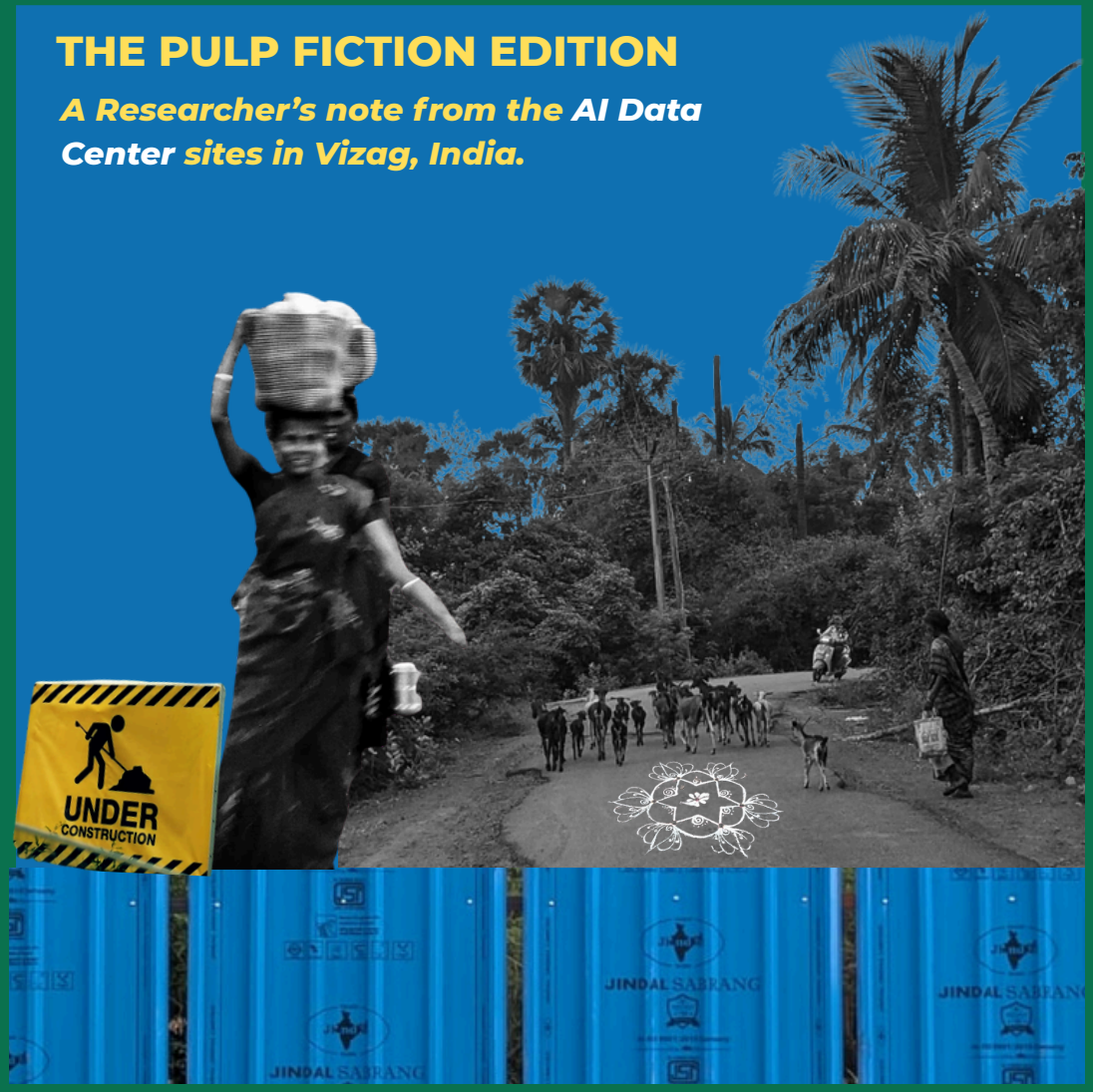
defindia.org

University of Sheffield

THE PULP FICTION EDITION

A Researcher's note from the AI Data Center sites in Vizag, India.



Introduction

This photobook is curated by Mili Dangwal and published as part of the research project Negotiating ‘Sustainable AI’, led by Dr Preeti Raghunath and funded by the Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures at the University of Sheffield, UK. The Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is a partner organisation in India for the project, with Mili Dangwal serving as a Researcher.

While government stakeholders express readiness to welcome this massive digital infrastructure, conversations on the ground reveal important questions around water availability, local resources, employment, environmental impact, and health and radiation risks. They also raise concerns about transparency, public participation, and the larger question of how much such infrastructure is actually needed.

Pulp fiction was the name given to cheap, mass-produced stories printed in wood-pulp magazines in the early to mid-20th century—stories filled with adventure, promise, danger, and spectacle, offering readers visions of worlds in the making.

India’s AI data-centre boom has its own kind of pulp fiction: stories of investment, jobs, AI readiness, and digital transformation. Yet behind these promises lies a deeply material reality. Land is acquired, forests are cleared, water is extracted, energy is consumed, and communities and landscapes are reshaped.

In Visakhapatnam (Vizag), the digital future is not somewhere in the cloud. It is being built here, on landscapes that already sustain lives. Through photographs from the ground, this book invites the viewer to look beyond the language of the “cloud” and ask: What does this digital expansion mean for people, resources, and the environment? Who gets to decide, and who gets to live with its consequences?

And when the resources begin to run dry, who gets to leave? Will these infrastructures move on to the next place, or will the people who live here be the ones left behind?

If it is Vizag today, could it be your neighbourhood tomorrow?

Rushikonda Beach, Vishakapatnam



From Industrial Powerhouse to India's AI Frontier

Visakhapatnam (commonly known as Vizag) is one of India's most strategically important coastal cities. Nestled between the Eastern Ghats and the Bay of Bengal, one of the country's busiest ports, and a site to a varied range of industries.

Since 1941, the city has welcomed numerous large-scale industrial projects, each promising economic growth and employment while also leaving behind lessons about environmental and social trade-offs.

In October 2025, Google announced a landmark partnership to develop India's largest AI data centre campus, alongside new green energy infrastructure, in Vizag. The project represents an estimated investment of USD 15 billion over five years (2026–2030).

The proposed campus spans nearly 600 acres across three locations: **Tarluvada** (266 acres), **Adavivaram-Mudasarlova** (160 acres), and **Rambilli** (174 acres). Together, these facilities are expected to deliver 1 Gigawatt of computing capacity, making them among the largest AI infrastructure projects in India.

THE ~~EASE~~ OF DOING BUSINESS

The Google data centre parks were classified as Category B2 under Schedule 8(a) of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006, under which the project did not require an EIA study, a public hearing, or appraisal by the Union Ministry of Environment, and was approved solely by the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA).

The EIA Notification also contains a General Condition stating that any Category B project located within 10 kilometres of a protected area must be treated as a Category A project and appraised by the Union MoEFCC. However that provision isn't applied to data Center site in Vizag.

The pace of approvals further adds to these concerns. The environmental clearance was granted in a span of 10 days, with no EIA study, no public hearings, and no central appraisal.


TARLUVADA

Tarluvada is a rural village located in Anandapuram Mandal of Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh, approximately 38 kilometers northeast of Visakhapatnam's urban center. With a population of around 3,500 people, the village's economy is primarily dependent on agriculture. As the region witnesses the emergence of an IT hub, the proposed data center has generated diverse perspectives among local residents, reflecting both economic concerns and anxieties about social and environmental change.



Construction at the Data Centre site, Tarluvada

Into the forest to make way for the concrete.

Minutes of the State Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC) record that nearly 90 per cent of the Tarluvada site falls within the Pedda Chukka Konda Reserve Forest area. Despite this, the committee recommended environmental clearance, citing the absence of relevant information in the Survey of India topographic sheet.

The proposed Tarluvada site lies approximately 1.53 kilometres from the Kambalakonda Wildlife Sanctuary, raising questions over whether the project should have been assessed under Category A instead of receiving clearance solely at the state level.



Massive trees are being cut down to clear the site


RAMBILI

Rambilli, Andhra Pradesh, is emerging as an important location in the development of large-scale digital infrastructure and subsea connectivity along India’s east coast. The area hosts a major Google data center campus project, which is expected to benefit from planned high-capacity submarine fiber networks and regional digital infrastructure. While major cable landing stations are concentrated in the wider Visakhapatnam coastal area, these projects are designed to strengthen connectivity across the broader tech corridor.

Rambilli’s strategic importance is further enhanced by its proximity to key coastal and defense infrastructure, including the Navy’s Project Varsha base, making the region significant for both digital connectivity and strategic development. However, Rambilli is also dubbed a 'toxic zone', with the Pharma City polluting ground water and making nearby areas unliveable.

The cloud, it turns out, first arrives as smoke.




ReNew


UNDER
CONSTRUCTION


ADVIVARAM

While construction continues, this area falls squarely within Arilova–Adavivaram, part of the Eco-Sensitive Zone notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) around the Kambalakonda Wildlife Sanctuary, where construction activities are prohibited.

Nearby Arilova colony residents expressed already shortage of water in the houses, raising concerns how the construction once completed will leave anything for them or not?



The blue shed marks the demarcation of the construction site, situated on the Simachalam Hills.



“What do you feel about a data center coming so close to your community?”

Resident 1: “It does not bother me much as long as fair compensation is provided. The money can be used for my children’s education.”

Resident 2: “Our forefathers protected Chukkakonda hills from advancing British troops and now it is an irony that our state has now sold the land to a foreign entity.”

Resident 3: “I think radiation from the data center can cause cancer, and women might face additional difficulties, especially during pregnancy.”

Resident 4: “I recently completed my engineering studies, and I am aware that these data centres won’t provide jobs for people like us. Rather, they will employ only a handful of skilled workers while taking so much from us. What, then, are they giving us?”

A tribute to the non- renewable resources we still assume will outlast us.