

Week of August 10-14

AI FOR ALL GLOBAL BRIEF

GLOBAL SIGNALS

Is the Gulf Buying AI Sovereignty — or Renting It?

The Gulf's trillion-dollar AI buildout is being reframed — not by critics, but by its own logic. Within weeks of HUMAIN's CEO vowing to compress two decades of technological progress into a single year, Washington approved export licenses for tens of thousands of Nvidia's most advanced processors to HUMAIN and G42. Riyadh raised its pledged U.S. investment to \$1 trillion. A sharp new analysis from the Middle East Council on Global Affairs makes the case that what the Gulf is building is not independence — it is sophisticated, expensive dependency, its architecture pointing firmly toward an American-controlled compute stack.

The argument is structural rather than polemical. The chips are American. The cloud that runs them is, in most of these deals, operated by American firms. The frontier models are American. That does not make the investment irrational — world-class tenancy beats being locked out entirely. But it reframes what “AI sovereignty” means when most of the critical stack is owned, export-licensed, and enforcement-monitored from Washington.

Why it matters: For Gulf policymakers, this is a clarifying moment about what sovereign AI actually requires versus what an impressive AI buildout achieves. For every other government weighing its own AI sovereignty strategy, the Gulf's experience is the most detailed available test case: the wealthiest possible version of the dependency trap, which makes it easier to see, not harder.

Source: [Middle East Council on Global Affairs](#)

ALSO THIS WEEK

- Qatar's Ooredoo is leading an \$800M investment in an Indonesian AI compute platform; Abu Dhabi's Mubadala is weighing a \$6.3B, 500-megawatt data center in Japan — Gulf capital hedging its domestic AI bet by taking stakes in infrastructure elsewhere. [\[source\]](#)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Washington's \$26 Billion Counteroffensive in Africa's Data Center Race

Compute diplomacy and energy diplomacy have merged. The U.S. is winning African data-center contracts by bundling them with the power plants needed to run them — something no other competitor has reliably offered. In Lesotho, a U.S. company secured a \$6.2 billion package combining a data center with a hydropower plant, the largest single transaction in that country's history. In Gabon, a \$100 million contract for two data centers was paired with a gas-to-power plant, won in direct competition with a Chinese bid.

The power-plus-compute bundling addresses the bottleneck that has quietly derailed flagship African AI infrastructure projects elsewhere: grid capacity. The Microsoft and G42 geothermal data center in Kenya — a \$1 billion project announced with fanfare in 2024 — stalled in May 2026 after officials determined the national grid couldn't support it.

Why it matters: For communities in Lesotho and Gabon, the practical question is not which superpower wins the diplomatic headline but whether a data center and power plant that wouldn't otherwise be financed arrives, operates reliably, employs local workers, and sells electricity at accessible rates.

Source: [Fox News / WWBL](#)

ALSO THIS WEEK

- Even hyperscalers building custom silicon to escape Nvidia dependence are hitting the same advanced-packaging capacity wall — Google's TPU v7 production revised down, Broadcom's CoWoS wafer output cut. The compute bottleneck keeps migrating, not disappearing. [\[source\]](#)

EDUCATION AND HUMAN CAPACITY

One Million Enrollments, One Question: Does Speed Equal Depth?

Saudi Arabia's national AI upskilling initiative, SAMAI, has now trained more than 1.2 million citizens — surpassing its original three-year target in under a year. Women make up 52% of participants; roughly 9% of the Kingdom's working-age population has completed training. The removal of cost, access, and credential barriers appears to be driving uptake that continues to climb months after the program first crossed the million-citizen mark.

The headline figure is the hook, but the more durable story is the underlying demand signal it represents. Across the Gulf, AI investment has been narrated almost entirely in the language of compute: chips, megawatts, data centers, sovereign funds. SAMAI's continued growth suggests that the human-capacity side of the same ambition is generating equally real, sustained momentum — and that latent appetite for skills access has been substantially underserved rather than absent. Whether enrollment translates into meaningfully upskilled workers is a separate and harder question; short courses and credentialed learning are not the same thing.

Why it matters: For an individual in Riyadh or Jeddah, the removal of cost and credential barriers to AI training is a direct change in life options — not a geopolitical story. That kind of structural access shift, when it happens at scale, is what workforce transformation actually looks like from the inside.

Source: [Saudi Press Agency, official](#) | [Arab News](#)

ALSO THIS WEEK

- Google's Africa-facing skills and founder-support initiative is a rare AI story framed around building local capability rather than dependency — worth tracking alongside the infrastructure deals in this issue to distinguish “sold here” from “built here.” [\[source\]](#)

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

India's Only Oscar-Qualifying Short Film Festival Just Added Its First AI Category

The Bengaluru International Short Film Festival (BISFF) — India's sole Academy-accredited short film festival — expanded to 10 competition arenas for its 16th edition, adding “AI: Machine Made Movies” alongside a new screendance category. The AI category drew 118 entries out of a record 3,340 total submissions from 100+ countries, with no minimum AI-involvement threshold required.

BISFF also launched its first Discovery Film Market this year, connecting 100+ filmmakers directly with 50+ buyers, distributors, and OTT platforms — solving the distribution gap that lower AI production costs alone can't close for Indian filmmakers.

Why it matters: A filmmaker in Chennai or Kolkata now has a home-market AI competition track alongside international ones like Venice's Reply AI Film Festival — the kind of dual access that builds a regional AI filmmaking community rather than requiring filmmakers to go through Western festival gatekeepers first.

Source: [Variety](#) | [Deccan Herald](#)

ALSO THIS WEEK

- Nollywood filmmakers and creative-economy entrepreneurs are building AI tools calibrated to their own languages and genres — not waiting for Western platforms to build for Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, or Amharic. [\[source\]](#)

REGIONAL LENS

Latin America's 20 Countries Just Agreed on a Regional AI Ethics Roadmap — Sovereignty Is Notably Absent From It

More than 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries signed the Santo Domingo Declaration (June 25–26) at the region's third ministerial AI ethics summit, agreeing to a 2026–2027 roadmap built around five pillars: governance, the future of work, protection of vulnerable groups, environmental sustainability, and infrastructure. The declaration also establishes a new regional expert group specifically targeting AI-driven disinformation — a direct response to the region's frequent elections and heavy social media exposure.

What's notably missing: as one Uruguayan AI researcher pointed out, the word “sovereignty” — the concept of the region leveraging AI knowledge generated by and for itself — doesn't appear anywhere in the agreement, even as Europe, China, and Japan advance their own sovereignty-framed strategies.

Why it matters: UNESCO's regional AI ethics lead put it directly: “Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most unequal regions in the world, and AI can both deepen and reduce those gaps depending on how it is governed.” The roadmap's real test is whether 20 governments with wildly different institutional capacity turn shared principles into enforced policy.

Source: [SciDev.Net](#) | [Santo Domingo Declaration, official \(UNESCO\)](#)

ALSO THIS WEEK

- Washington's \$26B Africa data center push, read through a “who actually benefits” lens — cross-referenced from Infrastructure, not duplicated. [\[source\]](#)

Two Open Doors for Global South AI Work — One Closes in Days

The Gates Foundation's Grand Challenges call for AI-enabled family planning tools in sub-Saharan Africa closes August 25 (11:30am Pacific) — up to \$500,000 per project for real-world deployment and evaluation of AI-driven consumer engagement tools that improve contraceptive uptake and continuation.

Separately, the African Development Bank has launched or significantly expanded an AI-focused financing initiative — a longer-horizon structural story to track and, for eligible institutions, engage with deliberately over the coming months, not a near-term open call.

Why it matters: For a researcher in Nairobi or a health NGO in Dhaka, the Gates deadline is a concrete door closing in days. The AfDB initiative is the longer game — but it's the one that shapes whether the infrastructure and skills gaps documented elsewhere in this issue close over the next decade.

Source: [Gates Foundation, official Grand Challenges portal](#)

ALSO THIS WEEK

- GITEX Global has confirmed a December date shift this year, with the Expand North Star startup and investor track now folded directly into the main show — founders and accelerators should adjust pitch and application timelines now. [\[source\]](#)

ONE SIGNAL WE ARE WATCHING

Compute access is a layered bottleneck, not a single one. This week's issue documents the same chain in five different registers: Gulf sovereign funds discovering that owning the hardware doesn't equal owning the stack; U.S. diplomacy winning African data-center deals by financing the power layer nobody else would touch; Saudi Arabia showing what happens when the skills-access barrier is removed at scale; Indian filmmakers building the competition infrastructure to compete on their own terms; and Latin America confronting AI governance without yet naming sovereignty as the goal. Chips gate everything else, but chips are gated by power, power by grid infrastructure, infrastructure by financing and political will — and all of it by whether the resulting systems actually work in the languages and contexts of the communities they're meant to serve.

AI for All Global Brief is a publication of Tomorrow Foundation.