DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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Topics Covered

Indian women script history, clinch maiden World Cup title

In testimony to the progress made by the team over the years, Harmanpreet Kaur's unit defeats South Africa by 52 runs in the final; Shafali Verma makes a sensational comeback, with a half-century, two key wickets to seal India's coronation

Lavanya L.
NAVI MUMBAI

Indian women created history before a packed D.Y. Patil Stadium here on Sunday, winning the Women's ODI World Cup defeating South Africa by 52 runs.

If the team's astounding run to the final in 2017, slaying giant Australia *en route*, is often cited as the cornerstone of a revolution, the maiden championship win is the fulfilment of a gritty effort to match promise with performance.

In the eight years since, progress was agonisingly slow but steady. India's ambitions to dominate world cricket slowly made room for the women.

Parity in match fees, more fixtures, and the lucrative Women's Premier League helped India rub shoulders with Australia and England.

At the D.Y. Patil Stadium, with trailblazers like Diana Edulji, Mithali Raj, and Jhulan Goswami in attendance, India – with a squad featuring veterans pining for victory and youngsters eager to succeed – clinched its maiden world crown. A roller-coaster run for the home side in the tournament saw different members come in the clutch. If youngsters Amanjot Kaur and Richa Ghosh bailed India out early on, seniors Smriti Mandhana, Jemimah Rodrigues, and Deepti Sharma helped traverse the ravines of knockout cricket. Destiny's child Shafali Verma scripted a sensational comeback story, with a half-century and two key wickets in the final to seal India's coronation.

Harmanpreet Kaur and team are often held to the standards set by that 2017 campaign. Its run now was far from perfect, with three losses to the other semifinalists in the league stage. But as the captain admitted before the summit clash, only the big picture mattered – what a win could do for a side that always buckled and fell short of the podium.

"We know how it feels to lose. We look forward to seeing how it feels to win," Harmanpreet said.

Her team and the billion Indian hearts they carry with them now know.

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Milestone moment: Captain Harmanpreet Kaur and others celebrate after winning the ODI World Cup in Navi Mumbai on Sunday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

TATHASTU
Institute Of Civil Services

📞 9560300770 🌐 www.tathastuics.com ✉ enquiry@tathastuics.com
Plot No.B 22, Bada Bazar Road, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi-110060

(2)

ISRO launches GSAT-7R, India's heaviest communication satellite

Saurabh Trivedi
Vasudevan Mukunth
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

The Indian Space Research Organisation on Sunday successfully launched the Indian Navy's advanced communication satellite GSAT-7R (CMS-03) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.

The indigenously designed and developed satellite, weighing approximately 4,400 kg, is India's heaviest communication satellite to date and marks a major milestone in strengthening the Navy's space-based communications and maritime domain awareness.

The ISRO launched the rocket aboard its most powerful launch vehicle, the LVM3, on its M5 mission. The lift-off took place at

The ISRO launching LVM3-M5 carrying a communication satellite from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota on Sunday. ANI

about 5.26 p.m. from the second launch pad, and mission control soon confirmed that the satellite had been successfully inserted into a geosynchronous transfer orbit (GTO).

This is the heaviest Indian-built communications satellite launched from Indian soil so far. Because of the high mass of the GSAT-7R, the launch vehicle targeted a standard GTO; once there, the satellite will raise and circular-

ise its orbit using its onboard propulsion systems.

The Navy said that equipped with state-of-the-art indigenous components, the GSAT-7R would provide robust and secure telecommunication coverage across the Indian Ocean Region. Its advanced payload features transponders supporting voice, data, and video links over multiple communication bands, ensuring seamless connectivity between the Navy's ships, submarines, aircraft, and Maritime Operations Centres. The launch highlights India's growing self-reliance in space technology and the Navy's commitment to safeguarding national maritime interests, it said.

(3)

Depressing pattern

Any gap between guidance and practice can cause a crowd crush

Sadly, the Srikakulam crowd collapse that occurred in a private and unregistered temple, on a day when high footfall was expected, is hardly surprising. Reports indicate that there was one combined entry and exit, public use of an under-construction area, inadequate stewarding, severe capacity overshoot, and weak infrastructure. The Hathras crowd crush in 2024 followed an event where permission was reportedly given for only a third of the crowd that attended, and investigations cited inadequate exits and gaps in planning and supervision. The 2011 Sabarimala crush also revealed systemic weaknesses in circulation control on a day with predictable surges and a trigger that became lethal due to constrained pathways. These incidents had different proximate triggers but the same causes of failure: reciprocal pedestrian flows and shared gates, weak physical public infrastructure, and a lack of real-time density monitoring. India already has guidance to anticipate these failures, including the 2014 National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) guidelines and the National Building Code (NBC). Indian authorities have already demonstrated a feasible path from guidance to operations, including in recent Sabarimala seasons and with the Integrated Command and Control Centre operating at Tirumala. This includes licensed plans compliant with NDMA or NBC prescriptions; calculated occupancy; certified structures that prevent bidirectional flows; real-time density control by trained stewards; and real-time communications and crowd analytics. The persistence of stampedes is due to the gap between guidance and enforced practice.

That almost 80% of stampedes in India occur at religious gatherings or pilgrimages is not coincidental. Pilgrim and congregational events often proceed without any licence that ties permission to a crowd safety plan that can be tested for compliance. Authorities often infer the capacity from the space available, rather than what can be estimated from egress options and evacuation times, tolerate bad or no gating plans, accept temporary barricades without certified load ratings, and do not cordon off areas with construction materials. Public safety is a process and its absence, including during crowding disasters, is rarely due to single-point failures. The Srikakulam incident aligns with a known risk pattern and only disciplined adoption of the country's own codes, enforced by licensing, will reverse it. India also needs a policy culture that treats religious events as engineered systems requiring licensing and auditing.

Engage the Taliban, don't recognise them

Stanly Johny

As the saying goes, the enemy's enemy is a friend. When the Afghan Taliban were an insurgency, they were clients of the Pakistani military establishment. Now, they are the state in Afghanistan. Their return to power in Kabul also brought back old fissures between Pakistan and Afghanistan, two neighbours divided by a disputed 2,640-kilometre border, to the centre of inter-state relations. As tensions between the two rise, often spilling into cross-border clashes, India may be tempted to see the Taliban, its enemy's enemy, as a 'friend'.

It may not be a coincidence that Pakistan bombed Kabul earlier in October, just as Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was visiting India. Mr. Muttaqi's visit, the highest-level contact between the Sunni extremist Taliban and India, was the clearest indication yet that both sides are keen to improve ties. India has since decided to upgrade its technical mission in Kabul to a full embassy and resume stalled infrastructure and welfare projects with Mr. Muttaqi giving his assurance that the Taliban regime "will not allow any group to use our territory against others".

The case for engagement is well known. When the Taliban, then backed by Pakistan, returned to Kabul in August 2021, India, which had backed anti-Taliban forces in the 1990s, faced the prospect of losing the influence it had built in Afghanistan over the previous two decades. The question before New Delhi was whether to remain engaged with the new rulers or distance itself from them.

India's objectives
Broadly speaking, India has three objectives when it comes to dealing with Afghanistan. First, it had invested some $3 billion in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021 – after the collapse of the first Taliban regime. It seeks to protect those investments, and build on the goodwill it earned during the period. Second, unlike in the 1990s, New Delhi does not want Afghan soil to be used by anti-India militants. Third, it does not want the Taliban to become an external arm of Pakistan's establishment, which would give Islamabad-Rawalpindi strategic depth in the region. As an Indian diplomat told this writer in 2021, soon after the Taliban's reconquest, "India would like to explore the autonomy of the Taliban from their masters". To meet these goals, India has opted for a policy of conditional and gradual engagement with Taliban 2.0.

Mr. Muttaqi's visit to New Delhi and the decision to upgrade the Indian mission in Kabul to an embassy suggest that India is expanding the scope of this conditional engagement. The dramatic deterioration in Pakistan-Taliban relations adds a new geopolitical dimension to India's approach. These developments have prompted calls for India to move faster in formally recognising the Taliban regime. There is,

indeed, a case for recognition. The Taliban appear more consolidated than they were in the 1990s, and unlike in the past, no regional power seems interested in backing anti-Taliban forces – at least for now. The National Resistance Front, the primary anti-Taliban group, remains weak, with its leadership in exile in Tajikistan. The Taliban's most serious military challenge comes from the Islamic State-Khorasan, a transnational terrorist outfit that threatens regional security. Russia has formally recognised the Taliban, and China has exchanged ambassadors with Kabul.

Long-term risks
While recognition of the Taliban could allow India to fast-track cooperation with the regime, further deepening Pakistan's anxieties, it would also carry significant long-term risks. The Taliban, who emerged from the anarchy of the Afghan civil war in the early 1990s, have not fundamentally changed. Nor have they ever claimed to have changed – either ideologically or programmatically.

To be sure, the Taliban are not the only totalitarian regime in the world, and states, even democracies, should do diplomacy with different political systems. But the Taliban's totalitarianism is distinct. It is perhaps the only regime that bars girls from attending school beyond the primary level. It has enforced strict segregation between men and women in public spaces, and largely banned women from workplaces. The regime, headed by its reclusive Kandahar-based supreme leader Hibaitullah Akhundzada, and run by the Kabul Taliban, has maintained high levels of repression at a time when the economy is in serious trouble. Afghanistan's economy has contracted by around one-third since the Taliban seized power. Nearly 22.9 million Afghans – almost half the population – require humanitarian assistance this year. The exclusion of women from the workforce and education will have economic and social consequences. While the Taliban claim to have improved security over the past four years, they have also overseen a near-collapse of the economy.

Amid high-decibel repression and mounting economic distress, it is far from certain that the Pashtun, men-only regime of the Taliban has truly consolidated power in Afghanistan, a country of deep ethnic diversity that has seen almost continuous conflict since the mid-1970s. In the early 2000s, after the Taliban were toppled and the Islamic Republic was taking shape, Afghanistan enjoyed a period of relative calm and stability. Many believed that the country had embarked on a path towards democratisation and socio-economic modernisation. But it was only a matter of time before the Taliban re-emerged from the mountains of Pakistan's tribal belt to challenge the republic. So today's relative calm should not misguide anyone that the Taliban had won absolute lasting control over Afghanistan. It

makes sense for India to adopt a wait-and-watch approach.

Deep networks
In their second stint, the Taliban have sought to project an image of having severed ties with transnational jihadist organisations. The Taliban learned a key lesson from 2001: it was not their repressive policies at home that led to their downfall but their open alliance with al-Qaeda. This time, they have adopted a more pragmatic posture. In public, their leaders insist that they will not allow transnational groups to use Afghan territory. Yet, this does not mean that the Taliban have genuinely severed ties with such groups. The Haqqani network, which has long maintained close ties with al-Qaeda, is now deeply integrated into the Taliban establishment.

According to a recent report by a United Nations Security Council monitoring group, the Taliban have allowed al-Qaeda to consolidate "through safe houses and training camps scattered across Afghanistan". It notes that the Taliban remain "the primary partner of all foreign terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan", including al-Qaeda, Pakistani Taliban, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The only exception is the Islamic State-Khorasan, which opposes Taliban rule. For now, these groups have been allowed to operate quietly without posing an immediate security threat to Afghanistan's neighbouring countries or the wider region. But if domestic pressures mount, and the Taliban's grip on power weakens, these networks could easily resurface, because they haven't given up their commitment to global jihadism. In that case, the enemy's enemy may well turn out to be India's enemy too.

If India recognises the Taliban regime and allows the so-called Islamic Emirate to take over its embassy in New Delhi, that would grant the Taliban legitimacy they have long sought. It would also strengthen the Taliban's regional standing and prompt more countries to do the same. But such a move would also shut one of the few remaining windows New Delhi can press the Taliban to reform. Rather than pursuing short-term realpolitik, India should adopt a long-term strategic approach. Faced with a hostile Pakistan across the border and a collapsing economy at home, the Taliban need India's assistance far more than India needs the Taliban. While engaging the regime, both bilaterally and through regional and international mechanisms, New Delhi must urge the group to respect at least the fundamental freedoms of the Afghan people. If India's interests lie in stability in Afghanistan, Afghanistan's stability will ultimately depend on economic recovery, political inclusion and regional integration – not on the Taliban's guns.

stanly.johny@thehindu.co.in

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Cruising ahead

India's shipping sector needs help from the government to thrive

The India Maritime Week event, headlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, signalled government recognition that shipping is not just a business but a business with a strong strategic component. The Indian shipping sector had declined considerably over nearly two decades under the ideological framework of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, which weakened government support and diluted strategic intent for shipping. Barring port infrastructure, the Indian government seemed keen largely only on training and educating sea-farers so that they could continue to serve on foreign ships and bring in foreign exchange. The state-owned Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), once a global leader in ship ownership, was allowed to decline. Favourable government policies, such as giving the company first rights to transport India's oil, were withdrawn in the name of a level playing field and SCI barely escaped privatisation. But COVID-19 was a rude awakening. With India depending heavily on foreign-owned ships, it had little leverage to intervene in its own trade. Private Indian shipping was too small to step up fully. Post-pandemic, the government has realised that shipping, though a business, has much strategic importance, especially during times of disruption, war, and where protectionism and resurgent national interests of western countries rule trade. Recent government initiatives have sought to beef up the SCI's fleet strength.

A major part of the lakhs of crores of rupees in investments announced at the maritime week was port-related. The government has been running its ports under a landlord model, sharing revenue with private and foreign companies for terminal operations, which are now a target of investors. This has given the ports financial heft to embark on new projects – the Chennai and Kolkata ports, for instance, have taken up the transshipment hub project in the Andamans. Investments are also seen in port connectivity, Sagarmala projects, and Indian seafarer training. Another major push has been to have foreign shipping companies register their ships in India through their local subsidiaries, which would give the Indian government leverage over them for serving Indian needs as well as support allied businesses such as insurance. But movement is still barely visible in Indian merchant shipbuilding, where greater progress would have signalled industrial, technical, and project management expertise in heavy industry. The day that Indian shipyards quickly roll out state-of-the-art LNG ships or futuristic green fuel burning vessels, Indian shipping will be truly cruising full ahead.

The vision of Model Youth Gram Sabhas

In India's democratic architecture, the Gram Sabha holds a significance that is as fundamental as that of the Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha. Yet, the Gram Sabha, the constitutional cornerstone of grassroots democracy, remains an unsung hero in popular conversations and civic awareness. Unlike the Bal Sansad (Children's Parliament), Youth Parliament, and the Model United Nations, the Model Youth Gram Sabha is an unfamiliar concept for most. Yet, it is in these village assemblies, not the grand chambers of Parliament, that democracy finds its purest expression – direct, participatory, and accountable.

Article 243A of the Constitution, introduced by the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992, defines the Gram Sabha as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj system. It represents every registered voter in a village and empowers them to deliberate on budgets, development plans, and governance priorities. This institution embodies participatory democracy, empowering rural citizens to shape decisions affecting their community, fostering transparency, accountability, and inclusive development. But despite its revolutionary potential, participation remains minimal.

Why aren't Gram Sabhas aspirational?
Ask any young person if they dream of leading a village or becoming a Sarpanch, and you will likely be met with a puzzled silence. The educational curriculum largely focuses on Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections, parliamentary governance, or global models such as the United Nations. It remains silent on the Panchayati Raj institutions that form the bedrock of Indian democracy. This absence from classrooms has turned the Gram Sabha into a distant administrative concept rather than a living

Sushil Kumar Lohani

A 1995 batch IAS officer of the Odisha cadre and currently Additional Secretary in Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.
Email: s.lohani@nic.in

Manmohan Singh

CEO-Aspirational Bharat Collaborative, Piramal Foundation.
Email: manmohan@gandhifellow-ship.org

If the Model United Nations cultivates global citizenship, the Model Youth Gram Sabha can nurture civic pride and local leadership

democratic experience. To build a 'Viksit Bharat', the Gram Sabha must be positioned as aspirational, empowering rural youth, women, farmers to lead at the grassroots, shaping development and democracy. This requires embedding Gram Sabha simulations into school and college curriculum.

It was to bridge this gap that the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Tribal Welfare and the Aspirational Bharat Collaborative, launched the Model Youth Gram Sabha in 2025. Simulating real Gram Sabha processes, students play the roles of Sarpanch, ward members, health workers, and engineers discussing village budgets and development plans. The programme is supported by teacher training and offers incentives such as prizes and certificates to encourage enthusiastic participation. The exercise transforms abstract civics into lived experience, cultivating local governance knowledge, and making democratic participation concrete and engaging for the future generation.

In Phase 1, the Model Youth Gram Sabha is being launched in over 1,000 schools across 28 States and eight Union Territories (UTs). These include more than 600 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, 200 Eklavya Model Residential Schools, and select Zilla Parishad schools in Maharashtra. A team of 126 master trainers is leading nationwide teacher training. So far, 1,238 teachers from 24 States and UTs have been trained. More sessions are in progress.

Prior to the national rollout, successful pilots were held at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Baghpat in Uttar Pradesh and Eklavya Model Residential School Alwar in Rajasthan. The Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Sitapur, in Bundi district, Rajasthan, became a living classroom of democracy as more than 300 students

participated in a Model Youth Gram Sabha. In Phase 2, the initiative intends to expand beyond central institutions and Zilla Parishad schools to include all State-run schools across India.

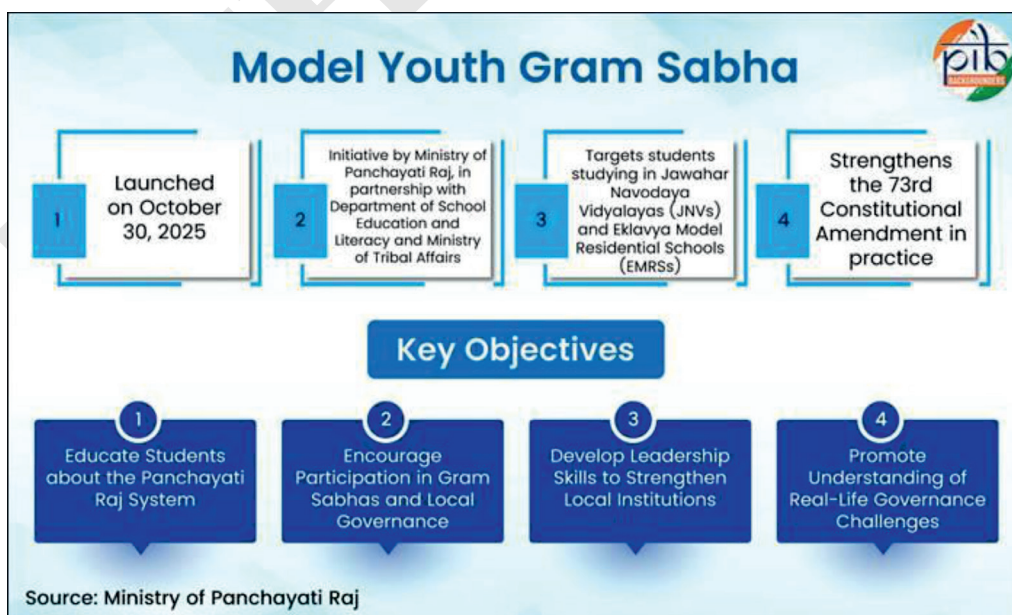**From simulation to transformation**
In a democracy such as India, active citizen participation is not just a right but a responsibility. If the Model United Nations cultivates global citizenship, the Model Youth Gram Sabha can nurture civic pride and local leadership. By being introduced to the Panchayati Raj systems, students are better able to understand the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic setup. The experience of conducting debates, passing resolutions, and negotiating consensus instils critical life skills.

This model has the potential to redefine civic education. By expanding it to all schools and colleges, India can make participation aspirational again. A future IAS officer or parliamentarian who once "chaired" a Youth Gram Sabha in school is more likely to value the power of local governance in real life.

The vision of Viksit Bharat cannot rest on policy alone. It depends on citizens who see governance not only as the government's responsibility but as a shared civic duty. The Model Youth Gram Sabha is more than a classroom exercise; it is a seedbed for democratic renewal.

When young people learn that their village meeting is as vital as Parliament, democracy ceases to be an abstract system – it becomes a lived culture. And when every child in India grows up believing their voice matters at the Gram Sabha, the dream of a truly participatory, self-reliant, and compassionate nation will no longer be a distant aspiration. It will be the everyday rhythm of Indian democracy.

Model Youth Gram Sabha

Model Youth Gram Sabha

- **1** Launched on October 30, 2025
- **2** Initiative by Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in partnership with Department of School Education and Literacy and Ministry of Tribal Affairs
- **3** Targets students studying in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) and Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs)
- **4** Strengthens the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in practice

Key Objectives

- **1** Educate Students about the Panchayati Raj System
- **2** Encourage Participation in Gram Sabhas and Local Governance
- **3** Develop Leadership Skills to Strengthen Local Institutions
- **4** Promote Understanding of Real-Life Governance Challenges

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj

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📞 9560300770   🌐 www.tathastuics.com   ✉ enquiry@tathastuics.com
Plot No.B 22, Bada Bazar Road, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi-110060

(7)

As AI adoption by companies accelerates, tech layoffs continue

Though not directly displaced by AI technology, many employees are losing jobs as companies are restructuring to manage higher spending

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

Last week, online retail giant Amazon announced that it would reduce its global corporate workforce by about 14,000 people. Amazon CEO Andy Jassy had already flagged the possibility of job cuts in June, saying the increased use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools and agents would lead to more corporate job cuts.

A week before Amazon's announcement, the world's biggest social media company, Meta, said it would be removing around 600 positions in its Superintelligence Labs to make its AI unit more flexible and responsive. In July, IT service provider, Tata Consultancy Services, announced that while the company was retraining and redeploying staff in new markets, and investing and deploying new technology and AI, it would be cutting more than 12,000 jobs as part of the process. During the same month, tech behemoth Microsoft announced that it would lay off nearly 4% of its workforce to curb costs amid investments in AI.

While layoffs have sparked concerns about AI displacing jobs, the technology itself is not directly putting people out of work. Rather, investments in AI are reshaping business strategies, prompting companies to adopt new technologies, restructure workforces, and prioritise hiring employees with AI-related skills. Thus, job displacement is an indirect consequence of how businesses are integrating AI and not the immediate effect of AI technology alone.

This year, 218 companies have collectively laid off over 1.12 lakh employees globally. This is lower than the 1.53 lakh, 2.64 lakh, and 1.65 lakh layoffs reported in 2024, 2023, and 2022 respectively. However, the average number of employees laid off per company has increased from about 221 in 2023 to nearly 517 in 2025. **(Chart 1)**.

This indicates that although fewer companies are laying off employees this year, those that are doing so are cutting larger numbers at one go. Many of these companies are likely tech firms, which typically employ large numbers of people and often hire and fire in bulk. These companies are also deeply involved in AI transformation, reshaping the industry.

An industry-wise analysis shows that hardware companies, such as Intel and Lenovo, accounted for 28% of all layoffs this year. They were followed by retail companies such as Amazon, eBay, and Wayfair, which accounted for 14% of all layoffs. The sales (Salesforce) and consumer tech (Meta, Google) industries accounted for 9% and 7% of the total layoffs, respectively **(Chart 2)**.

Consequently, data show a significant rise in AI talent recruitment compared to the overall hiring rate across countries in 2024. **Chart 3** shows the relative AI hiring rate year-over-year ratio by region (see note in graphic). India leads in this measure with a relative AI hiring rate of over 33%, followed by Brazil and Saudi Arabia.

Data also show that the wages of workers with AI skills are 56% higher than the average salary. This is more pronounced in sectors such as wholesale and retail trade, energy and information, and communication **(Chart 4)**.

Higher wages for workers with AI skills don't necessarily reflect the scarcity of such workers. Instead, they reflect the high value employers place on these skills.

Global corporate investment in AI has also been increasing in recent years. In 2024, the total investment grew to $252.3 billion, almost 13 times higher that what it was a decade ago **(Chart 5)**.

Charts 3, 4, and 5 illustrate the broader trend: driven by a sharp rise in AI-related hiring and increased investments in technology and salaries, companies are actively restructuring their workforce to adapt to these changes.

The AI pivot

The data for the charts were sourced from Stanford University's AI Index 2025, layoffs.fyi and PwC's 2025 Global AI Jobs Barometer

Chart 1: Number of employees laid off globally in the last four years (bar), and the number of companies involved (line)
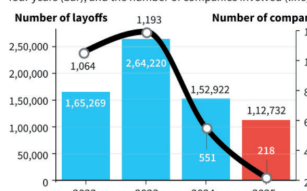
	Number of layoffs	Number of companies
2022	1,65,269	1,064
2023	2,64,220	1,193
2024	1,52,922	551
2025	1,12,732	218

Chart 2: Industry-wise share of employees laid off in 2025. Chart does not include companies classified as 'Others'

- Hardware 28.08%
- Retail 13.96%
- Sales and marketing 8.64%
- Consumer 7.38%
- HR 3.58%
- Data
- Transport 3.15%
- Security
- AI
- Energy 2.98%

Chart 5: Global corporate investment in AI since 2013. Figures in $ billions

Year	$ billions
2013	14.57
2014	19.04
2015	25.43
2016	33.82
2017	53.72
2018	79.62
2019	103.27
2020	221.87
2021	360.73
2022	253.25
2023	201
2024	252.33

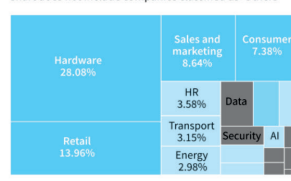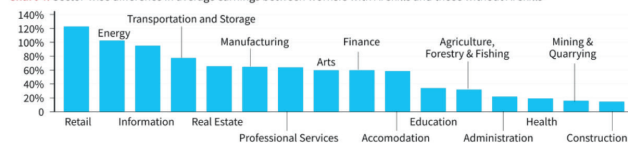**Chart 3:** Relative AI hiring rate year-over-year ratio by region in 2024 (*Please see note below for methodology)

India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Romania, Finland, Argentina, Canada, Singapore, UAE, U.S., Ireland, South Africa, Mexico, Latvia, Hungary, Chile, Hong Kong, Denmark, Turkey

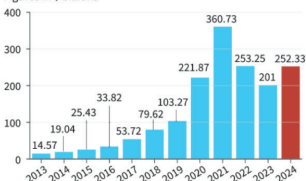**Chart 4:** Sector-wise difference in average earnings between workers with AI skills and those without AI skills

Retail, Energy, Transportation and Storage, Information, Manufacturing, Real Estate, Arts, Finance, Professional Services, Accomodation, Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, Education, Administration, Mining & Quarrying, Health, Construction

*Note: This measure by LinkedIn considers any member to have AI talent if they have added AI skills to their profile or have worked in AI. The relative AI talent hiring rate is the year-over-year change in AI hiring relative to the overall hiring rate in the same region

Experts join hands for Ramsar site tag for wetlands in Assam sanctuary

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

Conservationists, wildlife officials, academics, and students have got together to push for the Ramsar site tag for two interconnected wetlands in central Assam's Nagaon district.

The Rowmari-Donduwa wetland complex is within the 70.13 sq. km Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, which is a part of the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve. This complex has been recording more birds than the only two Ramsar sites in the northeast – Assam's Deepor Beel and Manipur's Loktak Lake.

A Ramsar site is a wetland designated as one of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental

Joint initiative: Birds at the Rowmari-Donduwa Wetland Complex in central Assam's Nagaon district. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

treaty signed in Ramsar, Iran in 1971.

"Laokhowa and the adjoining Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuaries function as connectivity corridors for wild animals migrating between the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve and Orang National Park (Kaziranga-Orang landscape)," said Sonali Ghosh, the Field Director of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

She said that civil society organisations and students have been researching and monitoring the wetland complex. She said that their efforts have yielded vital data on avian species

and the floodplain-marsh ecosystem of the two wetlands, which cover an area of approximately 3 sq. km. An average of 120 species of resident and migratory birds, including globally threatened species such as the knob-billed duck, black-necked stork, and the ferruginous pochard, have been recorded in the wetland complex annually.

According to the 6th Kaziranga Waterbird Census conducted a few months ago, 20,653 birds of 75 species were recorded at the Rowmari Beel, and 26,480 birds of 88 species were counted at Donduwa Beel.

Assam Forest Department officials said a proposal has been submitted to make the Rowmari-Donduwa wetland complex to a Ramsar Site.

BIG SHOT

WATER LETTUCE
(invasive plant).

A drone view shows workers removing water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*), an invasive plant species that impedes navigation and fishing, from the El Cerron Grande reservoir in El Salvador, on September 10. The plant has forced some 3,000 fishermen off the lake and has cost the local economy at least $1.3 million. REUTERS

(9)

Water Lettuce (Pistia stratiotes)

- Free-floating aquatic invasive plant
- Forms a rosette of soft, thick, light-green leaves (up to 14 cm long).
- Leaves have hair-like structures that trap air, aiding buoyancy.
- Roots hang freely in water, absorbing nutrients directly.
- Dioecious plant: separate male and female individuals.
- Reproduction: Both vegetative (by stolons) and sexual
- (through small flowers → green berries).
- Thrives in stagnant or slow-moving freshwater bodies.
- Native range: Believed to have originated in the Nile River Basin, Africa.
- Now found across tropical and subtropical regions worldwide — Asia, Africa, South America, and parts of the U.S. (notably Florida).
- In India, found in lakes, ponds, canals, and irrigation tanks — especially in eastern and southern states.

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Institute Of Civil Services

📞 9560300770 🌐 www.tathastuics.com ✉ enquiry@tathastuics.com
Plot No.B 22, Bada Bazar Road, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi-110060

(10)