have also seen significant momentum across the CIO ecosystem - from knowledge exchanges to community-led initiatives, all reinforcing the role of CIOs as architects of India's digital future.

We invite you to read on, reflect, and engage with the ideas shaping the next phase of enterprise technology leadership.

With Warm Regards,

Umesh Mehta

President of Governing Body, CIO Association

HACKATHONS: IGNITING INNOVATION, COLLABORATION & BUSINESS IMPACT

Driving a culture of innovation through collective creativity

By Deena Dayalan. K, Global Head – Digital Operations & India GDTC Site Leader & Kimberly - Clark Corporation
Member - Bangalore Chapter

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, innovation can no longer be confined to isolated teams or long planning cycles. It must be **inclusive, fast, experimental, and purpose-driven.** One of the most powerful mechanisms to enable this culture of innovation is a **Hackathon.**

A hackathon is not just a competition - it is a **platform for ideas,** a **catalyst for collaboration**, and a **safe space to experiment** while solving real business problems. When executed well, hackathons unlock hidden talent, accelerate problem-solving, and strengthen camaraderie across the organization.

Why Hackathons Matter

Hackathons bring together diverse skill sets—business, technology, design, data, and operations - to focus on **outcome-driven innovation.** They help organizations:

- **Drive innovation at scale** by encouraging creative thinking beyond day-to-day roles
- **Solve real business problems** through rapid ideation and experimentation
- **Break silos** and foster cross-functional collaboration
- **Build camaraderie and team spirit** through shared purpose and excitement
- **Identify future leaders and innovators**
- **Accelerate digital transformation** through MVPs and proof-of-concepts


Deena Dayalan

Types of Hackathons and Their Suitability

Different organizations and objectives call for different types of hackathons: Choosing the right format depends on **organizational maturity, strategic priorities, and the nature of the problem statements.**

- **Business Problem – Focused Hackathons:** Ideal for solving specific operational, customer, or process challenges and Best suited when there is a clear problem statement and measurable outcomes
- **Technology or Platform – Centric Hackathons:** Focused on adopting new technologies (AI, Cloud, Data, Automation, Cybersecurity) and Useful when driving technology adoption or capability building
- **Innovation / Open Theme Hackathons** - Encourage disruptive, blue-sky thinking and Suitable for organizations seeking breakthrough ideas or new business models
- **Internal vs. External Hackathons:**
  - Internal: Builds internal capability and collaboration
  - External: Brings fresh perspectives from startups, partners, or academia

Hackathon Execution: From Idea to Impact

A successful hackathon requires structure, clarity,

and strong sponsorship. Below is a proven execution framework:

1. Identify Business Problem Statements
2. Team Formation
3. Solution Ideation & Submission
4. Announce the Hackathon
5. Shortlisting & Evaluation
6. Mentor Assignment
7. Design & Development Phase
8. MVP / POC Development
9. Scoring & Evaluation Criteria such as Business impact and value, Innovation and creativity, Technical feasibility and scalability and User experience and design

Beyond the Event: Building a Culture of Innovation

The true success of a hackathon is not just in selecting winners, but in **what happens next**.

When ideas are nurtured, solutions are scaled, and participants feel empowered, hackathons become a cornerstone of an organization's innovation culture.

By investing in hackathons, we invest in our people, our ideas, and our future.

Let's continue to innovate, collaborate, and build solutions that make a real difference.

Hackathons are more than just events; they are the heartbeat of a thriving innovation culture where ideas meet execution.

AI ADOPTION IN SMEs: A PRAGMATIC PLAYBOOK FOR CIOs FROM EXPERIMENTATION TO LASTING BUSINESS IMPACT

By Varundeep Kaur
President, CIO Association Punjab Chapter

Artificial intelligence (AI) has progressed to such an extent that not using it is no longer a justifiable decision for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). However, engaging poorly can be just as problematic. For SMEs that are limited in capital, have scarce talent, and face high execution risk, AI projects that fail not only waste money but also damage organizational trust and kill future innovation.

Therefore, for CIOs in SMEs, the problem is not technological ambition but the ability to judiciously decide. The winners are not the ones who bring the most advanced models to the market, but those who make wise decisions time and time again about where to apply AI, how fast to scale it, and how to govern it without stifling momentum.

Why AI Adoption in SMEs Is Fundamentally Different

AI adoption frameworks developed for large enterprises hardly fit SME environments. Four structural differences notably alter the situation.

- **Capital constraints:** Budgets are limited and closely monitored.
- **Talent scarcity:** SMEs are not able to compete with Big Tech for AI specialists.
- **Data immaturity:** Data is there but is broken up and not well managed.
- **Execution sensitivity:** When projects fail, it quickly loses trust.

Therefore, SME AI strategies should focus on:

- Real, practical use cases instead of innovation theater.
- Small, incremental value rather than massive transformation.
- Keeping it simple, easy to explain, and reliable, rather than sophisticated.

The implication for CIOs is obvious: AI strategies for SMEs cannot be centered on technological novelty however to practicality, explainability, and incremental value creation.

Begin with Augmentation, Not Automation

AI projects for SMEs whose results are positive are characterized by human judgment being augmented rather than replaced.

Such a strategy allows the attainment of early value while accountability and trust are maintained.

Typical use cases with the highest success rate are:

- **Customer support:** Promoting ticket triage through assistance, drafting answer, and knowledge retrieval
- **Sales and marketing:** Lead rating, risk of customer churn, campaign optimization
- **Operations**: Demand prediction, stock planning, work scheduling optimization
- **Finance:** Invoice handling, irregularity identification, cash flow estimation

The Real Constraints CIOs Must Solve

Skills and Change Readiness

SMEs are very often guilty of making an incorrect guess on the amount of non-technical work required:

- Business users do not trust AI generated outputs
- Managers fail to convert AI insights into actions
- IT teams are overwhelmed by the role of AI translators

What works:

- Focused training for business users, not just IT teams
- Clearly explained what AI can and cannot do
- Use of simple dashboards and interpretable models

Data Quality and Integration

A majority of SMEs already store data in various systems such as ERPs, CRMs, Excel files, and other legacy systems; however,

- The data is inconsistent
- The data is not properly labeled
- No one takes responsibility for the data

Lesson: AI helps to expose latent data, related issues at an accelerated pace, rather than solving them.

Vendor Dependence and Lock-In

Even though vendors provide great AI solutions, SMEs tend to depend on them excessively which makes them vulnerable to some risks, like: Even though vendors provide great AI solutions, SMEs tend to depend on them excessively which makes them vulnerable to some risks, like:

- Black-box models without any explainability
- Subscription costs that keep on escalating
- Being unable to switch platforms

Mitigation strategies:

- Go for modular, API, based tools
- Demand for data portability
- Stay away from products that'll be hard to explain from a business point of view.

A CIO-Friendly Adoption Model

A phased adoption model is a great aid for SMEs in maintaining a good balance between speed and control.

- **Phase 1: Augment (low risk):** AI is an assistant to the employees. The human-in-the-loop is mandatory. The ROI is not about the number of employees cut but is measured in the time saved, fewer errors, and better decisions.
- **Phase 2: Optimize (controlled automation):** AI gets integrated with the workflows. The ownership of results is clear, and the system for checking the works gets implemented.
- **Phase 3: Differentiate (selective innovation):** AI is the key to the creation of completely new products or services, which are senior level sponsored, and have formal legal, ethical, and cybersecurity reviews.

Most SMEs are better off by sticking to the first two phases longer than they originally thought. Trying to differentiate too early very often is something that goes beyond an organization's level of readiness.

Governance Without Bureaucracy

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) don't need an AI governance model on the scale of a large corporation but what they certainly need is minimum viable controls.

Efficient governance is usually characterized by defining data ownership, making it a condition of AI case use authorization, vendor contracts that reflect model behavior and accountability, and outcome/risk reviews at regular intervals.

Governance, if it is thoughtfully designed, will be a facilitation of speed rather than a limitation.

What Differentiates the Most Successful SMEs

Only a small portion of SMEs manage to carry AI adoption to such a level that they can enjoy a competitive advantage over time. Such enterprises demonstrate certain regular patterns.

- They identify one or two major business problems to solve
- They value and invest in people along with technology
- They maintain human responsibility for results
- They consider AI as a skill to be developed rather than a project

Failure cases are most often the result of:

- Tool-first Thinking
- Absence of ownership
- Automating over 100% of the processes too quickly

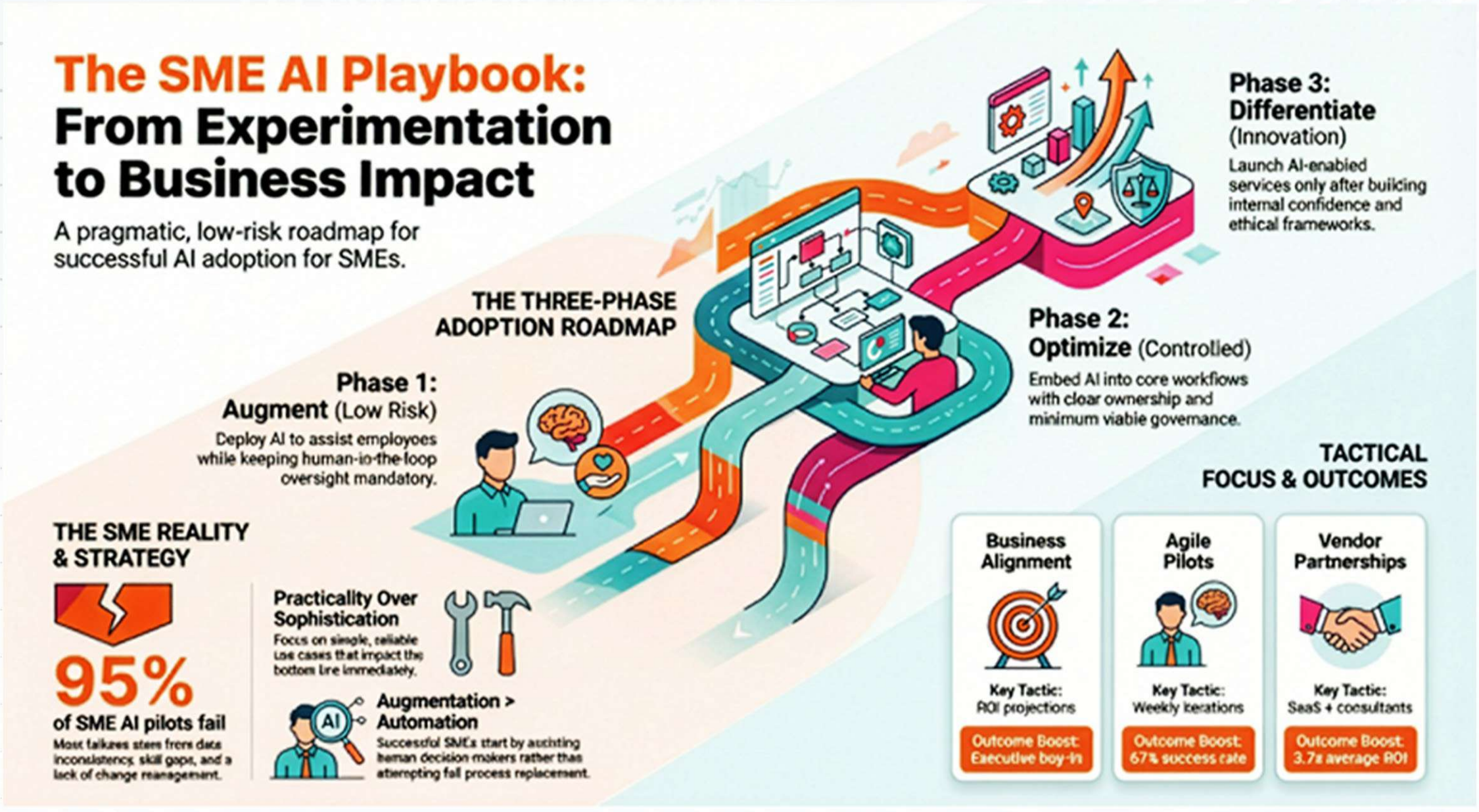
The CIO's Role in SME AI Success

For SMEs, the chief information officer is at the heart of AI's success. The role goes far beyond being the tech keeper. It also involves liaising between the business and tech sides, managing risks in a balanced way, and gaining the organization's trust.

Great CIOs constantly link AI projects with their impact on income, risk, or business continuity; they refuse tools that don't fit with the strategy; and they concentrate on developing internal trust before them setting out to do ambitious things.

Conclusion: Judgment Over Ambition

For SMEs, AI is not a race to scale however a discipline of choice. When guided by sound judgment, clear problem selection, deliberate sequencing, and proportionate governance, AI becomes a dependable lever for growth. Smart SMEs with AI can hold their own against big, well, resourced competitors not by running more AI, but by choosing the right AI, in time, and for the right reasons.



In the world of SMEs, AI success isn't about having the biggest budget—it's about having the best judgment. Start small, augment human intelligence, and let value dictate your velocity.

SIX THINKING HATS OF A CDIO / GCC LEADER

By Mukesh Rathi – Digital and AI Transformation Advisor and Coach, Mukesh Rathi Advisory Services

The role of today's CDIOs and GCC Leaders demands constant shifts in perspective—often within the same discussion, decision, or day. Responsibilities overlap, compete, and rarely arrive in a neat sequence.

The Six Thinking Hats offer a useful way to reflect on the different responsibilities modern digital leaders must balance—not sequentially, but continuously. More as a mental discipline than a framework—helping us recognise which mode of thinking is needed, and when it's time to switch.

With that framing, here's how I think about the six hats of a modern CIO or CDO.

🟡 Yellow Hat — *The Chief Optimist & Value Evangelist*

This is where most transformations begin.

The Yellow Hat is about possibility. It's the hat you wear when you paint a picture of the future that feels exciting, achievable, and worth investing in. It's where ambition meets belief—and where budgets usually follow confidence.

In today's environment, this optimism must be grounded in value. Research from firms like McKinsey continues to show that digital and AI initiatives fail less because of technology, and more because leaders struggle to connect vision to tangible business outcomes.

The Yellow Hat CIO/CDO doesn't just inspire. They **translate ambition into a credible value narrative.** Because hope is motivating—but funded hope is transformational.

🔴 Red Hat — *The Alignment Architect*

If the Yellow Hat wins hearts, the Red Hat keeps them.

This is the most underestimated hat in technology leadership. It's about emotional intelligence, trust, and alignment.

Modern transformations cut across silos, power structures, and incentives. Harvard Business Review research consistently shows that senior-leadership misalignment is one of the biggest predictors of transformation failure.

The Red Hat leader empanels peers, builds coalitions, and ensures this doesn't feel like IT's agenda or the data team's programme.

Transformation doesn't stall on code. It stalls on misalignment.

⚪ White Hat — *The Custodian of Digital Truth*

This is where optimism meets reality.

The White Hat is about facts, data, and architectural honesty. Creating a single version of digital truth the enterprise can trust. Surfacing data gaps. Naming technical debt. Making clear architectural choices.

This is also where tension shows up.

Push too hard on facts too early, and you risk deflating the optimism created by the Yellow Hat. Ignore facts for too long, and credibility erodes.

The White Hat works best **after** the Red Hat. Alignment creates safety. Safety allows truth.

Optimism inspires. Facts sustain.

🟢 Green Hat — *The Builder-in-Chief*

This is where leadership gets practical.

The Green Hat governs delivery: program execution, problem-solving, experimentation, and capability building. It's about turning intent into momentum.

MIT Sloan research on digital transformation highlights that organisations that invest equally in delivery discipline and capability building outperform those that focus on tools alone.

The Green Hat CIO/CDO knows that:

- Execution is a muscle
- Capability compounds
- Innovation without delivery is theatre

When done well, the Geen Hat feeds the Red Hat positively and allows room to expand more on the Yellow Hat.

Ideas are exciting. Delivery is where trust is earned.

⚫ Black Hat — *The Enterprise Risk Guardian*

Every transformation needs someone paid to worry. The Black Hat focuses on risk management, compliance, cyber security, resilience, and institutional trust. In an era of AI, escalating cyber threats, and regulatory scrutiny, this hat has never been more important.

But the best Black Hat leaders don't block progress. They enable *safe speed*.

BCG research shows that organisations that integrate risk thinking early—rather than treating it as a late-stage gate—move faster and with fewer surprises.

The goal isn't to eliminate risk. It's to avoid being surprised by it.

🔵 Blue Hat — *The Transformation Conductor*

This is the hat that holds all others together.

The Blue Hat is about orchestration—governance, prioritisation, sequencing, and knowing which hat the organisation needs *right now*. It balances budget, outcomes, delivery, risk, talent, and pace.

This is where leaders truly earn their leadership stripes. Not by wearing every hat perfectly—but by **switching deliberately**.

The Blue Hat isn't the loudest voice in the room. It's the one setting the tempo.

Final Reflection

Revisiting de Bono's work reminded me of something simple—but powerful:

For today's CIOs, CDOs and GCC Leaders, success doesn't come from mastering one hat. It comes from knowing when to change them.

And occasionally—remembering to take one off.

The '60-Second Hat-Check'

- 🟡 **Yellow:** Am I spending enough time evangelizing the 'Why' to inspire my team?
- 🔴 **Red:** Who is the one stakeholder I haven't fully aligned with yet?
- ⚪ **White:** What is the "inconvenient truth" about our current data that I'm avoiding?
- 🟢 **Green:** Is our execution muscle actually getting stronger, or just busier?
- ⚫ **Black:** What is the one critical risk that is keeping me up at night?
- 🔵 **Blue:** Am I conducting the orchestra, or just playing an individual instrument?

Quick TIPS

If you've been stuck wearing the Black Hat (Risk Guardian) all week, try switching to the Yellow Hat (Optimist) for your next team huddle. A shift in your perspective can often shift the energy of the entire room.

SPONSORED COLUMN

DAVOS 2026: WHAT THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM MEANS FOR INDIA'S CIO & CTO COMMUNITY

By Aman Mehra, Head – Strategy & Transformation, Sify Technologies

Every January, Davos becomes a kind of global "control room", not because decisions are made there, but because signals are. The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026 is one of those moments when geopolitics, economics, climate, and technology converge in the same hallway conversations.

This year, I returned with a sharper sense of what the world is about to ask of enterprises. The message is clear: the next decade will be defined by how well we build, govern, and scale digital infrastructure for a more fragmented, more intelligent, and more fragile world.

I have spent over 25 years at Sify. I have seen the company evolve from an internet pioneer to an enterprise network leader, from ICT to cloud, from digital infrastructure to now, AI. Through each chapter, one truth has held: relevance is not a destination - it is a discipline. Every five to seven years, the world changes its expectations. And those who survive are the ones willing to reinvent themselves before they are forced to.

Y2K reshaped India's destiny. AI, in my view, is even more profound. The difference this time is that the world is not waiting for us. We are in a compressed, competitive race. If India is to become a $10–20 trillion economy, it will not be through incremental efficiency. It will be through digital infrastructure at scale.

For India's CIOs and CTOs, Davos 2026 is not "far away." It is a preview of the operating environment you are being asked to design for: accelerated AI adoption, tighter regulation, higher cyber risk, and rising expectations that technology leaders will deliver growth and trust - at national scale.

A contested world becomes an architecture problem

One of the strongest undercurrents at Davos this year is fragmentation. Geopolitics is reshaping supply chains, data flows, and alliances. Nations are rethinking dependency, autonomy, and resilience.

For CIOs and CTOs, this is not abstract. It shows up as architectural questions:

- Where does data live, and under which jurisdiction?
- How do we design for continuity when cloud regions, chip supply, and cross-border services are uncertain?
- What does "sovereign-by-design" look like without sacrificing agility?

In India, across BFSI, healthcare, telecom, and public-sector adjacencies, digital sovereignty is no longer a policy conversation. It is becoming an enterprise blueprint.

This is where infrastructure matters. AI requires compute, networks, data centers, and secure platforms. The ability to design hybrid and sovereign architectures, blending global innovation with local control will increasingly differentiate Indian enterprises. The CIO's role expands from "technology leader" to "national-scale systems architect."

What we are witnessing is not disruption; it is evolution. Enterprises are not abandoning their core, they are adding new building blocks as customer expectations and technologies evolve. At Sify, we have lived this repeatedly. Each phase of reinvention was driven not by fashion, but by foresight. Today, CIOs sit at the heart of that evolutionary arc.

AI is not a single layer. It is an ecosystem: high-density data centers, GPU infrastructure, low-latency networks, cloud platforms, data pipelines, security frameworks, and governance controls. The ability to orchestrate this end-to-end stack is what separates experimentation from enterprise-grade deployment. The CIO's challenge is not just to adopt AI, but to *industrialize* it.

From pilots to responsible scale

If the last two years were about experimentation, 2026 is about deployment at scale, responsibly. Business teams want speed. Regulators want safeguards. Customers want personalization. Boards want risk control. The CIO sits at the center of this tension.

What Davos makes clear is that governance can no longer be episodic. It must become operational: AI governance as a platform, data readiness as a differentiator, and shadow AI as an enterprise risk.

A theme repeated across conversations: AI will not fail because models are weak; it will fail where data, security, and infrastructure are brittle.

Cyber risk becomes systemic risk

Another unmistakable signal from Davos is the evolution of cyber risk. AI is amplifying both attack capability and potential impact, while geopolitical fragmentation widens the threat surface.

For CIOs and CTOs, this shifts the conversation from prevention to resilience, from perimeter defense to ecosystem security, and from IT risk to enterprise risk tied to reputation and continuity. Security is no longer a cost center. It is a growth enabler.

The technology leader becomes a workforce architect

Davos also reflects a deep global anxiety around jobs and skills. AI will transform work at scale. For India, this is both an opportunity and a responsibility.

CIOs and CTOs will be asked to lead role redesign, AI fluency across functions, and new productivity contracts in a world of copilots.

Technology cannot be introduced as a threat. It must be framed as a multiplier for human potential. The CIO becomes a steward not just of systems, but of futures.

Infrastructure as strategy

As enterprises move from pilots to production, the question will shift from "Which model should we use?" to "Where and how do we run it?" Performance, cost, latency, sovereignty, compliance, and carbon footprint will matter as much as accuracy.

India has long been a consumer of global technology. AI gives us a chance to change that equation. We have the talent and entrepreneurial energy. What we need is the foundation. Models are portable; infrastructure is not. Nations that own their digital foundations will shape the future. Those that do not will rent it.

India must move from being an AI user to an AI builder, not only through startups and software, but through compute, networks, data platforms, and sovereign digital systems. This is not just a technology imperative; it is an economic one.

At Sify, our role is to help enterprises move from ambition to execution: providing AI-ready infrastructure, sovereign cloud environments, high-performance networks, and secure digital foundations - an integrated system designed for scale, trust, and longevity.

After 25 years of watching this industry evolve, one thing is clear: relevance belongs to those who build for what comes next. Davos 2026 is not a forecast. It is a call to design.

HEALTHY HABITS

HOW RUNNING HELPED THIS 65-YEAR-OLD LOSE 36 KG

Rattan Singh, a retired corporate honcho turned fitness enthusiast, is on a mission to stay away from obesity and also inspire others to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle

Written by Binoy Valsan

This 65-year-old has managed to shed 36 kg with sheer determination and grit without resorting to any injection or pill.

Rattan Singh (65) starts his morning with a heart health screening ever since he began his fitness and weight loss journey last year. But he does not go to any medical facility to get himself examined. He just puts on his running sneakers and steps out of his home in Faridabad, Haryana around 6 am for a 8 to 10 km run everyday.

He gets his daily cardiac health updates from the streets and by-lanes of Faridabad's Sector 15A and the Town Park in Sector 12, where he runs for about 8 to 10 km to keep himself fit and also inspire others to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle.

"Running is like my personal ECG test. For me, it is like a cardiac test in real time, a treadmill test in the open. Completing my daily running routine without any complication, pain, or discomfort gives a sort of self-assurance that my heart still has miles to go," says Singh.

Both running and weight loss are to be taken up with extreme caution in older adults due to multiple medical and physiological reasons, including muscle and bone loss. This 65-year-old has managed to shed 36 kg with sheer determination and grit without resorting to any injection or pill. He began his fitness journey in March 2024 with 107.4 kg on his weighing scale, which has now tumbled down to 71 kg as of November 2024.

"It is always better to lose weight the traditional way, through exercise and dieting. For me, running is the weight loss mantra. Keep running to stay away from obesity," Singh adds. He also clarifies that he gets an annual full body check up every year to rule out any medical complications at his age.

Climbing the corporate ladder and gaining girth

When Singh hung up his corporate boots to put on his running sneakers, he had earned a battery of ailments along with his career accolades. Riding on his agrarian background and educational qualifications as an agriculture engineer, Singh maneuvered himself as a senior sales honcho and

Slowly, Singh started to realise the burden of moving around with his hundred plus frame that left him constantly fatigued with swollen and stiff knees on a daily basis. His cholesterol levels were also off the charts and he started having Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA) that crippled his sleeping patterns, leaving him exhausted and irritable on most days.

"I finally decided to do something about my body weight on a March 2024 night when I got the urge to urinate but had to literally struggle to get out of my bed and walk a few metres to the loo. I felt scared and ashamed at the same time," recollected Singh as he spoke about his running and weight loss journey.

A slow and steady start

Singh decided to take it slow initially because of his knee pain and overall body weight and started his fitness journey with short walks.

"I started to walk one kilometer and then slowly started to increase the pace and distance as my focus was weight loss. I also started to enjoy the whole running experience as it kept me fresh and charged up for the better part of the day," Singh adds.

Strengthen your heart and tone your muscles

Singh soon started participating in 5 k and 10 k runs organized in Faridabad and nearby areas. He also slowly started to run outside his hometown, mainly in half marathons and track events organised in rest of the National Capital Region (NCR) and Delhi. After running in the Delhi Tuffman 10 K challenge in August 2024, Singh had to be rushed to the hospital with severe body pain and fatigue.

"The doctors told me it was mainly due to severe dehydration. I was also instructed to improve my protein intake and also start strength training to improve my muscle health," Singh says.

Singh adds that he has been doing weightlifting and targeted muscle strengthening exercises for almost 120 minutes at least thrice a week, apart from his daily running and once in a week interval running sessions.

"I focus on my core, thighs and lower leg muscles mainly. I also make it a point to avoid overstraining my knees. I could actually feel the improvement in my gait and running style during my running and training sessions as I was gradually losing weight," he says. His latest cholesterol readings are at 122 mg/dL , his blood pressure is normal and both his knee health and sleep hygiene have also improved.

No junk food except for an occasional rabri jalebi booster

Singh had been a hardcore foodie in his corporate avatar. But he completely gave up packaged ultra processed food once he embarked on his fitness journey and decided to include running as part of his lifestyle.

"I rely on homecooked food and try to have balanced meals with more protein and fiber and bare minimum carbs. I have eggs, chicken, along with half a roti for lunch and dinner," Singh says.

He also eats nuts, fruits and vegetable salads during the day and prefers to have an early dinner and crash for the day before 9:30 pm.

"I go a bit easy on my carb intake on the day before my half marathons and long distance runs. I have rabri and a couple of jalebis before these events to give me enough energy to run. But I am allowed to have it because I end up burning every ounce of those excess calories," Singh says. Apart from this Singh's workout miracle food is a banana that pumps instant energy into his muscles.

#KillObesity and stay on track

Singh is now a familiar face at all major running events and has so far completed 56 running events (10K and above) across the country. He says that he might have initially taken up running to improve his personal health but it has now become a post-retirement passion project.

"Wherever I am running or being interviewed, my focus is to spread awareness about obesity and its adverse effects, especially on heart disease and diabetes. We need to kill obesity before it kills us," Singh says.

His family includes his wife Suman Singh, a contemporary oil painter and his daughter Ashmita Singh and his son Ashish Singh, who are his source of inspiration and support for his running and weight loss goals. Singh's running calendar is already packed with events, including the upcoming Vedanta Pink City Half Marathon in Jaipur, Tata Steel 25 K in Kolkata, Tata Mumbai Marathon and the Indian Navy Half Marathon.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

TREND WATCH

Shadow AI: The Invisible Workforce Reshaping Enterprise Risk

AI has slipped into the workplace faster than any technology wave before it. What began as a handful of sanctioned copilots and pilots has become an ecosystem of tools - IDEs, code assistants, design engines, research bots, meeting summarizers, all available to anyone with curiosity and a browser.

And that speed has created a new phenomenon: ***Shadow AI.***

Shadow AI refers to AI tools and workflows being used inside an organization without formal IT approval, security review, or governance. It may look harmless, an engineer installing Google's Antigravity IDE on a work laptop, a product manager pasting roadmap notes into Claude, or a marketer running campaign data through a generative model while the official tool request sits in procurement limbo.

But what feels like individual ingenuity at the edge quickly becomes an enterprise risk at scale Shadow AI expands the attack surface of the organization. It bypasses data governance, privacy policies, and security controls. It introduces unknown data flows into systems that were never designed to handle regulated or proprietary information. And most importantly, it does so invisibly, outside the line of sight of CISOs, IT teams, and compliance frameworks.

According to Netskope's *2026 Cloud and Threat Report*, the three categories of data most involved in AI data policy violations over the past year were:

- Source code (42%)
- Regulated data (32%)
- Intellectual property (16%)

These are not abstract risks. They are the crown jewels of modern enterprises. The most cited example remains Samsung, which discovered that proprietary semiconductor data had been leaked through internal engineering use of ChatGPT, used to review source code, optimize performance, and summarize internal meetings. What seemed like routine productivity hacks became a direct exposure of IP.

Shadow AI isn't driven by malice. It's driven by friction.

Teams are under pressure to move faster. Developers are expected to ship more with fewer resources. Marketers are expected to personalize at scale. Analysts are expected to synthesize oceans of data in minutes. When official tools lag, approval cycles stretch into months, and experimentation is gated by bureaucracy, people route around the system.

In other words, Shadow AI is not a user problem. It is a systems problem.

The deeper risk is not just data leakage; it is architectural drift. When dozens of unsanctioned tools enter workflows, organizations lose visibility into:

- Where data flows
- How models are trained or retained
- Which prompts contain sensitive information
- What third-party vendors now sit in the operational chain

This creates a parallel technology stack, one that leadership doesn't know exists, cannot audit, and therefore, cannot secure.

Left unaddressed, Shadow AI will outgrow official tooling. Not because people want to rebel, but because innovation always finds oxygen.

The question, then, is not how to stop Shadow AI, but how to absorb its energy safely.

How to Keep Shadow AI at Bay

For developers and practitioners:

Be an advocate, not a rogue agent. The instinct to explore is healthy, it is how innovation happens. But test new tools on personal devices. Document what improves. Measure time saved, bugs reduced, quality increased. Then bring that evidence to your team lead or IT partner.

You are far more likely to get approval when you show up with outcomes, not requests.

Shadow AI becomes dangerous when it is invisible. Turn experimentation into a signal, not a secret.

For leaders and IT teams:

Rigid six-month procurement cycles are part of the problem. When evaluation takes longer than innovation, people will bypass you. Consider:

- Fast-track AI evaluation pipelines
- Time-bound sandbox environments
- Pre-approved "experimentation zones" with data redaction
- Lightweight security reviews for low-risk tools

Create safe spaces for curiosity. Give teams a way to explore without exposing production data. Make "approved" feel faster than "workaround."

Most importantly, shift posture from control to *enablement*. Governance in the AI era is not about saying no. It is about building rails that

let people move fast without falling off a cliff. Shadow AI is a symptom of something larger: the gap between how fast technology moves and how slowly organizations adapt. The companies that win will not be the ones that ban AI.

They will be the ones that design for it, architecting trust, speed, and security into the same system.

In the AI-native enterprise, the goal is not to eliminate shadow. It is to turn it into light.

EDITORIAL

Union Budget 2026: What CIOs Should Read Between the Lines

The Union Budget 2026 is not a headline-grabbing "tech budget" — and that is precisely why it matters to CIOs.

This year's budget is best understood as a **platform-setting budget**. It focuses less on announcing shiny new schemes and more on building the structural conditions required for India's next phase of enterprise growth — digital, industrial, and talent-led. For CIOs and technology leaders, the signals are subtle but significant.

Digital Infrastructure as Core National Capability

The continued emphasis on large-scale digital infrastructure - data centres, cloud ecosystems, connectivity, and compute, reinforces a critical shift: digital infrastructure is no longer viewed as a support layer, but as **core national capacity**.

For CIOs, this brings long-term confidence. Whether you are designing hybrid cloud architectures, evaluating sovereign data strategies, or planning AI-heavy workloads, the policy direction suggests stability and continuity rather than short-term experimentation.

CIO takeaway: This is a good moment to revalidate long-horizon infrastructure decisions and move from tactical cloud adoption to intentional, multi-year architecture planning.

Simplification Is a Technology Opportunity

One of the quieter but most impactful themes of the budget is simplification - of tax structures, classifications, and compliance processes. While this may appear administrative, it directly affects enterprise technology landscapes.

Simpler compliance regimes reduce manual workarounds, duplicated systems, and patchwork processes that many CIOs have inherited over time.

CIO takeaway: This is an opportunity to modernise ERP, finance, and governance systems, not just to comply, but to operate faster and cleaner.

Manufacturing, Semiconductors, and the Tech Stack

The sustained push on manufacturing and semiconductor ecosystems signals a deeper convergence between hardware, software, and infrastructure. India is positioning itself to play a more meaningful role across the technology value chain.

For CIOs in manufacturing, BFSI, telecom, logistics, and industrial sectors, this opens up new conversations around edge computing, IoT, resilience, and vendor strategy.

CIO takeaway: Hardware and infrastructure strategy can no longer sit outside core technology planning.

Talent Strategy Moves Centre Stage

The budget's focus on skilling, capability building, and global talent participation reinforces a reality CIOs already face: **talent is now a strategic constraint.**

Technology leadership today requires equal attention to platforms and people - from AI readiness to cybersecurity skills and future operating models.

CIO takeaway: Workforce and skill strategy must evolve alongside technology roadmaps.

The Bigger Picture

Union Budget 2026 does not prescribe transformation. Instead, it **removes friction**, regulatory, infrastructural, and operational, for organisations ready to transform.

For the **CIO Association** community, the message is clear: this is a moment to think beyond annual plans and align technology leadership with India's longer-term economic and digital trajectory.

The path is being prepared. The advantage will go to CIOs who move early, think structurally, and lead with intent.

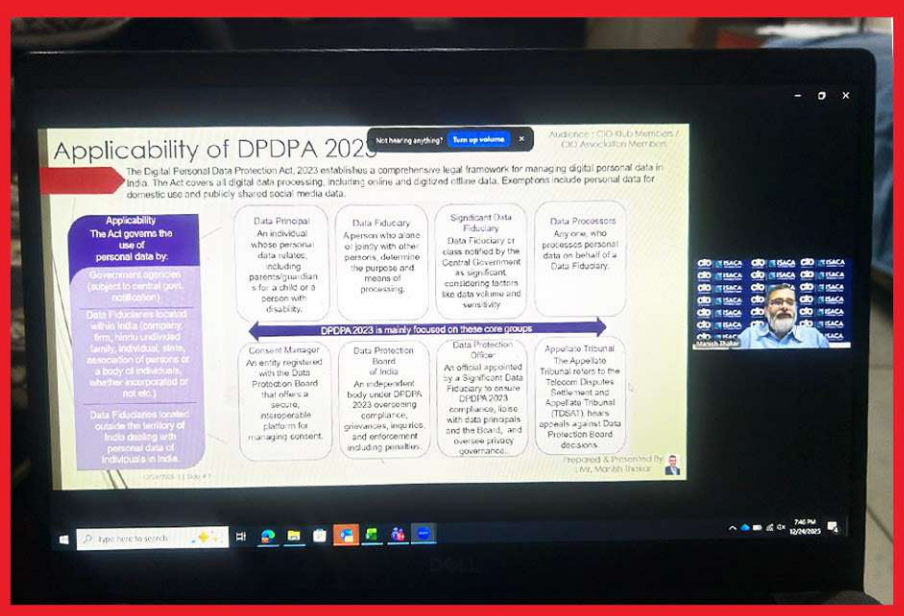
SPECIAL CHAPTER EVENT

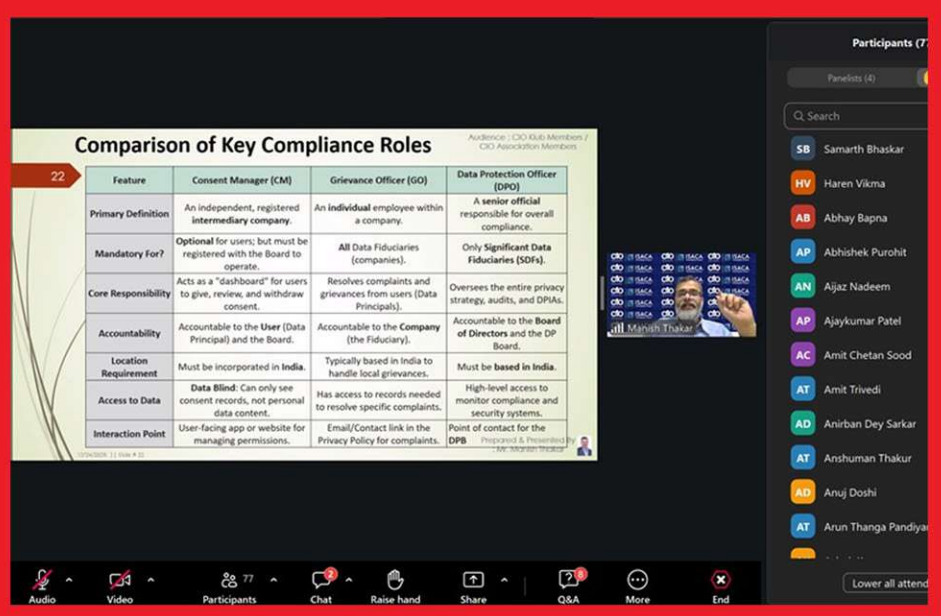
Chapter: Punjab | Topic: Future Forward (4th Edition)
Partner: Mawai ERP Consultants and SAP | 14th December, 2025

Chapter: Kerala | Topic: ICSET (9th Edition)
Partner: ICT Academy of Kerala | 13th January, 2026

KNOWLEDGE SHARING SESSION

Chapter: Gujarat | Topic: DPDP Act 2023 - CIO Readiness Workshop
Partner: ISACA Ahmedabad | 24th December, 2025



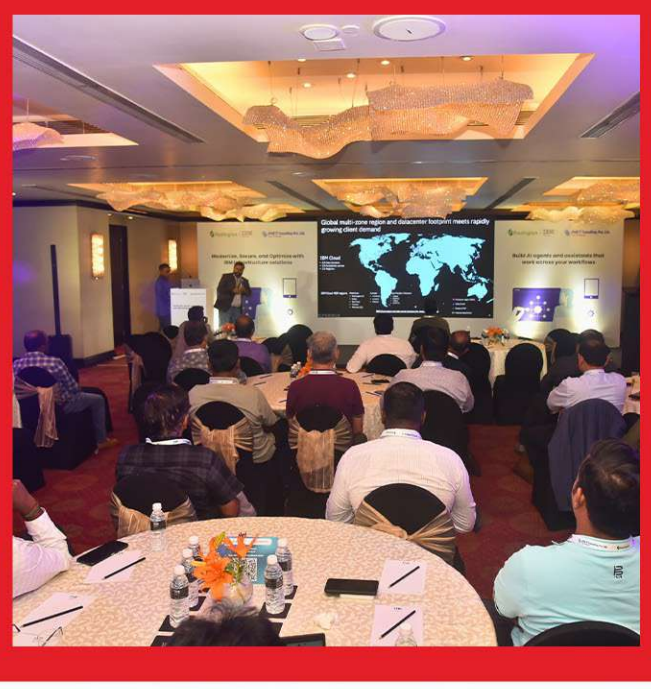


KNOWLEDGE SHARING SESSION

Chapter: Rajasthan | Topic: Royal City, Modern Cloud
Partner: Nutanix and Progression | 24th December, 2025



Chapter: Chennai | Topic: Scaling IBM AI: Pilot to Mastery
Partner: IBM & Zyne It Consulting Pvt Ltd | 19th December, 2025



Chapter: Pune | Topic: Rule the DPDPA and AI & IoT at Work
Partner: ISACA Ahmedabad | 21th December, 2025

KNOWLEDGE SHARING SESSION

Chapter: Delhi | Topic: AI at Scale - The CIO Leadership Roundtable
Partner: E2E Networks & NVIDIA | 9th January, 2026

Chapter: Pune | Topic: Emerging Trends in Military Education
18th January, 2026

Chapter: Indonesia | Topic: Integrated Cyber Security Platforms
Partner: WhizHack & Metamorph | 21st January, 2026

KNOWLEDGE SHARING SESSION

Chapter: Chennai | Topic: ICSET 9th Edition
Partner: Business Core Solutions | 27th January, 2026

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Chapter: Kolkata | Topic: CIO Futurescape 2026 | 10th January, 2026

Chapter: Nagpur | Topic: Orange City Tech Conclave 2026 | 24th January, 2026

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

We invite partners to collaborate in these events and showcase their solutions to technology leaders, foster innovation, and create powerful brand engagement opportunities across the CIO community

MUMBAI

21st February, 2026

Digital Nirvana: Mumbai Chapter's Annual Conclave

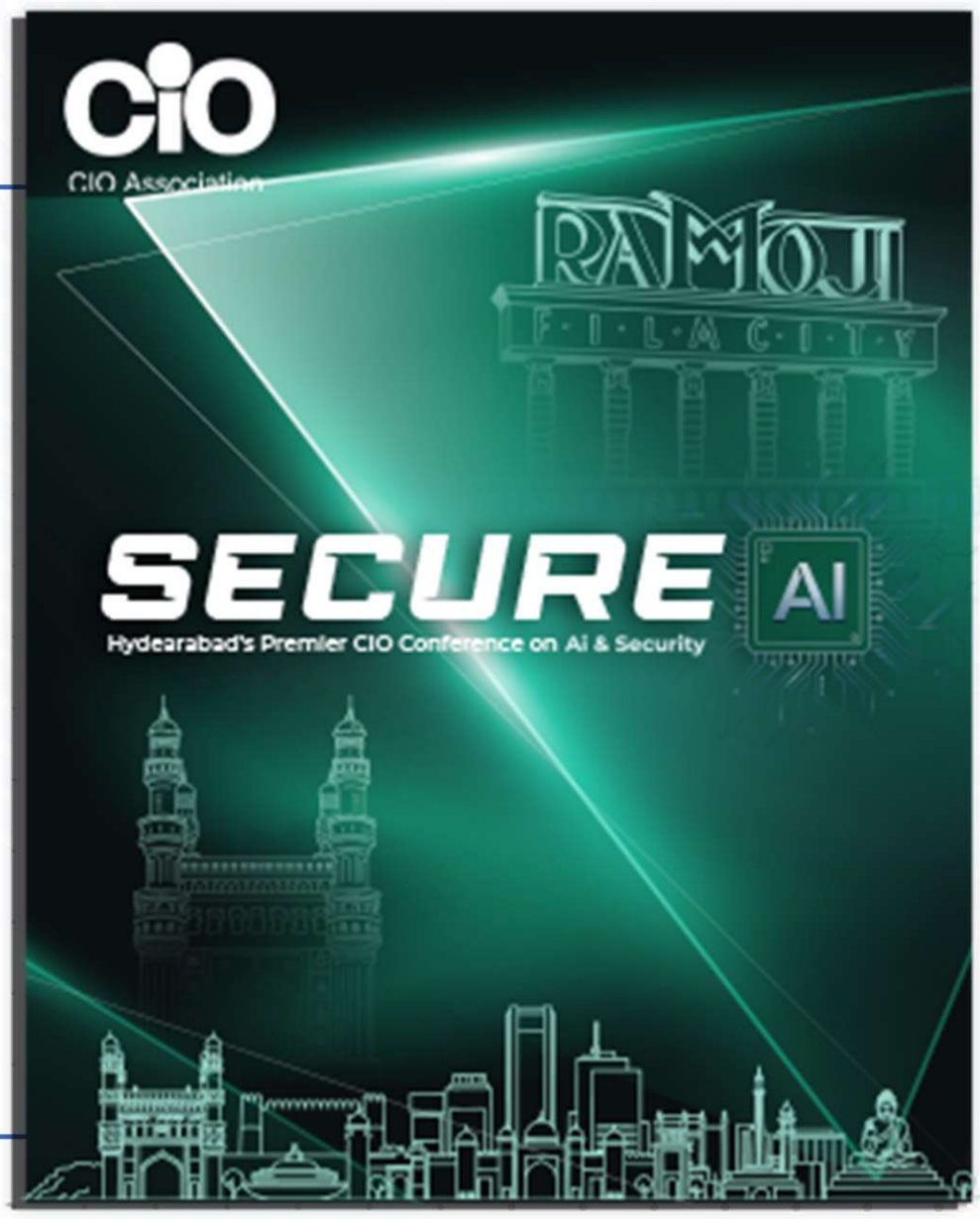
Marking a milestone 17th-anniversary celebration, this conclave brings together over 300 technology leaders to explore the transition from singularity to enterprise security. The event serves as a premier platform for high-level insights into innovation and leadership.

HYDERABAD

14th March, 2026

Secure AI: Hyderabad's Premier CIO Conference

This specialized event addresses the critical convergence of artificial intelligence and cybersecurity for the modern enterprise. It offers Hyderabad's technology community a strategic forum to discuss the frameworks necessary for deploying secure, resilient AI solutions.



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KERALA

25th April, 2026

GOCC 2026: A Milestone Collaboration Event

This premier executive gathering returns as a significant highlight of the annual calendar. The conclave provides a strategic environment for senior leadership to drive cross-industry collaboration and strengthen professional networks within the digital ecosystem.

THE MARCH OUTLOOK: REFLECTION, INNOVATION & INCLUSION

As we wrap up this edition, we invite you to pause for a moment of reflection. From the strategic "hats" we wear to the global signals from Davos, technology leadership is as much about perspective as it is about infrastructure.

As we look toward the month of March, we celebrate two powerful themes: The Spirit of Innovation (Holi) and The Power of Inclusion (International Women's Day).

To our Women Leaders: We celebrate your role in "Breaking the Code"—building the ethical AI and inclusive systems that define our future.

To the entire Community: May your professional palette be as vibrant as the festival of Holi. Here's to adding more "color" to your digital roadmaps and "momentum" to your enterprise goals.

Wishing you a month of high-impact leadership and colorful success!