Automation and the IT sector

What is the issue?

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- Despite all the fear mongering around the “Artificial Intelligence” (AI) Technologies, they can’t be wished away.
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- While some jobs will indeed become redundant, more opportunities are bound to open up in new areas.
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What is AI and what is the threat related to it?

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- AI is the intelligence demonstrated by machines which are programmed to continuously ‘learn’, and mimic cognitive human functions.
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- AI has already started impacting our lives and services like – “Voice-based searches in smart phones and Self-driven cars are already a reality”.
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- Gartner’s “Technology hype cycle” has predicted mainstream adoption of AI to take off over the next 2-5 years on a massive scale.
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- India currently holds a dominating position in the global services trade by virtue of its large youthful workforce.
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- But many noted economist have warned that ‘AI systems’ and the consequent employment cuts could steal India’s demographic thunder.
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Will it wipe out the IT Industry?

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- It is a fact that AI-based bots have already taken away some jobs in the IT industry and this trend is expected to continue for a while.
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- But we will still need people to monitor and maintain automated systems and a phase of sustained co-existence will eventually be reached.
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- We will therefore ultimately end up with a more engaged and motivated workforce that would perform critical tasks rather than mundane activities.
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- Additionally, historically, evolving technology has always been a net job creator and humans and machines have usually thrived and declined together.
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- Hence, AI is also likely to create more jobs than it would destroy if the environment to foster innovation is nurtured.
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- Notably, when computer made its foray into workspaces some 3 decades ago, the same fears of a technology takeover of jobs was expressed.
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- But the down the lane, while computers have enhanced efficiency and reduced manual labour, newer opportunities that didn't exist before have opened up.
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How are the expected trends in employment?

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- **New Skills -** A Gartner's report predicts that by 2020, automation will create 2.3 million jobs, while only 1.8 million jobs will be lost.
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- To capitalise on these opportunities and wade through the disruptive technologies, the IT workforce needs reskilling/upskilling to stay relevant.
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- By demonstrating the right attitude, individuals can adapt by garnering more domain knowledge and developing analytical skills.
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- The industry and other support organisations need to promote such skill development programs for their own growth and for the larger benefits.
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- **Uberisation -** Uberisation of workforce simply indicates freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs (like the taxi aggregator's model).
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- With experts being hired on need basis for specific tasks and various projects being outsourced to individuals, this trend is gaining popularity.
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- Organisations are warming up to the concept of remote workers, who can be contracted from anywhere on the planet, without any binding control.
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- Such flexi working ecosystems is clearly the future and the workforce too needs to stay abreast with these developments to monetize on them.
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- It is to be noted that contracted workers may be working for more than one organisation simultaneously.
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What are reforms needed in the ed-sector?

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- About 8 lakh students pass out of the nearly 3000 engineering colleges in the country, and an astounding 55% aspire for a job in the software industry.
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- But shockingly only a mere 3% of them are equipped with skills needed for the job, which is partly due to lacklustre industry-academia collaboration.
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- In order to evolve an IT workforce that can be future-proofed, we need to enhance industry collaboration through internships and other engagements.
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- The sheer volume of the pass-outs is also a big hindrance and better curbs to hinder proliferation of substandard colleges in the domain could help.
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Source: Business Line

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