

World and tech leaders grapple with AI challenges at Paris summit

AFP- Political and tech industry leaders descended on Paris Monday for a two-day summit on artificial intelligence, hoping to find common ground on the revolutionary technology set to remake business and society across the world.

Co-hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the summit aims to lay the groundwork for governing the nascent sector, as global powers race to play leading roles in the fast-developing technology.

Monday's meeting of around 1,500 guests in the French capital's opulent Grand Palais will feature lectures and panel discussions outlining the promises of and challenges posed by AI.

Political leaders, including US Vice President JD Vance and Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, are set to rub shoulders with the likes of OpenAI boss Sam Altman and Google chief Sundar Pichai.

A largely suit-wearing crowd of men and women speaking languages from all over the world gathered under the glass-and-steel dome of the great hall, built for the 1900 Universal Exhibition.

Selected companies, academics and non-profit groups were showing off their work with AI at stands around the cavernous space decked out with screens and geodesic domes.

Two years on from the emergence of OpenAI's ChatGPT chatbot, able to respond to all kinds of natural-language prompts, "artificial intelligence fuels both immense hopes and, at

times, exaggerated fear,” Macron’s AI envoy Anne Bouverot told guests as she opened the summit.

She promised a “turning point” that would bring more countries on board with AI development that until now has been restricted to a few advanced economies.

Also on the agenda is “sustainable development” of the resource- and energy-hungry technology.

“We know that AI can help mitigate climate change, but we also know that its current trajectory is unsustainable,” Bouverot said.

– ‘Stargate’ sets the pace –

Macron had on Sunday trumpeted the benefits of artificial intelligence and French efforts in the field.

In a TV interview, he announced “109 billion euros (\$113 billion) of investment in artificial intelligence in the coming years” in France.

That was “the equivalent for France of what the US has announced with ‘Stargate’,” the \$500-billion US programme led by ChatGPT maker OpenAI, he added.

The technical challenges and price of entry for nations hoping to keep abreast in the AI race have become clearer in recent weeks.

Chinese startup DeepSeek stunned Silicon Valley heavyweights with its low-cost, high-performance AI models.

In the United States, President Donald Trump lent the aura of his office to the “Stargate” project to build computing infrastructure such as data centres.

These vast buildings concentrate in one place the data storage and processing power needed to develop and run the most

advanced AI models.

“Europe has to find a way to take a position, take some initiative and take back control,” said Sylvain Duranton of the Boston Consulting Group.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen is expected to announce around 10 public supercomputers designed for use by researchers and startups while attending the summit.

– Global governance puzzle –

Away from the investment grandstanding, a group of countries, companies and philanthropic organisations said Sunday they would pump \$400 million into a partnership called “Current AI” that would foster “public interest” approaches to the technology.

Current AI aims to raise as much as \$2.5 billion for its mission to grant AI developers access to more data, offer open-source tools and infrastructure for programmers to build on, and “develop systems to measure AI’s social and environmental impact”.

“We’ve seen the harms of unchecked tech development and the transformative potential it holds when aligned with the public interest,” Current AI founder Martin Tisne said.

On Tuesday, political leaders from around 100 countries will hold a plenary session, with notable attendees including Modi, Vance, Zhang and Von der Leyen.

France hopes governments will agree on voluntary commitments to make AI sustainable and environmentally friendly.

But any agreement may prove elusive between blocs as diverse as the European Union, United States, China and India, each with different priorities in tech development and regulation.

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