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Jio's standalone tech may sharpen its market edge

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Business India

India has entered the 5G era. We are not the first and a few countries like the US, UK and China started deploying 5G a couple of years ago. But we are way ahead of many advanced countries too.

Considering, large numbers of people in India have not shifted to 4G yet, are we ready for 5G and all the investment it entails? In the past we always adopted technologies late, on the grounds that investible resources were scarce and we could not afford the newest technologies. Many don't even remember that the government allowed colour television only at the time of the Asiad games in 1982! And more will remember how long we were stuck with outdated Ambassador cars and old Fiat models.

The same question arose when we shifted from 2G and 3G to the 4G standard. But it was 4G that allowed the spread of smartphones all over the country – first to the middle class and then quickly to the poor. Of course, many Indians still do not have smartphones. But it is the spread of smartphones that led to the explosive growth of e-commerce, videos for entertainment and education, and myriads and other users. All these have made our mobile phones indispensable!

The spread of 4G created huge business and employment opportunities. Just think of the number of people employed by Uber, Ola, Swiggy, Zomato, and of course the shopping networks of Flipkart, Amazon, JioMart and thousands of other businesses. It also allowed the payment networks like UPI, Paytm and others to make life easier for millions and millions of Indians. Added to this, hundreds lakh of jobs were created in developing the web apps and software needed for all these services. Interestingly, hundreds of companies started offering Software as a Service (SaaS) applications. This, in turn, has created a new dimension to our already flourishing software industry, allowing small SaaS companies to sell their services over the internet to global audiences.

5G will take this continuous evolution to a completely different level. The speed and capacity of 5G allows development of newer applications and services that are just not possible otherwise. In fields ranging from mobility, to medical diagnostics and monitoring, to augmented reality and virtual reality, to gaming to education, farming, manufacturing and importantly defence, entirely new experiences and capabilities will be created. In addition, there are thousands of uses that creative younger people will devise which will spread across the world in ways that we can only imagine. We could not afford to be left behind in the 5G revolution.

To be sure, there are a whole series of issues and hurdles along the way. The first is the Government decision to continue with high pricing of spectrum by auctions. The four companies that bid for spectrum have committed to ₹1.5 lakh crore for the spectrum they acquired, which is less than what companies globally use to service customers. This is added to the huge amounts that are already owed to government on account of earlier auctions and payment of past, adjusted gross revenues as directed by the Supreme Court. All these levies reduced the number of private players to three (plus the government's BSNL). And of these Vodafone Idea has been pushed to a precarious position, where the parent Vodafone has written off its investment in India. And even though 5G is largely software-intensive, the companies have to invest in new equipment and towers. Naturally the question arises as to whether the Indian consumer will pay the extra amounts? And to what extent the companies can afford to subsidise the users.

But judging by the past, demand will expand, revenues of the companies will grow, thousands of new apps services will be created, and in the end most of these issues will get sorted out.Without question, we are entering into a brave new 5G age.

Ashok H. Advani

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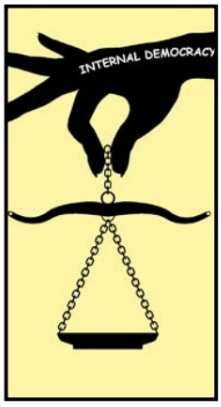
Internal democracy

Tharoor's call applies to all parties



A contest for the top post in Indian political parties, whether it is the Bharatiya Janata Party, Congress, or even our regional parties, is a rarity. On the other hand, we recently came across reports that the YSR Congress party, which rules Andhra Pradesh, has elected the party president and chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, to the post for life. The Election Commission of India, which remains passive in such matters, has now rightly ordered YSRCP to make a clear public statement denying the reports to clear up any confusion. If not denied, the EC said it could "assume contagious proportions". The EC, it is being said, will now also nudge parties to follow the internal democracy commitments. Howsoever honourable the intention, the EC does not have the power to deregister parties that fail to comply with the rules. In the past, the EC has asked the law ministry for the power to deregister political parties, but the proposal has not been implemented so far. That is why the Congress MP Shashi Tharoor's quest for election and internal democracy within his party needs to be supported by all right-thinking Indians, politicians and non-politicians alike.

While Mallikarjun Kharge, who has emerged as the Congress establishment's candidate and even garnered the support of a majority in the party, including the so-called Group of 23 rebels, is expected to roundly trounce Tharoor, there is no doubt that the latter has raised some winning ideas. In his manifesto, there are suggestions for the party to deal with the debilitating crises it faces internally, with regard to its decision-making processes, and externally, in its apparent inability to stand up to a formidable opponent. Tharoor's "ten tenets", like "ten commandments", include steps to decentralise the organisation and empower the party at all levels, re-imagine the role of the All India Congress Committee, and recalibrate outreach to the people with a bigger role for women and an increased focus on youth. He believes it is necessary for Congress to reach out to the layered and varied concerns of the BJP voter, instead of writing him off as *Hindutvavadi*. Such lofty prescriptions may not find favour with Congressmen hungry for power and Tharoor may be dismissed as a scholar-diplomat ready to engage in a gabfest, but it makes sense if political parties are to function with some internal democracy and not be solely guided by the unquestioned prerogative and unchecked discretion of top leaders.

The irony is that even a party like the BJP, which has attacked the Congress for inculcating a personality cult, first around Nehru, then Indira Gandhi and finally the living scions of the family, has forgotten about internal democracy. The current BJP president, J.P. Nadda's term is coming to an end. But there is no election for his successor in the offing. One only hears talk about Nadda being "re-nominated".

As for Tharoor, critics call him a political lightweight. Sure, he does not hail from a political dynasty and didn't cut his teeth in student politics, yet in 2009, after coming back from the UN, he wrested Thiruvananthapuram from CPI strongman P Ramachandran Nair in a thumping win. Since then he has held the seat twice, making him a three-time Lok Sabha winner on his own steam which cannot be said of many Congress MPs. His manifesto's tagline "Think tomorrow, think Tharoor" reminds one of the pitch that ex-UK Chancellor of Exchequer Rishi Sunak made during the Conservative Party leadership contest – "Ready 4 Rishi".

Be that as it may, there is one thing that Tharoor or perhaps even Kharge is forgetting. The contest they are engaged in is actually for the second most important position in the Congress. Such is the nature of their party that for the time being the Gandhis will remain the final authority in the party, while the elected president will be tasked with the running of the organisation.

Within the Congress, an impression is already gaining strength that the Gandhi family is tilting the scales in favour of Kharge. This needs to be dispelled. The Nehru-Gandhi family's moral authority over the party stems from its supposed neutrality and fairness in internal tussles. That authority is often exercised through representatives who at times fail to maintain neutrality. Recent episodes in Punjab and Rajasthan — the promotion of Navjot Singh Sidhu and the pressure on Ashok Gehlot, respectively — have weakened the authority of the family. The Congress leadership will have to sooner than later allow popular leaders to emerge stronger in the party. Even in a normal contest, Kharge may ultimately have romped home the winner but the Gandhi family would still do themselves and the party a favour by making it public that they have no candidate. ◆

India needs multiple HDFC Banks

To grow and scale up PSU banks the government must make way for professionals

The government recently proposed to privatise IDBI Bank, a listed entity with a market cap of around ₹46,000 crore. The government and LIC collectively hold 94 per cent stake in the bank and both will be selling a little more than 30 per cent each. DIPAM (Department of Investment and Public Asset Management) has already put in place the Preliminary Information Memorandum to enable potential buyers to submit their expression of interest before the end of this calendar year.

The privatisation is subject to the rules and regulations of RBI and SEBI which mandate 40 per cent stake is held by the new owner at all times for a minimum period of 5 years and that the stake is progressively divested with voting rights capped at 26 per cent. SEBI guidelines mandate an open offer to public shareholders to the extent of 26 per cent. In this case it may well be redundant as the shareholders besides the government and LIC only hold 6 per cent. Unless of course the government and LIC shareholdings in the bank post the divestment are allowed to be treated as public and permitted to tender more shares in the mandatory open offer!

This time round, besides NBFCs, listed private sector banks and foreign banks, a new category. Alternate Investment Funds (AIFs) listed with SEBI can also bid. Large business houses with assets of ₹5,000 crore or more have been debarred from bidding. It is of course debatable as to whether any entity would really like to take over a bank and have the government of India and LIC as its shareholders.

It is true that India requires large banks if it has to accelerate its journey towards becoming a $5 trillion economy by FY30 and a $10 trillion a few more years down the line. Currently, there are very few banks besides SBI which can provide credit to the corporates to really grow and grow fast. Save for SBI and maybe Bank of Baroda (to some extent) the initiative to nationalise the other banks in 1969 and bring it within the folds of the government has clearly not brought any other PSU bank anywhere near SBI. To keep these banks afloat, the government has to continuously pump money to salvage them. While every bank does show the chairman of the bank handing over the dividend cheque to the prime minister, the returns on assets are poor. Instead of perennially infusing cash to keep the banks afloat, the government may well privatise other banks. Bank of India and Central Bank were once large banks and enjoyed tremendous goodwill with customers. The government could well consider selling off their stake in these banks. Instead of hunting for strategic buyers it could consider selling its entire stake in public. The most successful banks in India, HDFC, ICICI, and Axis do not have any owners. They are run by professionals with a few professionals putting these banks on a self-sustaining growth path. Deepak Parekh and Aditya Puri in the case of HDFC or KV Kamath in the case of ICICI Bank did help in the initial stages. If the government were to sell its stake in some large PSUs and put thorough professionals in place, the banks would grow faster and scale up sufficiently to match private sector banks. Even an ailing Yes Bank was brought onto the growth path by the professionals of SBI. Having an owner with his skin in the game like Kotak Bank helps but it may well be difficult to find such owner bankers.

The point is that merely privatising IDBI is not a panacea to accelerate growth. Technically, with LIC being the major shareholder, IDBI Bank is classified as a private sector bank. Will foreign banks, which are more focussed on making money through treasury operations or investment advisories, really be able to run a retail business? Over the past few years several large banks like CITI, Deutsche and Barclays gave up their business to focus on the large corporate houses of SMEs. Private equity, whose tenure of investments is limited to 7-10 years would be able to grow the bank sufficiently but may also be uninterested in bidding for IDBI. At best, large ones like KKR or Blackstone which have been growing their footprints in the financial sector, may contemplate the takeover of a bank. Instead of settling for second or third best, the government can well look at privatisation of IDBI by offloading equity through a follow on IPO. It can look at setting up a new team, even picking some from the existing one and giving it full freedom to grow.

Thinking out of the box and having confidence in the growing Indian shareholder tribe to build institutions are also alternatives which should be tried. ◆

Expanding network

Krsnaa Diagnostics Ltd, one of the fastest growing players in the diagnostics space, plans to launch 600 diagnostics centres across India. With this, the Pune headquartered diagnostics player, with a pan-India presence, will strengthen its footprint across Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, and Rajasthan, spreading across metros, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. The centres will be equipped to offer specialised services in precision medicine, genetics, genomics, and molecular diagnostics, along with the routine investigations of biochemistry and serology. The ₹500-crore company (listed on BSE and NSE) started its journey in 2011 with two radiology centres and is present today in 16 states with 2,000-plus centres across India. It has differentiated itself not only by offering quality services in radiology and pathology, but has also focused on the public-private partnership (PPP) segment, where it serves underpenetrated and underserved areas by collaborating with private healthcare providers, including corporate hospitals and trust hospitals.

Digital transformation

Tech Mahindra has entered into a strategic partnership with SoftTech, a provider of advanced digital solutions for the construction and civil infrastructure industry, to digitally transform the global construction and infrastructure industry. The partnership will combine the technological capabilities of Tech Mahindra and the domain expertise of SoftTech to provide customised solutions for end-to-end digital transformation of businesses in the construction and infrastructure industry. This will enable customers across the government and corporate sectors to streamline business operations, boost efficiency and improve customer experience by leveraging leading-edge technologies like AI, ML, Building Information Modelling, Digital Twins, construction wearables, Robotics, Metaverse, and IoT. Besides, this also aims to build more sustainable and responsible solutions for social and environmental impacts within the architecture-engineering-construction) space.

'Siemens Xcelerator'

Siemens India has been the preferred technology solutions provider, conceptualising and implementing various flagship projects in mobility, energy management, power and gas, smart cities, etc and is strengthening its digitalization portfolio and working on select applications in the country. The company's order backlog from continuing operations stands at an all-time high at ₹17,856 crore. According to a source, Siemens sees major opportunities in India as companies look to open new plants to benefit from the government's production-linked incentive schemes, and also adopt digital technologies on its shop floors. On the development front, Siemens launches open digital business platform 'Siemens Xcelerator' in India which would accelerate digital transformation and value creation for customers of all sizes in industry, buildings, grids and mobility. It has signed an MoU with Switch Mobility, a subsidiary of Ashok Leyland for delivering cost-effective E-Mobility solutions. Meanwhile, the consortium of Siemens Limited India and Siemens Mobility GmbH has secured an order from Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) related to Signalling and Telecommunication for Kolkata Metro Line 3 & 6. Previously, it has equipped Kolkata Metro's North-South corridor and East-West line with TPWS signalling and rail electrification systems, respectively.

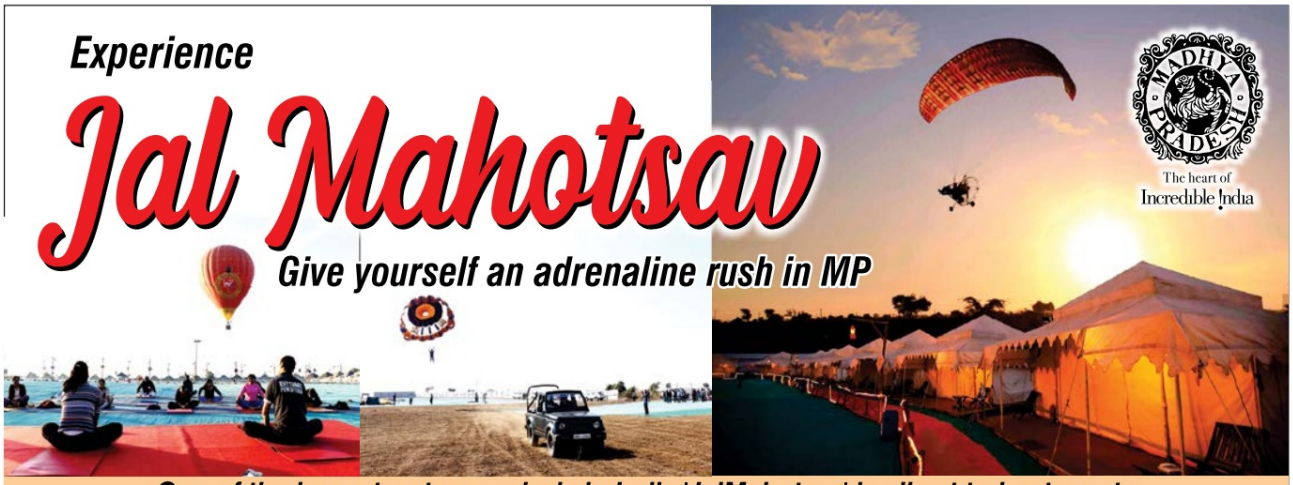
On the drive

According to a source, Maruti Suzuki's recent offering, the Grand Vitara has received an overwhelming response from customers with over 57,000 bookings. The launch is important for the company to gain market share in the SUV segment. Earlier in August 2022, the company launched Alto K10. During the same month it also launched S-CNG variant of its iconic sporty hatchback Swift. Meanwhile, the company is currently working on many new offerings for the Indian

market including two new SUVs that will be launched over the next 6 months in the country. These include the Baleno-based YTB SUV and the Jimny 5-door SUV. Both these SUVs are likely to be showcased at the upcoming Auto Expo 2023. For the future Maruti is setting up third manufacturing plant in Kharkhoda in Sonipat, Haryana. The project is spread over 800 acres and at peak production capacity would be around 8 lakh units in the next 8 years requiring a total investment of ₹18,000 crore. The first phase of the project would be set up with an investment of over ₹11,000 crore. The first phase of the new plant will commence from 2025, followed by the second phase in the later part of 2026.

On target?

VIP Industries, the luggage manufacturer has targeted an annual revenue of ₹2,000 crore in FY23, given a recovery in demand and a fall in some key raw material prices. Trendlyne's Forecaster estimates its revenue to grow 32.9 per cent YoY to ₹1,921.3 crore in FY23. At the end of FY22, the company had 376 exclusive brand outlets, and by the end of FY23, it aims to increase its retail store network to 500. The firm hopes to achieve this target by expanding into smaller towns in India, and most of these outlets will be opened through a franchise model. The rise in demand for travel this festive season is expected to augur well for the company given its dominant position in the organised luggage industry where the firm commands a market share of 45 per cent in the industry. ◆



One of the largest water carnivals in India 'JalMahotsav' is all set to host you to experience adventure activities and beautiful tent city of Hanuwantiya in Madhya Pradesh

If you are planning an adventure-packed vacation with full of fun then Hanuwantiya Island in Khandwa District of Madhya Pradesh is the place that you should add in your bucket list this time. One of India's longest Water cation presented by Madhya Pradesh Tourism, 'JalMahotsav' is a combination of food, art, nature, culture and adventure where you can experience clear skies, sparkling blue water and the thrill of scuba diving, bumper boats and much more.

This picturesque destination awaits your presence for 'Jal Mahotsav', the festival which will commence in the last week of November 2022 and will go on till the last week of January 2023. A water cation to Jal Mahotsav has all the elements to give a boost to your body, mind, and spirit.

It offers an array of adventure activities organised at nature's paradise Hanu-wantiya. Located on the banks of Indira Sagar Dam (India's largest reservoir), this is a perfect holiday destination for spending an exciting vacation with your loved ones.

At 'JalMahotsav', you can start your day with the golden rays of the rising sun lighting up the tent city, followed by a delicious breakfast and beautiful Mediterranean blue water views to admire.

What to see and do

At 'JalMahotsav', visitors can enjoy adventure activities based on land, air, or water.

Air and water activities- The major attraction of this festival are air and water activities which include wind surfing, water parasailing, water zorbing, jet-skiing, speed boats ride, cruise boats ride, paramotoring, banana boat ride, hot air balloon ride, zip line and more.

Land-based activities: Yoga camp, wellness and spa, cycling, volleyball, archery, tug of war, climbing, kite flying, bull carting and other activities in adventure zone. One can also go for nature walks, cycle around the island, and visit the local villages. Food zone, craft bazaar, stargazing, island camping and experiencing melody of folk, classical and pop music and dance will keep you going throughout the festival.

Other Attractions

Apart from these amazing activities, Khandwa District has several other tourist attractions as well that include Nagchun dam, Ghantaghar, Omkare-shwar Jyotirlinga, Tulija Bhavani temple, Indira Sagar Dam and SailaniIsland.

Also, it is a must-visit place for nature enthusiasts as they can indulge in bird watching, trekking, and night camping.

Way to Hanuwantiya

If you are already making plans and wondering how to get here, the nearest airport is Indore, around 3 hours away from the Madhya Dweep islands where Hanuwantiya is located. If you are travelling by rail, you need to get off at Khandwa, 50 km away. And if you prefer the road, then Hanuwantiya is well connected to Indore, Bhopal and Khandwa.

For booking visit: **www.jalmahotsav.com**

PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, the Coimbatore-based autonomous arts and science college, and **Elgi Equipment**, one of the world's leading air-compressor manufacturers, have come together to inaugurate the 'GRG-ELGi Digital Innovation Dojo' at the college's GRG Campus in Peelamedu. This is the first Digital Innovation Dojo, in line with ELGi's digital transformation strategy based on the premise of 'Experiment, Start Small & Scale Fast'. "We are thankful to Elgi Equipment for joining forces with us to cultivate and strengthen students' practical knowledge and skillset. The GRG-ELGi Digital Innovation DOJO will showcase the effective implementation of a strong industry-academia collaboration and how it benefits various stakeholders and, most importantly, society. In the future, we hope to help other companies and institutions establish similar facilities that will propel us to the front and centre of digital innovation as the future belongs to those willing to adapt and change," said **R. Nandini**, chairperson, GRG Institutions. At the inauguration,

Jairam Varadaraj, Managing Director, Elgi Equipment, said: "At ELGi, we believe collaboration is at the heart of successful business. We are delighted to partner PSGR Krishnammal College for Women. While we're excited about the possibilities, we're confident that the Digital Innovation Dojo will upskill and empower young women students, creating a talent pool for the future as we continue to advance on our digital transformation journey." ◆

Mark Schneider, global CEO, **Nestle**, who was in the country last fortnight, has said that there were concerns on inflation, which at some point had a dampening effect on demand, but the Indian market is in an advantageous position on this front. "I think India is in an advantageous position in the sense that, though there are inflation concerns, you also see such a strong underlying volume demand from a rising middle class and people reaching higher levels of income," affirmed Schneider. He announced plans to invest ₹5,000 crore in India by 2025. According to him India's 'bounce back from that situation (Covid-19) is impressive' and that could not have been done without significant progress on vaccination in the country. He admitted that there are challenges regarding inflation and global supply chains, particularly in the food and beverage space. In the global markets, now there is more focus on local supply chains and fortunately in India, 99 per cent of what Nestle sells is locally manufactured, he said. "But, in some other parts of the world, we are just trying to step by step regroup, and make sure that the supply chains get less vulnerable," he added. Nestle was not hit hard by supply chain restrictions and was impacted only temporarily, informed Schneider. ◆

Torrent Pharmaceuticals has announced the acquisition of the Chennai-based leading dermatology player Curatio Healthcare (I). The company has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire 100 per cent stake in Curatio Healthcare for ₹2,000 crore, which includes ₹115 crore (on the date of signing) of cash and cash equivalents in the acquired business indicating an Enterprise Value of ₹1,885 crore, a statement from the company said. "The acquisition offers Torrent the opportunity to enhance its presence in dermatology with a differentiated portfolio and is a strong strategic fit. Curatio has built a commendable set of high market share brands in cosmetic and pediatric dermatology that we look forward to adding to our product offerings," said **Aman Mehta**, director, Torrent Pharma. With this acquisition, Torrent Pharma will add 600 medical representatives and a distribution network of 900 stockists. Sequoia, Chrys-Capital and the promotor of Curatio mentioned: "Over the last 15 years, Curatio has built a strong portfolio of differentiated products in the derma segment that are well received by doctors and patients. We believe Torrent is best suited to further catapult the business which we have built." ◆

Gulf Oil has announced an exclusive partnership with **Piaggio Vehicles** and **Switch Mobility** for a special range of EV fluids. With this tie-up, Gulf Oil will officially supply EV fluids. The launch event was graced by the presence of **Sanjay Hinduja**, chairman, Gulf Oil, and ace cricketer & brand ambassador **Mahendra Singh Dhoni**. Through this partnership, Piaggio Vehicles and Switch Mobility will have direct access to the complete range of EV fluids under Gulf's portfolio. Commenting on the partnership, **Ravi Chawla**, MD & CEO, Gulf Oil, said, "Gulf Oil's partnership with Piaggio Vehicles & Switch Mobility in India is a testament to the best-in-class product offering that will deliver superior performance to the Piaggio Vehicles' three-wheeler EV transmission. Our product offering for Switch Mobility will deliver unmatched performance to their electric buses through an entire range which includes coolants and transmission fluids." Added Hinduja: "As the automotive industry adds a new chapter with electric mobility, being the leading technology player in the lubricant space, it is our responsibility to drive the industry and to develop segment-leading products to support the EV sector. Acceptance of our products by marquee players like Piaggio Vehicles and Switch Mobility further augments our commitment to develop cutting edge products for the EV sector." ◆

M.K. Stalin, Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu, last fortnight inaugurated the manufacturing unit of Taiwanese firm **Pegatron** that will make iPhones at the Mahindra World City, Chengalpattu, near Chennai. The total investment in this project is ₹1,100 crore, which will generate about 14,000 jobs. Pegatron is the third Apple vendor to set up its manufacturing unit in India after Foxconn (in Tamil Nadu) and Wistron. The plant has been set up under the Centre's Production Linked Incentive scheme (PLI). Describing the event as a proud moment for Tamil Nadu, Stalin said the state would soon replace China as the hub for making new models of smartphones. **Rajeev Chandrasekhar**, Union Minister of State for Electronics, Information Technology, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, said this plant was the fifth biggest electronics investment in Tamil Nadu. The Centre has been working with the state governments and was determined to create an environment conducive for investors from around the world. "Pegatron Technology India was incorporated in July in Chennai and is the wholly-owned subsidiary of Pegatron Corporation Taiwan. We were able to set up the factory with the support of the state government and the Centre," added **Jian Jong Cheng**, chairman, Pegatron Technology India. ◆

Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan Board (OTPPB) has made its presence in the country with an office in Mumbai to spearhead its focus on domestic investments. It has also announced that mortgage major HDFC's vice-chairman & chief executive Keki Mistry will be a senior advisor to OTPPB, which already has investments of over ₹18,000 crore in the country. Also, Deepak Dara, who joined the company in 2020 as chief of staff to the chief investment officer, will be serving as the head of India operations by taking over the role in early 2023. Ben Chan, executive managing director and head, Asia-Pacific, will oversee the office in Mumbai, along with others in the region in Hong Kong and Singapore. This is the sixth global office for the company, which has investments of over ₹14.85 lakh crore across asset classes, and is aimed at building on its existing Indian portfolio. "India is an attractive investment destination and will be one of our growth markets over the next 5-10 years," acknowledged **Jo Taylor**, president & chief executive, OTPPB. "It has a large, growing and dynamic economy, with openness to foreign capital which makes it a strategically important market for us". ◆

Crane India has announced the inauguration of its new Engineered Check Valves factory in Satara, Maharashtra. The event was hosted by Crane Process Flow Technologies India Private Limited and ChemPharma & Energy, Duo-Chek and Noz-Chek, businesses of Crane Co. Led by **Hari Jinaga**, president, Crane India, in the presence of customers, business partners and other global leaders of Crane, the ceremony enabled presentation of the new plant capabilities that will be completely dedicated to its Engineered Check products. The new facility holds direct employment for approximately 100 associates, who support the requirements of a variety of industries within the chemical processing, oil and gas, petrochemical and energy sectors including renewable energy and other emerging markets, such as hydrogen production. "The facilities that have been built here in Satara are best-in-class; our new Engineered Check Valves factory reflects digital transformation trends and features a fully automated manufacturing process to ensure our products maintain the quality Crane is known for," said Jinaga. "Crane India has been an influential force in the country through our contributions and investments in local communities over the past 30 years. Along with the new Engineered Check Valves factory inauguration, today we have also reaffirmed our partnership with the local NGO Maher by opening the next building within the Crane funded Maher Home complex for disadvantaged children in Satara," he added. ◆

Mercedes-Benz has achieved a significant milestone in its India journey, by rolling out the country's most advanced luxury electric vehicle – the EQS 580 4MATIC at a price of ₹1.55 crore. India is the first market outside Germany to make the EQS 580 4MATIC. Speaking on the occasion, **Martin Schwenk**, MD & CEO, Mercedes-Benz India, said, "The EQS 580 4MATIC is our first locally made EV in India and will play a pivotal role in driving our ambitious EV plans for the market. It is a perfect blend of technology, luxury and safety, pioneering numerous tech features for our customers. India is the first country outside Germany to manufacture the EQS 580 4MATIC, and this unique distinction underpins Mercedes-Benz India's deep customer commitment and long-term vision for developing the luxury EV market here." Added Schwenk: "The making of EQS 580 4MATIC in India is a key milestone and a strong testament to our state-of-the-art manufacturing prowess and our commitment to the vision of 'Make in India'. It reiterates our relentless focus on developing the local market, creating value for customers and introducing future-ready products, combining the best of luxury, technology and safety. The 'Made in India' EQS sets a high benchmark in the entire Indian automotive market and combines luxury and technology like no other modern EV in the market". Union minister Nitin Gadkari officially rolled out the first EV at the plant. ◆

A concept whose time has come

Companies across the world increasingly embrace metaverse

Metaverse has seized the imagination of one and all in the world. Put simply, it is a virtual world, where people interact via their digital proxies. To create this virtual world, technologies such as AR (augmented reality) and VR (virtual reality) are used.

Educators say it is always better to move from the concrete to the abstract. This aptly applies to metaverse too. If you have visited amusement parks that offer 3D virtual reality or played advanced video games, then understanding this concept becomes easy.

The world over, many big companies are embracing metaverse. Companies that have entered this space include Adidas, Balenciaga & Fortnite, Christie's, Coca-Cola, Hyundai, Louis Vuitton and Nike. It is an unchartered plane and nobody knows how it is going to evolve.

Indian companies too are testing this space. Entertainment company Shemaroo is a late addition. Shemaroo has joined hands with Decentraland, a metaverse platform, to enter the virtual world, which it has titled Shemaroo Theatre. It can be accessed from the Decentraland platform.

According to press reports, in February this year, Walt Disney Co appointed Mike White, who has been with the firm for more than 10 years to enter the metaverse space. In May, Mondelez India Foods (formerly Cadbury India) used the metaverse to recruit freshers. "With the metaverse making communication far more immersive, we hope to bring some of our Mondelez signature experiences to our colleagues in an interesting and unique format, thereby strengthening our efforts towards building the future of workplace," said Shilpa Vaid, head HR, Mondelez India. "The idea is to better embrace the hybrid world by experimenting and evolving our practices – right from hiring to upskilling."

Virtual bars and lounges Mumbai-based liquor maker Allied Blenders & Distillers, forayed into metaverse in July this year, by launching ABD MetaBar – a virtual reality space. In September, the company launched its new whisky – ICONiQ White – in ADB Metbar. It will be launched physically soon.

The Netherlands-based beer maker Heineken NV in April this year launched its beer brand Heineken Silver on the metaverse. "We launched Heineken Silver in the metaverse first as an ironic take on a product launch to highlight that we believe the best way to experience Heineken is in the real world," remarked Bram Westenbrink, brand director, Heineken..

Public sector bank Union Bank of India too has entered this space. In July this year, it has launched its virtual lounge named Uni-verse. US-based bank JPMorgan Chase entered the metaverse in February this year by opening a virtual lounge named Onyx lounge.

Company	Metaverse initiative
Allied Blenders & Distillers	ABD MetaBar
Asian Paints	NA
Ceat	CEAT Shoppe
Flipkart	Flipverse
ITC	Fabelle chocolates virtual presence in two virtual weddings held in February 2022.
M & M	NFT
Makemytrip	NFT
Mccain Foods India	Holi party
MG Motor India	MGVERSE
Mondelez India	Hiring freshers
Olive Bar & Kitchen	NFT
Royal Enfield	NFT
Shemaroo Entertainment	Shemaroo Theatre
Tata Consumer Products	Holi party
Titan	Launch of wedding jewelry collection - Rivaah.
Union Bank of India	Uni-Verse
NFT - Non Fungible Token	

"There is a lot of client interest to learn more about the metaverse," affirmed Christine Moy, JPMorgan's head of crypto-currency and the metaverse. "We put together our white paper to help clients cut through the noise and highlight what the current reality is."

A few Indian companies have got into the metaverse by offering non-fungible tokens (NFTs). Simply put, an NFT represents ownership which cannot be disputed. To give an example: an artist can paint a picture on the computer. An NFT can be created out of this painting, where the NFT will have the finger prints of the file, a token name and a symbol. This is stored. It is important to note that the NFT will not have the original painting; it will only have the finger print, token name and symbol. A buyer of NFT does not get a copy of the painting, he anticipates the value of NFT, which he has bought, to go up. The most cited example is that of the first tweet by Jack Dorsey, the founder of Twitter, he made an NFT out of it and sold it for a little over $2.9 million. This tweet is still in the public domain, but there is only one owner.

Reportedly, many global companies are looking to have a chief metaverse

officer. French advertising company Publicis Groupe thought perhaps a machine could do a better job and, so, appointed a machine to fill the slot. The name of the machine is Leon. The company issued a press note to this effect in June this year.

"The metaverse is an endless, unknown territory to explore with creativity," said Marco Venturelli, chief creative officer, Publicis France, creator of Leon. "To truly innovate we have to experiment and learn as we go. Leon's mission is to motivate all of us to be brave and progressive, because the earlier we move, the further we can go".

While companies are still struggling with this new concept, Delaware-based Metarverse Holdings, officially announced in September this year that Dubai will become the world's first virtual city. A beta version is expected to go live in the fourth quarter of 2022. ◆

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REBRANDING

What's in a name?

Many big companies this year are changing their names and rebranding themselves. The latest to join this bandwagon is IT company HCL Tech (formerly HCL Technologies). In a press release, Roshni Nadar Malhotra, chairperson, HCL Tech, described the announcement as an evolution for HCL Tech to embrace a distinct global brand identity, while retaining connectivity with the HCL group. The company has changed not only its name, but its logo too.

At the start of the calendar year, Tata Sky changed its name to Tata Play and created a new logo. The company said the need for change was that its business interest had grown beyond Direct To Home (DTH) services. Citing a similar reason, Cosmo Films has changed its name to Cosmo First.

During an earnings conference call for its first quarter results for FY23, in August this year, the company gave the rational for the name change. The management said the company's business activities had expanded beyond films into specialty chemicals, D2C pet care and soon to launch films for-consumer application.

It was change in ownership that made three companies change their names. Ruchi Soya Industries, which was acquired by Patanjali group, has changed its name to Patanjali Foods. The effective date as per exchange filing is 24 June 2022. "Members may note that the company is at present engaged in the business of edible oils, vanaspati, food, nutraceutical and health products," its 2021-22 Annual Report informed. "However, the company's name Ruchi Soya Industries Limited contained only 'soya' in its name and, hence, it no longer justified with all the commercial activities being undertaken by the company."

Clariant Chemicals (India) has also renamed itself – it is now Heubach Colorants India. Switzerland-based Clariant group sold its pigments business to a consortium of SK Capital Partners (US-based private investment outfit) and Germany-based pigment maker Heubach group. The transaction was completed in January this year. As a result, Clariant Chemicals (India), which is a listed company, saw a change in management control. In August this year, the company received the board's approval to change its name.

And in June 2022, Canara HSBC Oriental Bank of Commerce Life Insurance rebranded and renamed itself Canara HSBC Life Insurance. It may be recalled that Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank of India were merged with Punjab National Bank, effective from 1 April 2020. Prior to the merger Canara Bank held 51 per cent, Oriental Bank of Commerce's stake was 23 per cent and HSBC Insurance (Asia-Pacific) Holdings held 26 per cent in this life insurance company. After the merger, Oriental Bank's stake is now held by Punjab National Bank. The holding of the other two entities remains unchanged.

Global reach The board of Redington in June this year, approved to change the name of the company from Redington (India) Limited to Redington Limited. In an exchange filing, it says it has changed the name, considering its global presence and operations. Its annual report for 2021-22 says that the Middle-East and Africa accounts for 44.7 per cent, Turkey and South Asia for another 11.8 per cent and the balance of 43.5 per cent revenue from India.

A look at the company's 2021-22 Business Responsibility & Sustainability Report gives an answer to its activities. The company is a trader in computers, computer peripheral equipment, software, electronic and telecommunications equipment and parts. This accounts for 97.1 per cent of its turnover.

During 2021-22, Kolkata-based HSIL sold its building products business to Hindware, a wholly owned subsidiary of Hindware Home Innovation. HSIL's new name is AGI Greenpac. The company has a new logo too.

"The name change is a part of our transformational journey," explains Sandip Somany, vice-chairman & managing director, in the company's 2021-22 annual report. The name AGI Greenpac is new but the motto 'Excellence in Packaging' remains the same. The logo ties the brand closer to its identity as a sustainable packaging company."

Zomato's board in June this year approved the acquisition of Blink Commerce -- popularly known as Blinkit. Pursuant to this, the company circulated a mail internally, saying it would like to change the name of the company from Zomato to Eternal.

Apparently, the suggestion did not find acceptance. The company in a filing dated 29 August 2022 has this to say: "Eternal remains an internal identity – it is only a notion to bind all our different businesses and leaders under a common name and a mission, and there is no plan whatsoever to rebrand the Zomato app to Eternal." After all, what's in a name? ◆

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COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

Road to recovery

Following the uptrend in sales figures of passenger vehicles, next in line is the commercial vehicles (CVs) segment. To continue the momentum, Tata Motors, introduced a range of pickups – Yodha 2.0, Intra V20 bi-fuel and Intra V50. These tough pickups come with bold new designs, offer the highest load-carrying capacity and are equipped with the latest tech features for a safe and comfortable drive.

The pandemic restricted cargo movement considerably and now, demand for light commercial vehicles (LCVs) is picking up. The FMCG, e-commerce and logistics sectors growing rapidly will further boost demand for LCVs. LCVs are considered to be the largest segment in the automotive industry. The other players in this segment include Tata, Mahindra, Ashok Leyland, Eicher, Piaggio and Maruti Suzuki. Mahindra's Furio, Supro, Jeeto and Bolero pickup, Ashok Leyland's Bada Dost and Maruti Suzuki's Super Carry are a few other products.

Currently, freight transport in India is mainly dominated by road transport. Pickup vehicles are highly suitable for bulk transportation. India has significant room for future growth in the segment. This demand is due to rapid urbanisation, booming e-commerce, and increasing construction and infrastructure activities. Pickups with different tonnage offerings play a significant role in the rapid development of the country.

Talking about the new range of pickups, Girish Wagh, Executive Director, Tata Motors, said: "Our small commercial vehicles are renowned for providing livelihoods to millions of customers and enabling their success. As their ambition for business growth and a better life turns bolder, they will discover an ideal match in our new range of pickups as these have been specially co-developed to address their evolving aspirations."

To connect with customers at all times and with its wide dealer network across India, Tata Motors offer the Sampoorna Seva 2.0 which includes Tata Zippy, a repair time assurance programme with problem resolution within 48 hours. Alert, is a roadside assistance programme with assured problem resolution within 24 hours for vehicles under warranty. Another offer, Guru, provides 50,000+ trained technicians to provide roadside and workshop assistance for repairs and services across the country. Bandhu is a unique app that brings all stakeholders – mechanics, drivers and fleet owners – onto a single platform for an easy connect to the Tata Gurus when needed.

Consistent demand Out of the 32,979 CVs sold in the domestic market in September 2022, the SCV and pickups contribute 15,565 units to Tata Motors' sales figures. "The commercial vehicles industry witnessed a consistent demand in Q2FY23. Tata Motors' CV business registered a 20 per cent growth in domestic sales over Q2FY22, recording sales of 93,675 units during the quarter. This growth was led by stronger sales of MHCVs and a robust recovery in passenger carriers' demand. Improving fleet utilisation, pick-up in road construction projects and increase in cement consumption catalysed the demand recovery for MHCVs. Going forward, while we expect strong sales in the festive season, we will maintain a close watch on the evolving geopolitical, inflation and interest rate risks on both the supply and demand," explains Wagh, discussing sales performance and market trends.

According to Veejay Nakra, President, Automotive Division, Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd: "September was a very exciting month with a strong start to the festive season. We continue to see strong demand and performance across our portfolio of products, from SUVs, LCVs less than 3.5 tonnes and our last mile mobility brands. We are delighted that our SUVs have registered the highest ever sales of 34,262 vehicles as well as the highest ever overall volumes of 64,486 vehicles for the month of September." Ashok Leyland registered 6,024 LCVs in September 2022 as against 4,258 units in September 2021, with a jump of 41 per cent. With just one product, Maruti Suzuki's Super Carry performs well and consistently delivers good numbers. It sold 2,505 units in September 2022.

As per Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA) figures, Tata Motors leads the commercial vehicle OEM segment with a 40.17 per cent market share followed by Mahindra & Mahindra and Ashok Leyland with 24.54 per cent and 15.84 per cent market share respectively. FADA's vehicle retail data shows that the industry's LCVs segment sales figures were 43,076 units in September 2022 as against 37,536 units last month, a 14.76 per cent increase compared with the previous year. FADA continues to remain optimistic for the month of October due to the ongoing festive season.

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CONFERENCES

Power of skill

The Rubber, Chemical & Petrochemical Skill Development Council (RCPSDC), the sector skill council for all three sectors, had organised the first exclusive Skill Meet on the plastics sector in the financial capital Mumbai, the hub of plastic industries in the country. It was organised in collaboration with the All India Plastic Manufacturers Association (AIPMA), its centre of excellence AMTEC and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). At the Skill meet, they drew a roadmap for equipping the plastic industry with skilled manpower. The plastic industry also looked to triple in size in 6-7 years generating huge demand for the workforce.

The industry decided to go for import substitution and increase exports to enhance the size of the industry and generate employment. Currently, imports of plastic goods in the country is about ₹45,000 crore per annum, leading to huge scope for import substitution and generating employment for 5 million people in the next 6-7 years. "The plastic industry has also set the target a turnover of ₹10 lakh crore in the next 6-7 years", says Piyush Goyal, minister for commerce & industry.

The Skill Meet has been designed and developed by RCPSDC as a platform for bringing a large cross-section of industries into the fold of the skilling ecosystem. A large section of industries, especially MSMEs, are still not fully conversant with the opportunities available for skilling up manpower and the benefits that come from a skilled workforce. The objective of Skill Meet was to bring together key industry leaders of the plastic sector on one platform. The industries are planning to re-skill and up-skill their workforce and various government skilling initiatives.

Planning for future The key officials -- Vinod Patkotwar, chairman, RCPSDC; Kishore P. Sampat, president, AIPMA; Arvind Mehta, chairman, AIPMA's AMTEC; and Sobins Kuriakose, national head, state operations, NSDC; were present at the meet to discuss a variety of issues relating to the industry and the action plans for the future.

AIPMA's Sampat pointed to the urgent need to plug skill gaps in the available manpower. Speaking on the occasion, Patkotwar of RCPSDC informed that National Occupational Standards (NOS) are being formed for the plastic sector, so as to train youth in industry-ready curriculum. There was scope to train youth in rural India and those belonging to economically weaker sections through RCPSDC's training partners and generate skilled manpower, he added.

Plastic industry has suffered from perception issues, feels Jayesh Rambhia, past president, AIPMA. Students don't wish to join the industry in the belief that it might be banned. In reality, only 2-3 per cent of plastic items under single-used plastic have been banned. These communication gaps need to be plugged too to attract talented youth in the fold of the industry.

A key event highlight was a high-level panel discussion on 'Skill development requirement around waste management solution and techniques'. Hiten Bheda, chairman, environment committee, AIPMA, talked about segregation and disposal of plastic waste as a national priority. He asked for improving the quality of life of the rag pickers through skill training.

Maharashtra is a major centre for plastic & rubber industries, providing employment to many. Several industries in the state have shown keen interest in hiring skilled manpower.

RCPSDC has launched a project 'Utthaan: uplifting lives of plastic waste management workforce'. For a sector like plastic, waste management is perhaps a big priority and a lot of people are involved in rag-picking, segregation, treatment, recycling and remanufacturing process. Utthaan is a project at the confluence of improvement of skills and livelihoods of the most neglected workforce of the country. The project also aims to skill workers in plastic waste segregation, management, processing and recycling and other job roles, and also to help them perform their jobs more effectively and enhance their productivity. ◆

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Rule by interim heads

ONGC fails to get full-time CMD

ONGC: is the government not finding a candidate with the right political blessings?

The Modi government's inordinate delay in appointing a regular Chairman-cum-Managing Director in ONGC, considered a crown jewel among Indian public sector undertakings and one of the 10 *Maharatna* companies, has left energy sector experts and investor bewildered. For the past 18 months, ONGC has remained headless. And for the third time in succession, after Shashi Shankar retired, the oil and gas giant has again got an interim CMD.

This, among other things, has taken its toll on investor wealth. In 1996, when the company was listed, the share price was ₹19. Now the scrip is barely trading at ₹130. The highest share price of ONGC was ₹314. The company produces 70 per cent of crude oil in India and around 84 per cent of natural gas.

This has raised questions on the government's intent on the functioning of ONGC and also whether there are no suitable candidates within and even outside the organisation to take up the top job. There is also a view that if the government does not want ONGC to function as a public sector undertaking, then it should bite the bullet and privatise it.

In fact, this is what the Congress has been alleging. Last month, Jairam Ramesh, Rajya Sabha MP and party spokesman tweeted, "Just a few years ago ONGC was a crown jewel. Then came Mr. Modi. He forced ONGC to absorb GSPC, a scam-ridden company castigated by the CAG. ONGC is without a regular CMD since April '21. It's being deliberately destroyed so that one of the 'Humare Do' takes it over. Atrocious!"

According to RS Sharma, former Chairman and Managing Director, ONGC, "This reflects the mindset of the government about managing the affairs of a public sector undertaking... Many other PSUs are also in similar situation. Besides value loss for the investors, such attitude has a big demoralising effect on the workforce of the enterprise."

No succession plan for CMDs

CMD and Directors are Board level positions, which are presidential appointments done through the Public Enterprises Selection Board process. Though internally, ONGC has been making a lot of staffing changes and today it has a structured approach to succession planning, the company doesn't have a proper succession plan when it comes to CMDs.

There is lower-level succession planning which works through a programme which routes eligible employee nominations for senior management roles. This is via three sources. The first is a system recommendation programme which uses HIPO (identified pool of high potential executives) to nominate employees matching the senior role profile based on level, discipline, experience, performance score, ADC (Assessment Development Centre) score and sectors/locations covered. The second source is nomination of successor for the position by the identified/nominated position holder, which is based on experience and interactions. The third is self-application by an executive who considers himself/herself eligible for the vacant position.

The Talent Review Panel (TRP), consisting of the Administrative Director, Functional Director and Director (HR), after evaluating the applications, selects the candidates drawn from various sources.TRP submits its recommendation to the Executive Committee for final selection of the successor.

ONGC has been working towards creating a strong cadre base through a programme called DEEKSHA, to identify and monitor critical talent pool within the organisation. Apart from that, ONGC has a mechanism of identifying high potential employees through ADCs, which is utilised for Chief General Manager (E7) to ED (E9) promotions, as well as flagship leadership development programmes for senior level executives.

To develop a robust leadership pipeline, ONGC has chalked programmes such as the Leadership Development Programme (for E7 level executives) and Advanced Management Programme (for E6 level executives) at the IIMs, and Young Leaders Programme (for E4-E5 level executives).

Besides this, ONGC has periodically reviewed its organisational structure to relook all the activity/positions (employee roles) in each of the business verticals and their present and future requirement, in consultation with business heads of each strategic unit.

So what has gone wrong when it comes to CMDs? The message that has gone down the line is that of insecurity and uncertainty. Possibly, the government is not finding a candidate with the right political blessings.

However, the government does not seem to be bothered by the fact that not having a regular CMD can create uncertainty within the organisation and affect the morale. The lack of continuity proves a deterrent for the interim head to take forward the vision of the organisation. Surely, feel old timers, a regular head has a tenure and better focus on long-term stability of the organisation. ◆

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Plastic ban fiasco

Banned items still in circulation

Single-use plastic ban: doomed to fail?

India is the fifth highest generator of plastic waste in the world. That is why it made a lot of sense when Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to the people to rid India of single-use plastic in his Independence Day speech in 2019. India notified the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules in August 2021, and the ban came into effect a year later. The government banned single-use plastic items that have low utility but are frequently littered around. The aim of the ban was to curb plastic pollution, since single-use plastic harms terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. However, three months since the ban came into effect, little has moved on the ground.

Banned plastic items are still in circulation in market places, eateries and other public places. These products are available wholesale as usual. Neither has there been any punitive action nor any advisory to stop using these products. Experts say the ban was doomed for failure as it covered too little of what makes up total plastic waste. The share of plastic used for these banned single-use plastic products is less than 2-3 per cent of the total plastic waste generated in India.

From 1 July, India banned the following single-use plastic items: ear buds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, polystyrene (thermocol) for decoration, plastic plates, cups, glasses, cutlery such as forks, spoons, knives; straws, trays, wrapping or packing film around sweet boxes, invitation cards, cigarette packets, plastic or PVC banners less than 100 micron, and stirrers.

It also turned out that the ban was skewed against the smallest segment of the plastic industry, which is the one that needs the maximum hand-holding in order to transition away from single-use plastic. Experts say India needs to make the big players accountable for their share of plastic pollution. A ban is already in place on carry bags having thickness less than 75 microns and, from 31 December, 2022, bags up to 120 microns will also be banned. Also, there is a complete ban on plastic sachets used for storing, packing or selling gutka, tobacco and pan masala.

In 2020-21, nearly 3.5 million tonnes of plastic waste were generated all over India, as per details provided by 35 states and Union Territories. Plastic goods manufacturers are expected to recycle around 800,000 tonnes per annum as part of their Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) but the recycling being done is a fraction of this figure.

The fact that the ban as it stands impacts the most vulnerable segments of the plastic industry and causes economic damage and job losses is also being overlooked. It also directly impacts consumers, as Kotak India found in its July report.

Costly alternatives

Among banned items, with a move from plastic to paper, the cost of straws could increase for low value packs of juices and other beverages, from ₹0.25-0.30 to ₹1-1.25 per unit, as per industry estimates in the Kotak India report. These low-value packs make up for more than 30 per cent of overall volumes, and switching to alternatives could increase packaging costs, especially in the case of sachets. "Thus, any broad-based ban in the medium term could impact volumes as well as profitability of the sector," the report warns.

Larger plastic goods manufacturers are expected to diversify their operations to produce sustainable alternatives. However, the hefty price of these alternatives like disposable straws, for instance, at an average of ₹1 to ₹5 disposable straw [in comparison to plastic straws] deters buyers.

Hiten Bheda, ex-President, All India Plastic Manufacturers Association (AIPMA), fears that small manufacturers will get wiped out thanks to the ban. "The lower segment of this industry primarily offering monolayer packaging which is easier to recycle are affected the most, whereas multi-layered plastics used by large brands which are difficult to recycle, and retrieve from the environment, continue to grow," says Bheda. "The latter are the main contributors to visible pollution and leave a deeper carbon footprint. How is it fair that the policy based on the "Polluter Pays" principle has failed to recognise this?"

Behda says small manufacturing units at the bottom of the pyramid have the largest employment generation potential. But it is these very units that are being penalised. ◆

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The saga of the CDS

Citizens worry that even critical decisions involving our armed forces are today guided by political considerations

Ten months after the death of India's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Bipin Rawat, in a helicopter crash within two years of assuming his exalted posting, the government appointed three-star Lt. Gen. Anil Chauhan as the second CDS, on 28 September.

And thereby stirs a controversy. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government is no stranger to discord, with decision-making overtly driven by political interests.

Gen. Rawat had been appointed Chief of the Army Staff (CoAS) in 2016 by superseding two officers senior to him, on the contention that merit was considered over seniority. But in what eventually appeared to have been a calculated move, his selection was announced on 31 December 2019 following the retirement on 30 September of Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa, who was then the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). By his sheer seniority among the three service chiefs, Dhanoa would in normal course have become India's first CDS, but it was his retirement that paved the way for Gen. Rawat to succeed him as the COSC, and ultimately step up as CDS.

In Gen. Chauhan's case, questions were raised as to why the government waited so long following Gen. Rawat's untimely death to appoint his successor, especially when much of the first CDS's task was timebound. When Gen. Rawat was appointed CDS, he was tasked to enable the Indian armed forces to implement coordinated defence doctrines and procedures, apart from implementing the five-year Defence Capital Acquisition Plan and the two-year roll-on Annual Acquisition Plan as a follow up to the Integrated Capability Development Plan. The CDS's sensitive assignment besides entails supervision of all the tri-Services organisations and agencies, including those related to Cyber and Space, serving as the government's single point of military advice, and functioning as the Military Adviser to

India's new CDS: Lt. Gen. Anil Chauhan

the Nuclear Command Authority. His mandate is to bring about jointness in operation, logistics, transport, training, support services, communications, repairs and maintenance of the three Services, within three years of assuming office, apart from implementing the ambitious theaterisation plan that seeks to ensure tri-services synergy and prepare the military for future security challenges.

Out-of-turn appointments Gen. Rawat's appointment had also established a convention whereby the CDS would be chairman COSC and made permanent in that role, making him the "first among equals" holding the four-star rank alongside salary and perquisites on par with a service chief. Following Gen. Rawat's death on 8 December 2021, then army chief, Gen. M.M. Naravane, was appointed chairman COSC on 15 December, but not CDS. After his retirement on 30 April this year, Air Chief Marshal Vivek Ram Chaudhari was expected to be made chairman COSC, and possibly CDS, but neither of the appointments happened. Chairman COSC serves as the principal adviser to the Prime Minister and Defence Minister, but it was decided from 2020 that this role would be concurrently performed by the CDS, who would also be Secretary to the Department of Military Affairs.

To accommodate Lt. Gen. Chauhan, the government besides introduced an amendment on 6 June, through a new sub-rule (4) (a) under Army (Amendment) Rules, 2022, that stated, "The Central Government may, if considered necessary, in public interest, so to do, appoint as Chief of Defence Staff, an officer who is serving as Lieutenant General or General or an officer who has retired in the rank of Lieutenant General or General, but has not attained the age of sixty-two years on the date of his appointment."

It is not that Gen. Rawat or Gen. Chauhan have been unqualified for the post of CDS, but out-of-turn appointments raise questions about the promotional procedures of our armed forces. With promotions in all armed forces, including India's, stringently hinging on individual performance and ability, the hierarchy gets structured entirely by merit plus seniority. It also raises the question of an officer who has not headed his service, now heading all three services.

Though the government has the prerogative in making out-of-turn appointments, it has traditionally been guided by the principle of seniority. Discounting this principle has wide implications, as it unsettles and demoralises the rank and file, and politicises the armed forces by motivating those officers in line to divert their energies to building up the right political nexuses.

After retiring from service as Eastern Army Commander on 31 May last year, 61-year-old Gen. Chauhan served as the military adviser to the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) headed by National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval. A question arises whether there was conflict of interest in Gen. Chauhan, as military adviser, possibly having a say in the selection of the second CDS and perhaps in the changing of the Army Rules.

It hence remains to be seen whether the CDS is able to execute his charter so deftly delineated on paper, or he will become just another layer in the defence apparatus, functioning from the shadows of the political leadership.◆

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Not many options left

Russia's plan to annex parts of Ukraine makes India's position more untenable

BRIJ KHINDARIA

President Vladimir Putin's unilateral annexation of four Ukrainian regions through military conquest has put Prime Minister Narendra Modi in an almost untenable diplomatic position, if he continues to maintain India's uncomfortable neutrality in Russia's war with Ukraine. A main reason is that US President Joe Biden will no longer be able to avoid imposing sanctions on Indian companies doing business with Russia since India continues to import Russian oil, fertiliser, weapons and other materials and seeks to expand exports to Russia to pay for them. Using rouble or rupee accounts was a work-around to skirt American sanctions on Russia's use of the dollar and euro in international transactions. The US Treasury tolerated this manipulation because of Biden's keen desire to keep India close as Washington gears up to confront China.

But Moscow's annexation of nearly 20 per cent of Ukrainian territory has changed the legal situation and violates Delhi's repeated assertions that international frontiers should be sacrosanct and military conquest cannot be seen as legitimate under international law. Modi told Putin recently that the current era in history is not one of wars, so negotiated solutions should be found quickly. Instead, Putin's annexation has made the military situation more intractable.

The US and its European allies have, of course, decried the annexation and declared that they will never accept it. They will also announce new financial, trade and economic punishments for Moscow. Those punishments will be de-fanged, if India continues business as usual with Russia. So, Washington and Brussels may be forced to inflict penalties by designating specific Indian companies for trading with Moscow -- a step against which Delhi will not be able to offer protection.

India should not take the annexation of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions lightly. It is not a symbolic step that condemnation by almost the entire world can overturn. The West has been describing it as an act of desperation by Putin, as Ukrainian forces push back and acquire territory lost earlier to the Russian invasion. This is a misleading narrative. From the start, Putin said he wanted at least those four regions because of long-standing affiliation to Russian culture. He has done that now and can claim to the Russian public that his central war aims have been achieved.

Other war aims were to demilitarise Ukraine and install a Moscow-friendly government in Kyiv. Those may never be achieved, but the annexation does give him a chance to stop his invasion, if Ukraine and the US are willing to negotiate a ceasefire and subsequently a longer term settlement. To deter an American military intervention, he has again threatened first use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine because he thinks that Biden will not retaliate with a nuclear strike on mainland Russia.

In effect, Washington and Brussels do not have many options left. They have reached the limit of sanctions which already cover all of Russia's foreign reserves and foreign trade. The US has also already designated for penalties almost everyone who is significant in Russia, including elite top officials, generals, major companies and even Putin's children and presumed woman friend. There is still room to provide more military aid to Ukraine, but it has already received nearly $30 billion so far this year and US budgets of over $60 billion have been approved. America's purse has limits ruled by politics.

The West seems to be living in a wishful world in which Putin is an evil villain and his military is decrepit, incapable even of conscripting soldiers

The West seems to be living in a wishful world in which Putin is an evil villain and his military is decrepit, incapable even of conscripting soldiers. They apparently think that Putin could be removed from power if they continue their support long enough for Ukraine's plucky military. Here, Delhi has correctly understood that the Russian people and their government are far too resilient to collapse in defeat at the hands of Ukrainians, who cannot stand for a week without US help.

It is true that legality is on the side of the West and India. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres confirmed this is the toughest statement he has ever made on any subject. "The UN Charter is clear. Any annexation of a State's territory by another State resulting from the threat or use of force is a violation of the Principles of the UN Charter and international law," he said. "It is a dangerous escalation. It has no place in the modern world. It must not be accepted." This is also Modi's view but Putin is in no mood to listen to legal niceties. ◆

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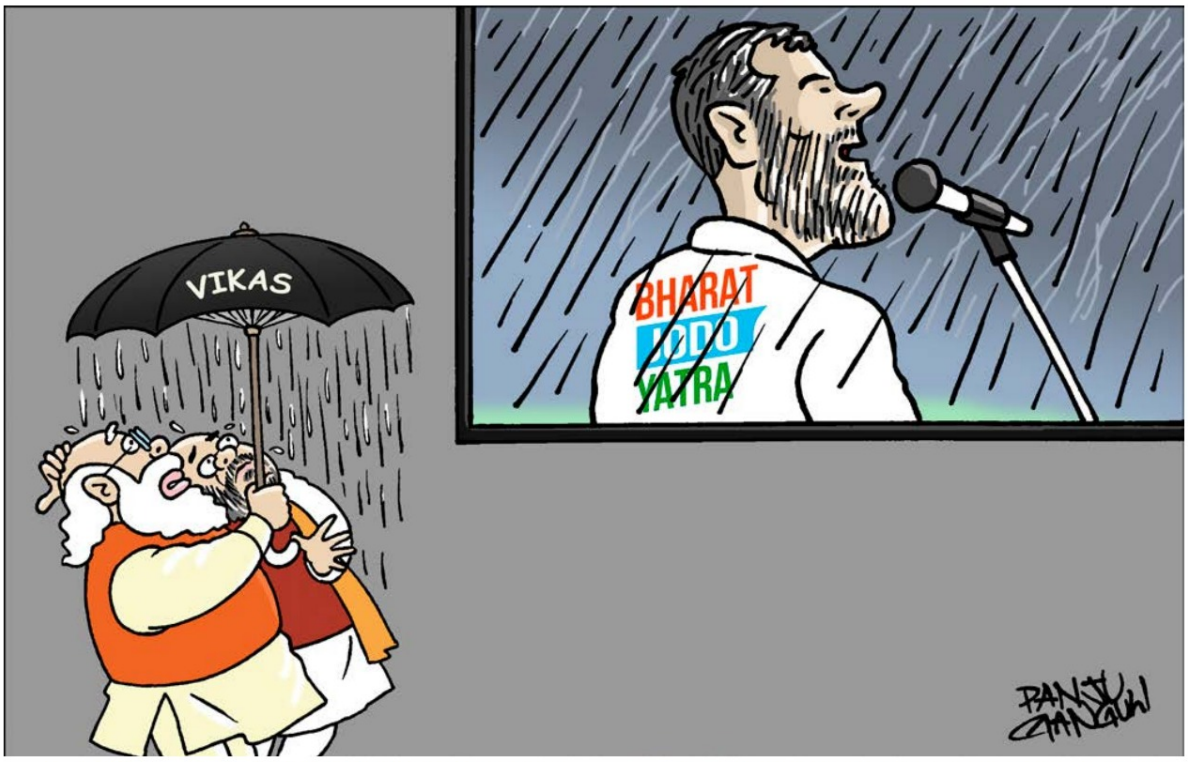

WE BELIEVE THERE IS IMMENSE SCOPE TO DELIVER EVIDENCE-BASED INTEGRATED MEDICINE, COMBINING ALLOPATHIC AND TRADITIONAL MODELS, TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES AND QUALITY OF LIFE OF OUR PATIENTS. THIS WILL BE A TRANSITIONAL JOURNEY

PRATAP C REDDY
Chairman
Apollo Hospital Enterprise

MY JOURNEY FROM A SMALL VILLAGE IN BIHAR TO LONDON STOCK EXCHANGE HAS BEEN ONE FILLED WITH MANY LEARNINGS, LOTS OF HARD WORK AND SELF-BELIEF. MY ADVICE TO THE STUDENTS WAS SIMPLE - BE FEARLESS, HUMBLE AND FLEXIBLE

ANIL AGARWAL
Chairman, Vedanta

Customer in, Stock out

Creating demand is not the only function of brand marketing, fulfilling demand through proper stocking and supply, is also a major part of marketing

JAGDEEP KAPOOR

For the last few years, during Covid, every brand marketeer was crying that customers are not coming in. Now, customers are coming in, with full revenge, with full vengeance, which full *Khunnas* (Indian term), but almost 25 to 30 per cent are going away, empty-handed, because their demand is not being fulfilled, because there are stockouts.

This consumption season, is full of boom. Gone is the doom and gloom. But, if you want your sales to zoom, you need to avoid stockouts.

Whether it be garments, or whether it be electronics, whether it be FMCG, or whether it be cars, whether it be jewellery, whether it be home appliances, whether it be mobile phones, or whether it be household fixtures and fittings, all over India, there seems to be a gap between demand and supply. The customers are coming in, but they are facing stockouts.

This means that either there was an underestimation of demand or there is an over explosion of customer shopping or production planning went for a toss, but all this would definitely lead to sales loss.

Any brand marketing initiative requires preplanning, requires an estimation of the mood of the customers and hence an estimation of the sales forecast. It also requires regular supplies and a very strong logistics network. If the front-end has to be successful, the backend has to be ready and prepared.

Cutting inventory, cutting costs, layoffs, and many such things are done by companies with full effort. These are the negative things. But positive things like getting ready for booming sales, a flood of walk-ins many a time gets missed out by brand marketers.

Customers are not going to wait. They would either go to another store or worse, they would switch to another brand.

The rate at which advertising spends have grown is not the same rate at which products and services in terms of their supply, has grown. This leads to a vacuum and obviously leads to stockouts. Good brands cannot afford stockouts.

It is not enough to generate demand, if you do not have the wherewithal to fulfil that demand.

The implications are dire. Apart from loss of sales, there is loss of face, loss of Brand sales, loss of reputation, loss of trust, loss of profit of the channel, and most importantly loss of brand equity. While generating demand is an important thing to do, fulfilling that demand is equally important and must be paid attention to, by brand marketers.

This aspect of brand marketing maybe considered boring by many people, but fulfilment of demand is an extremely important and significant function of marketing, because only when the customer is able to purchase, procure, acquire the brand, would it lead to consumption and thereafter , if satisfaction, then repeat purchases.

Many a time, we hear phrases like, 'we were surprised by the sudden increase in demand;' 'we did not expect such a huge consumers rush' and so on and so forth. Why were you surprised? If you have not eaten food for a few days, would you not jump and devour, when the first meal comes in your presence? For over two years customers were deprived of shopping, buying and consuming, the way they wished. During this festive season is the opportunity when consumers are wanting to indulge to their hearts content and hence why would brand marketers be surprised? I think

instead of being surprised it would be better if they were prepared.

Every brand marketeer wants the brand awareness to go up, the brand trials to go up, the brand repeats to go up, their brand sales to go up, the brand market share to go up and the brand profit to go up. But only by spending advertising money and getting customers in, is half the job. Not having a stockout is the rest of the job. If the customer comes in with full hope and goes out empty-handed, brand marketing has not done its complete job. It could be a complete stockout, it could be a stockout of some colours, some sizes, some variants, some SKUs, any kind of stockout is a serious stock out. This is because it ends the customer's hopes and makes them dissatisfied.

So the next time you plan all the possible campaigns, to get customers in, please make sure to avoid a stock out.

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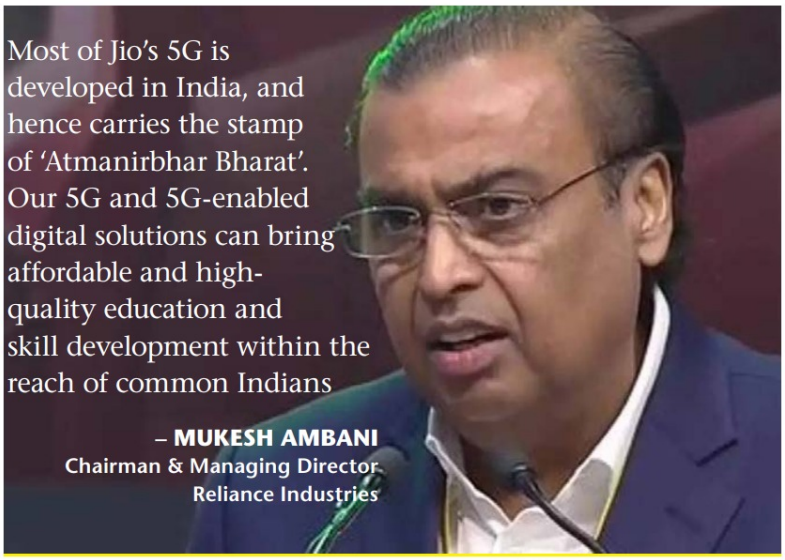
India rings in 5G

Jio's standalone tech may sharpen its market edge



Finally, it's here. On 1 October, after several policy snafus, infrastructural handicaps and a delayed dry run, 5G mobile telecom services were launched in eight cities of India. The importance that India accords to the development was evident in Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating the services to coincide with the sixth edition of the India Mobile Congress, the premier industry event. Industry leaders Mukesh Ambani of Reliance and his son Akash, Sunil Bharti Mittal of Bharti Airtel and Kumar Mangalam Birla of Vodafone Idea were present at the launch event in New Delhi. In the next few months and years, 5G services will progressively cover the rest of the country.

As 5G gains traction, Indian telecom giants are expected to invest billions of dollars in the development of advanced infrastructure. According to a report from the London-based Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA), the investment could touch $19.5 billion by 2025.

Such a humongous investment, says K Rajaraman, telecom secretary, will spawn thousands of fresh job opportunities in the market, requiring suitable skilling of manpower in new technologies like Augmented Reality, New Reality and Internet of Things. Even the software upgrade (from 4G to 5G) will be a resource and manpower-intensive exercise. For instance, new apps will have to be developed.

On the whole, 5G could benefit the Indian economy by more than 0.6 per cent of the GDP forecast for the year 2040. This would reflect the large number of 5G uses that will be implemented in the main sectors of the economy. The benefits are expected to be released in new applications in the manufacturing sector as well as the retail, ICT and agricultural sectors, education, health, transport, traffic management, smart cities, smart homes, and multiple applications of IoT (Internet of Things). "The launch of 5G services will enable the country to become a $5 trillion economy in the next few years, with a trillion-dollar contribution by the digital economy," says Kumar Mangalam Birla.

User experience

For the ordinary user, a lot is expected in terms of enhanced experience. Experts believe that 5G technology will 'revolutionise' telecom through improved user experience in terms of data download rates (expected to be 10 times that of 4G), up to three times greater spectrum efficiency, and ultra-low latency (network delay). Users will not be required to switch SIM cards when the network is available for them. Once 5G is fully operational, phone junkies can download a full-length movie in a matter of seconds on a 5G phone.

Ericsson, the Swedish telecom company, has released a study: 'Promise of 5G' which found that consumer 5G readiness is already high in India. Also, the intent to upgrade to 5G is two times greater among urban Indian smartphone users than it is in markets like the United States and the United Kingdom, where 5G networks have already rolled out.

According to the study, India witnessed a three-fold increase in the number of smartphone users who own a 5G handset over the past two years. More than 100 million users with 5G-ready smartphones want to upgrade to a 5G subscription in 2023 and more than half of them are open to upgrading to a higher tier data plan in the next 12 months.

This means more business for our service providers. "The transition to 5G provides an opportunity to service providers to strengthen their position in the Indian market. More innovative experiences need to be bundled to meet the expectations of early adopters to successfully monetise 5G," says Jasmeet Sethi, head of Ericsson ConsumerLab.

A leading, emerging tech

There is emerging evidence to justify this statement. A study by Ernst & Young has found that as an emerging technology, 5G is already showing the potential of attracting higher investments by enterprises than even AI (artificial intelligence), blockchain and quantum computing. The EY survey found that almost three-fourths (70 per cent) of enterprises in India are willing to make the highest investments in 5G in the next three years compared to other emerging technologies.

Companies in various sectors other than telecommunication enterprises want to tap into the benefits as well. Out of a total of 56 enterprises factored in for the EY survey, 18 per cent have

Standalone v/s non-standalone

✓ The two most common configurations for 5G networks are standalone and non-standalone. The standalone (SA) version of the technology, dubbed 'real 5G' by some over-exuberant marketers, comes with new core network technology, promising benefits its older, non-standalone (NSA) sibling cannot support.

✓ However, the new variant remains conspicuous by its absence in many countries as in the non-standalone architecture, operators can maximise the utilisation of their existing network infrastructure with relatively lower investment.

✓ In the standalone option, which Jio has chosen for India, the 5G network operates using specialised equipment and coexists with the present 4G network. Jio has committed to investing ₹2 lakh crore in its standalone 5G network.

✓ The non-standalone networks, being deployed by Bharti Airtel and Vodafone India, are substantially less expensive and take considerably less time to provide services than standalone networks since they are built on existing infrastructure.

✓ Most smartphones today can connect to non-standalone 5G networks, which are basically 5G airwaves broadcast over 4G networks, and will require software upgrades from their manufacturers to connect to standalone networks.

✓ State-owned telecom operator Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) could launch 5G services on its network by August next year as the government is keen to have four competitors in the market – three private players and a public sector one. BSNL's 5G will be based on non-standalone architecture.◆

already started investing in 5G technology. Twenty per cent of all enterprises surveyed plan to invest in the emerging technology in the next year. Half of the enterprises plan to invest in 5G in the next 2-3 years. A similar number of enterprises are exploring the relationship of 5G with other emerging technologies, including AI and cloud computing. Among the beneficial vectors of the 5G technology, AR/VR, live-streaming, and cloud gaming emerged as the top 5G uses.

Societal benefits

As for the Modi government, it is eyeing the new economic opportunities and societal benefits that 5G can unleash, given its potential for being a transformational force for Indian society. The government believes that, apart from enhanced mobile broadband, Industry 4.0 will drive the adoption of 5G. Industry 4.0 refers to the trend of automation and digitalisation of manufacturing processes by leveraging information and communication technologies. An exultant Ministry of Communications, headed by ex-bureaucrat Ashwini Vaishnaw, recently even stuck its neck out with the calculation that the cumulative economic impact of 5G on India could reach $450 billion by 2035.

Prashant Singhal, Emerging Markets Technology, Media & Entertainment, and Telecom Leader, EY, says: "5G in India will transform the socioeconomic fabric as well as society at large. By enabling high-speed broadband connectivity for people, it will bridge the digital divide and promote newer avenues of economic growth. The transition to 5G will unlock new use cases and revenue streams through innovative business models."

In August this year, the country's biggest ever spectrum auction ended, with bids upwards of ₹1.5 lakh crore coming in after seven days of bidding spread over 40 rounds, belying initial expectations that the auction process would be wrapped up in under three days. A total of 51.2GHz of spectrum was sold, of the total 72GHz that was up for grabs – close to 71 per cent. At the time, Vaishnaw said the total spectrum sold was "good enough" for covering all circles in the country, estimating there would be "good coverage" of 5G in the next 2-3 years.

Jio's edge

Since then, telecom operators have revealed how they plan to roll out 5G services on their networks. Reliance Jio, which was the top spender at this year's 5G spectrum auctions, bidding an amount of more than ₹88,000 crore, said that it will roll out high-speed mobile internet services on its 5G network by Diwali this year in metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata. Mukesh Ambani, Chairman and Managing Director, Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL), says that by December 2023, the company will deliver Jio 5G "to every town, every *taluka*, and every *tehsil* of our country".

Bharti Airtel, the second highest spender in the auction, launched 5G telecom services in eight cities, including four metros, on the day of the inaugural function. Though users of Apple's iPhone and the large device ecosystem of Samsung were not able to access the high-speed services on the opening day as the smartphone companies need to carry out testing and a software upgrade, the telco is hopeful of covering the entire country by March 2024.

The third-highest bidder in the auctions, Vodafone Idea (Vi) is still to officially announce its 5G launch plans. The company is said to be leveraging the global experience of its promoter, the UK-based Vodafone Group, which has proven expertise in deploying 5G in many markets.

The fourth participant in the spectrum race, Adani Data Networks, a subsidiary of the Adani Group, has said that it will not offer consumer-led 5G services for now, and only focus on enterprise use cases. In the spectrum auction, it acquired spectrum only in the 26GHz band which is best suited for business-level use cases of 5G.

Some experts believe that the advantages of standalone 5G architecture, as well as the largest and best mix of spectrum and carrier aggregation technology, mean that Jio 5G will be able to offer an unparalleled combination of coverage, capacity, quality and affordability. With standalone 5G, experts believe Jio can deliver new and powerful services like low latency, massive machine-to-machine communication, 5G voice, edge computing and network slicing, and the metaverse (*see box*).

Mahesh Uppal, director, ComFirst India, a company that specialises in the telecom regulatory space, recalls: "Jio's entry and growth also helped in making transformational changes not only to the telecom sector, but to the gig economy as well. But for its services, we wouldn't have seen this kind of a shake-up – fall in tariffs, expansion of services and greater access of e-commerce, among others – in the country."

But Uppal also believes that it will be wrong to underestimate Bharti Airtel (which is building on its 4G infra to launch 5G) and its contribution to the telecom sector. To match Jio's strategy of purchasing large quantities of low-band spectrum, Airtel will use all the tricks in the trade to catch up by using cheaper non-standalone tech.

Another intense race for customers is in the offing. While Airtel is offering 5G services at 4G rates now, Jio has promised to be 'affordable'. Tariff hikes are inevitable only when 5G gains popularity.

Late start

In India, 5G didn't happen out of the blue. The process wasn't seamless. India has been a late starter. (China, for instance, rolled out 5G for commercial use across 50 cities in 2019.) In fact, the government began tinkering with the idea only in 2017 when it set up a high-level forum for 5G, headed by secretary, DoT. The objective: to position India as a globally synchronised participant in the design, development and manufacturing of 5G-based technology, products and applications. The forum was to finalise the Report on 5G Vision, Mission and Goals by March 2018 but it came out with a roadmap only in 2020.

It took more than a year, till May 2021, for the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to give permission to Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) to conduct trials for the use and applications of 5G technology in India. DoT had allocated the 5G trial spectrum

Keeping China out

Chinese telecom gear-makers were not permitted to participate in the 5G roll-out, thanks to pressure from the United States and the Doklam incident, the border standoff between Indian and Chinese troops near Sikkim.

Given that the Chinese accounted for 20 per cent of India's 4G gear market in India and Huawei's position as a global 5G leader, Chinese vendors could have cornered a sizable share of the gear market for the next-generation networks. But that was not to be. The gainers have been western telecom equipment majors Nokia, Ericsson, and Samsung.

The US has been lobbying with Western countries as well as its other friends to shut China out from 5G because of accusations of cyber-attacks and spying. China's biggest tech company, Huawei, has seen its 5G business prospects being blunted across the world. Being barred from India translates into a considerable loss for Chinese firms as Indian telcos have signed multi-year 5G equipment deals worth billions of dollars.

Keeping out Chinese vendors will have an impact on Indian 5G networks because Huawei equipment tends to be less expensive than western alternatives. However, the Modi government and telcos are willing to absorb this impact owing to security concerns.

Expecting a job boom

K. RAJARAMAN
Telecom Secretary

to Airtel in four Indian telecom circles including Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Delhi in the 3500MHz, 28GHz and 700MHz bands. Reliance Jio and Vodafone Idea (Vi) were allotted spectrums in the 700MHz, 3.5GHz and 26GHz bands. MTNL was the fourth applicant TSP.

With Huawei out of the picture because of its links with Communist warlords in Beijing (see box), the TSPs had to tie up with original equipment manufacturers and technology providers like Ericsson, Nokia, Samsung and C-DOT. Reliance Jio began conducting trials using its own indigenous technology. Airtel started testing its 5G network in Gurgaon's Cyber Hub area. The telco operated in the middle band spectrum of 3500Mhz with Ericson 5G network gear. The 5G network of Bharti Airtel was able to deliver a throughput of over 1 Gbps.

The duration of the trials was for a period of 6 months, which included a time period of 2 months for the procurement and setting up of the equipment. As of January 2021, 5G trials by TSPs have not been permitted by DoT. However, the full impact of the 5G experience was to be available to select customers more than a year later, when adequate spectrum was made available to TSPs and government approvals were received.

Tharoor panel

A lot of ground had to be covered. One just has to recall the findings and recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee on Information Technology, headed by Shashi Tharoor, on India's preparedness for 5G to get an idea of where we once were. In its 2021 report, the Committee noted that 118 operators across 59 countries (including the US, China, and the UK) had deployed 5G though, on a limited scale so far. But in India, the commercial rollout of 5G was yet to happen.

The Committee highlighted a number of gaps in preparatory work for the launch of 5G services in India, including inadequate availability of spectrum, high spectrum prices, poor development of use cases for 5G, low fiberisation (connectivity with optical fibre) and deficient backhaul capacity.

Hence a number of issues had to be tackled. First, the allocation of new bands of spectrum was crucial for the rollout of 5G. The auction of 5G spectrum was kept pending as wrangling broke out between the TSPs and

Huge economic impact

ASHWINI VAISHNAW
Union minister, Communications

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) over the reserve price. The Tharoor-led Committee noted the concerns of the telecom companies that the reserve price set by the TRAI for 5G spectrum (₹492 crore per MHz) was exorbitantly high. The Committee observed that, considering the financial stress in the sector and the fact that the 5G ecosystem was still to be developed, a high reserve price might adversely impact the ability of service providers to roll out the same.

Spectrum price wrangle

Also, based on the then availability of spectrum, approximately 50MHz spectrum per operator could be ensured. This was substantially lower than the global average of about 100MHz per operator. In case of 4G too, the average spectrum per operator in India is

More business opportunities

JASMEET SETHI
Head of Ericsson ConsumerLab

around one-fourth of the global average. The Committee observed there was an urgent need for an audit of all allocated spectrum for detecting underutilisation and subsequently rationalising the allocation of spectrum. Also, the licensing policy for spectrum for industry and captive uses needed to be streamlined. This would aid in attracting manufacturers to set up a base in India.

True, events like the Covid-19 outbreak forced the government to put off the spectrum auction. Also, the government's policy on spectrum was aimed at maximising revenue.

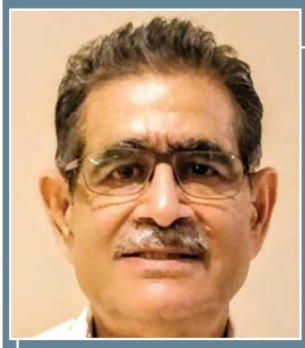
Another issue was telecom equipment. India is greatly import-dependent in this respect. This became clear later from the import orders worth billions of dollars that Indian telcos placed with western vendors like Nokia and Ericsson to get their networks going. The Tharoor panel has rightly noted that 5G as such presented an opportunity for the promotion of domestic manufacturing as well as indigenous technology due to the changed nature of network components as compared to 3G and 4G. There would also be a multifold increase in demand for telecom equipment to provide ubiquitous connectivity. An ecosystem should quickly be developed for complete manufacturing rather than just assembly, as manufacturing gives higher value addition.

The telecom industry was also caught in a raging controversy regarding the use of 5Gi, an indigenously developed sub-standard of 5G. A joint collaboration between IIT Madras, IIT Hyderabad, TSDSI, and the Centre of Excellence in Wireless Technology, 5Gi was aimed at improving rural coverage of 5G. Though approved by the UN-affiliated International Telecommunication Union, private telcos had raised concerns about its interoperability and the high cost of network deployment. While the makers of the standard say that it will require only minor changes in the network to deploy 5Gi, private telcos and some major vendors allege that 5Gi demands major hardware changes. The DoT, while releasing the spectrum for the 5G trial, had asked the service providers to conduct a trial of 5Gi. However, none of the telcos ran a test of this technology.

Infra not in place

Not all the infrastructure and policy prerequisites were in place when the official call was taken on the date of the commercial launch. Looking ahead, the road to a smooth rollout is fraught with challenges, the most important one being infrastructure deployment. 5G networks require robust infrastructure to manage the huge data traffic involved. According to industry assessments, at least 70 per cent of towers need to be fiberised from the current level of 33 per cent for a successful launch of 5G. In India, less than 7 per cent of households are connected through fibre.

The Tharoor Committee recommended that fibre should be accorded the status of essential national infrastructure. It observed that delays and costs associated with the right of way permissions need to be reduced to support fiberisation. Sharing of fibre infrastructure across government and private players should be promoted. A single window clearance of grant of permission for fibre laying should be considered. This was not followed up. It was only in August this year that the government amended the right of way rules, making it easier for telcos to set up towers and optic fibre on street furniture by paying minimal charges.



Don't underestimate Airtel

MAHESH UPPAL
Director, ComFirst India

Experts believe that 5G will make a strong case if the service is bundled with a 5G-rich app and not just better speed technology. Again, the government has only recently set up a 5G testbed to enable start-ups and industry players to test and validate their products locally and reduce dependence on foreign facilities. Finally, as the EY report surmised, Indian enterprises need to focus on cross-industry collaboration to unlock the full potential of the technology. While this is now happening, it is yet to bloom optimally.

That being said, don't expect a countrywide seamless availability of the network any time soon. 5G services will take time to mature and will initially be available only in a handful of cities. But once it gains traction, the sky is the limit. Of course, after 5G, there will be 6G. ◆

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Dawn of a new era

Reliance Jio's True 5G Service was formally launched on Dusshera day

The roll out of 5G services is expected to unlock infinite choices in the country

For those who have been hooked on to India Mobile Congress (IMC) since its inception in 2017, the recently concluded 6th edition simply meant addition of more grandeur to it. Billed as one of the leading telecom exhibitions in the world, reflecting the rapid-fire churnings in the world's second largest telecom market in volume terms, the show this time reassumed the physical format after a gap of three years and had many elements which probably made it bigger and better.

As usual the presence of the chiefs of three top telcos (who also share intense rivalry) on the stage turned out to be a great photo op for lensmen and those present during the inauguration. But the defining element this time was the initiation of the 5G era which warranted the presence of the prime minister himself who attended it for the first time (he had earlier attended the virtual summit in 2020). "The country's telecom industry is giving an amazing gift to 130 crore Indians in the form of 5G. 5G brings the dawn of a new era to the country, it is the beginning of immense opportunities for the country," Modi said.

For over 1.05 lakh visitors who attended the 4-day show, the event simply meant a peek into the future. People thronging different booths (239 stalls in total) were greeted with demo of diverse technological functionalities vis-à-vis metaverse, AR/VR, cloud gaming, blockchain and AI, big data analytics, etc. which are expected to become usual components of general life in the not-so-distant future. With 4G support, they have already arrived in a basic form but with 5G intervention, they will go to the next level.

The new age solutions vis-à-vis healthcare, transportation, agriculture, power, education and industry 4.0 benchmark were equally appealing adding to the wow factor of the show. The show as an observer said, "marks the beginning of act one on the grand 5G stage" and, therefore, has triggered speculations and curiosity in the minds of consumers across the value chain including business and industries pertaining to various dimensions of 5G rollout.

Quantum leap

The show at Pragati Maidan had an interesting element in terms of stall positioning. Close to the main entrance point, the expansive booths of Reliance Jio and Airtel – the two major players – were positioned facing each other. In fact, these were the two of the most crowded booths in the exhibition as visitors were keen to understand and even get firsthand experience of what the flagbearers of Indian telecom industry will be offering to them under their emerging portfolio of 5G services.

The fierce rivals have taken the lead in setting the 5G stage with the preliminary rollouts on a select basis. Airtel 5G service has been rolled out in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Siliguri, Nagpur and Varanasi. Reliance Jio's True 5G Service, announced at the IMC, became a reality on Dusshera day with the commencement of beta trial in four cities -- Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Varanasi. And now off the block, both of

them are promising fast rollout on a larger basis.

"5G network has expanded very fast in countries like Australia, the Philippines and Thailand. And I am expecting a similar trend in India where consumers have developed a big appetite for digital services. Plus all kinds of industries can leverage on it for making their systems and operations more efficient," says Nunzio Mirtillo, Head of Market Area South East Asia, Oceania and India, Ericsson. "5G service is now available in 70 countries, South Korea was the first to launch it in 2019 and penetration levels are 60 per cent," points out Sudarshan Banerjee, former CEO, Hutchison Essar.

Network equipment major Ericsson, in its Mobility Report announced in June this year had made big-ticket projections for 5G growth globally. As per its forecast, 5G subscriptions across the world will cross 1 billion by 2022 end and rise to 4.4 billion by 2027. The 2027 timeline stated that 5G will account for: 90 per cent of subscriptions in North America, 82 per cent of subscriptions in Western Europe; 80 per cent in the Gulf Cooperation Council region; and 74 per cent in North East Asia. In India (the services had not started when the report was released), 5G was projected to account for 40 per cent of all subscriptions by 2027.

"In India, mobile broadband is the foundation on which the government's Digital India initiative will be realized… While 4G contributes around 68 per cent of the total mobile subscriptions in India, its contribution is expected to drop to 55 per cent in 2027. 4G subscriptions are forecast to decline annually to an estimated 700 million subscriptions in 2027 as subscribers migrate to 5G post introduction of 5G in India," the report had maintained.

The company earlier had commissioned another survey (to research consultancy firm Omdia) which was India specific and it had strongly underlined that "Indian enterprises want to start using 5G within the next 12 months. A further 31 per cent expect to use 5G by 2024."

On the occasion of recently held IMC, consultancy firm KPMG released a fresh report which has emphasised on the massive economic opportunities the switchover to 5G will bring in.

The IMC event offered a peek into the future

"5G will be a catalyst to India's path of reaching 20 per cent digital GDP (by 2025). Today amongst others, digital transformation initiatives through smart factory, remote healthcare, digital school are real and functioning. With 5G, many of these initiatives will achieve scale and acceleration.

The Indian telecom market offers the right ingredients to have its justifiable impact. This impact could range upto 0.5 per cent of incremental GDP growth due to elements of flexibility, low latency and expansive connectivity, all of which will have a positive impact on businesses and its users (direct and indirect)," Yezdi Nagporewalla, CEO, KPMG in India said while summing up the main takeaways of the report.

B2B to lead the drive

While the two of the major telcos have shown their intentions of rolling out 5G services at a national level by the end of the next year, as per industry buzz other leading players, Vodafone and BSNL, are likely to divulge their rollout plans before the month end. And as 5G's ambit expands all through 2023, the multiple benefits to individual as well as enterprise customers will increasingly become apparent.

Experts and industry officials say, 5G at its best, will deliver multiple functionalities to common consumers ranging from something as basic as getting instant alert on your mobile to fill up necessary items in your refrigerator to finding a parking space while approaching a destination. It would result in accessing superior online educational modules and better healthcare record management. And when it comes to gaming and entertainment, it would simply unlock infinite choices.

When it comes to enterprise side, the scope is even higher in the critical areas like smart manufacturing, smart construction, smart city planning and management, safety and security, mobility, etc. "Safety and security are the major domains where 5G is expected to pick up quickly. In a 5G supported system, you would receive an alarm instantly at any sign of violation of basic protocols. It can even go to the extent of ensuring gender safety within a given working environment. If a female worker in any part of the establishment is alone, the system will tell you," points out a senior official of Vodafone.

At the Vodafone stall, the company was proving this point by beaming live from a metro tunnel in western Delhi which had proper technological checks and balances powered by 5G. "5G rollout will unlock the power of construction industry to revolutionise in years

5G aided 'Smart Agriculture' will make a big difference to the sector

With 5G, initiatives like ambulance services will gain scale and acceleration

to come. Both dynamic and temporary in nature, construction sites tend to lack the ICT infrastructure needed to harness robotics and other digital technologies. But 5G networks may transform all of that. By enabling contractors to automate important on-site processes, 5G-connected robots could help achieve a major leap forward in both safety and productivity," says, Vikramjiet Roy, Managing Director, Maccaferri (India).

Agriculture is another area where applications built on 5G are expected to make a major difference. Some of the telcos present at the event emphasised on the multiple benefits the application has delivered to farmers and other stakeholders in the value chain in their test runs linked with agrarian businesses which they are calling 'smart agriculture.' The applications helped (as they claimed to have witnessed during the trial) in optimal utilization of farm inputs due to more scientific assessment of soil condition, weather condition and other critical factors that goes to the extent of finding right market linkage for the end produce.

According to Sudarshan Banerjee, like other markets, 5G will make inroads with enterprises in India too. "5G is a game changer in segments like retail, supply chain through adaptation of AI (Artificial Intelligence), IoT (Internet of Things) and ML (Machine Learning). 5G service will be more adaptive in B2B segment than B2C except, a very small percentage of users for movies and sports," he opines.

Other churnings

In the last couple of years, many speculative theories have been doing the rounds pertaining to the pricing dimension of a full-fledged 5G service to different set of customers. Considering the staggering investments which telcos and other stakeholders will have to bear in rolling out 5G, a popular theory has been it will at least cost 5x of the existing arpu (average monthly revenue per user charges) level in the country which is currently close to ₹160. However, the players who have now rolled out 5G on a selective basis haven't declared any tariff plan. The 4G chips used by their existing subscribers can be broadly used to access new generation services in the pockets where it has been rolled provided the device is also compatible to 5G.

Analysts feel it would take a while before a tariff plan evolves as the rollout in the initial year would be mostly in beta or experimental phase wherein telcos would like the customers to get used to the new range of services. It could also be a trial and error spell for them as they learn to unleash infinite services and innovation built on 5G platform. In most of the countries where 5G has been rolled out, this has been the broader trend on the pricing front. "As far as I know, Canadian and US service providers are not charging any premium for 5G," Banerjee says.

The initiation and the subsequent evolution of 5G meanwhile is likely to push the hardware industry supporting telecom business in a serious upgradation mode. "For better results, you will need improved devices across the network as the 5G services take serious roots. Among other things, 5G will ensure M2M (machine to machine) connectivity coming of age and it may also need upgraded devices," says a senior official of a leading telco.

Hardware rejigs also include arrival of 5G compliant handsets in large volume. Incidentally around the time when IMC was happening at Delhi's Pragati Maidan, the leading e-commerce firms were running their seasonal sales programme and this time a major attraction was new range of 5G handsets available in the price range of ₹15,000-₹20,000. Indian handset manufacturer Lava went a step ahead and launched, what it claims to be, the country's most affordable 5G smartphone 'Blaze 5G' at the event which has been priced around ₹10,000.

"The product aligns with the larger vision of providing the next generation 5G technology to Indians at an affordable price point. With the launch of this smartphone we are making the power of 5G technology accessible to all," Sunil Raina, President & Business Head, Lava International. And the marketmen are expecting a deluge of such offerings as 5G's journey picks up momentum. ◆

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Calendar and agenda …

… make a difference with your next board meeting

Current hot topics of ESG and DEI are not making board members better at what they do, and many of them are constantly seeking tips and advice for becoming better at what they do for their fiduciary duties and governance. While there are enough materials on the modern board issues, good old governance tips are forgotten by most.

The board of directors' model was never designed to take on the duties boards actually face today. Globally, board members are stuck with a governance model that isn't fit to purpose. It is outmoded, formalistic, and mostly inadequate. Yet the model is not going to go away. To paraphrase what Winston Churchill said on democracy, "It's the worst possible way of doing anything... except for everything else we've tried!"

If we can't reinvent the model, let's try to make it work as much as we can. In a series of articles we will attempt to share some of the *gyan* we have gleaned from a multitude of board members across the world. These are the rarely written down boardroom 'folk wisdom' that directors pick up serving on other boards... and too often, go no further than their own boardroom.

These tips can shape a workable boardroom and if you follow the same you can make a difference in the next board meeting. We take up from the top first: Calendar and Agenda.

You've gathered together a mixed group of leaders, advisors, owners and experts in your boardroom. What next? A smart rule to remember is that you don't want to waste a single minute of this brain huddle. This means it is crucial to make effective board calendars and meeting agendas. Many boards (especially private and young firms) give these timeline items shockingly little thought, looking just at legal needs for what the board has to approve when, and that's that. Here are some scheduling *gyan* that can make your board year, and each meeting, deliver more value.

• Ask your company secretary to chart out the regular schedule of your board and committee meetings for the next one-year – or better still, the next two years – at the start of each fiscal year. Most of the boilerplate stuff such as approvals, the audit year, renewals of contracts, reports, etc, works to known legal timelines, so the majority of 'must' board business should be easy to pre-plan. What about special meetings or emergencies (too common over the past couple of years)? You always have the flexibility to add these – a good rule is to pre-plan what you can.

Dr M. MUNEER

RALPH WARD

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• Set board and committee meeting dates for a year or two out... and then make sure directors know these dates early and are reminded in calendar. Include the annual schedule in each board mailing, and make it an up-front tab on your board portal. Use your normal planning tools to get on board members' calendars. Directors are very busy committed people, and it helps everyone's planning to know now where they have to be on a certain date in 2023. Make sure your board calendar is a 'can't miss' item.

• Next up are board agendas. Since you now know what the board needs to do on specific dates, it's an easy next step to fill in basic 'must' agenda items for each meeting. Hacking your agenda begins by aiming to reduce the time and effort required by rote or nonproductive items to give your board more time for discussion, training, self evaluation, and the other items at the end of the agenda that gets lost when directors have to bug out early.

• The basic agenda items include legal requirements, so they have to be covered... but you can trim them to make room for more, high-value board work. Here are two great board agenda hacks. First, log how long certain agenda items take over the course of several meetings. Come up with a reasonable average (trimming time from simple matters that drag on), and print your next agenda with a suggested 'time budgets' for each item. A basic approval – five minutes. An audit report – 10. The chair tells everyone that these seem like reasonable times for the items, but doesn't try to enforce them. However, everyone gets a subconscious nudge when they notice a rote approval clocking past the suggested time.

• Agenda hack #2 – consent agendas. Much board busywork is made up of checklist items – renewal of a loan covenant, receipt of a report or letter, personnel approvals. Yet, working through each on the agenda with proposal, discussion, motion, second, etc. gobbles up time. So, why not telescope some of these housekeeping items into a single agenda item, with discussion and approval of the whole bunch at once? Make clear that anyone can pull an item out for separate approval (though no one ever does). All at once, half an hour of parliamentary minutiae is condensed to five minutes.

Good luck with making a difference in the next board meeting agenda. ◆

Setting a new direction

Modi unveiling the NLP: gathering speed like cheetahs?

The NLP paves the way for infrastructure & service revolution in India

The symbolism was not lost on anyone. On the occasion of his 72nd birthday on 17 September, the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi released five cheetahs brought from Namibia, at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh. And in the evening of the same day, at Delhi's Vigyan Bhawan, he unveiled the National Logistics Policy (NLP) which finally became a reality three years after the draft policy was released in consultation with various stakeholders. "There is some relevance between the release of cheetahs in the morning and the launch of the National Logistics Policy in the evening. We want movement of goods from one place to another with the speed of the cheetah. The country wants to move forward at the same speed," he said.

Logistics and supply chain have a pervasive presence in all business operations (from raw materials procurement to final delivery of finished goods to the target end consumers – industrial, wholesalers, retailers, actual customers). They create a broad and robust ecosystem for adding efficiency to basic transportation and the storage and distribution of goods. This has become a permanent basis for discussion, all the more so in recent decades as India's economic profile significantly improved since the launch of reforms in the early 90s. Even hard-nosed critics will find it difficult to dispute the fact that India made substantial gains in the manufacturing and industrial sectors or that consumer facing businesses like retail have grown at breakneck speed, especially in the last few decades.

In fact, India has just pipped Britain to become the fifth largest economy. Reaching this milestone (from it being left with two months forex reserves in 1991 leading to the commencement of reforms) resulted in modest to massive expansion in almost all business spheres, while new verticals have also emerged. Needless to say, logistics operations, as defined by the mammoth transportation fleet size, warehousing and cold chain, express services, air cargo and shipping (mainly for exim trade), infrastructure assets like terminals and freight stations, railway freight carriages, high-end distribution centres, etc – have increasingly become

more prominent.

The new policy initiated by the government is meant to ensure optimal and integrated utilisation (the multi-modalism era, in India and elsewhere has arrived) of assets by adding advanced technological processes. Despite quantitative growth, gaining efficiency has been a sore point and that is now being tackled. At a time when India plans to further upgrade its economic profile (it aims to be the third largest economy by 2030), the NLP is expected to be that vital fulcrum which will expedite development programmes (old and new) and give the best of results.

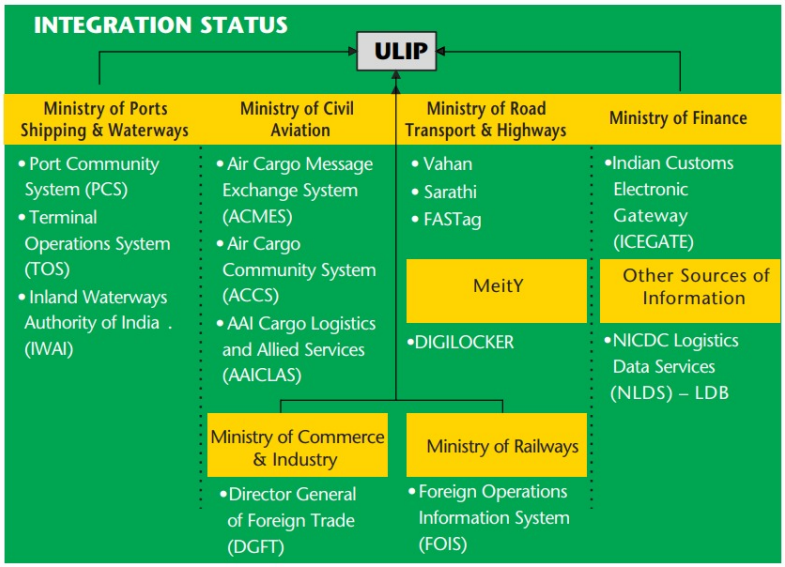
While announcing the policy, Modi divulged a new mantra: "Policy plus performance is equal to progress." And stakeholders in business waiting for this policy to finally become a reality seemed relieved the much-needed catalyst had been introduced. "Reduced logistics cost and increased logistic efficiencies will energise the economy across sectors in multiple ways and take us many steps closer to emerging as a global manufacturing powerhouse," CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said in a statement. "The launch of the National Logistics Policy is a seminal moment for India's logistics sector," Rizwan Soomar, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, DP World Subcontinent, added.

Inland waterways are expected to boost the logistics sector

Centre-stage positioning

For old-timers in the logistics industry, the unveiling of a dedicated logistics policy marks a sea change in the fortune of the sector in less than two decades. This is the culmination of the process of giving a formidable organised base to a sector for rapid future growth in both qualitative and quantitative senses in the coming years. Considered the business of transporters, truckers and dingy godown owners not too long ago, the sector has been transformed by market forces (the demand for bigger and better automated warehouses and more efficient vehicles) as well as the government, in terms of adding a policy punch and recognising its importance. "In the last 7-8 years, the government has emphasised the criticality of the sector with a slew of announcements starting with according it infrastructure status in 2017, creating a separate logistics department within the ministry of commerce and now this dedicated policy. In between, the government has initiated LEADS (Logistics Ease Across Different States) ranking and today we have nearly a dozen states with their own logistics policy," Vinod Asthana, former MD, Central Railways Warehousing Corporation (CRWC) points out. "Till 15 years ago, logistics was not a word used even in discussions within government circles or the then Planning Commission meetings. The word used was infrastructure, as the conventional wisdom was that having good infra hubs, either ports or airports or railway terminals, would ensure improvement in operations. It took quite a while even within government circles to understand that it is the combination of infra and processes that brings efficiency to the overall system," a former advisor to the Planning Commission points out.

Needless to say, these initiatives have aided in giving a rejig to the sector. This is reflected in the rapid expansion in the volume of automated warehouses, industrial parks and cold chain facilities, substantial fund inflow from institutional infrastructure financiers, the



arrival of more technology empowered solution providers, technology enabled processes deployed at ports and airports in goods clearances, etc. And all this assisted by a simultaneous push to ongoing gigantic infrastructure projects like the Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC) and the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) which were kickstarted before 2010 by the then UPA government as well as new programmes launched by the current government like Sagarmala, Bharat Mala, Inland Waterways, and Mission Gati Shakti.

The new policy will address issues related to warehousing including temperature-controlled storages

Major consideration

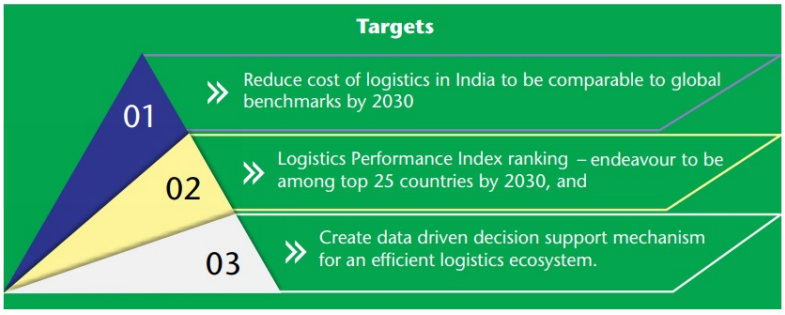
Those within the government who worked on finalising this policy had clearcut objectives in mind. "When we embarked on drafting the policy, we also realised there were many elements of inefficiency in the ecosystem. Logistics operations have been governed by a rent seeking tendency across the value chain and it has largely been a cost-plus business. Multiple and non-transparent billings have been a critical bottleneck," says N Sivasailam, former Special Secretary (Logistics), Ministry of Commerce. It was during his tenure that the draft logistics policy was framed and released for the feedback of shareholders in 2019. Industry practitioners agree that the cost-plus model has been the driving force of the operations for too long. "The sector has been largely unorganised for a very long time. It is true that for top-of-the-rung established and branded service providers, pruning costs have been a major focus in the last decade or so and they have received positive results. But in an overall sense, multiple pricing has remained a problem area. If a transaction is happening using multiple modes – roadways, railways and ships – there would be different sets of billings, making the process complicated," agrees a senior representative of a leading transporters association.

The new policy will address three primary concerns – reducing cost of logistics to the global benchmarks by 2030, making it to the top 25 countries list in logistics performance index ranking, and creating a data driven decision support mechanism for an efficient logistics ecosystem. "The troika of Gati Shakti Master Plan, Gati Shakti Vishwavidhyalaya and the National Logistics Policy will transform the country's logistics and transportation sector. Each of them is transformative but together these magically reduce logistics cost by a whopping 40 per cent (from 13-14 per cent to 8-9 per cent) giving a huge competitive edge to India's economy," observes Pawan Kumar Agarwal, Former Special Secretary (Logistics), who emphasises that the policy brings a major shift in strategic terms to the table.

"There have been three major shifts. Piecemeal development of transport infrastructure now gives way to the National Master Plan State and City Master Plan based geospatial planning; disjointed IT systems are to be replaced by a Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP) and there will be sub-optimal use of existing transport assets to synergetic the use of such infrastructure," he adds.

By creating ULIP, the government has brought in the ultimate panacea, which will do away with the typical silo style functioning of operators, while using technology will make the process efficient and transparent. As per the policy paper, ULIP is an open-source platform which works on a request & response-based system that integrates multiple systems of different stakeholders. It is divided into three layers, namely Integration layer, Governance layer and Presentation layer. Under the Integration layer and the Governance layer, 30 logistics systems of 07 Ministries/Departments covering over 1,600 fields have been integrated through 102 APIs with ULIP. The aim is to create a UPI kind of a structure in which every single transaction of the logistics department can be authenticated. NICDC's Logistics Data Bank Project (the technology wing of National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation) has been leveraged to develop ULIP.

Apart from ULIP, the policy also foresees the creation of a digital dashboard – E-LogS. This is envisaged as a digital system for registering, coordinating, and monitoring the resolution of user issues – authorised user associations will thereby register and upload their issues. Furthermore, the new policy facilitates the creation of a Services



Improvement Group (SIG) on the lines of the Network Planning Group (NPG). It will comprise officers nominated from various user ministries and will provide for monitoring and coordination mechanisms for unresolved user issues pertaining to services, documentation, processes, policy, along with identification of interventions for improving the user interface, the policy paper says.

The road ahead

It is claimed the unveiling of the policy comes as a big booster which would eventually usher in a new age logistics regime comparable with global standards. And the industry at large has welcomed it, calling it extremely progressive. "Competitiveness of Indian produce and products in global markets has suffered because of the disadvantage of a high supply chain and logistics costs. Besides costs, sub-optimal logistics efficiency has also affected the flawless execution of exports and imports of fresh and other shelf-life-limited products. The new logistics policy with comprehensive coverage of all legs of transportation, if executed well, is expected to bring down the cost of doing business and boost India's presence in global markets as a more competitive buyer and seller," emphasises Siraj Choudhary, MD & CEO, National Commodities Management Services Limited (NCML).

According to Ketan Kulkarni, Chief Commercial Officer of the country's leading air transportation player, Blue Dart, emphasis on creating a quality work pool for the sector through a set of structural programmes is a major highlight. "Employment generation & skilling along with the introduction of new Logistics & Supply Chain courses for students is expected to address the lack of manpower issues in the sector and provide global employment opportunities," he underlines.

The policy has also been unquestionably praised as a roadmap for a long-haul, efficient journey. "The National Logistics Policy paves the way for infrastructure & service revolution in India as the country charts its growth trajectory for the next few decades. The policy directs all players to collaborate to eliminate pockets of waste and inefficiency," Jakob Friis Sorensen, MD, APM Terminals Pipavav comments. And then there are those from the manufacturing or retailing side who believe that the NLP will bring a world of difference to their operations.

Wind beneath its wings: Air cargo will get a big boost

"It is an extremely vital step taken by the Government that will boost the growth of the automobile sector as the policy focuses on building superior infrastructure like 35 multi-modal logistics hubs, which will promote seamless transportation of goods," says Vinod Aggarwal, the President of SIAM (Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers). Rajneesh Kumar, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Flipkart Group, strongly believes that the benefits of the policy will ultimately also trickle down to the consumer. "Along with improving efficiency across the value chain, it will also result in a considerable reduction in logistics costs from their present level, thereby benefiting the end customer with lower costs," he says.

However, while the new policy may be said to greatly contribute towards creating a new base for the logistics sector, on a micro basis, the debate is on how it will actually roll out. The magical integration that the policy is promising to bring in is a mammoth exercise and, as many analysts point out, would be easier said than done. The policy paper, ratified by the union cabinet, is concerned with the gradual evolution of solutions and measures with support from the key ministries sharing the onus of the government's epic-scale Gati Shakti programme. After the

The unveiling of a dedicated logistics policy marks a sea change in the fortune of the sector

Road ahead: reduced logistics cost and increased logistic efficiencies will energise the economy

unveiling of the policy, there will be more follow-ups in terms of announcements of measures on critical parameters like standardisation, digital platforms, etc. For instance, as per the policy paper, for initiating action for bridging digital gaps: 'Logistics Division, DPIIT will arrange development of Proof of Concept (PoC) for cross-sectoral use cases for logistics stakeholders to address gap areas including Secured Logistics Document Exchange (SLDE) platform (launch in 6 months), digital dashboard to improve container information and availability, Truck Visibility and Positioning Platform (TVPP), Electronic Logging Device (ELD), Import Clearance System for PGAs, Smart Road Enforcement app, etc.' Similarly, for the setting up of new operational standards across the value chain – 'Logistics Division, DPIIT, will be in coordination with the relevant standard setting agencies (Bureau of Indian Standards, Institute of Packaging, Food Safety Standards Authority of India, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, Telecommunications Standards Development Society, India (TSDSI), Telecommunications Engineering Centre (TEC), etc) to develop standards for physical assets (containers, trucks, warehousing including temperature-controlled storages; transportation, terminals, etc.) and service benchmarking (service levels and design standards for sustainable packaging) with due regard to existing international recommendations to ensure inter-operability across modes/asset classes, increase in containerisation, reduction in logistics costs,

improved logistics efficiency, etc.' The policy paper has asked the nodal ministries to collate and compile the necessary standards in six months.

Creating collective synergy

The nodal ministries involved in this gigantic exercise include: Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Central Board of Indirect Taxes, Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Department of Telecommunications, Department of Food & Public Distribution, Department of Commerce, Logistics Division, DPIIT, and Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Even the integration of ULIP (*refer to the graph* – Integration Status) entails creating collective synergy between over a dozen large-scale digital platforms currently run by 6-7 ministries and government agencies. The government agencies claim a major part of the exercise has been undertaken and the platform is now open for registration. "The platform is receiving tremendous response from the industry. To date, 13 organisations – MapmyIndia, Cargo Exchange, Freight Fox, Conmove, Intugine, Eikonatech, Yes Bank, SuperProcure, CargoShakti, Cloudstrats, Shyplite, APSEZL, and AITWA have signed Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA) to access data on ULIP. NDAs with 11 more organisations like Instavans, Bosch India, Portlinks, Shiprocket, etc are in process," a DPIIT release issued on 1 October maintained. The release adds that a dedicated support team is working round the clock to provide support to industry players for registration on the portal. 'After registration, users need to submit their use cases, which will then be reviewed based on the proposed usage of the requested data. After a successful review, users requesting data will have to sign an NDA. With the signing of the NDAs, industry players can develop APIs for integration with ULIP.'

"In the past, the logistics sector has also suffered from lack of coordination between the decision-making agencies which are part of different ministries. This time, the government seems to be creating an institutionalised, uniform mechanism asking different wings in clear terms to give up their upmanship tendencies in the greater interest. Let's see how it evolves," says a logistics sector veteran who did not wish to be named. For former Logistics Secretary Pawan Agarwal, the new policy means a new starting point for all stakeholders who must now show a better collaborative spirit. "The Prime Minister, in his speech, clearly mentioned that the policy itself is not the final result. In fact, it is the beginning. It is now asking all the stakeholders to take their respective responsibilities more seriously for the rejig of the logistics sector. We now have a new driving force," he comments. How this new driving force will accelerate the pace of the $200 billion annual turnover industry (only services, minus physical assets) is something experts are likely to closely examine in the months and years ahead. ◆

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An opportune time

National Logistics Policy will accelerate investments into the sector

The National Logistics Policy (NLP), unveiled by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, on 17 September, comes at an opportune moment when India aims to be a $5 trillion economy by 2024-25, for which logistics is set to play a pivotal role. The policy is geared towards enabling a robust monitoring framework and ensuring skill development for greater efficiency in the logistics service ecosystem. It will also help further boost inter-stakeholder coordination and drive standardisation across the logistics chains.

The NLP will build on the PM GatiShakti plan, bringing in an integrated tech enabled approach to reduce the country's logistics cost, setting a new global benchmark and consequently further improving the ease of doing business. The policy also aims to propel India to the top 25 countries by 2030 in the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index. These intended outcomes will generate an even better environment for foreign businesses to invest in India and eventually assist in further consolidating our position as the global manufacturing country of choice.

The Comprehensive Logistics Action Plan (CLAP), proposed under the policy, rests on 8 pillars, comprising of integrated digital logistics systems, standardisation of physical assets, human resource development and capacity building, state engagement, export-import logistics, a service improvement framework, a sectoral plan for efficient logistics as well as the development of logistics parks. It will provide a transparent, detailed, and strategic direction to the implementation of the policy that will simultaneously address bottlenecks across all touchpoints in the logistics value chain. The aim of the policy to enable seamless movement of goods will be realised through its specialised focus on sectoral plans for cement, coal, steel, food grains and fertilisers, prompting tailored capacity and infrastructure building for high-value commodities. Here, the confluence of local and international supply chain sensibilities will be instrumental in the successful fruition of this action plan to attract substantial investments.

The other momentous target of the National Logistics Policy is its push for end-to-end digitization through the introduction of Service Improvement Framework, facilitation of increased inter-ministerial coordination, faster decision-making, and ensuring a paperless supply chain. Digital augmentation will benefit stakeholders across value-chains and grant visibility to the entire network of freight on one unified platform, making even the medium and small enterprises competitive.

RIZWAN SOOMAR

The author is Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, DP World Subcontinent

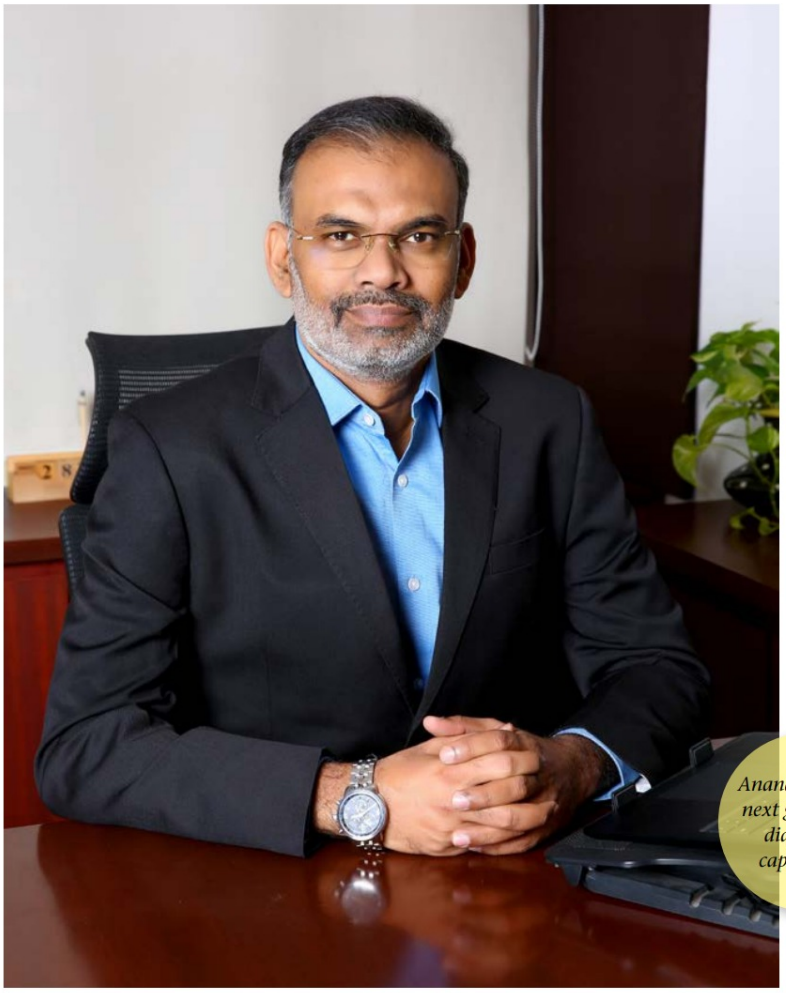
The National Logistics Policy's emphasis on promoting multi-modality will help reduce the cost of logistics by encouraging greater use of time and cost-efficient modes such as rail and coastal shipping. The cost of logistics will reduce only if an efficient and optimal multi-modal mix is implemented combining rail, coastal shipping and first/last mile connectivity using roads. The impetus to develop multimodal logistics parks will ensure users have options to create customised transport and storage configurations that reflect the time and/or cost sensitivity of the cargo being moved. While ports will continue to be the focal points of evacuation of cargo; using the fastest, cheapest or safest mode of transport will open new avenues for hinterland movement of goods between production and consumption points. Infrastructure development programmes such as Sagarmala, India Maritime Vision 2030, Bharatmala and PM GatiShakti will help achieve the objectives set out in the National Logistics Policy.

Sectors like warehousing will benefit from the increased standardisation across physical assets like racks, handling equipment, trucks, containers, and pellets, leading to further efficiencies. Standardisation, a key provision introduced in the policy, will help attract investments in warehousing thereby helping reduce transportation, warehousing and inventory costs for businesses.

One of the determining factors for global investors is the governance protocols that are in place for enabling business ease. The coming together of LEADS (Logistics Ease Across Different States) and Ease of Logistics (E-Logs), will be particularly beneficial for addressing business issues in a timely manner, providing better commercial benefits to businesses, and enhancing investor confidence in the regulatory ecosystem.

Lastly, the policy's focus towards building a strong pool of logistics professionals, integrated with the present expansion of the GatiShakti Vishwavidyalaya will help produce a specialised cadre of trained logistics professionals in diverse disciplines related to transportation, technology, and management. It will simultaneously further innovation and foster the spirit of entrepreneurship in the sector, creating more logistics enterprises that are 'Made in India' for India. While the government has provided a well-deliberated strategic direction to the sector, all the stakeholders will have to implement the provisions of the policy in coherence and synergy with each other, to help the sector unlock its full potential.

Getting future-ready



Anand: building next generation diagnostic capabilities

SRL Diagnostics is ramping up its capabilities to maintain a leadership position in the market

Having emerged as a number one player in terms of its network of labs in the last fiscal year, Gurugram-headquartered SRL Diagnostics is positioning itself strongly in the domestic diagnostic market. The subsidiary business of Fortis Healthcare Ltd, SRL, the second largest player in terms of revenue (₹1,618 crore in FY22) after Dr Lal PathLabs (₹2,087 crore), has made big strides in the last few years. The company was formerly known as Super Religare Laboratories. SRL befitted when the second largest healthcare operator in the world, Malaysia's IHH Healthcare, which also has a significant presence in the global diagnostic market, picked up 31.1 per cent stake in Fortis Healthcare in 2018 after winning a prolonged four-way bidding war.

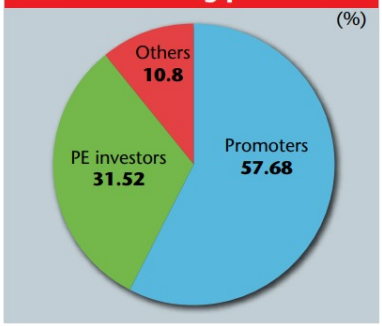
Despite Covid-related challenges, SRL has aggressively expanded its network in focused geographies. In the last fiscal year, it has significantly grown its footprint by adding over 800 customer touchpoints (CTPs) and embedding over 1,700 direct clients. Its network currently consists of over 400 labs, 3,000+ customer touchpoints and 5,600+ direct clients with daily collections of samples. In an endeavour to get closer to customers and provide services at their doorstep, the company has consistently added to its network of touchpoints and thus improved its CTP per lab to 15.3. This has also helped it improve its B2C share to 55 per cent (as against 45 per cent B2B) from around 45 per cent around 3 years ago.

Pan India presence

Backed by the International Finance Corporation as also PE players like Resurgence PE Investments and NYLIM Jacob Ballas India Fund III, the company, enjoying a pan-India presence across 600 cities in 28 states and 8 UTs, is one of the largest employers in the diagnostics space with 7,000-odd employees, including over 450 pathologists and radiologists. IFC, along with the two PE players, currently holds 31.5 per cent of the company, while the promoter group (Fortis Healthcare) holds 57.68 per cent and others 10.80 per cent.

Apart from the domestic market, SRL also caters to international markets like South Asia, Africa, Dubai and other part of Middle East. Its international network consists of more than 120 collection centres and 800 direct clients. These centres send

Shareholding pattern



samples in a temperature-controlled environment to SRL reference labs in India, which process them and make the reports available on a real-time basis using SRL's efficient and highly acclaimed IT system and robust logistics network. The company has also put up state-of-the-art labs in Dubai, Kathmandu and Biratnagar in Nepal. Started in 2003, the international division, currently contributing around 2 per cent to the revenue, also assists its international clients and partners in the planning and implementation of laboratory management services, along with complete IT support through its indigenously developed lab management software – CLIMS.

"The last couple of years, in particular, have been quite eventful for us. Despite the pandemic-related challenges, we have been aggressively expanding our network in focused geographies and are looking to maintain this momentum and our leadership position going ahead. We have built up a wide test menu consisting of the most basic tests to super specialised and advanced genetic tests. In order to be future-ready, we are now on the path to building our next generation diagnostic capabilities. We intend to position ourselves as a full-service clinical lab which is preferred by patients and referred by doctors," states Anand K, CEO, SRL Diagnostics.

SRL's high-flying moment came in 2021 when it was selected as the official diagnostic lab partner by the Indian Olympic Association to provide diagnostic services to Indian athletes and officials for the Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 Olympics. As the first corporate lab chain in the country, SRL, in the past 25 years, has been a trendsetter and an innovator in the industry. Recently,

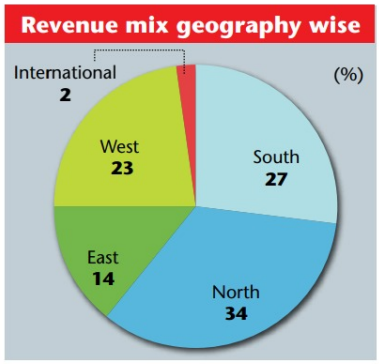
SRL has a wide range of test menu

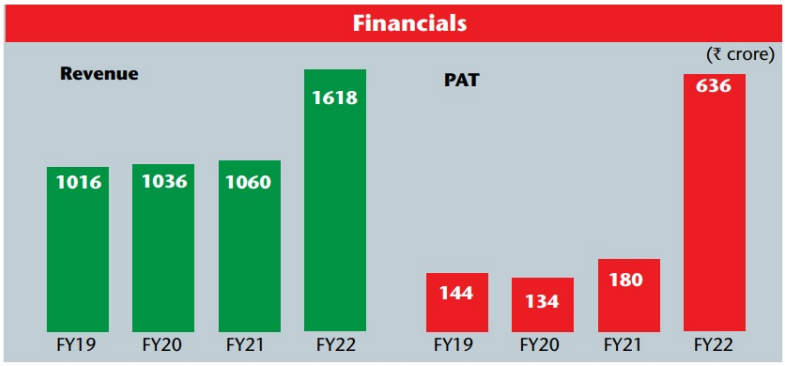
it became the country's first lab to be integrated with Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission as a Health Information Provider. SRL's lab software, CLIMS, is now ABDM-integrated under the National Health Authority.

Next generation tests

SRL has been building its next-generation diagnostics capabilities. Over the last two years, it added close to 200 tests to its test menu of around 4,000 tests, with a special focus on genomics in cancer, reproductive disorders, rare diseases and inherited disorders. Pre-implantation genetic screening & pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, whole genome sequencing for tuberculosis, Myeloid Panel, TERT mutation analysis on pyrosequencing, are just some examples of such solutions. Next generation diagnostic tests, which currently contribute 2-3 per cent to the company's overall revenue, are expected to expand its share to around 10-15 per cent in the next 3-5 years.

"Currently, we are undertaking a number of new initiatives, especially in the area of genomics, proteomics and pharmacogenomics that will enable us to be ready for the next big shift in diagnostics. This year, we will particularly look at co-marketing initiatives, clinical trial studies and contract validation for kit manufacturers and technology providers, and the co-development of new biomarkers as one of our key areas of growth. Besides, we are progressing well on our project with Microsoft to develop an AI algorithm for the diagnosis of breast pathologies. This would be a breakthrough in digital pathology to usher in new AI driven tools in histopathology," explains the SRL CEO.





Experts believe that SRL's focus on genomics, next generation diagnostics, along with its work in digital pathology and specialised testing categories will help differentiate it and also enable it to be future-ready. SRL has been at the forefront of embracing change and quickly adapting to changing customer expectations.

The last two years have been difficult on account of frequent disruptions due to new variants of Covid-19. Repeated infections, supply chain disruptions and a shortage of essentials have created challenging times for the healthcare industry as a whole. In fact, the pandemic has acted as a catalyst for change in how the industry is perceived amongst patients, clinicians, regulatory bodies and even the general public.

With a renewed health and fitness consciousness, the company has seen a considerable pickup in its wellness portfolio. The growth in the preventive healthcare/wellness segment has been driven by well curated wellness packages coupled with its offering of smart health reports that are easy to understand. SRL's home collection service capabilities are now available in over 150 cities across India.

SRL has, in recent times, been focussing on various digital priority areas. Its digital revenues doubled in FY22 compared to FY21. As part of its digital drive, the company collaborates with online platforms to reach out to new customers. It has taken a slew of measures to improve the customer experience – from live phlebotomist tracking to introducing smart health reports and being available on demand on messaging platforms like WhatsApp. The WhatsApp chatbot, especially, enables customers to book tests, get a report status, get reports delivered securely, solve any difficulties understanding the same and search for the nearest centre.

"We have ramped up our testing capacity and opened more centres and drive-through sites to collect samples across the length and breadth of the country. We have 22 RT-PCR labs and have added 800 customer touchpoints in the last fiscal year, which is the highest addition in the history of SRL. This has helped us in our endeavour to get closer to our customers and provide services at their doorstep. All these initiatives around customer-centricity and digital transformation have helped us build an organisation that is technologically ready for the future," says Anand.

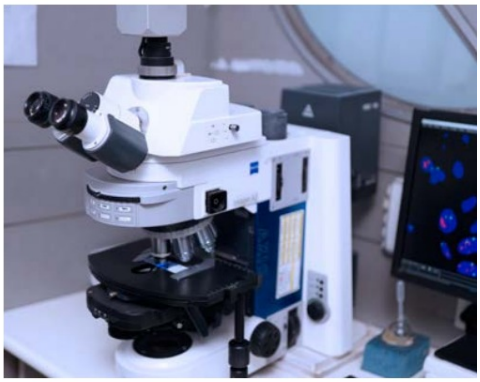
Importantly, the business has continued to have a well-diversified geographical mix without over-dependence on any region, allowing it to optimally capitalise on its pan-India network. SRL's regional revenue contributions are 34 per cent from the North, 23 per cent from the West, 27 per cent from the South, 14 per cent from the East, and 2 per cent from international markets.

Financial performance

During the last fiscal, the company recorded a revenue growth of over 52 per cent to around ₹1,618 crore as compared to the previous fiscal year, even as the PAT was up 252 per cent to ₹636 crore. The business served a total of over 21 million patients during the year, compared to 11 million during FY21. It completed 44 million tests in FY22 as compared to 23 million tests performed in FY21. Apart from other initiatives, the improved financial performance has been primarily attributed to the acquisition of DDRC SRL Diagnostics Pvt Ltd and the increase in treating Covid and its allied tests.

In the last couple of years, Covid tests have been contributing over 25 per cent to SRL's annual revenue. However, by Q1 FY23, this contribution was down to around 6 per cent, adversely impacting growth, and revenue was down to around ₹333 crore from ₹441 crore in Q1FY22. Analysts are of the view that though the dwindling Covid revenue could result in short-term aberrations, given SRL's size, scale and spread, it should be able to mitigate this. SRL's conscious initiative to enlarge its next generation diagnostics portfolio and other efforts will go a long way in adding to its topline in a profitable manner.

Early last fiscal, the company completed the acquisition of its 50:50 joint venture, DDRC SRL, by acquiring the remaining 50 per cent for a consideration of ₹350 crore. This acquisition has given SRL direct access to Kochi-based diagnostic player DDRC's 200 labs in the southern state. SRL had become a 50:50 joint venture partner of DDRC, when it first acquired a 50 per cent stake in 2010. Promoted by Joy Joseph and his family,



SRL has been at the forefront of embracing change

35-year-old DDRC is a dominant player in the state. The transaction will help SRL consolidate its position in Kerala. It also complements SRL's strategy of scaling the B2C business and expanding its product portfolio in the areas of lifestyle diseases, specialised tests and preventive packages.

The diagnostic service provider, which commenced its first reference lab in Mumbai in 1996, has recently launched a state-of-the-art reference laboratory at Ashok Nagar, Chennai. Spread across over 20,000 sq ft, the lab has the capability to conduct more than one lakh tests each month, ranging from the most routine tests to esoteric and genetic ones. The facility will also be a 'Centre of Excellence' for transplant immunology. Apart from the highly specialised compatibility testing and evaluation needed for successful transplants, the Centre of Excellence will also focus on research, academics, knowledge sharing and skill building. The lab also houses all clinical laboratory departments including clinical chemistry, haematology, histopathology, biochemistry, flow cytometry, microbiology, etc.

With this, SRL now has a network of six reference labs. It has one global reference laboratory in Mumbai and five regional reference laboratories in Gurgaon, Chennai, Bengaluru, Kochi and Kolkata. Besides, there are four Centres of Excellence across HLA & transplant immunology, histopathology & AI, genomics and molecular pathology. In fact, the company currently has the largest network of 45 NABL accredited labs, including two CAP accredited labs (College of American Pathologists, the

The company has the largest network of 45 NABL accredited labs

global gold standard in laboratory accreditation) in Mumbai and Dubai. SRL's network of labs also includes state reference laboratories in different states that help it provide reports in the shortest possible time. Moreover, the STAT or satellite laboratories in Tier II and Tier III cities and towns help it service the deeper pockets of many regions.

The company also has a full-fledged R&D division established as early as 2001. The R&D team works on new assay (tests) development, new technology evaluation, test validations, translational multidisciplinary research, contract research (clinical and biotechnological) and knowledge management activities.

"Over the last two years, one of our strategic priorities has been to improve the retail network; ie the B2C part. We have considerably strengthened our channel mix increasing our B2C share to 55 per cent as compared to 45 per cent around three years ago. To this effect, we have been consistently adding new network touchpoints and have reinforced our network by adding close to 1,500+ centres and over 20 new laboratories," says Anand who joined the company in August 2020 from the Apollo Hospitals Group where he was the CEO of its diagnostic business unit AHLL, based in Hyderabad.

Anand has over 25 years of work experience in the healthcare industry, specialising in diagnostic and laboratory services in India, South Asia, Africa and the Middle East. He is a proven healthcare leader with extensive experience in leading diagnostic companies, including Metropolis Healthcare, Neuberg Diagnostics and others. Organised players today hold around 16-17 per cent of the industry and Anand has played a big role in this movement through the 20+ acquisitions that he has steered over the past 25 years.

B2C presence

Recently, he also played a decisive role in completing the 100 per cent acquisition of Kochi-based diagnostic player DDRC (by SRL) which has put up a strategy to expand both organically and inorganically. In the last few years, SRL has positioned itself quite strongly by building up capabilities in existing as well as newer areas. The company is now consciously moving towards consumers by increasing its B2C presence in the domestic market which is rapidly changing in favour of large, organised players. SRL is looking to add 1,000 more collections centres by the next year and also 30-40 labs in the next year. It has plans to invest around ₹100 crore in the next couple of years in ramping up its infrastructure and building up newer capabilities.

"The scope for growth in the Indian healthcare industry, especially the diagnostics industry is considerable. The shift in industry trends, wherein the market share is moving from the unorganised to the organised sector has accelerated. Consumers prefer the assurance of quality and efficiency offered by a branded, pan-India player, something that unorganised players cannot offer. Also, post the pandemic, people are paying more attention to their health," says Dr. Arvind Lal, Executive Chairman, Dr Lal PathLabs.

The domestic diagnostic industry is one of the fastest expanding service verticals in India. The industry is estimated at $9 billion, and is anticipated to increase at around 10 per cent CAGR over the next 5 years.

Most of the market is dominated by the fragmented standalone centres while the largest organised player has a market share of less than 5 per cent. The diagnostic chains command 16 per cent of the market share and around 10 per cent of the total market share is with national players. Also, more than 65 per cent of the business comes from urban areas. So, there is a huge opportunity for national players to grow organically and inorganically in highly penetrated areas like cities as well as rural areas where penetration is low.

"A growing preference for evidence-based treatment and personalised medicine will expand the role that diagnostics plays in clinical decision-making. Increased insurance penetration, aging population, rising income levels, preventive care and wellness, increasing incidence of chronic and lifestyle diseases, are growth levers that will propel the industry forward. We have taken measures to improve productivity, automate processes to build efficiencies and better leverage our existing infrastructure. As a healthcare organisation that is committed to enabling superior care, we have always stayed a step ahead and walked the extra mile for all our stakeholders. Our resilience, ability to adapt, and a progressive vision will chart the way for the company's performance going ahead," says Anand.

With all these developments in place, SRL is betting big on the rapidly-transforming domestic diagnostic market which is consolidating in favour of large, organised players. Over the last few years, particularly during the pandemic, it has shown not only a great deal of resilience but has also meticulously ramped up its overall testing and delivery network. The company has consciously tried to connect with consumers by improving its presence in the B2C segment. Moreover, it is also building its capabilities in next generation diagnostics, which will not only help diversify its portfolio but also be a differentiating factor in a market where new players are also entering to add to the competition.

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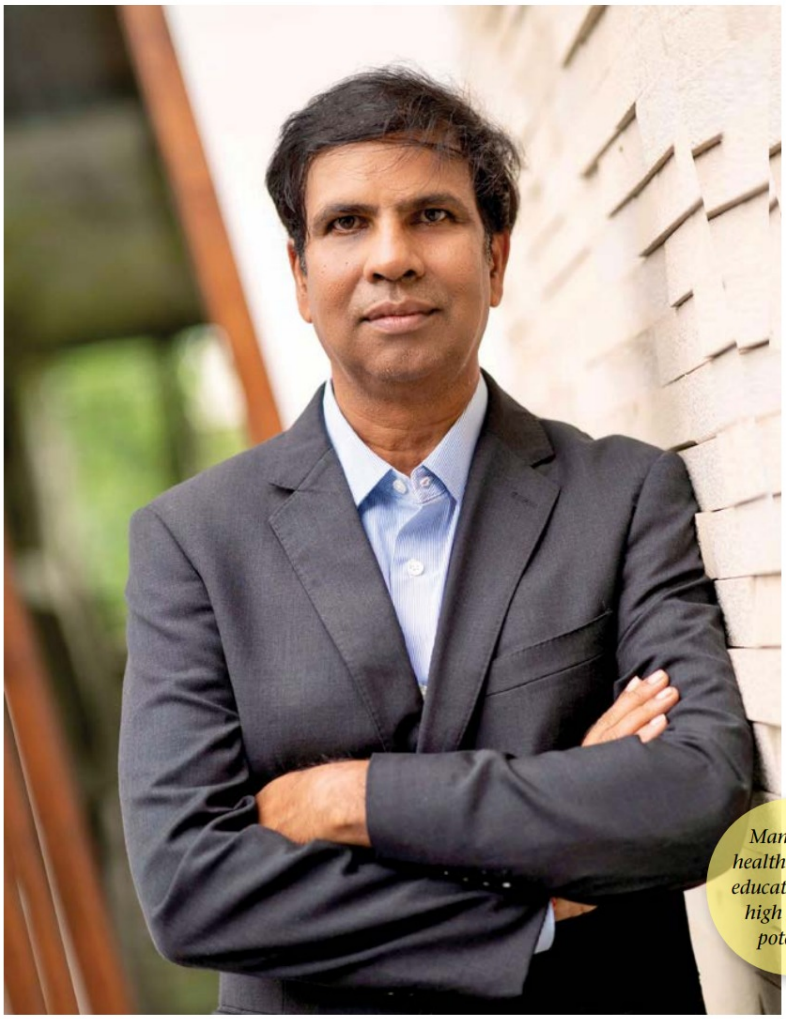
Mover and shaker



Manchala: healthcare and education have high growth potential

Athena Global Technologies is empowering the pharmacy and education sectors with digital tech

Unlike many software services companies, Athena Global Technologies Ltd (AGTL) is shifting to higher gears. From IT services as the business focus, the company is moving into and reinventing itself as an internet technology company. The business plan? To invest in new digital products that can become giant segments on their own with the use of cloud and integrated technology for the benefit of thousands of pharmacy stores and students looking for high calibre education.

The man leading this change is Satish Manchala, MD of Athena Global Technologies. Manchala reckons that technology has been shifting towards digital transformation across various industries with the seamless integration of e-commerce and digital efficiencies brought about by advanced technological capabilities. Towards this end, Athena launched Medley Medical Solutions for pharmacy businesses, and Tutoroot Technologies for new-age education. Athena Global has been investing for some time in these two new ventures, and the efforts of labour are now beginning to bear fruit.

"We began the journey of delivering digital products and services a long time back, and post Covid we have seen the shift accelerate. We want to empower medical and pharmacy stores all across the country, and at the same time we want to make higher education personalised and effective for students. Both healthcare and education are high growth potential, and we believe we are taking the business models of single mom-and-pop retail pharmacy shops and online higher education to a different level," says Manchala.

Consider this – there are over 8 lakh-plus stand-alone medical stores in India. Almost all of them face a big challenge: competing with giant e-pharmacy stores. While all these big pharmacy stores have pumped in billions of dollars in e-pharmacies, they continue to disrupt how medical products are distributed across the country. Further, single pharmacy stores are also falling behind on business metrics compared to pharmacy chains. Both these segments are huge competitive challenges for single stores.

Most of these small pharmacy stores are not digitised and have hardly any brand pull to be able to maximise sales. They also conduct their business in an inefficient manner. For instance, while the larger players have big brands, they are also able to source a larger volume of products for pharma producers and distributors. As a result, the smaller stores are not able to get the discounts that the larger pharmacy players command in the market. This becomes a huge competitive disadvantage as wholesales give higher discounts to larger players and cut back on the same to the smaller ones.

AGTL's Medley Med has become an aggregator for thousands of small pharmacy stores for stock replenishment. The firm aggregates orders on a single platform online from all the small pharmacy stores on the network. This allows Medley Med to combine all these small orders together and place a bulk order with distributors, thereby getting huge

discounts in the process equal to the those of the larger pharmacy players. The firm then passes on these discounts to the small retailer, who then can compete effectively with large pharmacies.

Empowering medical stores

Additionally, the system works automatically on the Medley Med network. Retailers do not have to go through the lengthy process of writing orders separately. They can upload their requirements in the system. Medley Med's backend network provides 95-98 per cent-plus delivery as it has a very strong backend. This system not only lower costs of services but also ensures quick delivery of medicines. Medley Med also provides loyalty rewards, much like a big player. It started this model in FY16 and has now tied up with hundreds of pharmacies for order sourcing requirements.

"We are helping retailers get their orders from different pharma companies through a single source. We use technology to ensure that ordering medicines by pharmacies is done online and in a seamless manner. Our ERP software brings in efficiencies of scale and helps owners of pharmacies to access data at their fingertips. With this we feel that smaller pharmacies have a level playing field with the larger players," says Manchala.

Vasishta: providing skill sets for students

Building on this platform, Medley Med later added the franchise model on this platform. Any new pharmacy that is opening its store can partner with Medley Plus with a deposit of ₹1.5 lakh and get stock worth ₹5 lakh to start a pharmacy store, plus all the IT infrastructure, and backend support for the franchisee. Not only does this save capital expenditures for a new pharmacy store, but it also reduces establishing and infra costs. It provides the ability to compete for a new player regarding stock, and in stock management.

This makes the lives of hundreds of pharmacies much easier. The firm will also be extending the service to existing pharmacies on its sourcing model. Medley Med has also extended its tie-ups to some FMCG products, and going forward, the firm will continue to improve its sourcing and supply model. "We are a one-stop shop as far as sourcing and pharmacy infrastructure is concerned," says Manchala.

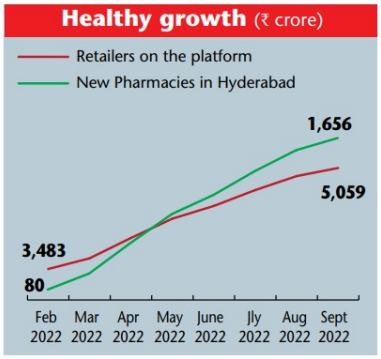
Further, pharmacies can also run an efficient inventory model on this platform and avoid unnecessarily loading of stock in their shops. The company helps pharmacies track fast-moving products, etc as compared to others, which will land plenty of savings in the long run. Medley also provides the ERP backend, which is another leg of the business to make pharmacies more efficient. This tech platform can be scaled rapidly anywhere as the platform is cloud-based. The firm has access to huge amounts of data as well, which will help identify the kind of products made across its locations.

Medley Med also has an online SAAS (Software as a Service) telemedicine platform where it provides online doctor consultancy, and diagnostics. The firm offers this as a white label product to businesses, and hospital chains which can integrate this on their websites. It's an all-in-one software.

Taking this further, Medley has also started local street clinics. The firm has partnered with pharmacies that have enough space within their premises to put up a kiosk or private place to provide consultation via a laptop or printer. A patient can take advantage of instant consultations – with the help of tie-ups with a doctor provided by Medley Med at the backend. With this model, a pharmacy can expand its revenue streams through online consultancy, diagnostics, and the sale of pills.

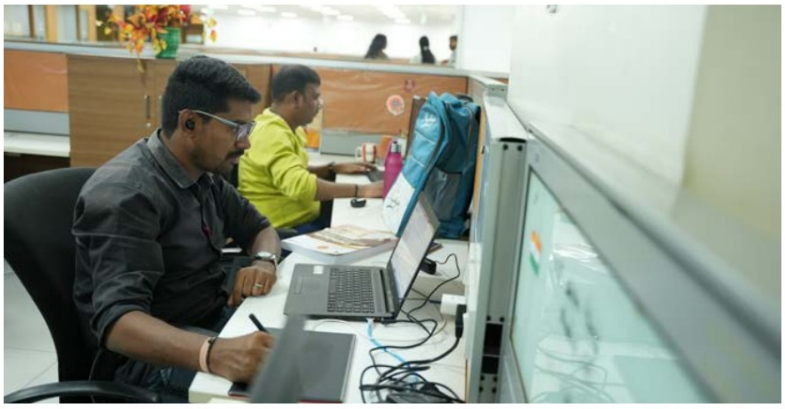
Education's big potential

Another vertical that Athena has made a splash in is education. The education vertical Tutoroot provides personalised learning to its students. With today's teaching models revolving around digital and centralised classes in the post



EMERGING STARS (₹ crore)

Company	Investment	Key highlights
Medley Medical Solutions	33.6	Medley Med is empowering mom-and-pop pharmacies to compete with online e-pharmacies with its cutting edge sourcing, technology and ERP platform
Tutoroot Technologies	14.5	Ed-tech company Tutoroot bringing foreign teachers and curriculum to enable students international and quality education



The company's ERP software helps owners of pharmacies to access data at their fingertips

Covid world, the digital classroom has lost the effect of personal coaching.

"Besides, over the past few years, the school education system around the world has undergone a tremendous revolution. Students are looking for enhanced skill sets, and personalised guidance to achieve their academic outcomes," says Suresh Kochattil, broadcaster and presenter at Tutoroot.

"We are incorporating digital tools into the classroom so as to enable educational institutions to deliver better learning outcomes and working models. We aim to revamp the education system and raise it to international standards, and we are equipping schools and education institutions with the latest ed-tech equipment. With seasoned faculty, we are able to foster higher engagement and learning outcomes for students," says Manchala.

As a part of its ed-tech endeavour, Tutoroot launched a 24-month Gateway 'To Success' programme for students to tackle the IIT-JEE. Tutoroot has experienced faculty drawn from IITs, NITs, and PhDs across the country. Besides, Tutoroot has incorporated an International Exam Excellence Centre (IEEC) to facilitate the growth of distinctive sets of skills essential for excelling in the secondary and senior secondary exams of international schooling systems.

Further, Tutoroot has partnered with schools to offer Direct to School Digital Online Learning support for students in the 8th, 9th and 10th grades in the IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) and IBDP (International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) curriculums. The subjects offered are English, maths, physics, chemistry, biology, computer science, economics, business studies, visual, and theatre arts. In fact, the latter is offered exclusively as personalised tuitions. Further, Tutoroot also offers EGDE, a foundation course in maths and science for national level entrance exams, adding value to the existing teaching content.

All this is done through interactive online classes with the best faculty with extensive experience. Batches consist of only 20 students, so teachers and professors can provide a personalised learning experience.

The unique mentor scheme, exclusive sessions for queries followed by partnerships with internationally recognised education organisations, is set to prepare students at an international level of learning. In fact, Tutoroot has a roster of key foreign tutors to provide strategic inputs and raise the level of students to international standards.

"We are excited to be a part of Tutoroot for the IBDP and IGCSE programmes. The classes are modelled on the Oxbridge tutorial and supervision teaching systems, recreating the teaching experience of Oxbridge as part of an immersive and tailored programme, guided by experienced mentors who have graduated from, or are currently studying at Oxford or Cambridge. Classes will be taught in line with the teaching philosophy based on Bloom's Taxonomy. This theory focusses on helping students through the processes of remembering, understanding, analysing, evaluating and creating. The mentors' teaching approach will lead the students through each stage to help with their studies," says professor Louis McEvoy.

Tutoroot aims to be one of the top learning brands in the country and focuses on tech courses for students who graduate from engineering colleges. This platform enables schools and teaching institutes to incorporate the platform into their curriculums.

Of scale and size

For Manchala, the journey is getting exciting, and could be immensely profitable. The education technology platform is taking root. With a focus on personalised education that is missing in the online and hybrid education models of today, Tutoroot should easily transform student learning outcomes over time.

In the pharmacy model, once Medley Med starts to scale up and add more pharmacies on its platform, massive economies of scale are set to kick in. Turbocharging the small mom-and-pop pharmacy with new age digital technology has made Medley Med one of the most compelling ideas in the business world.

A vast chain of pharmacy stores under its wing will allow Medley Med to become a large e-commerce pharmacy player, much like some of the biggies. In fact, Athena Global Technologies has invested nearly ₹34 crore in Medley Medical Solutions, which is a fraction of the investments some of the e-pharmacies have made and continue to make. In the education venture, Tutoroot Technologies, investments so far have been to the tune of ₹15 crore.

"We are making strategic capital allocations to these sectors, and we think that there is a potential to build a substantial business from these investments over time," says Manchala. Despite these investments, Athena Global Technologies stock has gained a 23 per cent CAGR in the last four years as investors seem to be warming up to the potential. Currently, shares trade at ₹60.

Indeed, Athena Global Technologies is incubating and nurturing two unique business models with huge potential. With every passing day and with scale and size, these new digital businesses could easily become the envy of large, deep-pocketed players. ◆

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Combating plastic menace

The solution lies in collective action

India's recent move to ban single-use plastics is a welcome step but we need to turn our attention to the more pressing issue of tackling the bigger issue of scientific solid waste management. Plastic waste in India makes up for only 6-8 per cent of all solid waste, as against a global average of 12 per cent. Industry estimates reveal that the ban will target only about 3 per cent of the total plastic waste produced. Hence, the ban on single-use plastics on its own does little to address India's massive waste management burden.

What do we really want, when we talk about single-use plastic ban? You know what's common between the Antarctica, the deep sea, and the French Pyrenees? They are all isolated and unhabitable; yet, we've found micro-plastics in all these places.

Our major problem is not in plastic usage but it's in the disposal of plastic waste. It's not just our government's duty to provide adequate waste recycling facilities but also the moral responsibility of every individual to ensure we know how to dispose plastic correctly and consistently put that knowledge into action. People can't change their behaviours overnight; hence, it's crucial to focus on behaviour change campaigns. For example, washing take-out containers with soap and water before disposing them in the dry garbage bin is key to ensuring that they are recycled – an unwashed container goes straight to a landfill, or worse, a water body. True, providing incentives for recycling or offering eco-friendly options that don't cost a high premium will have a significant impact on people's behaviour.

Godrej Consumer Products in Pondicherry is working with the municipality and a partner organisation to build accountability of waste segregation onto citizens, commercial establishments and institutions. In the pilot phase of the programme, over 90 per cent of citizens started segregating their waste.

Unpacking the regulations around plastics. Along with single-use plastic ban, we have the plastic waste management rules that focus on externed producer responsibility (EPR) and use of post-consumer recycled (PCR) plastics in packaging. In India, over 40 per cent of all packaging is in some form of plastic.

The rules state that companies should collect back 100 per cent plastic they put out and recycle 60-80 per cent of the waste based on plastic category. It also demands to reuse 10-60 per cent recycled plastic in packaging based on plastic category. While the rules focus on recycling and reuse, they do not focus on reducing plastic usage or using alternatives.

GAYATRI DIVECHA

About 9 per cent of all plastic waste is being recycled today. This is poised to rise to 17 per cent by 2060. Given these low figures, brands and businesses achieving their EPR targets seems impossible. Recycling and reuse are not going to be enough – and have proven in other cities like New York, to be ineffective as a stand-alone solution. We need to lower plastic usage in packaging and explore alternatives. The government of India has a blanket, open statement that encourages the use of alternatives to plastic without the necessary infrastructural, procedural support. Import fees on bio-plastics and sustainable alternatives are much higher than plastic products. The need of the hour is to get rid of these blocks in terms of taxes acting as a deterrent.

Reducing plastic packaging intensity is going to be vital to reduce the quantum of plastic we use. At Godrej Consumer Products, we have reduced our plastic packaging intensity by 6 per cent and aim to reduce it by 20 per cent by 2024. We are also exploring alternatives to plastic. We have recently replaced our traditional non-biodegradable wick in Good Knight Gold Flash liquid vapouriser to a biodegradable innovative wick that we developed in-house. We have been able to reduce our plastic dependency by over 300 tonnes a year while reducing our costs and maintaining the same efficiency of the product.

Learnings we can apply. India needs a well-defined holistic strategy to manage its waste before it's too late. Our landfill management practices fall far short of the scientific approach that's needed to ensure they don't pose a hazard to local populations. We need stringent laws to police the indiscriminate dumping of garbage in landfills that is currently the norm. Recently the National Green Tribunal (NGT) imposed an ₹12,000 crore fine on Maharashtra state for not managing their solid and liquid waste properly. The citizens must bear the brunt on both ends – pay higher taxes and still live around landfills and filth.

Using an approach founded on technology, transparency and awareness will enable us to more accurately identify waste that is recyclable and create a formalised recycling ecosystem that can also create revenue and employment opportunities for governments and individuals. The solution lies in collective action.

The problem can only be tackled in any meaningful way if the government, corporate sector and every one of us as individual citizens join together. The first step all of us together need to take is to introduce awareness and transparency. ◆

The author is head, corporate social responsibility, Godrej Industries and associate companies

'Landmark' growth

SANJAY BORADE

Sanjay and Aryaman Thakker: robust business processes

This Ahmedabad-based auto dealer chain is in an overdrive

This is the *Chai Pe Charcha* story of 1998. Thirty-two-year-old Sanjay Thakker was having a chat with his young friends and one of them announced that Honda was looking for a dealer in Ahmedabad. They decided to give it a try and Thakker jumped at the idea. That was how the first shop of Landmark Cars Limited was set up at New York Tower in 1998 in Ahmedabad.

"Looking back, it's with immense happiness that we realise that the gamble worked as today we have emerged as a large, professional setup with 112 outlets across 32 cities," says Thakker. "The Japanese appreciated the young blood and their courage and helped us bring in a lot of professionalism," he says.

His father passed away when Sanjay was 11 years old and he grew up in an extended family which proved to be very helpful. Both sides of the family come from business backgrounds, and there were early conversations about growing the family business or venturing into new areas. That left a lasting impression and sowed the thoughts of becoming an entrepreneur in Thakker's mind. He was just 17 years old when he started working. He set up his first office in a small room in Sewri in Central Mumbai from where the family managed collection of rent and getting encroachers out of their properties. He quickly ventured into the arbitrage business, taking advantage of the price difference between the Madras and Mumbai stock exchanges. He grabbed the opportunity to build the capital which was subsequently used for setting up Landmark.

Landmark took the major decision to separate management from the dealership, thus empowering the men at the showroom. This is revolutionary since 95 per cent of dealer outlets are looked after directly by promoter families even for day-to-day activities. A majority of dealers own the properties and try to thrive on realty appreciation.

Rajiv Vohra, board director who has been associated with Landmark since the beginning says: "I have always had the highest regard for Thakker, not only as a business person but also as an individual. He firmly believes in separating ownership from management and this set the foundation for growth in the early days. This helped not only attract talent at all levels but also retain it," says Vohra who was with Honda Cars in 1997 and subsequently joined Landmark.

Debt-free

"Landmark goes with an asset light model with long-term lease arrangements," explains Thakker. Landmark continues to be debt-free. Group Landmark has a presence across the automotive retail value chain, including sales of new vehicles, after-sales service (including spare parts, lubricants, and accessories), pre-owned passenger vehicles, and facilitation of sales of third-party financial and insurance products.

The company was the number one dealer in India for Mercedes-Benz, Honda and Jeep in terms of wholesale sales for Fiscal 2021 and a top contributor to Volkswagen retail sales for calendar year 2020. It was the third largest dealership in India for Renault in terms of wholesale sales contribution for calendar year 2020. In Fiscal 2021, Landmark

contributed 13.41 per cent (Mercedes-Benz), 5.20 per cent (Honda), 21.63 per cent (Jeep), 5.95 per cent (Volkswagen) and 4.83 per cent (Renault) of domestic sales, as per a CRISIL Report.

Urvi Modi, Board Director says: "Sanjay is extremely approachable and accessible to all, irrespective of their level in the organisation. He is great at time management; he is able to fit in so much into his day that it amazes me." Modi particularly appreciates the multitasking skills of Sanjay Thakker, who she says is very hands-on, and can think of the micro details of things yet does not micro-manage. In 2015, TPG was looking to invest in an auto dealer chain which runs on the successful model of China Grand Auto (CGA) and it arrived at Landmark. TPG took a 29 per cent stake by putting in ₹140 crore which helped Landmark expand its portfolio with Jeep.

According to the CRISIL Report, currently, there are only a handful of very large dealerships in India with more than 100 outlets and a presence across four to five states in India. Compared with global dealership giants such as Penske Automotive (approximately 320 dealerships across the US and UK, Group 1 automotive (approximately 185 dealerships across the US, UK and Brazil) and Zhongsheng Group Holding (386 dealerships across China), Indian dealerships are still in the development stages with significant room for expansion.

Thakker explains that his company's focus has been on the fast-growing premium and luxury segments of the Indian passenger vehicle market. CRISIL Research expects the premium segment to grow at a CAGR of 10-12 per cent from Fiscal 2021 to Fiscal 2026, while the luxury segment is expected to grow at a CAGR of 20-22 per cent during the same period. Landmark recently signed a letter of intent with the automaker BYD, a leading player in the global EV (electric vehicle) market, for dealerships in the National Capital Region-Delhi and Mumbai for their electric passenger vehicles.

Complementary businesses

The Indian auto market was divided between Maruti and other brands, with the former ruling the roost till last year. But now there is a clean shift towards premium and luxury cars. "Our business caters to the entire customer value-chain including retailing new vehicles, servicing and repairing vehicles, selling spare parts, lubricants and other products, selling pre-owned passenger vehicles and the distribution of third party financial and insurance products," says Sanjay Thakker's son Aryaman, director of Landmark. "We benefit from the synergies of these complementary businesses as well as increased customer retention from servicing our customer's various automotive needs," adds Aryaman, a Warwick Business School product with an MSc in Marketing and Strategy.

"I am a happy user of a Jeep Compass 4x4 which I bought quite recently," says Shatrughun Jiwnani. "It was a good choice and a pleasure dealing with the team at Landmark. They were very professional and I had a great purchase experience buying my Jeep from Landmark Jeep."

"As the number one dealer in India in terms of wholesale sales in Fiscal 2021 by sales volumes for new passenger vehicles for Mercedes-Benz, Honda and Jeep and the top contributor in terms of retail sales for Volkswagen in calendar year 2020, there is ample opportunity for new business in other segments by utilising our synergies in complementary businesses. For example, each sale of a new or pre-owned passenger vehicle provides us the opportunity to sell the customer an extended service contract or a financial product such as vehicle financing and insurance. Customers who purchase vehicles

LANDMARK CARS

Particulars	6 months ended Sept 31, 2021	FY21	FY20	FiY19
Total Revenue (₹ crore)	1,412.84	1,956.10	2,218.61	2,826.52
EBIDTA (₹ crore)	77.65	120.06	83.20	88.63
PAT (₹ crore)	27.95	11.15	-28.94	-24.43
TCI (₹ crore)	28.26	12.47	-28.94	-24.43
EBIDTA Margin %	5.47%	6.11%	3.73%	3.13%
PAT Margin %	1.98%	0.57%	-1.30%	-0.86%
TCI Margin %	2.00%	0.64%	-1.30%	-0.86%
No. of Vehicles Sold	8,375	13,635	16,961	22,281

Note: TCI means Total Comprehensive Income

from us also entrust us with the servicing and repairs of their vehicles at our dealership's authorised service centres through products such as extended warranties," Thakker explains.

Paras Somani – Executive & whole time director recalls the "inspirational 20 years" with Sanjay Thakker. "He practises empowerment while being approachable and transparent all at the same time with his visionary and democratic style of leadership while his analytical abilities, collaborative partnership, high impact communication and strategic innovation give him an edge," says Somani.

The senior Thakker explains that Landmark has established robust business processes "which assists us in reducing costs and increasing efficiency as well as ensuring faster operationalisation of new facilities". The company made forays into technology and platforms through its investments in Chatpay Commerce Private Limited (known as Pitstop) and Sheerdrive Private Limited (Sheerdrive). It holds a 9.79 per cent equity interest in Pitstop which aims to be a multi-brand car service and repair provider that focuses on reskilling and training technicians and providing access to the necessary modern equipment and OES and white labelled spare parts. The company holds a 19.97 per cent equity interest in Sheerdrive, an auto technology start-up. "We believe that the platform will drive transparency, accuracy and velocity of used car transactions," he says as the company has implemented Sheerdrive's platform in its pre-owned passenger vehicles business.

Continued to be profitable

Nimish Choksi's relationship with Landmark goes way back, as he has been a loyal customer for almost 8 years. "The team at Landmark is always available, extremely knowledgeable with a tremendous 'can do' attitude," Choksi says.

Landmark's total income in the six months ended 30 September, 2021 was ₹1419.7 crore. The company clocked ₹1966.3 crore in Fiscal 2021, ₹2,228.9 crore in 2020 and ₹2,834.6 crore in 2019, says company CFO Surendra Kumar Agarwal. The fiscal 2020 figure reflected dull consumer sentiment coupled with inventory corrections for required BS VI emissions upgradation. The Covid-19 pandemic further impacted growth levels in Fiscal 2021. Despite a decline in revenues from operations between Fiscal 2019 and Fiscal 2021, in line with industry trends, Landmark's operations continued to be profitable during this period, explains Agarwal.

According to the Federation of Auto Dealers Associations (FADA), the passenger vehicle segment continued its 'Bolt' run by showing a growth of 10 per cent YoY and 44 per cent when compared to September 2019. Better availability due to easing semiconductor supply, new launches and feature-rich products kept customers glued to dealerships for getting their favourite vehicles during the auspicious period. The waiting period continues to range between 3 months to 24 months especially for SUVs and compact SUVs which have become the absolute choice for today's customer, FADA president Manish Raj Singhania says, quoting September 2022 data.

Landmark also runs service centres for Mercedes-Benz, Honda, Volkswagen, Jeep, Renault and Ashok Leyland, apart from providing after-sales service and repairs through 51 outlets across eight states.

Landmark Cars Limited is going public and has already received SEBI observations for its IPO. According to the draft red herring prospectus, the issue consists of a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating to ₹150 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to ₹612 crore. The offer for sale comprises up to ₹400 crore by TPG Growth II SF PTE Ltd, up to ₹62 crore by Sanjay Thakker HUF, up to ₹120 crore by Aastha Limited and up to ₹30 crore by Garima Misra. The proceeds from its fresh issuance worth ₹120 crore will be utilised for the repayment or prepayment of borrowings. Axis Capital Limited and ICICI Securities Limited are the Book Running Lead Managers and Link Intime India Private Limited is the registrar to the Issue. The IPO is expected to hit the market by Diwali.

CRISIL Research expects overall passenger vehicle sales, including in the mass market and premium markets, to grow at a CAGR of 8-10 per cent from Fiscal 2021 to Fiscal 2026, and reach approximately 4.2 million units by Fiscal 2026. The agency forecasts the premium segment to grow at a CAGR of 10-12 per cent from Fiscal 2021 to Fiscal 2026, while the luxury segment is expected to grow at a CAGR of 20-22 per cent during the same period. Landmark intends to capitalise on this expected growth in demand.

Joining the digital India drive, Landmark has formed a 35-member Transformation Team under the leadership of Aryaman Thakker. "We are not to be swept aside by the disruption, but in a way, we are disrupting ourselves," he says. The digitisation, using business and data analysis and even artificial intelligence, will enhance revenues for the company.

"As digitisation drives the nation and India takes off, we consider ourselves lucky to be in the business when the auto industry is going to witness exciting times over the next decade or so," sums up the junior Thakker. ◆

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A symbol of trust

Branded medicines exude quality for patients

In a country like India, which has 1.4 billion consumers and is a melting pot of diversity – from geography to communities to cultures to language to literacy -- brands play a pivotal role to empower the consumers to differentiate between quality and sub-standard products. They also help the consumers seek the best value for money based on credible information prior to purchase of the products. Brands represent the leaders of a particular category of products across any sector.

The pharma industry is no different – they build brands that represent trust and assure quality in the interest of patient care. However, there is a growing belief that the brands are the reason for higher healthcare costs and only benefit the brand owners. If that is true, why have branded medicines been around for decades? Are brands jeopardising the patient's health and safety? If not, what role do brands play in patient care?

Patient centricity at the core

As far as patients are concerned, preferring a branded generic is the same as a customer choosing any other branded product. I recall a conversation I once had with one of my trusted medical practitioners. I asked him, 'Why do you not prescribe generic medicines to me? Why are you promoting branded generic medicines?' He said: "Generic medicines in India are not trustworthy as much as branded generics are, because the latter assure my patient's safety and quality. I cannot afford to play with the life of my patients". The genesis of the conversation was building trust and assuring quality, which was partly resolved when, in 2008, the Department of Pharmaceuticals launched the Jan Aushadhi Scheme (JAS) to provide a brand to generic medicines and bring fair competition with branded generic medicines. I could see a smile on the face of my medical practitioner when he said: 'I can now prescribe *jan aushadhi* branded generic medicines, because the government is behind the brand.

We all know the fate of such retail stores. We have seen how they are managed today, even after providing several positive feedbacks on behalf of patients, which are ignored and not implemented till date in the interest of the beneficiaries.

The drug prices in India are among the lowest in the world. Unlike other countries that have robust insurance and healthcare ecosystem, most Indians pay for their medicines out of their pockets. This accounts for about 28 per cent of their healthcare expenses on medications, compared to the global average of 15 per cent.

BEJON KUMAR MISRA

The author is a professor and an international consumer policy expert in India

In India, the patients go to private registered medical practitioners (doctors) for day-to-day ailments and consult hospitals for major illnesses. For a patient, the doctor is the custodian of their health. Patients leave the choice of diagnosis and treatment to the doctors. Doctors, based on their experience, prescribe a brand, which they trust will treat the patient. The doctors' judgement is considered supreme in the selection of the brand, as they are responsible for the patients' health. Doctors know that all brands are not the same and substituting one medicine for another may lead to complications of the patient's health. Particularly, the pharmaceutical profile of every product depends on the manufacturing processes, distribution and storage of the products throughout the length and breadth of the country.

It is vital that the choice should be left to the doctors and their patients instead of being determined by channel members or any other factors. The manufacturers of certain branded medicines, I have observed, focus on development and upgradation of their products over a period of time. The companies work on the education of doctors, patients and channel members. Medicine is not just a mixture of chemical ingredients. It comprises a rigorous manufacturing and procurement process, quality control, distribution & storage, product & clinical development work, and thus build awareness over a period of time. Branding encourages innovation and build value around the best expected outcomes based on clinical research that represents the trust and quality of a medicine.

India has 10,000 plus manufacturers and 30,000 plus manufacturing units. We have about 100,000 plus formulations. The government has announced measures to improve the overall quality. We should work in a mission mode to strengthen the quality standards and implement stringent punitive measures to tackle the menace of spurious and not of standard quality (NSQ) medicines. Fake medicines and substitutions in the trade channel makes patients most vulnerable to risk and compromised healthcare. Several studies are available to find the most appropriate solutions, but there has to be a political will to protect the consumers.

Let the patient be at the centrestage and let the doctor be the custodian of patient's health. ◆

Social capital

Renamed TruCap, the NBFC is looking unserved needs

On 3 August 2022, the MSME focused lender Dhanvarsha Finvest Limited re-branded itself as TruCap Finance Limited (Tru). "The evolution of Dhanvarsha to TruCap unifies its product offerings on one platform driven by synchronising digital assets and an offline branch network to cater to a rapidly expanding customer base," says Rohan Juneja, 41, MD & CEO commenting on the way forward for the company. He started his career as an equity research associate with Keefe Bruyette & Woods. He was also with FrontPoint Partners LP as Financial Analyst and Vice President where he worked extensively on analysis, research and investment in financial services and real estate companies in India and US. Later, he was associated with Seawolf Capital LLC as Vice President, responsible for investing and managing a portfolio of listed equities within financial services companies in India and US.

He says: "Tru stands for trust, reliability, and user-friendliness in building credit solutions for unserved and unserved needs of small businesses. As consumers gain more confidence in transacting digitally, building a responsible lending platform is critical to truly build financial security, resilience, and freedom for our customer base."

Juneja: Tru stands for trust

Beginning in May 2017, Tru's mission started with an idea – to 'build social capital' by aiming to provide credit solutions to India's large underserved and under-banked MSME segment. Promoted under the aegis of the 80-year-old Wilson group (the pen company) of Mumbai, the company aims to provide timely, affordable, and sustainable access to credit to underserved borrowers, either through its own balance sheet or via significant distribution tie-ups coupled with its robust technology engine. The equity shares of the company have been listed on the BSE and the NSE since January 2017 and May 2022, respectively. With 59 per cent held by the Wilson group, 8 per cent is with the company management and the counter currently trades around ₹68 (face value: ₹2).

Financing options

Meanwhile, after the company piloted multiple models with ecosystem partners, it has arrived at offering affordable and ease-focused financing options through MSME business and gold loans under ₹20 lakh to start and enable the credit journey of millions of customers. "In the long term, we hope to grow and address larger credit needs as they develop," says Juneja. Tru will be offering gold finance to MSMEs through its offline branch network by retaining the brand name Dhanvarsha; and the evolving credit solutions and MSME business loans will be rebranded under the Tru umbrella to cater to the capital requirements of small micro-enterprise businesses.

Tru started lending operations in Mumbai in FY18 by offering loans against property and diversified into MSME business and MSME gold loans by building deep sectoral expertise in underwriting to finance daily cash and carry businesses such as kirana stores, small manufacturing units, medical

shops, etc. With an integrated digital platform and more than 58 experiential centres across Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi NCR and Goa, as well as a presence in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. It has 200-plus direct sales agents (DSAs), across West, Central, and North India. As of 22 March, it has a strong liability franchise with 29 marquee Indian lenders. "Tru will now focus on building a stronger and unique distribution network to help MSME business and consumers access credit at affordable rates with ease," adds Juneja.

Although financial inclusion has seen tremendous boost in the last couple of years through timely interventions such as Jan Dhan accounts, growth in digital payments, evolution of UPI, e-commerce, and embedded finance, a large MSME consumer base still faces challenges in securing loans. To fix this gap, Tru has expanded its distribution network within and around the vicinity of MSME hubs to simplify solution delivery.

"While discussing the situation with a friend I got to know about Tru. Its cooperative behaviour, personal guidance and easy access to funds helped me improve my business. I increased my stock and got into online grocery delivery. My sales have eventually increased in ecommerce line for about 20 per cent and 10 per cent increase in walk-ins have been noticed", says Dinesh Gala of Pragati Super Market, who after doing an MBA and acquiring experience of one year opened his own shop in Goregaon, Mumbai. He wished to expand his business, but it got tough due to lockdown. He says: "We have weathered ups and downs in business with the help of Tru."

Roopali Bhoir is proprietor of the business – Jai Malhar Transport, and runs with the support of her husband and son. The business deals with logistic and transport services, also providing tempo services for grocery deliveries across the city. "There came a time when we thought of expanding and improving our margins, but we did not have access to capital. This is when we heard about Tru. It helped us in covering working capital expense such as diesel for the vehicles, salaries of the drivers, investment in other transport related activities. We now have 100 employees," says Bhoir

Strategy to serve

In 2011, Hare Ram Mahato started as a street seller; it took him two years to rent a shop to establish his spice business. Earlier, he was operating as a micro enterprise but then he turned his business into a wholesale one. "I connected to Tru. Earlier we had one spice production unit in Dewa but now we have two more units in Vikhroli and Dombivli. I have plans to grow and expand further and build my own brand in the business of spice through the support of Tru," says Nahato.

In the recent past, with a strategy to serve the last mile customer, the company has entered into lending-as-a-Service (LAAS) partnerships with banks and financial institutions. Tru is equipped to scale its offerings to micro enterprise businesses and customers. "With 'collaboration' as a core pillar to build social capital for MSME markets through LAAS, the company's mission is to empower last mile reach for unserved MSME customers. "We aspire to bring positive social impact by building lives and livelihoods by assuring our consumers that capital is not difficult but flexible and can be used a positive leverage to grow and create sustainable businesses," adds Juneja.

Earlier in May 2022, Tru raised ₹62 crore in funding from global finance veterans along with the promoter group and key management. The company has an unlevered balance sheet with a debt-to-equity ratio of 1.5 times and capital adequacy in excess of 40 per cent. Its lending partners include marquee financial institutions like HDFC Ltd, State Bank of India, Central Bank of India, Northern Arc, DCB Bank, and 24 other financial service institutions.

Soon after rebranding, on 10 August, Tru declared financial results for Fiscal 1Q23 which included profit after tax of ₹1.85 crore in FY22 from ₹35 lakh. This was led by strong disbursement and AUM growth of 288 per cent and 199 per cent, respectively and an active customer count of 45,985. The key highlights for Q1FY23 were that the AUM stood at ₹359.2 crore, up three times in the last one year from ₹131.8 crore; disbursements stood at ₹162.1 crore in Q1FY23, up by 3.9 times from ₹41.7 crore. While the total revenue at ₹26.09 crore in Q1FY23 was up by 2.3 times from ₹11.42 crore in Q1FY22. The return on assets (ROA) is at 2.6 per cent and the net worth is over ₹211.0 crore, while the debt-to-equity ratio is 1.5 times. There are 45,985 active customers for Q1FY23 as compared to 10,956 in Q1FY22.

Finally, Tru has entered aggressively in the co-lending business working with banks. "We have a goal to touch ₹3,000 crore in this business, as a service to our customers," sums up Juneja.◆

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Preventive care

Flebo.in carves out a niche space in the Indian market and is looking at expanding its footprint pan-India

Increasingly, more and more people from all walks of life and age groups are preferring safe and secure sample collections from well-trained phlebotomists and these consumers are unwilling to compromise on quality

– ASHISH VIKRAM
Co-founder & CEO, Flebo.in

The Covid-19 pandemic and its deadly waves had an impact on families and caused mayhem in India. A grim statistic came to the fore during this time – the dearth of allied healthcare professionals to collect samples. Not surprisingly, the pandemic underscored some harsh realities of the healthcare system in India.

Against this backdrop, a new trend is sweeping India which not only offers hope to patients but also provides a boost to this sector. "Increasingly, more and more people from all walks of life and age groups are preferring safe and secure sample collections from well-trained phlebotomists and these consumers are unwilling to compromise on quality," explains Ashish Vikram, co-founder and CEO, Flebo.in, an aggregator platform that was launched in November 2021. Flebo.in is backed by SpiceJet CMD Ajay Singh and offers a one-of-a-kind bouquet of services that not only focus on sample collection but ensures that its trained phlebotomists wear anti-microbial suits while visiting the homes of patients.

"We started with the view of providing the best quality phlebotomy service to the customer. We use the best quality FDA approved vacutainers and needles that self-destruct after the first use. The special bevel-tipped needles require 32 per cent less pressure and hence are less painful. Our specially designed backpacks have a cold gel compartment for keeping collected samples, thus ensuring that they do not get spoilt during delivery to the lab. Our Flebos wear anti-microbial uniforms which reduces risk of infection from other patients. We guarantee that Flebos will arrive at the time and provide real time tracking of the sample so at any stage the customer knows where the sample is," says Vikram.

Rising footfalls

This strategy has been reaping huge benefits as the company has scored a 50 per cent rise in footfalls – especially from elderly patients, senior citizens and single working professionals – who have become especially careful post Covid. "It took us some time to put all the blocks in place. This included the artificial intelligence (AI) enabled IT system that is used for comparing and booking a test by the customer from Flebo.in, or the phlebotomist app which tells them the collections they have to do each day and guides them via a map from one collection site to another and is a customer feedback solution on which the ratings and also salaries of our phlebotomists depend. We have also put together a hiring and 'customer delight training' program for the phlebotomists, tied up with more than 70 labs in Delhi and NCR region, set up a call centre for people that want to book via a phone call or need any kind of help with their tests. Since our launch the number of collections per day in the Delhi region has been growing exponentially every month and more importantly, we have an average customer rating of 4.6/5 with more than 2,500 feedbacks received so far," adds Vikram who in sync with his professional outreach, adds that the company promises a "100 per cent money back guarantee" if their phlebotomists do not reach the homes of customers on time.

Interestingly, 30 per cent of the phlebotomists on the company's rolls are women and it is looking forward to adding more women to its network. "The big city life has its own challenges, especially on the safety and security front. Not everyone is comfortable letting a stranger into their home for allied healthcare services. The presence of a female phlebotomist smooths over this concern to a large extent especially, for our elderly customers," says Vikram.

"This is my first experience with Flebo and it was very nice and I am highly impressed with the service. The sample collector boy came on time, very hygienic, he took the sample very nicely and was very polite. The best part is the company's sample collection kit. Everything is packed in a sealed packet and opened in front of us," says Naveen Tyagi, a user of Flebo.

As per research reports the diagnostic market in India was at $9.5 billion in 2021 and is expected to grow to $25.6 billion by 2027. This is expected to accelerate the adoption of preventive healthcare in India and accelerate the growth of the diagnostic market beyond current predictions. Finally, Flebo.in is also looking at expanding its footprint pan-India in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, besides making its presence felt overseas as well. ◆

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Raising judicial transparency

The Supreme Court live-streams hearings of its Constitution benches for the first time

Screen grabs from the livestreams of the SC hearings

That day had three Constitution benches hearing pressing matters of constitutional legislation. One was the case concerning 10 per cent reservation for economically weaker sections (EWS), the second, the Shiv Sena case of Uddhav Thackeray versus Eknath Shinde, and the third, the case relating to the validity of the All India Bar Examination (AIBE).

The live-streaming on YouTube garnered wide public viewership, the Shiv Sena case recording 395,991 views, the EWS hearing, 275,045 views, and the AIBE case, 104,89 views. Many social media users expressed themselves effusively at witnessing SC proceedings live for the first time.

A day earlier, a a bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) U.U. Lalit had remarked that the court would soon have its own 'platform' to live-stream its proceedings, instead of having to use YouTube. In both instances, viewers will be able to access the proceedings on their cell phones, laptops or computers.

In a previous first, the top court had on 26 August live-streamed proceedings of a bench headed by then CJI, N.V. Ramana, through a webcast portal. It was a ceremonial proceeding, as Justice Ramana was to demit office that day.

It was exactly four years earlier, on 27 September 2018, that a three-judge bench led by then CJI Dipak Misra had given the landmark ruling allowing live-streaming of hearings in the top court, except in sensitive matters involving sexual offences and matrimonial disputes. Commenting that "sunlight is the best disinfectant" during hearings on the Swapnil Tripathi case, Justice Misra had mentioned, "Live-streaming as an extension of the principle of open courts will ensure that the interface between a court hearing with virtual reality will result in the dissemination of information in the widest possible sense, imparting transparency and accountability to the judicial process."

Some High Courts start live-streaming

His suggestion remained unimplemented as regards the SC, as modalities for live-streaming were not finalised. Under the guidance of the SC's e-Committee, a sub-committee was constituted for framing 'Model Rules for Live-Streaming', which were then forwarded to the Computer Committees of High Courts for feedback and suggestions. Subsequently, several High Courts, as of Gujarat, Odisha, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Patna and Madhya Pradesh, started live-streaming their hearings in their respective official YouTube pages, thereby allowing the media and other interested persons to join the proceedings.

"The decision to live-stream the proceedings of the Constitution benches was taken by the Full Court on 20 September 2022 and, soon thereafter, trial runs were undertaken by the Registry," said an SC press release. "The technical support teams ensured that the live-streaming was without any obstruction or difficulty and was completely seamless."

The press release noted that this step would go a long way in overcoming the barriers of distance and provide to citizens from every nook and corner the opportunity to watch the SC proceedings. It added, "This is a humble beginning, and attempts will now be made to live-stream proceedings in all important matters before live-streaming of all the proceedings becomes the order of the day."

It was senior advocate Indira Jaising who had petitioned the Supreme Court in January 2018, seeking direction from the bench presided over by then CJI, Justice Misra, for live-streaming of proceedings in the top court of cases of constitutional and national importance. Prior to her application, the SC had already initiated CCTV recording in trial courts and tribunals of each state so as to bring in transparency. Appearing in person, Jaising said citizens have the right to information, and her petition was filed for enforcement of public interest, to advance the rule of law and bring accessibility and transparency in the administration of justice.

Within weeks, Jamshed Mistry, counsel, SC and Bombay High Court, took up an intervention application on behalf of Mumbai-based businessman, Amrish Kilachand, to move the apex court to approve transcription services for all courtrooms in India, similar to what they have in Canada, the US, the UK, Australia and other developed nations. The court allowed the interlocutory application, and, according to Mistry, all requisite information was submitted to the SC committee and legal transcription for the top court and High Courts may soon be a reality.

In fact, the Karnataka High Court was the first to introduce legal transcription, drafting necessary rules allowing it. ◆

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Employer branding

A company should invigorate its employer brand to attract and retain the best talent

Some of the key challenges most companies face (besides work from home fatigue and moonlighting that adversely impact productivity and performance) relate to the ability to attract and retain talent, besides industry-specific challenges, such as high attrition in information technology & management consulting. All these factors have contributed to the phenomenon called The Big Resignation. Chief human resource officers, business heads, and executives tired of wasting time, energy and money on ineffective hiring techniques, in particular; are at a loss to find a long-term sustainable solution to fill vacancies.

Bryan Adams, CEO & founder, Ph. Creative, a world-renowned employee-branding agency, which has worked with leading MNCs, such as Apple and Virgin, is a vocal advocate. Welcome to the world of 'employer branding' – through meticulously developed employee value proposition (EVP). EVP is what an organisation wants to be associated with, as an employer and lays emphasis on 'give & get' – basically, an employment deal: the value that employees are expected to contribute and the value that they can expect in return.

The question, though, is how does a company reinvigorate its employer brand in order to attract and retain the best talent, on one hand, and also turn its current employees into loyal, enthusiastic and ardent ambassadors, on the other? One of the best examples of employee value proposition that strikes a chord is that of Unilever: 'Unilever is the place where you can bring your purpose to life through the work that you do, creating a better business and a better world. You will work with brands that are loved and improve the lives of our consumers and the communities around us.' Another inspiring one is from Nike: 'win as a team'.

Key elements to develop an 'employer branding' and to win the war on talent:

- Go for Jedis: A company must strive to attract purpose-driven Jedis – smart people who show extraordinary skills and expertise in their specified fields. Jedis have a razor-sharp focus and calmness with sincerity of purpose.
- Positive advocacy: Create a strong and compelling employer brand -- an external image, built on the perception of the environment around you, namely employees, potential candidates, suppliers and customers, etc. Key elements of which are employee satisfaction (perception of great place to work), customer delight (meet and exceed customer expectation always), leveraging story-telling techniques to prospective employees about company's core values, mission and vision. Some other tools of employer brand are timely appraisals, reward and recognition programmes, team meetings, employee welfare programmes including exit interviews & employee farewells. Even after choosing a different career or company employees from such organisations continue to be your brand ambassadors by narrating pleasant experience and stories.
- Research & employee interaction: Research goes a long way in helping establish employer brand. It is critical to ask employees the right questions about their knowledge and understanding of the organisation's EVP, which should not be left to be determined by the board or based on the assumption of the board members. It should be articulated based on outcome of such research at employee level.
- Activate your employer brand: An employer brand is as effective as its implementation – activation. It needs to move beyond mere words and ideals to a real intent to build a reputation that has an impact, Activation implies that the employer brand is being applied to all the touch points -- prospective employees, employee ecosystem to attract, engage and to retain top talent. It is a three-step process involving Three Hs -- Heart, Head and Hands; win employee's heart by making them believe in your brand, fill their heads by giving them the language and the emotion of your employer brand and equip their hands by providing them right tools to contribute effectively and bring the employer brand to life.
- Impressive website & career page: Being the first touch point for your company, the website and career page must bear the look and feel of organisation's employer brand. A study suggests that 50 per cent people decide to work for a company based on the employer brand and EVP of a company as depicted in the website. Conversely, one-third of prospective employees chose not to work for a company's 'whose' website was not impressive enough.
- Objectives & metrics: 'What gets measured, gets done'! Put in place 'smart' goals to cascade the EVP and employer brand, followed by periodic team meetings, cohorts and town halls to measure their effectiveness.

Like the advertisers will make you believe that a pack of chocolate will enhance joy for the family; employer branding should also make prospective and existing employees believe that the company that they are applying to or are working for have the same brand promise.

In summary, one is reminded of what Bryan Adam wrote in his book Give & Get Employer Branding: "Repel the many and compel the few with impact, purpose and belonging". ◆

ANAND GARG

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Securing data

Futurex bets big on the Indian data security solutions market

Futurex, the world's leading enterprise data security solutions provider has recently opened its office in Noida. The Texas-headquartered company which has remained the trusted provider of hardened enterprise-class data security solutions for over 40 years, though has already been serving a wide range of Indian companies as part of its South Asia operation, has now decided to set up its operation in India to serve this rapidly-growing market better.

Futurex is the only company to offer cloud-based hardened enterprise-class data encryption solutions locally in the South Asian region. Its cloud HSM solutions help organisations migrate their aging cryptographic infrastructures from end-of-life legacy solutions. In India, Futurex serves customers across telecommunications, BFSI, e-governance, retail, and automobile sectors, securing high value transactions. Recently, some of the large enterprises and fintech companies have joined the fast-growing customer base of Futurex in India.

"Futurex is not new to the Indian market. We have served the South Asia region for close to a decade before setting up our separate office in Noida this year to cater to the spike in demand for enterprise data security solutions. Prior to this, we used to manage our operations via local partners, who are equipped with local support resources, from our USA corporate and EMEA office in London, UK. The Indian enterprise data security solutions market is growing quite rapidly. In fact, India has emerged as a significant market for us and hence we want to serve our customers well with our local team," says Ruchin Kumar, VP – South Asia, Futurex.

The global company, serving over 15,000 business and financial organisations through its innovative cryptography and tokenization solutions to address mission-critical data encryption and key-management needs, has also set up two data centres – one each in Mumbai and Hyderabad. These data centres, PCI certified and well equipped with FIPS certified HSMs and key management solutions, have been put up to address client's preference to work with data centres within the geographical boundaries, in compliance with Indian data residency norms.

Kumar: we want to serve our customers well

User-friendly solutions

"Customers can access PCI, FIPS 140-2 certified cloud-based cryptographic infrastructure to fulfil regional data residency and other compliance mandates at better RoI compared to similar setup on-premise. We offer this service through our PCI-certified data centres in Mumbai and Hyderabad. Futurex has 13 PCI-certified data centres worldwide to enable customers to scale their cryptographic infrastructure globally on demand and gain competitive edge due to faster data processing and transaction speeds," adds Kumar.

Having over 24 years of experience in the IT industry with the past 20 years in the IT security domain, Kumar has worked very closely with central banks and regulators in SAARC and ASEAN region in implementing security in payment systems, banking infrastructure and inter-banking settlements. Armed with a Masters in Computer Science, he previously worked with SafeNet, Gemalto & R&D division of C-DAC in New Delh. He has also been involved in government initiatives of e-governance, citizen centric services, setting up of national identity repositories and many others. His experience covers ecosystem in various security projects with organisations like central banks, clearing houses, IT ministries, Unique ID authorities, nodal agencies and many more.

India is the hotbed of innovations such as contactless payments, P2P transfers and digital banking that are disrupting age-old practices and delivering compelling value to stakeholders across the transaction lifecycle. This is creating huge demand for high performance HSM and key management solutions for encryption and tokenisation from fintech companies that are demonstrating complete transformation on the ground.

HSM-as-a-Service is not only helping organisations in managing their cash outflow better but also saving them from maintaining expensive resources to manage the cryptographic platforms. Also, PKI and management of complete lifecycle of keys on HSMs is part of every new initiative of government, BFSI and commercial enterprises. This is likely to create growth opportunities from the financial sector and government initiatives like UIDAI which is growing phenomenally. Cryptographic platforms in the form of HSMs and key management have shown YoY growth of 27 per cent in the last 3-4 years in India as against 15 per cent in the SAARC region.

Also, new payment innovations need faster and scalable crypto modules to secure the transactions. Other emerging technologies like IoT and Blockchain need equivalent smart HSMs to secure applications. With the advent of the 5G platform all these technologies will become part of day-to-day applications as they will get the speed and bandwidth they need.

"Futurex being the reliable partner to BFSI, Fintech and government customers, is providing security solutions which are seamlessly integrated, user friendly and brings a better ROI. Our security solutions are business enablers allowing customers to concentrate on their core business rather than worrying for data security and compliance," says Kumar.◆

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Sustainable approach

Godrej & Boyce has provided paddling boats and fishing nets to Shirwal's fishermen community

Godrej & Boyce pursues an array of integrated rural development programmes in Shirwal

Godrej & Boyce Mfg Co, the flagship company of the Godrej group with presence across multiple industries -- from home appliances, security solutions to aerospace & defence -- is also known for meticulously pursuing its strategic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects aimed at achieving Good & Green goals. Over the years, it has emerged as one of the most socially and environmentally responsible companies in the country.

"At Godrej & Boyce, we take a scalable approach to sustainability initiatives ensuring that we create sustained value for our business, the communities, and the planet. From helping design and build over 600 resource-efficient buildings, doubling our energy productivity, being water positive to conserving several thousand acres of mangrove ecosystems around Mumbai and empowering over 1.6 lakh youth with employable skills, we have been making significant strides in our environment and sustainability initiatives as well as to India's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030," says Nyrika Holkar, Executive Director, Godrej & Boyce.

G&B has been quite active in carrying out its Good & Green goals in and around its manufacturing facilities spread across several locations in the country. One such location is Shirwal in Satara district of Maharashtra, where the company has multiple facilities across its three verticals i.e. Godrej Appliances; Godrej Interio and Godrej Lawkim Motors. Though G&B has been engaged in implementing various impact projects for many years, it is since 2016 when it has been pursuing these programmes in a more structured manner with curated interventions to strengthen and develop village communities in the region. The company is carrying out integrated rural development programmes in villages (covered over 10 villages; also covered over 1,400 farmers in the last two years) to improve women livelihood, agriculture output, education, health, water management and sanitation infrastructure.

A holistic approach

"Despite the industrialisation in the area in the past two decades, Shirwal remained under-developed in terms of socio-economic development. Prior to launching CSR initiatives in the area, we at Godrej & Boyce, conducted a landscape study at Shirwal. Indications of inadequate educational and skill development infrastructure, lack of healthcare facilities, and water and sanitation issues were amongst the major issues faced by the people here. We recognised that tackling these issues would require a holistic approach, rather than isolating problems. With this approach, we have launched a host of initiatives in Shirwal. These initiatives are intended at strengthening and developing entire village communities," says Ashwini Deodeshmukh, Head CSR & Sustainability, Godrej & Boyce.

Majority of the people in the region are engaged in farm-based employment. They either own farms or are agricultural labourers. While most people in Shirwal are employed for more than six months in a year, there is a small percentage of people who only have access to livelihood activities for less than six months, something which negatively impacts their livelihood. Being an industrial area, there are various avenues of employment in Shirwal. However, the dependence on agriculture and traditional approach to women's roles in society prove to be obstacles for them to utilize employment opportunities.

Godrej & Boyce has focused on empowering women through providing them with self-employment opportunities which can be leveraged by individual women as well as women's self-help groups (SHGs). For instance, one of the initiatives where women have been able to increase their incomes was through the formation of a women's SHG called Krushi Jivala Women Farmer Group, located in Palashi village for running a shade-net floriculture enterprise. The land for the shed-net has been provided by one of the SHG member's husbands. Taking a multi-collaborative route, the company partnered with local, grassroots NGOs which has facilitated the process of setting up and formalising the SHG.

A member of AWARD, the NGO which facilitated the formation of the SHG says, "Our job was to handhold the Krushi Jivala and ensure that they got the right kind of support. For this, we helped them open bank accounts. The next step was to build awareness and link them with existing government schemes of the agriculture department and NABARD. These linkages with government schemes are beneficial for obtaining subsidies, loans, and access to markets. In addition to this Godrej & Boyce has supported capacity building training for the SHG member for 3 years."

One of the SHG members says, "Covid was a difficult time for us as we could not access the external markets for sales. We were incurring losses. It was then that the members of the village Panchayat helped us to set up a

An agriculture workshop at the village

Shirwal gets pipe water supply for irrigation

local market during the Covid lockdown when inter-city travel was prohibited. This significantly helped us to cut our losses and sustain during the pandemic."

Today, the SHG cultivates 4 kinds of flowers and generates an annual income of ₹1.25-1.5 lakh. Similarly, women from the villages are also trained in making Agarbattis as an income enhancement venture. G&B supports the women by bearing half of the equipment cost. The additional income earned through these ventures has been ₹10,000 per annum per group.

The entire Tondal Village had to migrate due to the construction of Veer Dam on River Neera. Post migration, 12-15 families had to take up fishing in the backwater of the dam for their livelihoods. Using a highly risky method where tubes from bus and truck tires would be used for floatation, the fishermen were exposed to accidents, injury, parasites, and diseases. Moreover, they could only capture 3-5 kg of fish per day which would fetch them around ₹300-400 per day.

Godrej & Boyce has provided these families with paddling boats, fishing nets, which enable them to catch 10-15 Kg of fish in a day and earn between ₹800- 1,000 per day. This intervention has not only increased the productivity of the fishing community, but the life-jackets have also provided them with an additional layer of safety while fishing. Additionally, for post fishing, the catch fetches better prices if it is dried before selling. To facilitate this in an eco-friendly manner, the company has provided the community with solar dryers which can be used for the purpose and help them get a better price for the catch. One of the fishermen says, "We sell this fish for ₹40 per kg. We get double the price for it when it is dried. The solar dryer which was provided by Godrej & Boyce can be operated without electricity and we can easily use it. After drying, we can get between ₹80-100 per kg."

Promoting tourism

The Fort near Bajarwadi in Shirwal is a popular tourist destination and attracts trekkers, especially on weekends. The fort has the potential to become a livelihood generation option for the village by giving rise to hospitality generation services. The idea was to encourage tourists to stay back in the village and experience the rural life rather than immediately leaving. Godrej & Boyce supported the training of several households in hospitality services and crafting rural tourism packages. Bullock rides, guided tours for explaining the history of the region, explaining about agricultural equipment are some of the highlights of the village tours. These initiatives have seen rise in tourism in the region. The NGO partner working on ground for this project estimates that the income of people engaged in tourism related activities has increased by 15-20 per cent. Moreover, there is still scope for development of homestays and engaging activities for tourists once they have completed the trek to the fort.

Moreover, the farmers in the Bajarwadi village have been also supported through organic farming and farm mechanization. Rice planters have been provided to facilitate sowing of rice.

A spokesperson from AWARD explains, "During the need assessment phase, it was found that there was shortage of manpower for agricultural work including sowing, harvesting and bedding. Many agricultural activities require intense physical labour, and some activities can take a long time to complete. Farmers end up spending more money on these activities. Equipment such as rice planters were provided to the village farming community to be used as per need. With this they were able to facilitate the tedious process of sowing rice and save on working hours. Three villages have started this activity on group basis and used rice transplanter for cultivation."

Working with the shared value approach, rather than creating a parallel infrastructure for education, Godrej & Boyce has provided infrastructure development for the government schools in Shirwal. The company supported one of the schools in Bajarwadi village to obtain an ISO 9001 certification. This certification not only helps improve the processes and management of the school but also emphasizes on the role of teachers and the quality of learning. This creates an environment conducive to learning. ◆

ARBIND GUPTA

(He visited Shirwal on invitation of the company)

Partners in progress

Cotton day focuses on partnership for industry growth

On 23 September 2022, the Cotton Council International (CII) celebrated its third Cotton Day in Mumbai focussing on partnerships for industry growth. CCI, along with the leadership of the US cotton industry was educating over 120 attendees on how US cotton adds value for its partners in the Indian textile industry.

This year's event, held both virtual and in-person featured the theme 'Your Partner for Prosperity', bringing a fresh perspective from leading industry experts on how US cotton connects the textile community and is a trusted partner in the textile supply chain. CCI, the export promotion arm of the National Cotton Council of America (NCC), is a non-profit trade association that promotes US cotton fibre and produces cotton products around the globe with our COTTON USA trademark. CCI has years of experience promoting US cotton fibre and products to trade and consumers. CCI works with spinning mills, fabric and garment manufacturers, brands, retailers, textile associations, governments and the USDA to facilitate the use of US cotton. Its reach extends to more than 50 countries through 20 offices around the world.

"Accountability and transparency are integral to the US cotton industry's values," says William Bettendorf, Director, Cotton USA Supply Chain & South Asia, adding that "both brands and consumers today are increasingly becoming more responsible in their sourcing strategies. Sustainability and transparency are the top priorities in our industry, and with a collaborative approach, we aim to add value for our partners."

"The Indian textile industry is one of the largest industries in the country and has witnessed phenomenal growth in the last two decades in terms of installed spindles and yarn production. Technology-wise, the Indian spinning industry has been able to keep pace with the international technology trends. Cotton has been the growth engine for Indian textile industry, and India has become one of the largest consumers of cotton, with about 22 per cent of the world's cotton consumption", says Peush Narang, CCI Country Representative-India and Sri Lanka.

Bettendorf: collaborative approach

Updates and guidelines

Cotton Day India 2022 featured eminent speakers and panellists from the US Embassy, CCI, and cotton industry, experts from the US and UK, along with allied companies that support the industry with traceability solutions. The event had sessions about the recent global cotton scenario, an update on Indian cotton, risk management, the US Cotton Trust Protocol and how sustainability and transparency are defining future global supply chains. It also included the latest CCI updates and industry guidelines on how Indian textile mills could adopt Cotton USA Solutions' best practices to help increase profitability.

In a period of ever greater supply chain scrutiny and a growing demand for transparency and assurance, the US Cotton Trust Protocol provides mills and manufacturers critical assurances they need to prove to their customers that they are an approved supply chain partner for brands and retailers who are sourcing more sustainably grown cotton. "The Trust Protocol brings quantifiable and verifiable goals and measurement to sustainable cotton production and drives continuous improvement in key sustainability metrics. A combination of a unique credit accounting system and the Permanent Bale Identification (PBI) system enables full transparency throughout the supply chain to finished product. Choosing Trust Protocol cotton will allow mills and manufacturers to give brands the critical assurances they need to show that the cotton fibre element of their supply chain is more sustainably grown with lower environmental and social risk. Brands and retailers will gain access to US cotton with sustainability credentials proven via Field to Market, measured via the Field Calculator and verified with Control Union Certifications", adds Bettendorf.

Talking about full traceability he adds, "it is our long-term aspiration and the Trust Protocol credit system is being built with that goal. However right from the start we will provide greater transparency in the supply chain than ever before. Aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the Trust Protocol is a complement to existing sustainability programmes. It is designed from the ground up to fit the diverse cotton growing landscape of the US in an effort to drive industry-wide goals for continuous improvement. The US cotton industry continues to use and develop innovative technologies, adopt best management practices, and fund research projects that will help develop new farming practices globally".

Meanwhile the Trust Protocol members are working with participating growers to help drive continuous improvement among six key elements of sustainability: land use, soil carbon, water management, soil loss, greenhouse gas emissions, and energy efficiency. In this, mills and manufacturers will gain access to US cotton with sustainability credentials proven via Field to Market via the Fieldprint Measurement Analysis and verified by Control Union Certifications.◆

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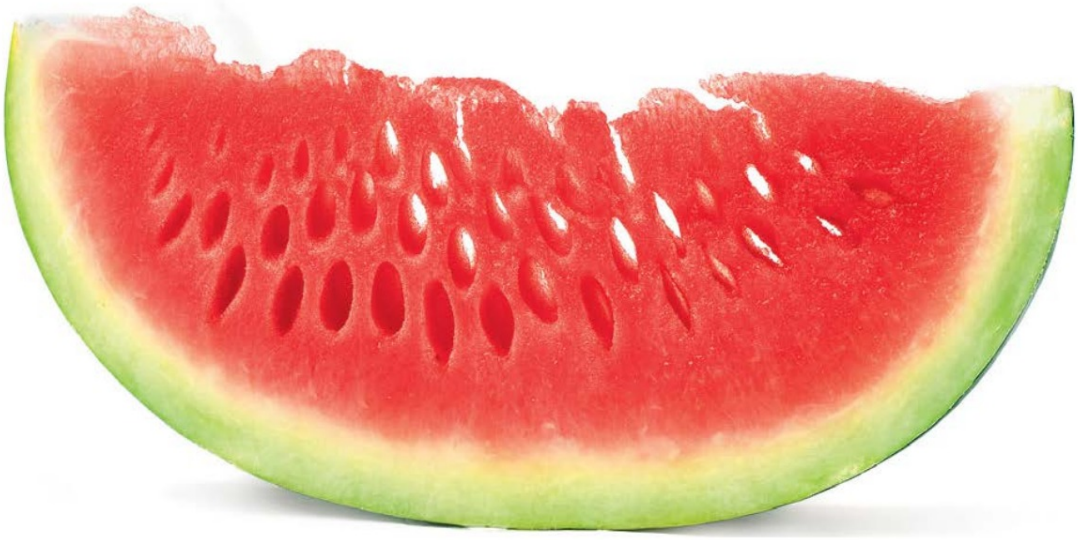
We take out the pips.
And leave you the fruit.



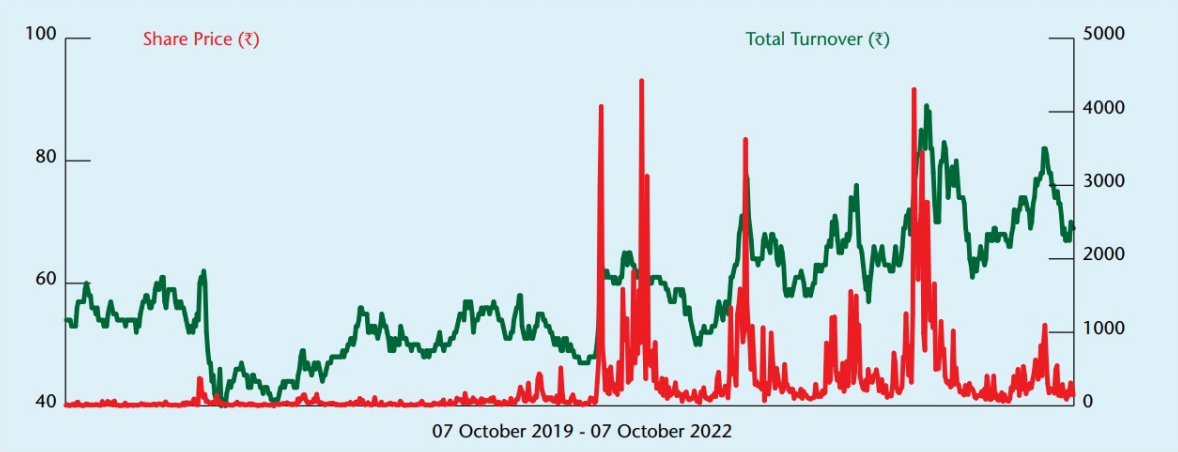
INCISIVE ◆ CREDIBLE ◆ AUTHORITATIVE

Emerging powerhouse

NLC's ambitious plans may soon make it a major power house both in thermal as well as solar

NLC India Ltd, formerly Neyveli Lignite, is a leading Navratna. While the former name of Neyveli Lignite gave the impression it was a leading lignite mining player in the country, the company has come a long way from being just another mining company. While it still produces more than 31 mtpa lignite, it is now much more than a mining player.

It is one of the largest power generators in the country, having built a capacity of 5,210 MW with a plant load factor of over 82 per cent. While many of its power plants are at pit-head plants, nearly 22 per cent of its current capacity is green power – solar and to a small extent, wind power. Since its inception in 1956 the company has amassed assets of over ₹34,500 crore and it has a net worth of ₹14,206 with the government of India owning 79 per cent. The Tamil Nadu government, through its institutions, holds around 4.3 per



GOOD SHOW

Qtr ended	Jun-22	Mar-21	Dec-21	Sep-21	Jun-21
Total Income (₹ crore)	3,966	3,164	2,845	3,314	3,222
Finance	221	215	232	264	265
PAT	740	331	230	358	358
EPS (₹)	4.1	2.39	1.66	1.42	2.39

GMDC and NLC

	GMDC	NLC
CMP (₹)	143	69
EPS (₹)	22.38	10.64
P/E x	6.35	6.47
PB x	0.96	0.69
ROE	15.04	10.69

CMP	69 (₹)
Marketcap	9547 crore
52 wk hi	92 (4-05-22)
52 wks low	55 (29-11-21)
PE	6.47x
PB	0.69

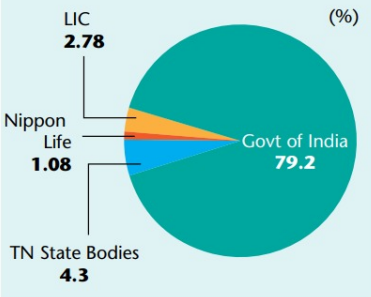
cent while individuals hold around 10 per cent.

From a single location in Tamil Nadu, NLC has footprints in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Assam and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The company has, over the years, gone from just mining to setting up power plants and has recently diversified into coal mining. Currently, it has a coal mine with a capacity of 20 million tonnes in Talabira, in Odisha, where it is in the process of setting up a super critical (3x800 MW) power plant.

While it has a glorious past what is more noteworthy is the plan to really scale up the power generating capacity of thermal power plants to 11,800 MW by 2030 and scale up its renewable power capacity nearly 4 times to 6,031 MW by 2030. The combined capacity will be 17,831 MW with a CAGR of 14.4 per cent from FY22. Lignite and coal production will go up to 89 mtpa by 2023.

2023 will be a landmark year for the company as one of its major power projects, set up as a joint venture with UPRVUNL (Uttar Pradesh Rajya Vidyut Utpadan Nigam Limited) is set to be completed in three phases during the year. The Ghatampur Thermal Power project will have a capacity of 660MWx3. NLC will have a 51 per cent stake in the project with the balance going to Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation (UPPC). Although delayed by 3 years since the anticipated date of completion the project has already inked a PPA with UPPC for 25 years with 75 per cent of the power to be supplied on a levelized basis of 4.52 kWh. The revised cost of the project is ₹19,422 crore.

LOW INDIVIDUAL HOLDINGS



NLC is increasingly using JV as a means to further its expansion in power. This protects it from taking all the risks on its books. In case of the Ghatampur Project, the funding is being done on a debt equity ratio of 70:30. The total cost of the projects in UP and Odisha has been envisaged at ₹46,000 crore. The total renewable project costs are envisaged at ₹23,405 crore.

A 1,000 MW Solar project which is being put up in collaboration with the Assam government was approved by NLC in July earlier this year and will likewise be a JV with NLC having 51 per cent.

Given its expertise in project execution and the running of plants, the company is also planning to get in the MRO segment in a big way. It already operates the coal mines in Odisha on an MRO basis. Adani is the other player which runs mines on an MRO basis. The rationale for the same is that with commercial mining set to take off, new players may require the expertise of existing players in the mining space. Currently, there are only two major players in lignite. GMDC is the other major player.

Diversification

After having successfully diversified into green energy, setting up solar plants, wind plants and even hybrid plants, NLC is actively eying other segments. It is in the process of finalising a project for getting methanol from lignite. A pilot project to make 0.4 mtpa methanol from lignite has been finalised. The project, envisaged at a cost of ₹4,400 crore, is estimated to be set up in 42 months. Engineer India Ltd (EIL) has been chosen as the project consultant with the project to be given on a lump sum turnkey basis. On completion, the project is expected to have ₹1,000 crore of LNG imports.

The company, which follows open cast mining for extracting lignite, is also planning to utilise the over burden (the initial mud to get to the seam) to convert it to sand.

In spite of the huge potential for NLC in the coming years the ₹10 paid up shares are traded at ₹69 at a p/e of 6.4 with a price to book value ratio of 0.9. The market cap of ₹9,547 crore seems to be low. One of the possible concerns is the timely execution of the projects. Many of them are capital intensive and with a debt of 70 per cent, timely execution becomes critical. GMDC, the other large company in mining coal and lignite, is traded at a similar p/e but has a higher return on equity of 15 per cent which is 50 per cent more than NLC ROE which stands at 10.7. The EPS of GMDC is ₹22.38 as against the ₹10.64 of NLC.

NLC could, however, undergo a rerating as its performance in the quarter ended June 2022 has been good. It has reported an EPS of ₹4.10 per share on a consolidated basis. This is more than half of the EPS of ₹8.05 reported in the 12 months ended March 2022. ◆

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SME PLATFORMS

Deals of a different kind

The SME platforms see a rush for listing

The SME platforms of both BSE and NSE together have seen a total of over 70 companies getting listed this calendar year (till the end of September). The rush is unabated. We took a look at the performance of select scrips listed in the calendar year 2022 and 2021 on both the platforms.

Out of 120 listings, 77 are trading above issue price. Topping the returns table is Knowledge Marine & Engineering Works, which went public last March. The company priced its share at ₹37 (₹10 + ₹27), which is trading now at ₹638, with its market cap at ₹653 crore. The Mumbai-based company is into dredging and, as of September 2022, owns 12 vessels. Saurabh M. Daswani and Kanak S. Kewalramani are the promoters. Sujay Kewalramani, the latter's husband, is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the company.

Knowledge Marine held an earnings conference call in May this year, relating to 2021-22. "The job is not easy, it requires a lot of skill," informed CEO Kewalramani, commenting on competition and the high margins which the company enjoyed. "Also, the competition is not high, with large players, such as Dredging Corporation of India and companies from Europe (Van Oord, Boskalis, Dredging International and Jan de Nul) choosing to fix contracts, which are for ₹100-150 crore. Therefore, there is minimal competition for contracts below ₹100 crore."

Kanak Kewalramani, who is also CFO of the company, appraised the attendees on the performance of the company. "Our operational revenue for 2021-22 has risen to ₹61.6 crore, which is 84 per cent up in 2021-22 over the previous year," she informed. "And, while the EBIDTA saw an uptick of ₹32.9 crore, with a margin of 53 per cent in 2021-22, the PAT stood at ₹20.9 crore, with a margin of 34 per cent during the same period."

By and large, public issues on this platform are on fixed prices. But, a few of them have taken the book building route too this time. One such case is the BSE-listed Prevest Denpro, which priced its share at ₹84 (₹10 + ₹74). Today, it is trading at ₹392, with a marketcap of ₹471 crore.

Prevest Denpro makes dental materials. The company's manufacturing unit is located in Samba (Jammu & Kashmir). A husband & wife team of Atul and Namrata Modi has promoted the company. Atul Modi holds a degree in mechanical engineering, while Namrata has a MBA degree.

Limited gain

For 2021-22, the company has recorded a total income of ₹39.73 crore, with a net profit of ₹11.56 crore. While speaking at the earnings conference call (for the first quarter of 2022-23) in August this year, Atul Modi (CMD) estimated that the company would generate revenues in excess of ₹50 crore in 2022-23.

PE Analytics and AB Cotspin India, both of which had tapped the market through the book building route, met with limited listing gains, as compared to Prevest. The issue size being small, public shareholding happens to be typically in multiples of 100. There are a few exceptions, such as Annapurna Swadisht and Varanium Cloud, both of which got listed on the same day (27 September 2022) on NSE. At the time of listing, the number of shareholders in the public category for Annapurna had stood at 1,064, while Varanium had 1,521. Nupur Recyclers, which got listed in December last, has 1,170 shareholders in the public category. Prevest Denpro has 1,251 public investors today. Numbers for these companies are as of June 2022.

Companies tapping the market are from different industries. BEW Engineering designs and makes plants and equipment for the pharmaceutical & chemical industry. Kotyark Industries produces bio-diesel, a liquid fuel. Empyrean Cashews refines raw cashew. Cool Caps Industries makes caps for plastic bottles. Maruti Interior Products is into making modular kitchen storage systems. The list goes on.

One company that is not in the list is EKI Energy Services, which has migrated to the main board. EKI got listed in April 2021 on the BSE's SME platform. The company had priced its issue at ₹102 (₹10 + ₹92) and the issue has got an encouraging response. "Our IPO was oversubscribed by ~3.66 times," informs Manish Dabkara, managing director, EKI, through its 2021-22 Annual Report. "I would like to highlight that this was the highest subscription achieved by any company in SME segment in the last three years. The company has raised ₹18.60 crore by issuing fresh equity shares".

The success of EKI so far has been unparalleled. In July 2022, the company gave a 3:1 bonus. Its current m cap is close to ₹4,000 crore and its scrip is changing hands at ₹1.398.

Buying and selling are slightly different on SME platforms. There are market-makers and, secondly, there is a minimum lot in each of these scrips, which are determined by the exchanges. In broking parlance, liquidity can be a hurdle. ◆

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NEW ISSUES

Asset light advantage

TTL is making an OFS to list on the bourse

Goyal and Singh: tracking emerging themes across industries and markets

Tracxn Technologies Limited (TTL) is a Bengaluru-based private market intelligence platform. According to the Frost & Sullivan report its RHP says it is a global market intelligence provider for private company data it ranks among the top five players globally in terms of the number of companies profiled offering data of private market companies across sectors and geographies. They have one of the largest global coverages of private companies in emerging technology sectors including IoT, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, robotics, blockchain, and electric vehicles.

Founded in 2012 by Neha Singh, CMD and Abhishek Goyal, VC and ED, Tracxn has received investments from Ratan Tata and the NRJN Family Trust. Among the angel investors are: Amit Ranjan, founder of Slideshare; Amit Singhal, ex-head of Google Search; Milliways Fund LLC; Aneesh Reddy Boddu, co-founder of Capillary Technologies; Girish Mathrubootham, founder of Freshdesk; Kolluri Living Trust; 3One4Capital Trust – 3One4 Capital Fund – Scheme I; Mukul Singhal Partner Pravega Ventures; NRJN Family Trust; VH Capital and Beenext Pte Ltd.

TRACXN TECH
ISSUE OPENS 10 October
SIZE OF ISSUE At the lower price band ₹290.04 crore and ₹309.37 crore at the upper price band
PRICE ₹75-80 per share
PROMOTERS Neha Singh and Abhishek Goyal
LISTING BSE and NSE
BLRM IIFL Securities

SSSSS

The company has an asset light business model and operates a software as a service (SaaS)-based platform which has scanned over 662 million web domains, and profiled over 1.84 million entities across 2,003 feeds categorised across industries, sectors, sub-sectors, geographies, affiliations and networks globally, as of June 2022. "The firm also offers customers private company data for deal sourcing, identifying M&A targets, deal diligence, analysis and tracking emerging themes across industries and markets, among other uses, through its subscription-based platform," says Neha Singh who has 3,271 users across 1,139 customer accounts in over 58 countries, as of June 2022. Its customers include a number of Fortune 500 companies and/or their affiliates

Over 70 per cent of the company's revenue comes from outside India – primarily APAC, EMEA and North America. In FY22, 29 per cent of the revenue was from India, 27 per cent from US, and 44 per cent from other countries. "There are significant cost advantages from India-based operations as a result of lower remuneration cost," says Goyal.

Talking about the revenues, TTL for fiscal 2021-22 posted a revenue of ₹63.45 crore from operations, a rise by 44.94 per cent as compared to ₹43.78 crore in fiscal 2020-21, primarily due to an increase in income from the sale of subscription services of its platform. However, there was a decrease in restated loss to ₹4.85 crore for fiscal 2021-22 against a restated loss of ₹5.35 crore for fiscal 2020-21. For the three months ended 30 June, 2022 it posted a rise of 22.93 per cent in its revenue from operations to ₹18.40 crore from ₹14.97 crore for the same period a year ago. However, it posted a net profit of ₹0.84 crore in the three months ended 30 June, 2022 compared to a loss of ₹0.72 crore in the three months ended 30 June, 2021.

TTL plans to raise between ₹209-309 crore through the issue. The offer is an Offer for Sale aggregating to 38,672,208 equity shares by the company's promoters and existing shareholders. Tracxn cofounders Goyal and Singh will offload up to 7,662,655 equity shares each. Similarly, Flipkart founders Binny Bansal and sachin Bansal will offload upto 1,263,096 equity shares each among others..◆

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Up in the sky!

Mukesh Ambani's son **Akash Ambani**, chairman, Reliance Jio, has been named by *TIME* magazine in the **TIME100 Next** list that recognises "rising stars from across industries and around the world. Significantly, he is the only Indian to be featured on the list this year. However, there is another Indian-born American business leader, subscription social platform OnlyFans' Indian-origin CEO Amrapali Gan, on the list as well. "The scion of Indian industrialist royalty, Akash Ambani was always expected to rise in business. But he has been putting in hard work," *Time* said about him. It must be noted that Akash, 30 was, in June last, promoted to the chairman of Jio, India's largest telecom company, with over 426 million subscribers, after being handed a board seat at just 22. "He has since played a key role landing multibillion-dollar investments from Google and Facebook," *Time* added. "If he handles Jio well, he may be given a crack at larger chunks of the family's conglomerate," said the profile in Time 100 Next. ◆

Art and a golden heart

Industrialist **Ratan Tata** is known for many remarkable charity works. But this one will win every heart. The recipient of his touch of good will is **Nilesh Mohite**, a 30-year-old artiste, who lives in Machhimar Nagar – a sprawling slum – in Cuffe Parade, Mumbai, with his mother, wife and a five-year-old daughter, in an 8x8 room. For months, Mohite had waited for an audience with Tata. "I had gifted him a painting," says Mohite. Later, he met Tata on the industrialist's birthday, 28 December in 2018 and gifted him yet another painting. "He asked me to come the next day. I went there but couldn't meet him, but I met him a few days later". Tata told Mohite that he wanted to give him money to buy a home so that he could live and work comfortably. Mohite refused the offer but answered instead: "Sir, I don't need money, I need work." So, about two months ago, Tata told Mohite to prepare for his exhibition. Activist Jyoti Bedekar and Marzy Farokh Parakh (of NGO Live to Give) helped with funds to buy colours, canvases and brushes. And a dream came true – the Taj Mahal Palace hotel in Colaba gave its coveted Taj Art Gallery to Mohite to display 21 works free from 26 September to 2 October. With his maiden exhibition, Mohite joins titans of art world like Jehangir Sabavala, M.F. Husain, V.S. Gaitonde, Ram Kumar and Laxman Shreshtha, who have exhibited at the gallery. ◆

Outstanding contribution

Raghupati Singhania, chairman & managing director, JK Tyre & Industries, has been conferred the prestigious '**Lifetime Achievement Award 2022**' at PHDCCI's 117th Annual Session 2022, celebrating India's Pursuit for Self-Reliance. The acclaimed award was presented to Singhania by **Om Birla**, Speaker, Lok Sabha. The event was organized to felicitate industry stalwarts, who have transformed society and made outstanding contributions, improving the community and setting benchmarks in entrepreneurship as well as leadership qualities. A prominent industrialist, Singhania has led transformation in each of his businesses. It was his leadership and innovation zeal that led JK Tyre to pioneer radial technology in India way back in 1977. On receiving the award, Singhania said: "I am honoured to receive this prestigious award and thankful to PHD Chamber of Commerce & Industry and jury members for conferring this honour on me. The award is a testament to JK Group's efforts towards serving society, with innovation and collaborative efforts. I would also like to thank my colleagues and industry partners for their support in our successful journey." Singhania was also conferred the 'Inspiring CEO of 2022' award at *The Economic Times* CEO Conclave 2022 in recognition of his substantial contributions ◆

Higher learning the British way

Nicola Huggett, head, **Cheltenham College**, the UK, one of the premier educational institutions in Britain since 1841, was in India recently to meet the officials, including **Vikrampati Singhania**, MD, JK Fenner, on education exchange between India and the UK. "Indians usually prefer foreign countries for higher education, but now for schooling, parents are sending their kids to boarding schools in the UK. We have met many fantastic Indian families. We are a co-educational school with 750+ students, 80 per cent of whom are in boarding school. Also, 20 per cent of the students are from overseas – 25 different countries, including India", says Huggett. "We do not have any exchange programme for students, but we want to introduce one soon. One of the reasons for our visit to India is to establish links and connections with the people. There are many Indian schools that are looking to collaborate with British schools and we would like to do the same. We have collaborated with schools in Oman and China and we would like to also collaborate with schools in India for our students to learn about India and for Indian students to learn about the British education system", adds Huggett. Many schools in the UK are looking to take a global approach. During her two-city tour – Mumbai and Delhi – she met many parents and also attended two educational fairs organised by Red Pen Education Consultants. ◆

The waterman cometh!

Ramkrishna Mukkavilli, founder & managing director, Maithri Aquatech, a Hyderabad-based start-up, has become the first Indian to be recognised by the UN Global Compact (UNGC) as a **Global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) pioneer** for water stewardship. Meghdoot, the company's one-of-a-kind solution, is based on an alternative water idea called Atmospheric Water Generation (AWG), which taps into a large, renewable water resource called AIR, which contains six times as much fresh water as all of the world's rivers combined. Mukkavilli's work in building water security with nature-based water solutions across India and 27 countries has helped him get this recognition. The technology meets the requirements of domestic consumers in water-scarce locations, top Fortune 500 companies, large public-sector companies, hospitals, schools, and underserved communities. It has saved an estimated 200 million litres of crucial groundwater resources from exploitation. "Recognitions such as these surely show the importance sustainable water solutions such as Meghdoot have in the current global climate and the intensity of the global water problem. This recognition will empower my efforts in mitigating the water crisis across the planet, and I urge others to do the same," said Mukkavilli. ◆

Save water, save earth

The ninth edition of **IFAT India** by Messe Muenchen India was held in Mumbai to discuss waste management, wastewater treatment solutions and emerging trends in this sector. It was attended by Consul Generals (or Consuls in Mumbai) of Germany, Switzerland, Norway, the Netherlands and Poland. Also present was **Ramveer Tanwar**, popularly known as the Pondman of India, and **Bhupinder Singh**, CEO, Messe Muenchen India. The gathering had more than 10,000 visitors and 250 odd exhibitors from 22 countries. Addressing the opportunities in this sector, Bhupinder Singh said: "IFAT India has once again proved to be the meeting place for ideas, innovations and partnerships in India's environment technology sector. Amidst the pressing environmental challenges, especially solid waste and wastewater treatment, IFAT India 2022 has presented technologies and solutions by bringing together the leading thought leaders, policymakers and innovators in this space. We are delighted to enable meaningful handshakes and unlock business opportunities through our exhibition, conferences and supporting programs". ◆

"₹10-lakh-crore investment coming"

Rajasthan recently plunged into a political crisis when over 90 MLAs threatened to submit their resignation against the move to replace Ashok Gehlot as chief minister. The crisis blew over only when the Congress leadership dropped the plan to install Gehlot as Congress president and let him continue in his post. Gehlot is back in action, planning out the new investor summit in Rajasthan

Can you tell us about the summit and what are its salient features this time?

Rajasthan government is hosting 'Invest Rajasthan Summit' in Jaipur on 7 and 8 October. The two-day summit will attract industrialists from across the nation and abroad. The theme of the summit "Committed Delivered" has gained wide acceptance among the public. For the first time the Rajasthan government has come up with a summit with a difference where projects will be inaugurated during the event.

What kind of response are you expecting?

In all, 4,192 memoranda of understanding/letters of intent worth ₹10.44 lakh crore have been received from various national and international investors at the different national and international investor meets and interactions held in the run-up to the summit. The MoUs/LoIs that were signed are in the sectors like mining and minerals, agriculture and agro-processing, tourism, textiles, engineering, chemicals and petrochemicals, health and medicines, logistics, energy and handicrafts.

The investments are coming in till the last minute. As recently on 26 September, two-wheeler maker Hero Electric signed an MoU to set up a mega electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing plant with an investment of ₹1,200 crore in Alwar district.

Forty per cent of MoUs have either been implemented or are in advance stage of implementation.

The energy sector has emerged as the main investment sector with 57 per cent of the proposed investment being in the implementation or under implementation phases of the MoUs/LOIs. Apart from this, investments in chemicals and petrochemicals comprise 18.2 per cent, textiles 9.5 per cent, petroleum and gas 5.9 per cent, and cement 4.6 per cent.

Who are the prominent invitees this time?

Many noted industrialists including L.N. Mittal of ArcelorMittal Group, Gautam Adani of Adani Group, C.K. Birla of C.K. Birla Group, Puneet Chatwal of Indian Hotels Company, Dr Praveer Sinha of Tata Power Company Ltd, Kamal Bali of Bolyo Group, Ajay Shriram of DCM Shriram, Anil Agarwal of Vedanta Group, B. Santhanam of St. Gobain, Sanjeev Puri of ITC and many others have confirmed their participation at the summit.

> What happens in politics is not visible. What is seen is not what happens

Additionally, more than 4,000 guests from abroad have confirmed their participation. All of them will interact with our officials. Separate sessions have been planned on tourism, agriculture and agro-processing, startsups, MSMEs and NPR.

What about the complaints of red tape and other hurdles which deter businessmen?

There is no red tape for genuine investors. The state government is dedicated to removing the hurdles in investment. To increase investment, the government has provided many facilities to investors through MSME Policy-2022, Handicraft Policy-2022, Tourism Promotion Policy-2022, Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme-RIPS-2019), Rajasthan Industrial Development Policy-2019 and One Stop Shop System.

It was feared that the political instability in Rajasthan would cast a shadow on the investor summit. Also your going away from Jaipur would leave your work incomplete.

What happens in politics is not visible. What is seen is not what happens.

No matter where I live, I will never be far from Rajasthan, Jodhpur and Mahamandir where I was born.

You have announced Rajasthan Ratna awards, the highest civilian honour in the state, for two industrialists this time...

Rajasthan Ratna is the highest civilian honour in the state. Yes, this year the award, which has been modeled on the lines of Bharat Ratna, will be given to two industrialists, Anil Agarwal and L.N. Mittal. Both are distinguished sons of the soil of Rajasthan. Other recipients are Justice Dalveer Bhandari, Justice R.M. Lodha, Sheen Kauf Nizam, and K.C. Male. ◆

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