IT firms honing AI skills with domain-specific LLMs, training

BETTER APPROACH. Industry sees greater value in AI-enabled solutions, consulting and managed services rather than training foundational models from scratch

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Leading Indian IT firms are deepening their AI capabilities by integrating large language models (LLMs), focusing on domain-specific applications and upskilling employees to meet the growing demand for AI-driven solutions.

Nikhil Malhotra, Chief Innovation Officer & Global Head of AI and Emerging Technologies at Tech Mahindra, said the company pioneered building LLMs in India with Project Indus, a foundational model it built from the ground up.

An independent study by The Assam Kaziranga University in Jorhat compared various models and found that Indus outperforms many counterparts in tokenisation efficiency, he shared.

"The speed of tokenisation is influenced by the number of parameters and the model's size. It is safe to say Indus has shown the possibility of outperforming even larger models by using optimised techniques. We are also leveraging LLMs to enhance our services for customers and to improve delivery. We are utilising OpenAI models to finetune our LLMs. The usage varies depending on the specific use case, which is determined through our research to compare the models and select the appropriate one."

'TAILORED TO NEEDS'
Deepak Bagchi, VP of AI CoE at Coforge, said Quasar, its AI platform, has integrated 23 LLMs, combining opensource and licensed models. This allows the platform to handle a range of tasks, from natural language processing to complex data analysis.

"We plan to finetune models tailored to client requirements. They will be optimised for tasks and industries, ensuring higher accuracy and efficiency. We are also focused on working with SLMs custom-built for specific use cases, which will be designed to address unique business challenges and provide targeted solutions."

Sridhar Mantha, CEO of Generative AI Business Services (GBS) at Happiest Minds Technologies, explained that rather than competing in the generic LLM space, the company focuses on utilising existing LLMs to create domain-specific applications leveraging its domain expertise to deliver business impact through industry specific

ALLAYING FEARS. "Contrary to the prevalent fear of job losses, AI has the potential to create opportunities, particularly for machine learning engineers, data scientists and AI researchers"

solution and use cases.

The challenges companies face in building LLMs, he explained, is "about strategic decision-making. Building proprietary LLMs requires massive investments in infrastructure, talent and R&D, making it less viable for most IT services firms. Considering it is a fast-evolving space, the investments need to be near-perpetual to keep ahead of the technology curve. Instead, we focus on fine-tuning existing models for enterprise-specific needs, balancing customisation with cost efficiency."

The industry sees greater value in AI-enabled solutions, consulting and managed services rather than training foundational models from scratch, he added. AI is a fundamental driver of its long-term growth strategy, with the company investing heavily to stay ahead of the curve.

With a dedicated business unit for GenAI, Happiest Minds is aligned with its 2031 vision of becoming a $1 billion company, he said. The company's AI, GenAI and Analytics business already contributes significantly to its overall revenue, accounting for 11 per cent.

"By partnering with leading AI providers and specialising in verticalised AI applications, security and responsible AI, IT firms can deliver high-impact solutions without the overhead of LLM development. While fullscale LLM development remains uncommon, specialised AI innovations tailored for business transformation are gaining momentum."

While Indian IT companies are making significant strides in AI, widespread concern remains about it potentially replacing various job roles. Acknowledging this, Coforge's Bagchi noted that AI has the potential to create new job opportunities, particularly in roles like machine learning engineers, data scientists and AI researchers.

This has led to a focus on reskilling and upskilling existing employees to meet the demands of said AI-driven roles. "We have set up a dedicated CoE to formalise the process across all the labs. The centralised AI CoE is led by the leadership team with over 250 AI practitioners, of which over 100 are certified professionals in technologies including MS Azure, GCP and AWS. The skills span areas like AI/ML, Data Science, Data Science Platform Engineers, Machine Learning Operations, and Integration Engineers. We have trained all employees directly working on AI/ML projects and have certified over 25,000 employees on relevant AI content as part of the 'AI Spark' module with advanced courses for top performers," he said.

JOB CREATION
Mantha noted that job creation happens in the new demands being created in AI. For example, GenAI-driven hiring is directly proportional to business adoption and demand. While there has been immense interest in GenAI, its adoption follows a hockey-stick trajectory — initial exploration and gradual implementation, followed by a sharp acceleration once businesses integrate this into their core operations.

"Currently, companies are prioritising upskilling and reskilling their workforce to align with Generative AI-driven workflows rather than engaging in largescale hiring. However, as GenAI adoption matures and more enterprises move from experimentation to full-scale deployment, we can expect a corresponding surge in hiring — particularly in specialised areas like AI model engineering, data science and AI operations. This shift will mirror the upswing of a hockey stick, where increased adoption drives greater workforce expansion."

He said Happiest Minds has established a dedicated business unit for GenAI and an AI CoE to drive AI literacy across the organisation. Investments include Gen AI training programmes at various levels, from foundational AI awareness to deep technical expertise.

Jaspreet Bindra, co-founder of AI & Beyond, said upskilling in AI and making targeted investments in AI-driven innovations are no longer just strategic options for Indian IT companies. Instead, they have become operational imperatives. With shrinking margins and intense competition, companies failing to adapt risk falling behind. Reskilling the workforce in AI tools like generative models, automation frameworks and data-driven decision-making processes is essential for maintaining relevance, he added.

"While these investments may incur short-term costs, they act as a hedge against long-term margin erosion. By embedding AI into core operations, companies can streamline processes, reduce overheads, and improve service delivery. This enhances productivity and operational efficiency and allows for innovative, AI-powered solutions that differentiate them in the global market. In a world where AI proficiency will define the next era of technology services, Indian IT firms must seize this opportunity to future-proof their business and secure sustained growth," he said.

With inputs from Vallari Sanzgiri in Mumbai

French shipping major CMA CGM to play a key role in IMEC

TE Raja Simhan
Chennai

French shipping major CMA CGM will play a pivotal role in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), the company said in a statement after the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with French President Emmanuel Macron to the group's headquarters in Marseille on Wednesday.

The leaders were welcomed by Rodolphe Saade, Chairman and CEO of the CMA CGM Group, at the Group's headquarters.

Discussions focused on the IMEC, which is a strategic trade route designed to enhance connectivity between India and Europe.

The CMA CGM Group, which is a global player in maritime, land, air and logistics solutions, intends to actively contribute to this initiative, the statement said.

TO ENHANCE TRANSIT
The IMEC project aims to enhance transit between

TRADE BOOST. Prime Minister Narendra Modi with French President Emmanuel Macron (left) and Rodolphe Saade, Chairman and CEO of the CMA CGM Group, in Marseille

Europe and India through integrated maritime and land infrastructure while also facilitating energy transport and telecommunications via a subsea cable.

With a modern fleet adapted to alternative energy sources and key port hubs in India, the UAE and the Mediterranean, CMA CGM will be a key contributor to the corridor's efficiency.

Additionally, a network of dry ports along the IMEC rail route — stretching from India through Saudi Arabia and the Middle East to Europe — will leverage the Group's logistics expertise, reinforcing the economic and strategic vision of this alternative trade route.

STRONG PRESENCE
With a presence in 160 countries through 400 offices, 750 warehouses, 1,60,000 employees and a wide fleet of 620 vessels, CMA CGM serves 420 of the world's 521 commercial ports and operates more than 250 shipping lines.

It has been in India for the last 34 years, with a workforce of nearly 17,000 employees.

RBI clears Temasek unit picking 7% stake in AU Small Finance Bank

Our Bureau
Mumbai

AU Small Finance Bank announced on Thursday that the Reserve Bank of India has approved Zulia Investments Pte. Ltd, an indirect wholly-owned subsidiary of Singapore's Temasek Holdings, to acquire up to 7 per cent stake in the bank.

The shares of AU Small Finance Bank were trading at ₹554.65, up by ₹ 0.25 or 0.05 per cent on the NSE on Thursday at 11.40 am.

RBI LETTER
The approval, granted through an RBI letter dated February 12, 2025, allows Zulia Investments, along with persons acting in concert and associate enterprises, to purchase the shares within one year, subject to regulatory compliance.

If the acquisition is not completed within this timeframe, the approval will be cancelled.

Shriram Finance raises $500 m via SACE ECB loan facility

Our Bureau
Mumbai

Shriram Finance raised $500 million via SACE External Commercial Borrowing Push loan facility, with a tenor of 10 years, the company said in a statement.

SACE is an Italian export credit agency run by the government of Italy.

Shriram Finance raised over $2.5 billion in offshore funding in the current financial year. Umesh Revankar, Executive Vice-Chairman of Shriram Finance, said the transaction shows the NBFC's strong ability to navigate global financial markets and forge strategic partnerships with international lenders.

This loan facility enhances the NBFC's ability to finance Italian vehicles and equipment.

CtrlS Datacenters to inaugurate Chennai campus on February 25

TE Raja Simhan
Chennai

The Hyderabad-based CtrlS Datacenters Ltd will inaugurate its ₹4,000 crore data centre in Chennai on February 25. Chief Minister MK Stalin is expected to inaugurate the centre located in the Ambattur industrial estate.

Named *NammaDatacenter* (our data centre), the Chennai campus marks a pivotal moment in the company's mission to strengthen India's digital infrastructure.

In February 2024, CtrlS Datacenters Ltd unveiled its upcoming data centre park in Chennai — its fifth hyperscale DC campus in India following Mumbai, Hyderabad, Noida and Bengaluru.

NEW JOBS
The company is expected to create about 500 direct jobs and over 9,000 indirect jobs. Located in the Ambattur industrial area, the campus will include two data centre buildings with a combined built-up area of almost 1 million square feet and 72 MW IT load capacity.

CtrlS Datacenters, which began operations in 2007, operates 15 data centres across eight key markets.