

Burger King India operator narrows quarterly loss as discounts draw customers

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Feb 3 (Reuters) - Burger King India operator reported a narrower third-quarter loss on Tuesday, as its discounted menu items helped bring in diners.

Restaurant Brands Asia ([RESR.NS](#))

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reported a net loss of 435.4 million rupees (\$4.8 million) for the three months ended December 31, compared to a loss of 504 million rupees a year earlier.

But Western fast-food brands face stiff competition from local diners and cloud kitchens, prompting them to roll out deeper discounts, including Burger King's two burgers for 79 rupees and meals priced at 99 rupees.

As customers become more selective, Restaurant Brands Asia aims to keep them coming back by keeping prices reasonable, Rajeev Varman, group CEO, said in a statement.

The efforts helped Burger King post 4.5% growth in same-store sales, which refer to sales from stores open for at least 12 months, quicker than the previous quarter's 2.8% growth.

Overall revenue from operations for Restaurant Brands Asia, which also operates restaurants in Indonesia, grew nearly 12% to 7.15 billion rupees.

Last month, the company [said](#) real estate-to-restaurants group Inspira Global will invest up to 34.16 billion rupees for a controlling stake in the firm, as private equity firm Everstone sells its stake.

(\$1 = 90.2350 Indian rupees)

India's Jubilant pulls ahead of KFC, McDonald's as fourth-quarter earnings near

By Shivani Tanna and Praveen Paramasivam

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May 5 (Reuters) - India's Jubilant FoodWorks' ([JUBI.NS](#))

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strong sales growth for the March quarter is set to outpace rivals whose franchisees are expected to report muted growth despite value-focused promotions, several analysts said.

Operators of U.S. chains KFC ([YUM.N](#))

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, McDonald's ([MCD.N](#))

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and Burger King ([QSR.TO](#))

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are likely to report a decline to mid-single-digit growth in same-store sales, as inflation-hit consumers cut back and local competition intensifies, according to six brokerages.

Jubilant, however, has already flagged a 12.1% increase in like-for-like sales in India in its quarterly update, which analysts say has benefited from its focus on online sales, discounts on third-party platforms, and a waiver of delivery fees on app orders.

Other franchisees have not issued sales updates. Sapphire kicks off earnings for the sector on Wednesday.

"Competitive intensity is growing in fried chicken and burger and the larger existing players like KFC and McDonald's don't have anything different to offer versus rivals," said Karan Taurani, an analyst at Elara Securities.

"Jubilant is performing the best of the lot," Taurani said, adding that its investments into 20-minute in-house delivery and app-led orders are helping reduce its reliance on third-party platforms, which rivals are heavily dependent on.

India's fast-food sector is cooling as inflation-hit consumers cut back, with franchisees relying on discounts to stay competitive in a crowded market.

Unlike Jubilant, which has pushed delivery and app-based offers, KFC and McDonald's franchisees rely more on dine-in traffic and face growing pressure from local cafes and restaurants, analysts said.

Jubilant reported a 34% jump in consolidated revenue to 21.07 billion rupees (\$250.05 million) for the March quarter.

While Jubilant's digital strategy has delivered steady outperformance through the year, analysts expect its profit margins — like those of other operators — to remain under pressure in the March quarter, partly due to rising raw material and marketing costs.

However, some analysts see fried chicken as a key long-term growth category, despite the challenge of sameness.

"If you see from a longer-term perspective, the next growth driver is the overall fried chicken category in India, but there would be some pressure for one or two quarters," said Preeyam Tolia of Axis Securities.

Indian state to inspect outlets of global fast-food chains after McDonald's cheese crackdown

By Dhwani Pandya and Praveen Paramasivam

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MUMBAI, Feb 27 (Reuters) - India's western state of Maharashtra will inspect outlets of global fast-food brands to check if they use cheese alternatives in products wrongly promoted as containing real cheese, widening scrutiny beyond a crackdown on McDonald's, a top official said.

The checks threaten to cause a headache for global brands after recent inflationary pressure hit consumption of burgers and pizzas that are pricey for many Indian consumers, prompting firms to launch of [discounted offerings](#).

McDonald's ([MCD.N](#))

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biggest India franchisee, Westlife Foodworld, ([WEST.NS](#))

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has been defending its use of "real cheese" after media reported that state authorities last year found some products made use of so-called cheese analogues of vegetable oil, rather than real cheese.

The McDonald's franchisee disagreed with the findings, but in December it dropped the word "cheese" from the names of many burgers and nuggets it sells statewide, letters seen by Reuters show.

It renamed a "corn and cheese burger" as an "American vegetarian burger", for example.

Inspectors of the state's Food and Drug Administration will now visit all McDonald's outlets, as well as those of other major brands, to check for similar violations of display and labelling rules, its chief, Abhimanyu Kale, told Reuters.

"We are planning to check all outlets of McDonald's," he said. "We will also take action on other well-known and frequently visited global fast-food chain outlets," he added, but declined to identify the brands being targeted.

Shares of Westlife plunged as much as 6.7% after the Reuters report.

Another senior state government official, who sought anonymity, said inspectors would visit Indian franchisee outlets of brands such as Domino's ([DPZ.N](#))

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, Pizza Hut, Burger King and KFC.

Indian state authorities have the power to suspend the licences of restaurants found to have infringed food and safety regulations in a way that misleads consumers.

Westlife, which runs McDonald's in west and south India, will welcome any inspections and maintains the "highest standards", its managing director, Saurabh Kalra, said.

Domino's franchisee Jubilant FoodWorks ([JUBI.NS](#))

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, Burger King operator Restaurant Brands Asia ([RESR.NS](#))

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and Devyani International ([DEVY.NS](#))

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, which operates Yum Brands' ([YUM.N](#))

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Pizza Hut and KFC in India, did not respond to Reuters queries.

Another Pizza Hut operator, India's Sapphire Foods ([SAPI.NS](#))
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, declined comment.

Devyani shares slipped on Tuesday's news to trade down 4%.

India's western state of Maharashtra is its second most populous. Home to the financial capital Mumbai, which has about 100 McDonald's outlets, and many other urban cities, it is a key market for global fast-food brands.

In the McDonald's case, state food inspectors suspended the licence of one outlet east of Mumbai in November for allegedly using analogues in products promoted as containing cheese.

The suspension was later revoked on appeal by Westlife, the franchisee.