The next chapter of India's GCC story may not play out on corporate campuses, but inside research labs. Of late, Indian IT companies have been tapping India's premier educational institutes to drive scalable solutions for global capability centres (GCCs) in AI, robotics, and cybersecurity.

Recently, HCLTech and IIT Kanpur signed a Memorandum of Understanding to jointly convert cutting-edge research into real-world pilots. Meanwhile, Infosys and IIT Madras already have a strong, multi-faceted partnership focused on research, innovation, and digital skill development.

Similarly, IIT Kharagpur has partnered with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) to set up an advanced research centre to produce high-quality research in the areas of digital health, robotics, and intelligent systems.

There's an obvious overlap here. Both GCCs and research-bent institutions focus on innovation through strategic R&D and developing high-end technological solutions. Their strengths lie in bringing together diverse minds, disciplines, and industries to solve problems that no single entity can address alone.

"In an era where GCCs exemplify the power of insourcing, building scale, control, and competitive edge from within, academic institutions remind us that true progress is rarely achieved in isolation," comments Mohan Subrahmanya, Country Leader and Executive Director of B2B technology provider Insight Enterprises' India GCC, in a conversation with **AIM**.

However, many GCCs in India continue to face a structural limitation—limited access to frontier research, deeptech talent, and early-stage intellectual property needed to drive breakthrough innovation.

That's where IITs enter.

"The collaboration between IT companies and academic institutions represents a strategic evolution rather than a reactive response to the rise of GCCs," Alouk Kumar, CEO of Inductus Group, notes.

For HCLTech, the collaboration with IIT Kanpur is all about harnessing academic research to deliver quicker enterprise solutions and better customer experiences.

"We are providing GCCs with a structured pipeline to deep-tech talent in AI and robotics, effectively transforming them from offshore hubs into autonomous innovation engines," says Kiran Cherukuri, Executive VP and Global GCC Practice Leader, HCLTech.

While GCCs are increasingly insourcing R&D to maintain tighter control over intellectual property and product roadmaps, traditional IT services firms also feel the need to reinvent themselves as basic software services become commoditised.

"By 2026, the industry's primary currency has shifted from labour arbitrage—hiring thousands to execute defined tasks—to innovation arbitrage, where the ability to co-create deeptech solutions such as agentic AI and quantum-resistant cryptography determines long-term relevance with global clients," Kumar states.

From Research Labs to Enterprise Pilots

Many of these partnerships focus on accelerating emerging AI and robotics innovations from academic research into real-world enterprise deployments.

"Based on the experience of existing deployments of HCLTech's cognitive robotics solutions like Kinetic AI.Inspect and Kinetic AI.QA, the first use cases to move from lab research to enterprise pilots will likely involve autonomous quality assurance, predictive asset maintenance, and cognitive workplace safety," Cherukuri predicts.

These use cases are expected to expand across manufacturing, healthcare, and high-tech industries, combining industrial deployment expertise with IIT Kanpur's intelligent systems research.

For many GCCs, building internal deeptech research labs remains prohibitively expensive and slow. Such partnerships introduce a shared innovation infrastructure designed to lower that barrier.

“This partnership gives GCCs a plug-and-play access to IIT Kanpur’s world-class R&D infrastructure and startup ecosystem through HCLTech’s established CoEs and accelerators,” he explains.

This shared-asset model allows GCCs to co-fund high-impact innovation while remaining operationally lean and focused on enterprise outcomes.

Closing India’s Deeptech Experience Gap

Beyond enterprise innovation, the collaboration also aims to reshape India’s deeptech talent pipeline by embedding academic researchers directly into industry challenges.

“We are solving the experience gap. By embedding IIT Kanpur researchers into real-world, industry-led challenges mentored by HCLTech domain experts, we are cultivating a new breed of enterprise-ready researchers,” Cherukuri mentions.

A major challenge in deeptech innovation is the so-called “Valley of Death,” where promising research fails to transition into commercial products. The translational R&D framework of GCC-IIT partnerships aims to compress this cycle significantly. If successful, the model could redefine how enterprises access research, talent, and commercialisation pathways, positioning India not just as a services powerhouse but a global engine for applied AI and robotics innovation.

“Our translational R&D framework ensures every project is scoped for deployment from Day 1,” Cherukuri says.

These partnerships enable IT firms to access basic research that is often too high-risk or long-term for conventional corporate cycles. Through co-innovation labs on university campuses, companies can pursue use-inspired research, blending theoretical breakthroughs with real-world applications.

The model also creates a proprietary talent pipeline, allowing firms to identify and groom specialised talent years before graduation. By integrating academia into innovation workflows, IT service providers gain niche, research-led expertise that many in-house GCCs may not yet possess—transforming competition into a collaborative triple helix of industry, academia, and government.

By integrating accelerator programmes with hyperscaler and OEM (original equipment manufacturer) partnerships, the model also seeks to reduce commercialisation timelines.

“This turns theoretical breakthroughs into scalable, ROI-positive enterprise solutions in months, not years,” Cherukuri comments.

The Academic Advantage

For academic institutions, the perks of such collaborations are enormous. Beyond corporate funding and research grants, universities gain access to real-world datasets and industrial-grade infrastructure, including AI supercomputing clusters that would otherwise remain out of reach.

“Faculty members benefit from industry equity, where research is validated against real market challenges, driving patents, impactful publications, and stronger global rankings,” Kumar states.

The curriculum gets continuously shaped by industry subject matter experts embedded within academic governance, ensuring graduates develop billable skills. Industry-embedded labs effectively market-proof their careers by exposing them to emerging technologies such as agentic AI, quantum computing, and advanced cybersecurity frameworks well before graduation.

Kumar believes that in 2026, a student’s professional worth will be increasingly defined by portfolio value—the real projects and research contributions completed during their academic journey—rather than degrees alone.

“As automation increasingly handles routine coding, the job market is shifting toward a quality-first meritocracy. Demand is rising for micro-specialists who operate at the intersection of technology, ethics, data architecture, and sustainability,” the Inductus Group CEO adds.

At the same time, this collaborative model is accelerating the decentralisation of talent, with R&D ecosystems expanding into tier-2 and tier-3 cities, reducing geographic concentration and strengthening workforce resilience.