

Employee addition of Indian IT firms stays healthy in Q2 amid AI-led disruption

DESPITE all the negative news flow, sharp correction in market cap and AI-led disruption; Indian IT companies seem to be holding their ground. As a thumb rule, employee addition numbers have been considered as a solid indicator of things in store. And this vital parameter is showing positive momentum going ahead. Take for example the movement in total employee strength of major Indian IT companies during the second quarter of current financial year (FY27).

TCS- India's largest IT services company, added 4,258 employees during July-September quarter of FY27, making it second consecutive quarter of headcount addition.

HCLTech, another large IT services firm, saw its total headcount growing by 6,450 employees in Q2 of FY27. This was also higher than 1,056 employees added during first quarter of FY27. Similarly, mid-tier IT firm- Tech Mahindra witnessed a solid addition in employee strength during the second quarter. The company added around 5,500 employees, making it the highest quarterly addition in two years. However, Wipro was the only exception, which reduced its employee strength by 6,716 during the second quarter. Other than Wipro, most large and mid-tier IT companies increased their headcount. Moreover, fresher hiring commentary and numbers looked encouraging for the second quarter and beyond.

In this perspective, it is essential to analyse the headcount movement with the overall growth prospects going ahead. As employee addition is a lead indicator in terms of revenue growth; Q2 numbers indicate a bit of optimism in

terms of future growth. Despite increasing pace of AI-led automation, Indian IT companies are adapting well. The overall contribution of AI revenue in the total revenue pie is increasing. That means, AI-led deflation (price decline in legacy IT projects) is slowly coming down. Moreover, except one or two, most companies' deal pipeline has increased. Additionally, the AI component in the outsourcing projects is increasing. These are all good news for the industry. However, one should look at the current employee addition trend with a different perspective. Because though the employee strength is increasing, notably the composition of staffers is going through a paradigm shift. And that is due to the ongoing AI wave. Most employees, who are added, have marketable AI skillsets and are able to deliver value in the AI projects. Even among freshers, companies are looking for those fresh graduates with solid AI skills and an aptitude to learn

new AI skills at the quickest. So, the IT staffing market has rapidly moved towards professionals with AI skills in the last two years. Another significant development should also be highlighted when evaluating the headcount growth in Q2 of FY27. Some large companies have acquired the GCC units in India from their parent firms. As a result, employees of these acquired entities have added to those companies' headcount. So, the headcount addition is not entirely organic in nature for some firms. Nonetheless, headcount addition indicates that Indian IT companies are able to hold ground in a low growth environment. It is now to be seen how IT companies leverage their workforce to ride the AI wave?



UP 2027: Akhilesh turns up the heat; BJP gets down to election micro-management

BJP prepares a booth-level strategy to counter organisational weaknesses and contain anti-incumbency



THE BJP has now shifted its focus to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, scheduled for early 2027. While the two principal campaigners, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav, have launched full-fledged campaigns, the Congress is yet to get its campaign off the ground.

The grand old party, which has been out of power in Uttar Pradesh for decades and lacks a strong cadre base and a substantial independent vote base, depends largely on its central leadership, particularly Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

In the 2022 Assembly elections, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra was entrusted with leading the Congress campaign. A late start and the lack of a robust organisational structure took their toll. Although her rallies drew crowds, the party failed to convert that response into votes. It won just two seats, with its vote share plunging to around 2.25 per cent from 6.25 per cent in 2017.

Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, who had until recently been involved in the opposition's campaign over alleged "vote chori" and the protests against the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Delhi, has reportedly travelled to Vietnam. There has been no official clarification on whether the visit is a vacation or has another purpose. The Congress, which routinely demands transparency from the government, has not publicly explained the reason for his trip. Even Congress MP Shashi Tharoor reacted to the uncertainty, saying, "I am not his travel agent."

Yogi, by contrast, has em-

barked on an intensive tour of Uttar Pradesh and is making concerted efforts to connect with voters. His speeches highlight the transformation of the state, which he argues has moved from backwardness towards greater development.

The BJP's internal surveys reportedly point to several factors that the party needs to address. These include agricultural distress, which Akhilesh Yadav has also highlighted in his speeches; the possibility of a broader opposition coalition built around caste-based mobilisation; internal differences within the state BJP; and coordination gaps between MPs and MLAs in some constituencies.

The SP, meanwhile, hopes to capitalise on issues such as "vote chori" and alleged "chanda chori", or irregularities in political funding, while seeking to win over Generation Z. However, these themes may not deliver the results the party expects. Some surveys have reportedly suggested that the impact of the "vote chori" issue has been limited, though the findings and methodologies would need to be examined before drawing firm conclusions. The appeal to Gen Z, too, risks remaining a slogan unless it translates into greater support among young voters.

At the same time, employment generation and industrial investment could help the BJP contain anti-incumbency. The state government's efforts to attract industries in manufacturing and information technology, along with employment generated directly and indirectly, form a central part of its development pitch.

The BJP's immediate priority is to strengthen its organisational machinery. Under the leadership of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the party has convened a meeting of its executive committee on October 30 and 31. Apart from drawing up a clear road map for the campaign, the meeting is expected to review the party's organisational structure down to the booth level



With Uttar Pradesh heading towards the 2027 Assembly elections, the BJP is stepping up its preparations under Amit Shah's leadership. While Yogi Adityanath focuses on development and voter outreach, Akhilesh Yadav is banking on anti-incumbency, caste mobilisation and allegations of electoral malpractice. Congress, meanwhile, remains conspicuously behind in campaign preparations

and establish guidelines for election micro-management, from campaigning to voter mobilisation. Ahead of the meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to undertake a two-day visit to Varanasi and Kedarnath on October 24 and 25. Industrial, public and development-related engagements are expected to feature in his itinerary.

According to the proposed schedule, Modi will first visit Varanasi, his Lok Sabha constituency in Uttar Pradesh, before travelling to Kedarnath in Uttarakhand.

In Varanasi, he is expected to inaugurate a factory in the Sevapuri area and attend programmes related to the city's development.

On October 25, the Prime Minister is expected to visit Kedarnath and review the progress of the Kedarnath Corridor development project. He is also likely to take

stock of infrastructure and other development works intended to improve facilities at and around the Himalayan pilgrimage centre.

The two-day programme is expected to combine development and public engagements in Uttar Pradesh with a review of infrastructure projects at one of Uttarakhand's most prominent pilgrimage centres.

To counter the BJP, Akhilesh Yadav has stepped up his "BJP hatao" campaign. He has claimed that even Yogi Adityanath's position as Chief Minister is not secure and that farmers and younger voters, among others, will bring about a change in the state. According to the SP chief, the challenges confronting Yogi are mounting, and the people have made up their minds to change the government.

Akhilesh has blamed the BJP for the problems facing the state and argued that they can be resolved only if the party is voted out of power.

He has also accused the ruling party of exploiting religious faith and devotion for political gain. "You can have faith and devotion, but the BJP members are known for playing with people's faith and devotion. You all know how people's faith has been exploited. First, it was people's faith in temples, and now their faith is being exploited for political gains," he alleged.

The SP chief has also raised concerns over the alleged circulation of voice messages tar-

getting voters. He questioned how BJP leaders had obtained voter lists that were not publicly available to everyone.

"Voter lists are not available to everyone, but they are available to all BJP leaders. Voice messages are being sent, and calls are being made. How did the voter lists reach the ministers in the BJP government?" he asked.

Akhilesh also accused the BJP government of electoral malpractice, alleging that officials in the Education Department, including Basic Shiksha Adhikaris (BSAs) and District Inspectors of Schools (DI-OSS), were intimidating voters through phone calls.

He warned that officials found to have engaged in such activities could face legal consequences if evidence emerged against them. He urged the Election Commission to remain impartial and called on government officials to discharge their duties without political interference. Those who act as political agents, he warned, could face imprisonment.

"No one will save you. Today or tomorrow, whenever there is a change, the law will send them to jail," he said.

As the political temperature rises, some initial surveys reportedly place the BJP ahead of the SP. Psephologists have projected that the SP-led opposition could win around 150 to 170 of the Assembly's 403 seats. Such estimates should be treated cautiously, as their reliability depends on the methodology, sample size and timing of the surveys.

Nevertheless, the BJP is facing political challenges and is keen to avoid complacency. Against this backdrop, the proposed October 30-31 meeting assumes considerable significance. The party's ability to address local grievances, resolve organisational differences and strengthen its booth-level machinery will be central to its preparations for the 2027 contest.

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Europe in the grip of social unrest as rising inflation triggers street protests

TERESA MEDRANO/SUMAN NAISHADHAM

RISING fuel costs, discontent with the state of schools, declining public services and a housing crisis have created perfectly stormy weather for an autumn of protests in Europe.

Crowds have taken to the streets for weeks in major cities, resulting in arrests, looting, injuries, and violence across France, Italy and Albania. In Spain and Portugal, tent camps have sprung up in protests against unaffordable rents and housing costs.

Young people "feel disappointed with the (social) model and experience a strong sense of uncertainty and a lack of control," said Maria Silvestre, professor of sociology at the University of Deusto in Spain. "And when specific situations come together, a spark suddenly ignites that is capable of channelling that discontent and driving people into the streets."

Cities have turned into battlefields as several top EU economies, including France, Italy and Spain, approach pivotal elections, while far-right parties have made electoral gains in Germany and could do so elsewhere. It also comes as Europe faces a critical moment in its support for Ukraine, with President Donald Trump making overtures to President Vladimir Putin even as Russia is blamed for increasingly frequent hybrid attacks in NATO countries.

Right-wing politicians have seized on the chaos. While protests in France have appeared broad-based, Trump portrayed immigrants as responsible for the destruction, writing on his Truth Social



People watch a burned-out car after a quiet night Monday under curfew, the first since weekend protests over the cost of living turned into rioting and looting across France, in Paris, Tuesday

platform: "The migrants have taken over France. They must Close the Borders, Fast!" on Monday.

Many of the protests have been fuelled by frustrated young people. Other elements including black-clad, masked agitators have fomented violence, but French authorities and police have not blamed immigrants. A look at what's driving the unrest.

Students say education resources are dwindling

In France, which has a centuries-old tradition of popular protest, high schoolers have staged blockades and demonstrations for more than three weeks, demanding more resources for schools they call understaffed and dilapidated, especially in lower-income neighbourhoods.

The protests then broadened as France's CGT labour union and other activists joined in while students paused for a fall break. The movement now includes demands over rising living costs and public services.

Despite hundreds of thousands of people marching peacefully, the weekend's unrest led to 2,400 arrests and serious disturbances in parts of France, including

looting in Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Bordeaux. In Limoges, flames engulfed the 19th-century City Hall and nearly destroyed the building. Some schools were set on fire. As students and rioters threw firebombs and law enforcement responded with tear gas, hundreds have been injured.

French President Emmanuel Macron condemned Saturday's violence, accusing far-left activists of trying to foment chaos by attacking buildings and police. "Those who looted will have to pay for the damage, and those who sought to bring down the Republic will be held accountable," Macron said in a rare televised address.

In Spain, elementary and secondary schoolteachers began an indefinite strike in Madrid last week to demand better pay and working conditions. Discontented teachers staged similar walkouts elsewhere in Spain this year.

Unaffordable housing stymies young people

In Madrid's central Puerta del Sol, tarpaulin tents have blanketed the square for weeks to protest rising housing costs, sparked by the eviction of Maricarmen, an 87-year-old woman who

later died while hospitalized. Smaller protest camps followed in other Spanish cities.

Some things have changed since the encampment began: public pressure led the ruling Socialist government to approve affordable housing measures, but a lack of support in Parliament meant they didn't pass, triggering a snap election announced by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez for November. A general strike will also take place in November — the first in 14 years.

Major housing protests also have taken place in Barcelona, a focal point of Spain's over-tourism and housing challenges.

In Spain, the minimum wage is 1,221 euros (\$1,370), while the average monthly rent for an 80-square-meter apartment is around 1,130 euros (about \$1,270), according to an analysis by the business newspaper Expansión.

"Most of my paycheck goes to the rent. My roommate struggles to make ends meet just like I do," said Diana Manzanarez, a 20-year-old waitress at the Madrid encampment. "This is my reality and the reality of most of us living in this city."

Similar housing protests have sprung up in Portugal's largest cities, Lisbon and Porto.

Untenable living costs as inflation rises in Italy

"Italia in Piazza," or Italy in the Streets, has galvanized thousands of demonstrators, voicing demands for better employment, healthcare, education, and access to housing, as well as higher wages to deal with rising costs. Inflation in Italy rose to 4.2 per cent in September, surpassing the eurozone's 3.8 per cent, according to government data.

Canada plans to use data centre to preserve its heritage

KELVIN CHAN WIIKWEMKOONG UNCEDED TERRITORY

FOR thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have passed down their traditions and culture through oral storytelling. Now, a Canadian Indigenous community is using a data centre to help preserve its heritage.

The Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory in rural Ontario installed a small data centre as it modernised its record-keeping systems. Among the digital files it holds are video recordings of Anishinaabe speaking their native language.

"Our language is one of the biggest things that most First Nations across the country are losing," said Wiikwemkoong Chief Tim Ominika. "We will have our knowledge keepers, our language speakers who may be moving on to the spirit world, but their legacy is still going to be protected for many years to come by having our own data systems in place and protecting that."

The idea of digital sovereignty has gained momentum in places like Europe, where leaders are wary of the widespread influence of American Big Tech. For the Wiikwemkoong First Nation and other Indigenous communities, it is also about asserting authority over their own information after historically being excluded from its collection and use by colonisers.

About the size of a single-car garage, the data centre installed last year also stores the community's corporate documents, health data for residents, and security camera footage.

"The purpose of all of this is having the ownership, access, control and possession of our information," Ominika said. It's about preventing anyone else from "having authority or setting their guidelines on what they could do with our data."

The First Nation has been transferring all its information from a Microsoft data centre in Toronto, about 190 miles (305 kilometres) south, said Michael McCormick, the community's chief technical officer.

Other Indigenous communities have been taking an interest

Wiikwemkoong is on the eastern end



of Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron, an area that attracts visitors with its rugged wilderness, extensive waterways and Anishinaabe cultural offerings. The reserve prides itself on being Canada's only "unceded territory," because it never signed a treaty surrendering its land.

The data centre, which underpins a modernisation of Wiikwemkoong's administrative services, has also paved the way for new public safety infrastructure, including a drone fleet and a network of surveillance cameras. A backup data centre on the mainland and public Wi-Fi transmitters are also planned for the community of about 4,000 people. The chief declined to disclose how much is being spent on the projects.

Improvements to data storage gained urgency after a flood in 2022 resulted in the loss of some of its digital records, which had been scattered in various offices. "That information is very important to us. And in order to protect it, keep it safe, we said, 'Why can't we look at developing and creating and implementing our own data sovereignty program?'" Ominika said.

Wiikwemkoong's upgrade program is among the first for Indigenous communities in Canada that include First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Delegations from other Indigenous communities in Ontario and neighbouring Manitoba have come to check out the project, McCormick said.

The chief said he has to explain to visitors that their data centre is not like the giant ones relied on by artificial intelligence companies that require vast amounts of land and water.

Wiikwemkoong's data center sits in a secure bunker next to the administrative office, accessed by a facial recognition scanner. Its four racks of computer servers are cooled by a pair of fans -- not wa-

ter -- and it has "a relatively small carbon footprint," McCormick said.

In the US, a few Native American tribes like the Navajo Nation have for years been operating their own data centres for local infrastructure services.

Wiikwemkoong's data centre is believed to be the only one on Indigenous territory in Canada, but McCormick said other Indigenous leaders are increasingly savvy about control of their data. The Chiefs of Ontario, which represents 133 First Nations in the province, held a data sovereignty conference earlier this year that included a panel on AI and data centres.

For generations, Indigenous communities worldwide have had no say in how information on them has been collected, interpreted and held by governments, researchers and institutions, said Carmen Jones, director of research and data management for the Chiefs of Ontario.

"As more information is collected and stored, it is critical that First Nations determine how that data is accessed, managed, and used," she said.

The technology has addressed some issues -- and raised new ones

Amid the island's natural splendour, the community faces its share of problems that community leaders hope the technology can help address.

Since installing the data centre, McCormick's team has added 700 surveillance cameras around the community, and a dozen drone docking stations on the administrative office's rooftop housing a fleet of DJI drones. They are used to find people who go missing in the area's wooded hills, look out for criminal activity, such as drug deals and break-ins, and monitor for forest fires.

Ominika said there was "a little bit of resistance" to the drone program from residents worried about privacy.

Wiikwemkoong's drones are supplied by DJI, a Chinese company whose drones have been blocked in the United States over national security concerns. McCormick said all drone footage would be stored locally. The chief said he wanted to make sure any information the drones collect "is going to be protected" and not "used against us, moving forward, by China."