AI to IoT, City First to Embrace New Innovations

Ayan Pramanik

Bengaluru: Last October, 30-year-old Sahil Kumar landed a job with a hefty salary at the Bengaluru innovation hub of a multinational. This, he says, glorifies his decision to switch to a software product firm five years ago.

Contrary to the common aspirations of many of his colleagues, Kumar, who hails from a small town near Salem in Tamil Nadu, chose Bengaluru as his second home. What helps him stay relevant is his "consistent urge" to explore new opportunities, much like the city he lives in.

Kumar's is not a one-off story. Bengaluru, capital of Karnataka, has seen a tech-tonic shift during the past three-and-a-half decades ever since Texas Instruments' opened shop in 1984. Today's second largest Indian IT services company, Infosys, moved its headquarters from Pune to Bengaluru in 1983. During early 21st century, the city lured many successful software engineers to leave high-profile jobs in the US to come home and build the IT services empire here.

Brand expert Harish Bijoor, who spent decades here, says Bengaluru continues to be the "magnet" for coders even after 26 years of liberalisation in 1991. "The image of Bengaluru saw a gradual shift from medical transcription city to IT services and climbed the hierarchy into Knowledge Process Outsourcing

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(KPO). Today you have the touches of artificial intelligence, IoT and the startup ecosystem... The beauty of it is Bengaluru has not got stuck into one end or the bottom end of the value chain. It has kept morphing itself, so every new piece of technology and every new innovation has helped the city up its ante in terms of abilities," Bijoor said.
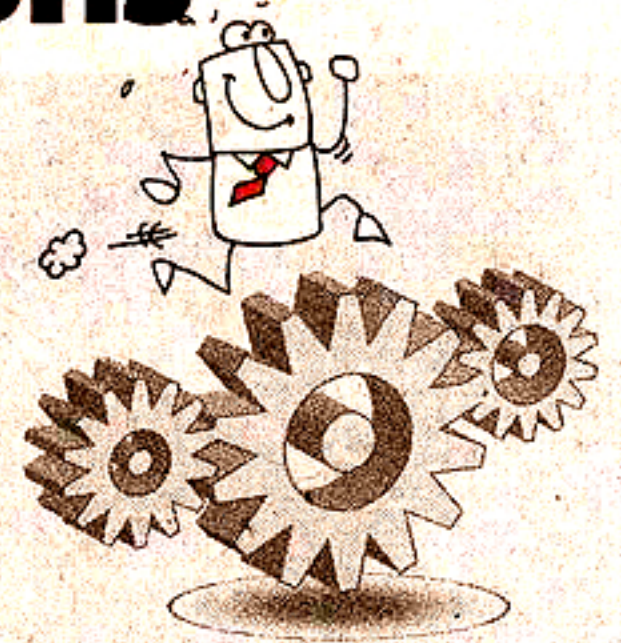
The city is home to nearly 3,500 IT companies, including 750 captives of global businesses, and thousands of startups today. Notwithstanding the fear of joblessness due to automa-

The Infosys campus in Mysore

NARASIMHA MURTHY

tion, Bengaluru continues to open up newer opportunities.

The $154-billion software services sector, which has been the largest contributor to state and city's economy, has for the first time witnessed a single-digit growth in 2016-17. Bengaluru accounts for nearly one-third of this business. Technology consultant Siddharth Pai says faster growth in startup ecosystem, deep-technology and deep-science has been able to bridge that gap, though it is far from being a substitute.

"Even though there has been some slowdown in hiring in IT services sector, because Bengaluru is an attractive destination, there are several other firms that have already started hiring. Many startups are being set up whether it is technology-based or based on other areas such as ecommerce platforms," said Pai.

An ever-positive environment for accepting new technologies and upskilling has been a catalyst, points out Bijoor. "Acceptance of reskilling has been popular in this city for long. Many people got into this ecosystem at the age of 25 and today they are above 50. If you look at these 25 years of work life, you will see reskilling has been a dominant part of their progress and even today as automation takes charge, reskilling on to the cutting edge pieces work is ac-
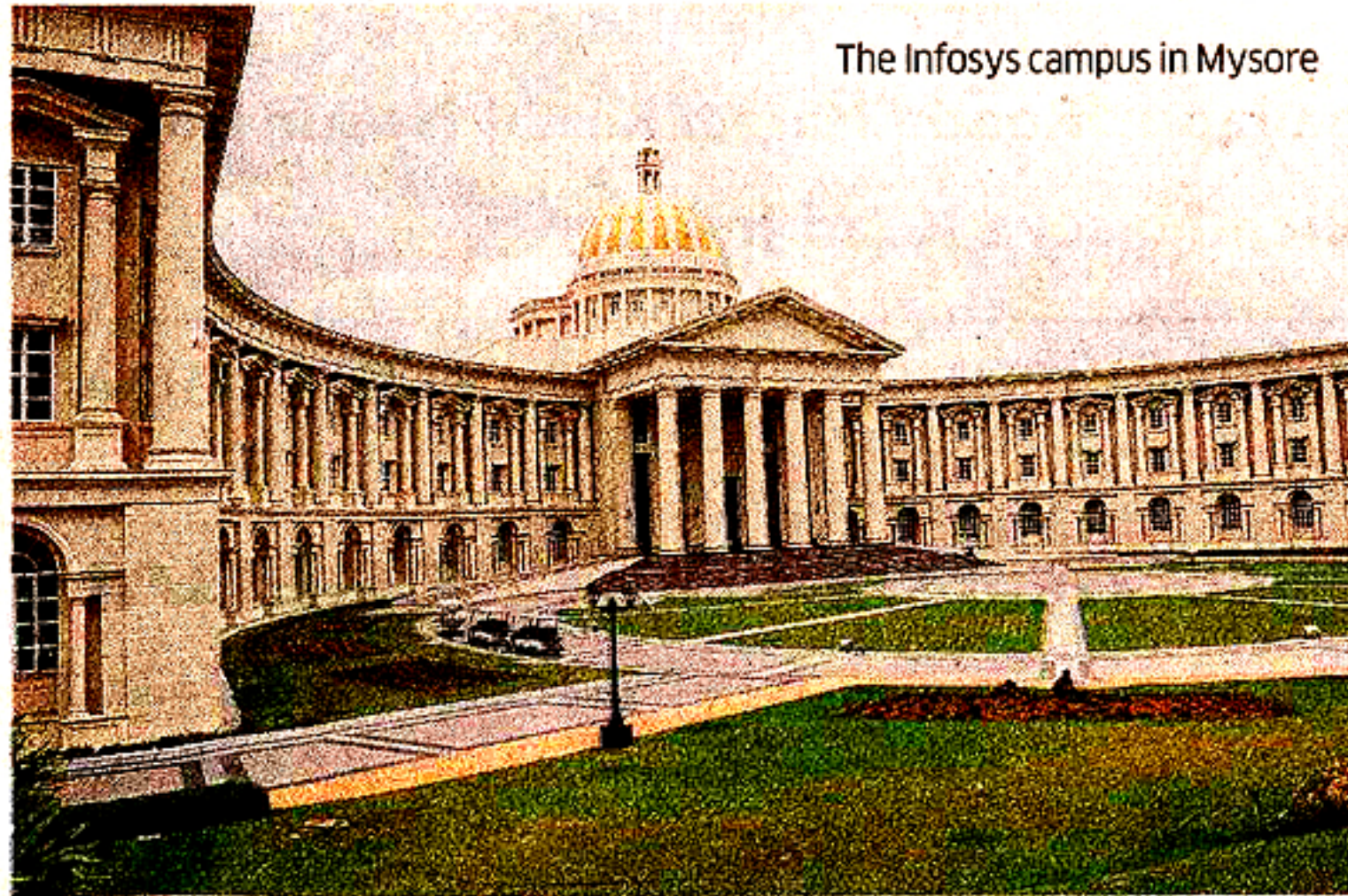
tually happening," he said.

Bengaluru, the first Indian city to have its logo "Be U" like Amsterdam and New York, has seen another steady economic evolution: startup boom. The city now practically has offices of all prominent global startups and ecommerce firms. Brands such as Flipkart, Ola, Uber, Mu Sigma, Practo, TeamIndus have been the early names to put Bengaluru on global startup map across industries starting from mobility to aerospace.

Can and Able

3,500 IT companies in B'luru

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