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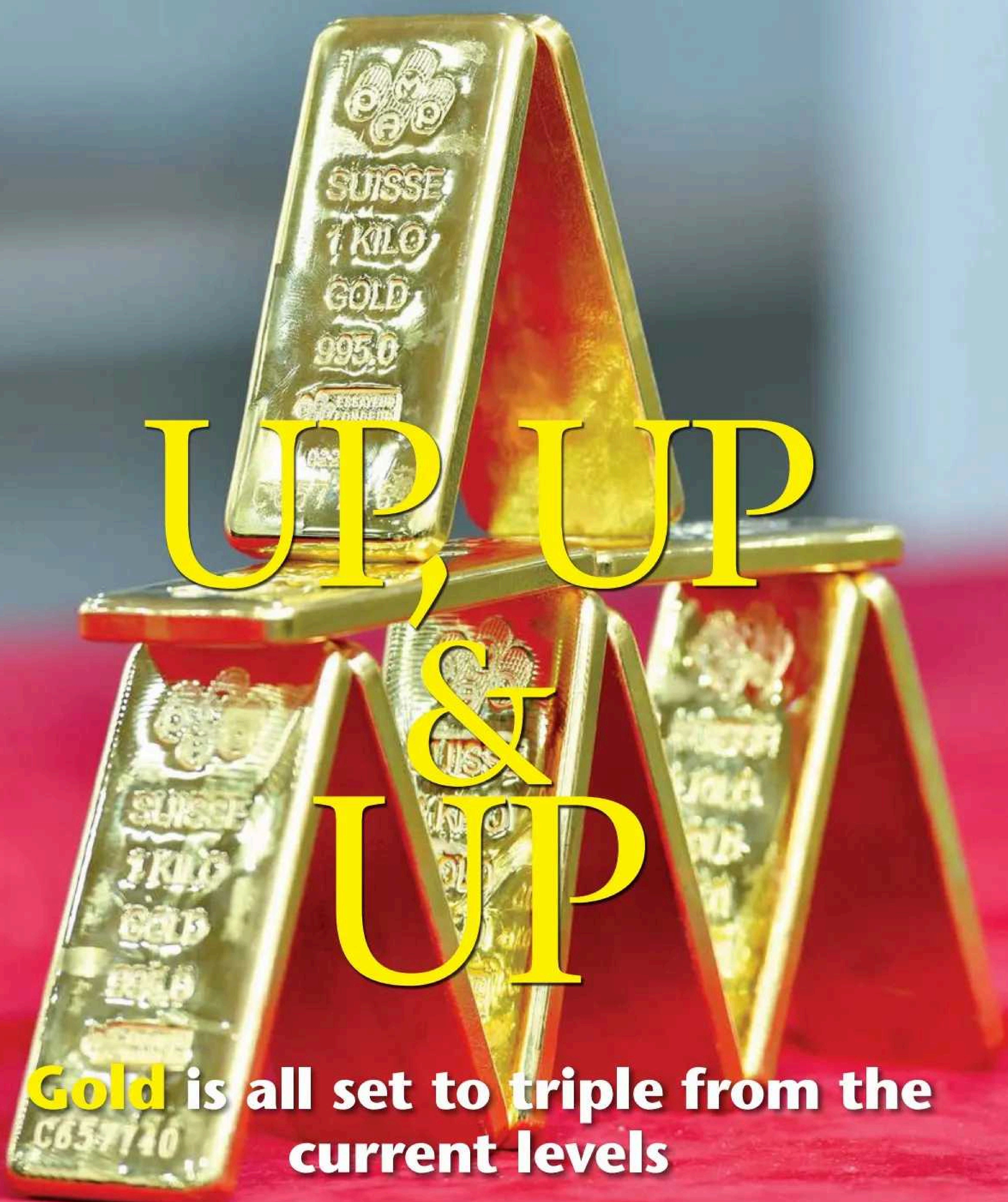
May 13-26, 2024

- **MODI'S SOUTHERN PUSH**
- **GIFT CITY VS IFSC**
- **TRIBECA DEVELOPERS**
- **NEPHRO CARE INDIA**



UP, UP & UP

Gold is all set to triple from the current levels

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Business India

The argument about the value of gold against fiat currencies (ie paper currencies) issued by governments and central banks, has been going on for over hundreds of years.

From time immemorial gold or gold coins were used as values of exchange for trade or as a store of wealth. Over time, governments started issuing paper currencies as being practical and conducive to trade. And in the initial years, in theory, the governments (or their central banks) kept an equivalent amount of gold to back up the value of the paper currencies. Thus, currencies were said to be based on a gold standard. But as trade and governments expanded, in practice only a small amount of gold was held compared to the currency, but in theory, any holder of the currency, including foreigners who earned the currency by trading, could ask for redemption of the paper currency for a fixed amount of real, physical gold. And for many years trade deficits were settled by gold actually being transferred by central banks.

This was also the basis of the Bretton Woods Agreement of fixed exchange rates, linked to the value of gold, that was established after WWII. This established the new world trading order. And led to the huge expansion of global trade and laid the foundations for global economic growth. And prosperity. But in March 1973, this system of fixed exchange rates was abandoned by the US, at least for Europeans and itself. The values of the major global currencies were freed from gold, which then ushered in free movement in gold prices globally.

So, for 50 years now the public that wants to invest in gold has had to reckon with a floating price. Gold is an asset class that has to be weighed against all other asset classes – particularly against the popular asset classes such as bank deposits, property and shares. Which asset class is a better hedge against inflation, and which offers higher safety, and which offers better returns.

For the vast majority of the public in India, particularly for the poor and middle class, gold has been the safest asset, and easy to understand as a store of value and a protection against inflation – given that inflation has been a constant factor in India since independence. But for many years gold did not fare as well as property. And with the relentless rise of equity markets since liberalisation in 1991, the stock markets, though with a higher level of risk, have outperformed every asset class.

Yet there are huge numbers of people who have an undying faith in gold. In the last few years, gold has had a huge run-up. There have been many reasons for this. The global uncertainty with the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, continuing tension between the US and China and China's aggressive moves in Asia have destabilised trade links and investment avenues. Add to this the fact that the US has steadily been weaponising the dollar by imposing sanctions and freezing of reserves of Russia (and earlier Afghanistan and Iran). In this global scenario, countries like China and Russia (and to some extent even India) have decided to diversify their holdings away from US treasuries to other currencies and gold. This has led to a sharp rise in the demand for gold, resulting in a huge run-up in the price of gold.

The question is, how long will the price rise continue? And could there be a sharp fall in price? This time's cover story makes interesting reading for not just gold diehards, but for all.

Ashok H. Advani

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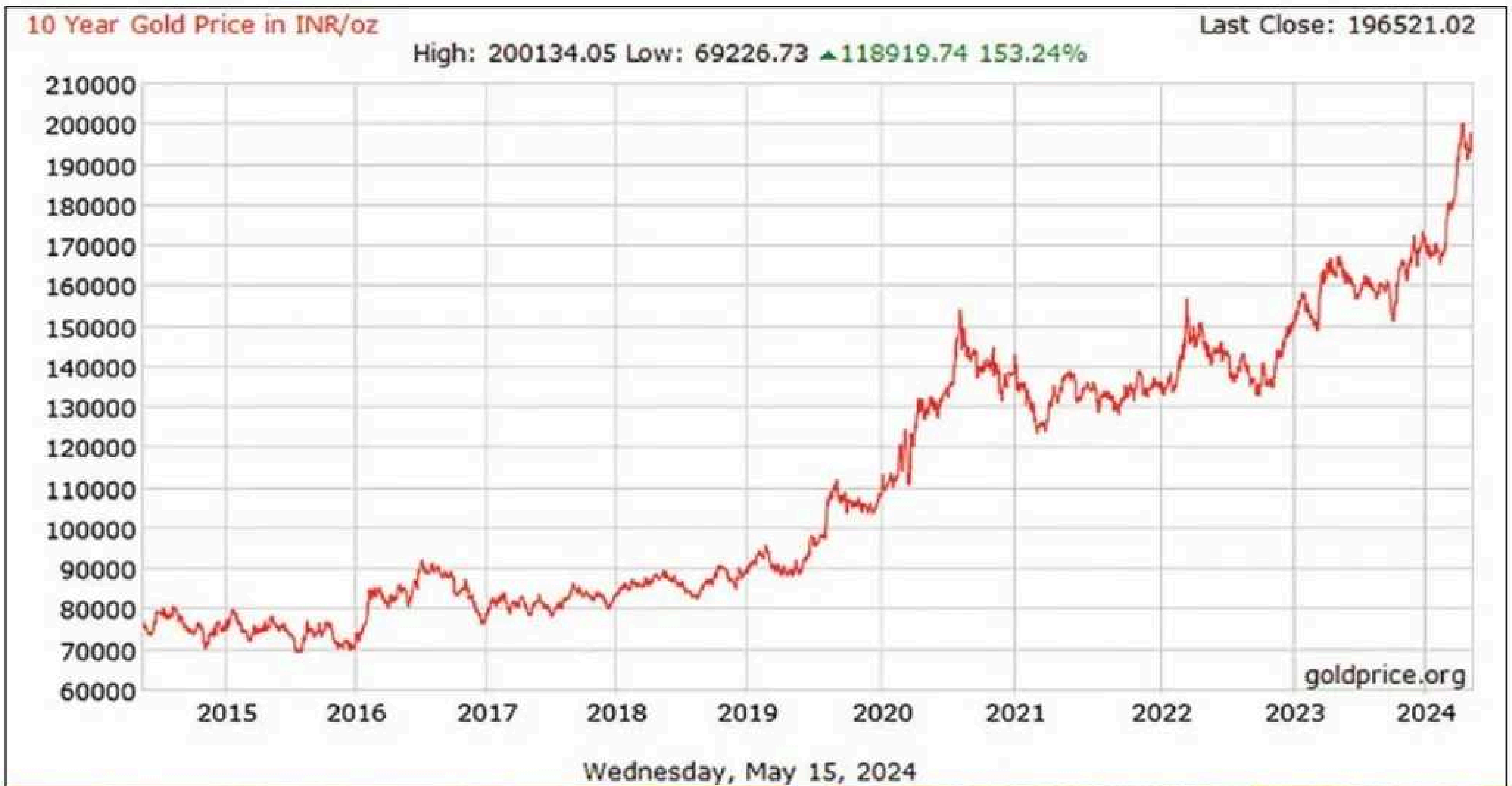

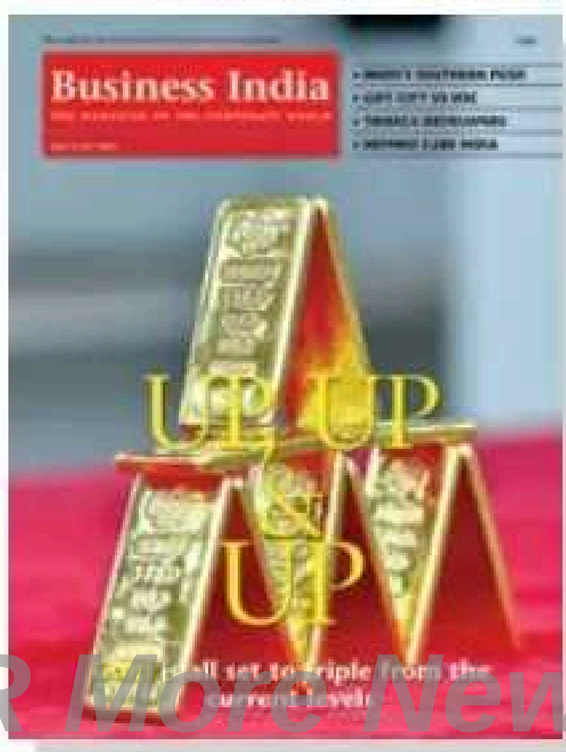

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FOCUS

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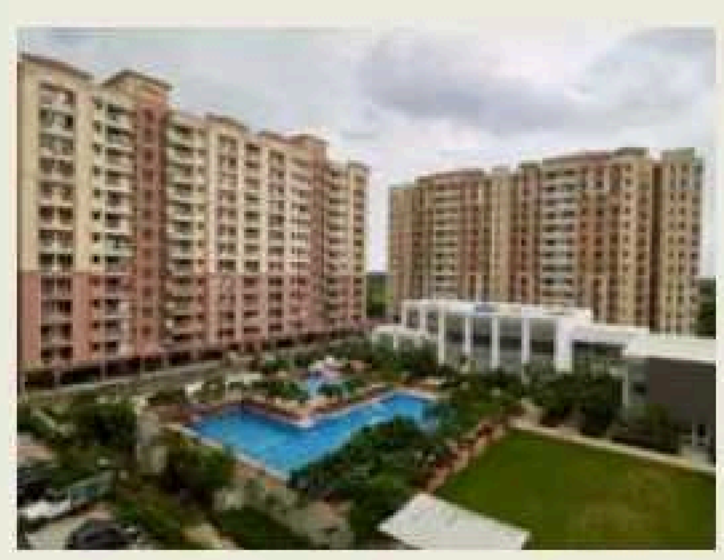

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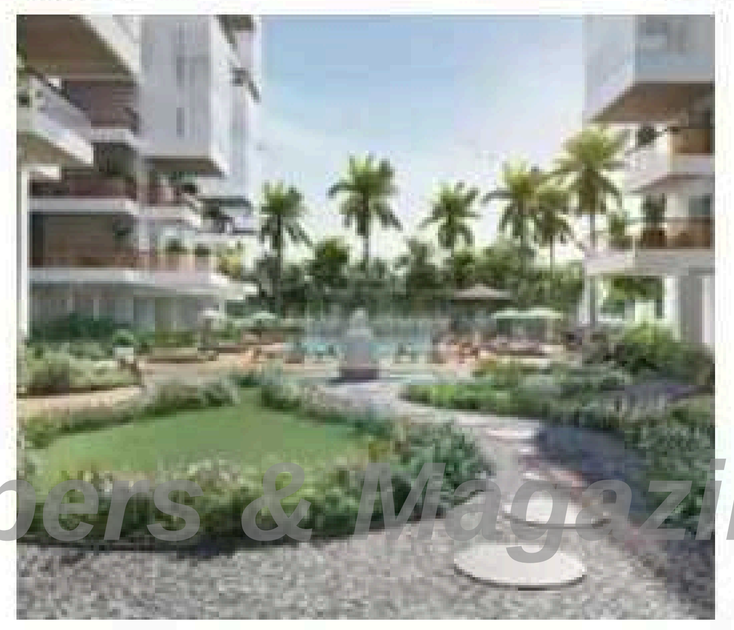

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A new political creature

Modi has combined Presidential system with PM's

The pro-government economist and psephologist like Surjit Bhalla and his ilk would have us believe that Indian elections are increasingly becoming presidential. Leadership, according to them, is a big thing. Unlike before 2014, the elections are now based on merit. Besides, the Opposition does not have a face; in fact, it has 50 faces. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the one face of the BJP, which is why he is the frontrunner and winner. That is the reason BJP will do well.

The Opposition parties huddled under the INDIA alliance debunk this argument as too jejune. They believe that the general elections in part are an aggregation of state elections, where national issues that impinge on the life of the common man also come into play. As for Modi, he is what some political scientists call India's first Prime Minister-President, a new hybrid political creature with shades of autocracy. He is in a 'permanent election' mode, and has tried to convert 543 Lok Sabha constituencies into one national constituency. Though the original design of our parliamentary system remains intact, the nature of prime ministerial politics has changed beyond recognition. Democracies are a unique architecture of 'separated institutions sharing powers', which has now been eroded.

As for Modi, he wants to rise above the cacophony of legislative debates. In a typical presidential style, he prefers to talk outside Parliament through his monthly *Mann Ki Baat* radio shows. The Presidential system is visible in other areas of governance and governmentality too. The induction of retired bureaucrats in the cabinet is another instance of a trend of Modi's growing reliance on professionals and experts.

One can debate Bhalla's thesis endlessly, though its corollary makes more sense. Conventional wisdom suggests that PMs rule with legislative authority and Presidents govern with executive orders. Unlike the first among equals in the Westminster system, there are no equals in the Presidential system. This vests in the President immense powers to lead (or mislead) the nation. Thus, Presidential mode of governance offers an interesting option. No guessing why strong, powerful and charismatic presidents are more popular than prime ministers. This comparison with Parliamentary democracy in India has exercised the minds of some of our cerebral MPs like Shashi Tharoor, who recently batted for the Presidential form of governance in India.

But, for a presidential system to fully and truly happen, the entire architecture of elections will have to change. In the US Presidential system, eligible voters, on election day, don't select the President directly. They are voting for 538 electors instead, who meet in their respective states and vote for President and Vice-President. The number is 538, as there are 100 senators (two per state) and 438 representatives (distributed by population). These electors comprise the Electoral College. Each state, no matter how populous, gets at least three electors, and the remaining are in proportion to the population of the state. In a sense, on election day, voters are telling their states how they want it to use its electoral votes, and the electors vote for the president on behalf of the people in their state.

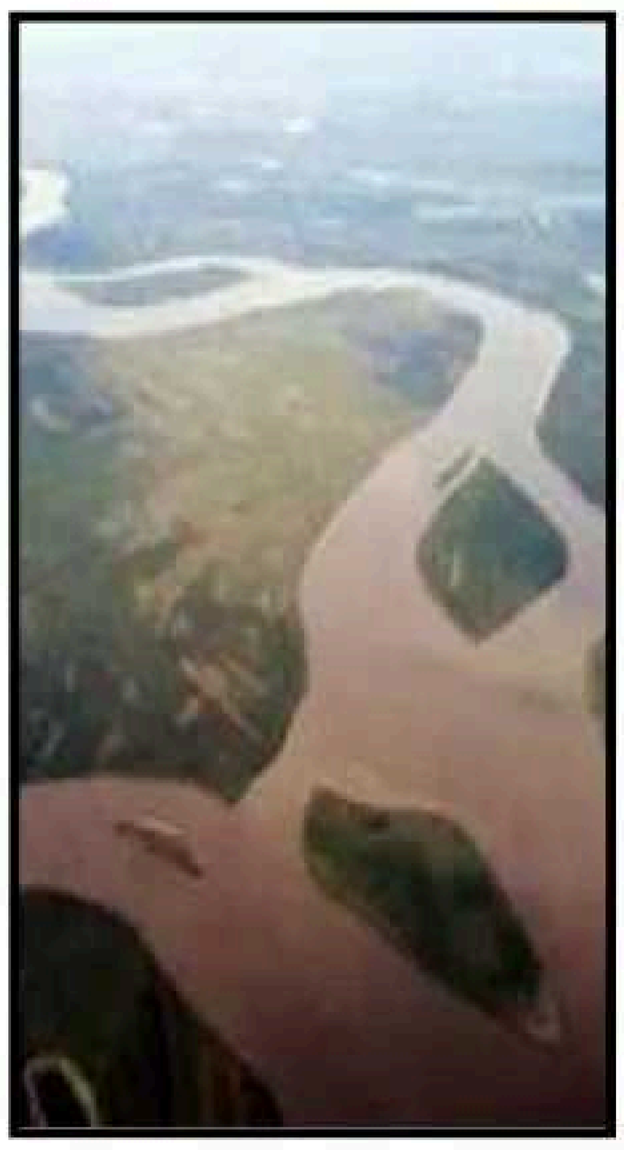
To win the presidency, 270 electoral votes are needed to get a majority of the Electoral College. The number of electors cannot change without a constitutional amendment, but electors allocated to each state can change every 10 years. In the electoral college system, the candidate with the highest number of votes in a state claims all of the state's electoral votes. For example, Donald Trump claimed all 29 electoral votes of Florida, winning the election over Hillary Clinton by a margin of 2.2 per cent. Some called the electoral college a 'winner-takes-all' system, as small margins in the key states with large populations (and thus more electors) can tilt the US elections in one party's favour. This concept of 'swing states' will be something Democratic candidate Joe Biden will have to face in the upcoming election, knowing that Donald Trump used this very system to clinch victory.

In India, it is a first-by-the-post electoral system. For each constituency, the electors can cast their vote for a single candidate (of their choice), the winner being the candidate who gets the most votes. The country has been divided into 543 Parliamentary Constituencies, each of which returns one MP to the Lok Sabha. The twenty-nine states and two of the seven Union Territories have their own assemblies (Vidhan Sabhas) which add up to 4,120 constituencies.

Can India adapt the US system to have a truly Presidential framework? Unlikely. We have to make do with PM-President creature. ◆

Inter-linking river projects

Water security has to be on the priority list of the new government



In his third consecutive term, Modi will have to take a lot of steps towards ensuring that India is firmly set on an irreversible path to *Viksit Bharat* by 2047. Water security is by far one of the big challenges which must be addressed, ideally in the next 5 years but certainly within 20 years. Water security entails both providing water as well as mitigating floods. It also includes water management. The prime minister has, over the last decade, spoken a lot on this matter and also executed a few projects. This issue of droughts and floods, should be taken up on a war footing if India is really to be made water-secure.

It is not as if the government is blissfully unaware of the advantages and challenges of water security. It has been doing its bit in a few villages, and districts and states. Assam is implementing the integrated river basin project in a bid to manage floods in its state with the help of the World Bank. Water harvesting, water conservation, water sanitation and propagating micro-irrigation has helped to certain extent. However, the biggest challenge is to execute the inter-linking of rivers to ensure that water flows from surplus to drought areas. The inter-linking of rivers was an idea mooted way back in the 1970s by Dr Rao.

While the government did set up a National Perspective Plan in 1980 to develop Himalayan rivers and peninsular rivers, only one project has seen the light of the day in the last 4.5 decades.

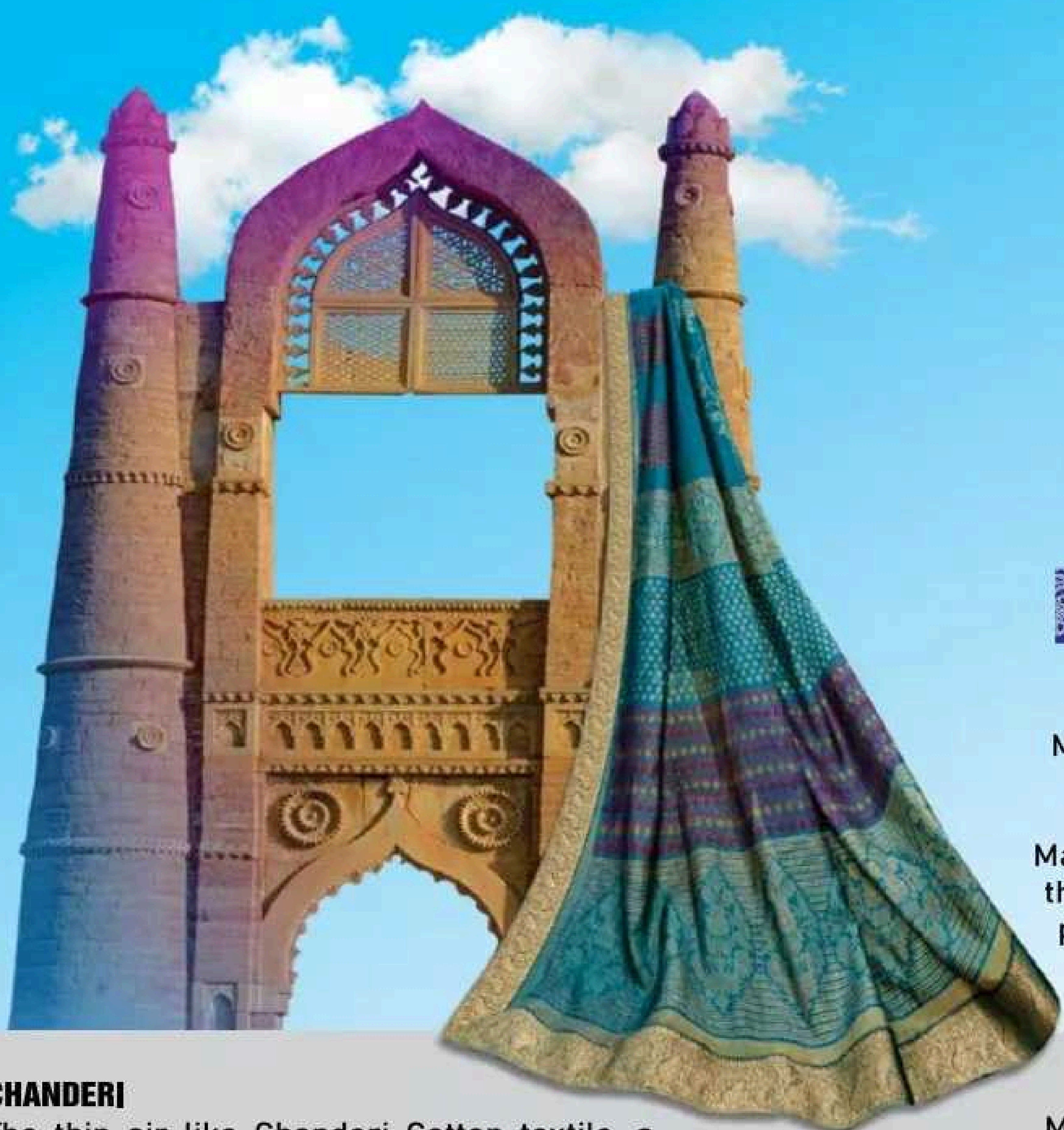
The Ken-Betwa Link Project, which would cost approximately ₹44,605 crore, involves these two subsidiaries of the Yamuna River. It envisages drawing water from the Ken in MP to the Betwa in UP by building the Dhaudhan dam (77 metres tall and 2 metres wide with a 230km-long canal). The water will be used to irrigate the arid region of Bundelkhand. Besides irrigating the land, it will supply drinking water to 6.2 million people and also produce over 100 MW of power. Such multi-purpose projects have been executed earlier as well. The Narmada project in Gujarat, which provides water to the formerly drought-stricken region of Kutch, is a prime example of how the face of Gujarat has changed due to such projects. But this is the first river linking project drawing water across two states. The funding for this project will come from a grant provided by the centre with a small (less than 10 per cent) loan component. The project, which was planned in 1982, finally took off during the Covid period. It has thus taken more than 40 years to materialise.

States are undertaking multipurpose projects. The Bhakra-Nangal Dam, Hirakud Dam, and the Damodar Valley projects are but some of the bigger ones. It is the multi-state river linking projects which are a real challenge. One of the reasons is that water is a state-legislated subject (listed under Entry 17 in the State List of the Constitution of India). Water supplies, irrigation, canals, storage, and drainage all fall entirely within the purview of states. At the time the Constitution was written, no one would have imagined that India could face water shortages, else it would have been placed in the Concurrent List, under the purview of both state and central governments. However, the Constitution has provided that the absolute power of the state can be overridden by the Centre through regulation of water and development of interstate rivers and river valleys, to the extent that such regulations and developments are done in the public interest. Being a democratic country, the Centre has still not used this Entry 56 of List 1 of the Constitution of India.

Should the Centre, if it were to get 400-plus seats in the forthcoming election as is being touted, use this entry for the betterment of two neighbouring states? It is a tricky question unless both states are promised benefits from undertaking such large projects. Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra have been agreeable to the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam project because each state got some benefit or other. Sharing of power generated from 1200 MW power plants is done in the ratio of 57 per cent for MP, 27 per cent by Maharashtra and 16 per cent by Gujarat. While the bulk of the water would be utilised in Gujarat, the state of Maharashtra and the drought-prone areas of Rajasthan will also receive water.

While reviving wells, building ponds, bund dams, or rejuvenating watersheds can be done at the district level, the government at the centre has to take up river-linking projects by building consensus with the states. It helps if both state and centre belong to the same party, but if the benefits are clearly outlined in equitable terms, there is no reason for more river-linking projects not to be undertaken. Mega projects will build a mega India. ◆

The heart of Incredible India



From Royal Weaves to Vibrant Prints

Discover TEXTILE TOURISM IN MADHYA PRADESH

Unveil the magic of Rich Textile Heritage

Madhya Pradesh is inevitably a kaleidoscope for textile lovers, with centuries-old tradition of handloom weaving and dying skills passed down through generations. Textile Tourism in Madhya Pradesh offers an immersive experience that surpasses the souvenir collection dating back to 5000 years. Let us take a peek into some of the top destinations in Madhya Pradesh for textile tourism.

CHANDERI

The thin air like Chanderi Cotton textile, a hand-weaved interlacement of gold and silver warp and weft forming popular motifs like paisley, guinea design, peacock, mehrab and flowers beholds the rich and prestigious

culture of Chanderi. The fabric was exclusive among royals and the then Queen of Baroda put a price on sarees after rubbing the fabric onto her cheeks. Folklores are prevalent as soft as the cloth as high was its price. Chanderi sarees are not just a textile or a cloth, but a handwoven saree exemplifying the history and the century-old tradition of sarees that come in three types of fabrics - pure silk, silk cotton and Chanderi cotton.

MAHESHWAR

Nestled on the banks of the Narmada River, Maheshwar a centuries-old centre for handloom weaving, has been famous for its

beautiful Maheshwari sarees characterised by vibrant colours, gold zari borders, and unique pit loom weaving techniques. These sarees, known for their unique style, were introduced by a queen about 250 years ago. Traditionally made from cotton, they come in a variety of designs including plain, striped, and even geometric patterns. Explore the bustling handloom market, visit heritage havelis showcasing the craft, or try hand at weaving a small piece of cloth under the guidance of a master weaver.

HAND BLOCK PRINTING ON TEXTILES

One of the few art forms practised through its original technique, the Nandna Print is a colourful block print produced in the village of Tarapur in Neemuch and Umedpura. This comfortable clothing is the traditional attire of the Bhil and Bhilal tribes.

The town named Bagh near the historic city Mandu boasts a 1000-year-old tradition of Bagh Print, a unique form of natural dye block printing. Visit a printer's workshop to witness the meticulous process of hand-carving wooden blocks and printing intricate floral and geometric patterns onto fabric.

Bherugarh is the centre of Batik Printing near Ujjain. This age-old wax-resist dyeing and printing craft is considered to have been practised in Egypt, Japan and India for over 2000 years. At present, textile lovers can visit Bherugarh and witness over 800 men and women working as printers in the village.

Handblock printing fabric-tying and dyeing crafts belong to Indore. For Handblock printing vegetable and natural dyes such as indigo, turmeric roots, pomegranate skin, lac, iron, etc. are utilised to create the colours in this technique which produce a complex yet understated impression. The amazing part is that since the natural colours penetrate the cloth, they do not quickly fade enhancing the fabric's aesthetic appeal. While in fabric tying and dyeing craft is referred to as Bandhani or Bandhej in Madhya Pradesh.

The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is recognising the potential of textile tourism and taking steps to promote this unique travel experience. Pranpur village in Chanderi is India's First Craft Handloom Tourism Village developed by the tourism department. This unique initiative intends to allow tourists to visit the weaver's community in Pranpur and directly interact with artisans, witness the weaving process, and understand the cultural significance of these textiles.

Ramping up portfolio

CapitaLand India Trust has entered into a forward purchase agreement with Phoenix Group to acquire IT buildings with a total leasable area of 2.5 million sq ft in Hyderabad's Hitec City, a major IT and office hub, where many large multinational companies are located. The acquisition of the strategically located assets is expected to increase CapitaLand's earnings and distributions for unit holders. As part of the forward purchase arrangement, CapitaLand will provide funding of ₹215 crore (S$34.68 million) to refinance the existing loan and receive interest on the funding at a rate, which is higher than its borrowing cost. It will also provide funding in future towards development of the buildings and acquire the buildings at a price to be determined as and when each building is constructed and leased up to 90 per cent. CapitaLand has a long-standing partnership with Phoenix Group since 2011, having acquired five buildings with about 2.1 million sq ft of total leasable area through a forward purchase agreement. The five buildings are located within CapitaLand's business park, aVance Hyderabad and it plans to acquire another two buildings in aVance Hyderabad from Phoenix Group within the next 18 months. As at 31 March 2024, CapitaLand assets under management stand at S$3.1 billion and its portfolio includes 10 world-class IT business parks, three industrial facilities, one logistics park and four data centre developments in India, with total completed floor area of 21 million sq ft, spread across Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune and Mumbai.

A green initiative

Leading glass manufacturer Asahi India Glass Ltd and Inox Air Products, the largest manufacturer of industrial and medical gases, have entered into a 20-year offtake agreement for supply of green hydrogen to Asahi's greenfield float glass facility in Soniyana, Chittorgarh, Rajasthan. This will be India's first ever green hydrogen plant for the float glass industry, paving the way for sustainable glass production. The plant will have a capacity to generate up to 190 tonnes of green hydrogen per annum through the electrolysis process. Slated to get commissioned by July 2024, the plant will be powered by Solar Energy. Inox is responsible for the design, engineering, installation, operations and continuous supply of green hydrogen to the Asahi's facility for 20 years. In the first phase, 95 tonnes green hydrogen will be supplied per annum. As a part of the agreement, Asahi will invest in the solar power plant, which would supply renewable energy for the generation of green hydrogen, which would be consumed in Asahi's float glass manufacturing process. Asahi is setting up a greenfield project in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, for making high-quality float glass to be used for automotive and architectural purposes with technology collaboration from its partners, AGC Europe. The agreement with Inox for setting up a green hydrogen plant for this project is a part of Asahi's overall sustainability strategy and is inspired by its vision to reduce carbon footprint in the glass manufacturing process.

Real expansion

Max Estates, the real estate arm of the Max Group, has signed a binding agreement for a residential development opportunity in Gurugram with gross development value potential of overs ₹9,000 crore. This 18.23-acre land parcel is contiguous to its existing 11.80 acres of land on Dwarka Expressway in sector 36 A, Gurugram on which the company had executed a joint development agreement last year. Max Estates is on track to launch Delhi NCR's first Inter-generational residential community in Q3 2024 with GDV potential now re-rated to ₹4,000 crore. This helps Max Estates consolidate its position (about 30 acres) in sector 36 A on Dwarka Expressway, which has emerged as a prime luxury residential destination in Gurugram, with massive infrastructure upgrade. Both opportunities imply a combined GDV potential over time of about ₹13,000 crore by developing and selling an area over 6.4 million sq ft. Established in 2016, Max Estates has developed a well-diversified portfolio of real estate across the two asset classes in Delhi NCR and, in this pursuit, has partnered with New York Life Insurance Co particularly for commercial office platform. Its marquee projects include a one-of-its-kind commercial office space Max Towers, on the edge of South Delhi, which opened its doors in 2019; Max House, a re-development of office campus; Max Square, located on a primary office vector, Noida Expressway; and 222 Rajpur, a luxury residential villa community on Rajpur Road, Dehradun.

Growth alliance

South Indian Bank has entered into an alliance with Northern Arc Capital, a leading NBFC, dedicated to empowering the lives of underserved individuals and businesses. The partnership is aimed at exploring and maximising business opportunities through combined efforts in the areas of loan origination, underwriting, disbursement, collection and reconciliation processes. The alliance will focus on co-lending and partnership lending activities, as well as facilitate seamless loan transfers between banks and originators. The partnership signifies a shared commitment to harnessing synergies, expertise and resources to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of lending operations. By joining forces, South Indian Bank and Northern Arc Capital aim to capitalise on emerging market trends, diversify their portfolios and provide innovative financial solutions to a broader customer base. The partnership will enable South Indian Bank to leverage nPOS, Northern Arc's proprietary technology platform for co-origination, co-lending and pool buyouts, as also to seamlessly connect with multiple originators for loan origination, underwriting, disbursement and reconciliation abilities. ◆

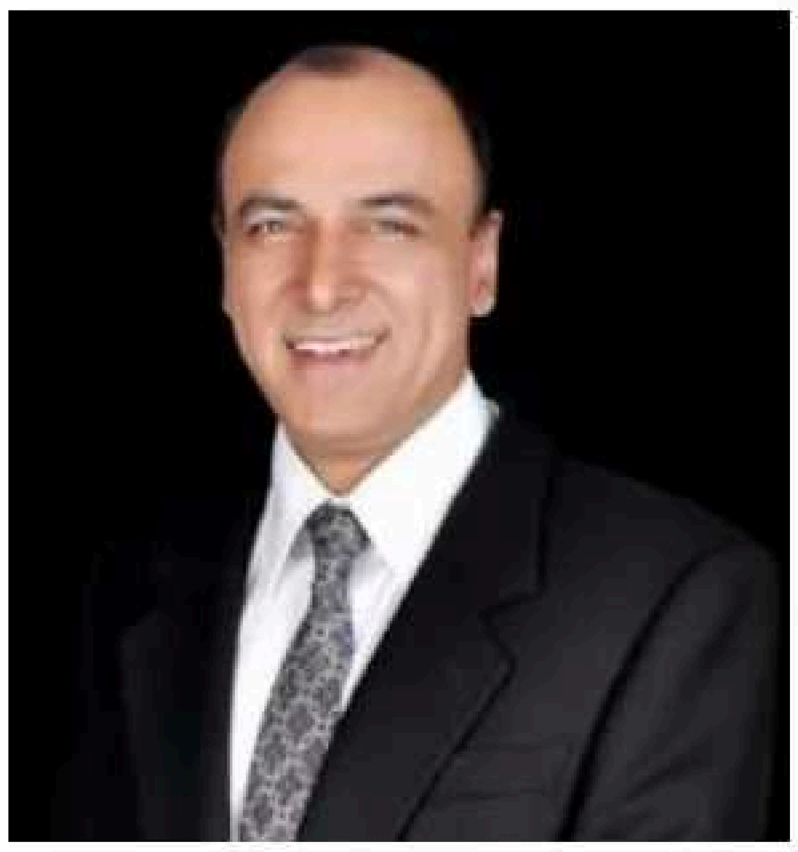
SOUTH INDIAN Bank
Experience Next Generation Banking

SBI Card has launched three variants of its first travel-focussed core credit card, 'SBI Card MILES'. The card aims at bringing holistic travel benefits to travellers of all kinds – travel aspirers to frequent fliers to travel aficionados. SBI Card MILES offers compelling features that include conversion of Travel Credits to Air Miles and Hotel Points, accelerated rewards on every travel booking, and airport lounge access among others. Empowering cardholders with absolute choice of redemption, the card now partners over 20 airline and hotel brands including Air Vistara, Air India, SpiceJet, Air France-KLM, Etihad Airways, Air Canada, Thai Airways, Qantas Airways, ITC Hotels, IHG Hotels & Resorts, and Accor among others. "The strong economic growth and robust consumption landscape has accentuated India's position in the world. Even in travel sector, today, India is considered amongst the key source markets for outbound travel in many countries including those in Asia and Europe. I congratulate SBI Card on the launch of SBI Card MILES, a strong product that will redefine the travel experiences for Indian consumers," said **Dinesh Kumar Khara**, Chairman, State Bank of India. ◆

South Korean auto giant **Hyundai Motor India** will introduce five new electric vehicles (EVs) by 2030. The Chennai plant will build the company's first electric sports utility vehicle by the end of 2024. Hyundai India and Kia recently signed an agreement with Exide Energy Solutions for the local production of batteries for EVs. **Euisun Chung**, executive chair, Hyundai Motor Group, who visited India recently, addressed his first overseas town hall meeting with Hyundai Motor India employees. "By 2030, we expect to see a substantial expansion in the EV market. In anticipation of this evolution, Hyundai is focussed on developing locally tailored EVs aimed at establishing us as a leading global EV brand," said Chung. "We also plan to proactively build charging stations at strategic locations – including dealerships – to facilitate the adoption of EVs." Kia India, an independent company of the Hyundai group, will start producing its EV for the local market in 2025 and expand later. The company will also focus on building EV charging infrastructure. "India is among the fastest-growing economies globally, and as this growth continues the strategic importance of Hyundai Motor India will only increase. By leveraging our strong reputation and competitive quality in India, we aim to expand exports to neighbouring countries, making India the global export hub to boost our regional market competitiveness," said Chung. ◆

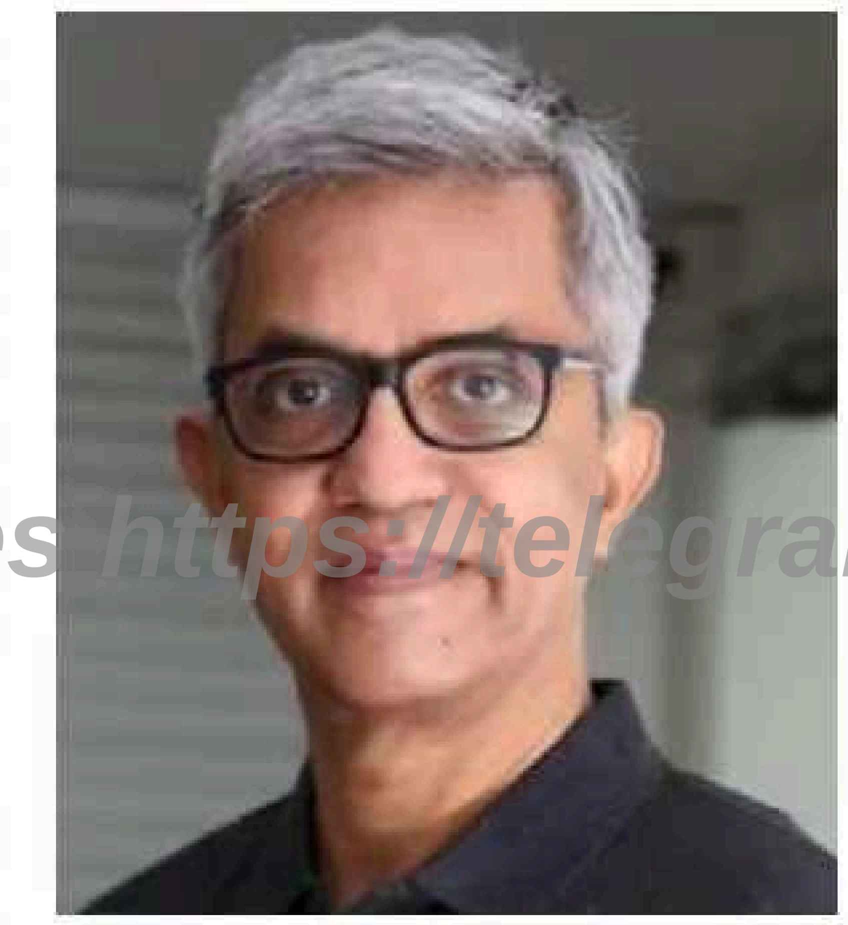
The Kolkata-based **Cosmic Birla Group**, which has recently entered into electric mobility space, is planning to set up a facility in West Bengal for the production of electric two-wheelers. The group also intends to launch electric three-wheelers and cars in the commercial vehicles space. It is looking to produce three-wheelers first in 2026-27. "We are setting up a new production facility at Domjur in West Bengal's Howrah district in the next three-four months," says **Aditya Vikram Birla**, chairman & MD, Cosmic Birla Group. "We have acquired land and construction for the plant has started. Total investment would be about ₹50 crore for the facility, which will produce electric two-wheelers". Production capacity of the Bengal plant would be about 15,000 vehicles per annum. The group entered into electric mobility space by acquiring Maharashtra-based EV maker Raft Motors six months ago. Last fortnight, Raft Motors launched four models of electric scooters under the brand Raft Cosmic EV. Now, the company has five e-scooters and one electric bike in its product portfolio. "We have big plans in the EV segment. We want to enter into three and four-wheelers space. We are looking to produce electric three-wheelers first in the financial year 2026-27," Birla adds. ◆

According to **Rodolfo Hrosz**, managing director, **Sanofi India**, the company is 'resetting its footprint'. The French healthcare major has lined up an array of innovative products for India, he added. "What worked for us in the past may not be what we need for future growth and therefore we have embarked on a journey of resetting our footprint in India, making our business fit for future growth," Hrosz explained, while unveiling the strategy for the company in India. Sanofi announced the availability of Soliqua – its pre-filled insulin pens – in the Indian market, and Rezurock, a post-transplant treatment, is being lined up for the end of 2024/ early 2025. Other 'super innovative therapies' being evaluated for India included Dupixent (for atopic dermatitis); Tzield (that delays the onset of stage 3 Type 1 diabetes) and Beyfortus (a vaccine against RSV: Respiratory syncytial virus), he explained. Last month, Sanofi formalised three 'customised' distribution partnerships with Emcure, Cipla and Dr Reddy's Laboratories for its cardiovascular, central nervous system (CNS) and paediatric/ adult vaccine brands, respectively – leading to concerns on possible deprioritisation of the local business, as witnessed with some industry peers. "One important detail – we didn't sell the brands," Hrosz said, brushing aside concerns. "We continue to own, produce and book sales on these brands. They are still our brands." ◆



DP World, a leading global provider of smart end-to-end supply chain solutions, has commenced warehousing operations in Loutulim, Goa. "At DP World, we are committed to building an integrated multi-modal supply chain network that will unlock trade opportunities for customers," said **Anoop Chauhan**, head, contract logistics & cold chain solutions, DP World Subcontinent, speaking about the new warehouse in Goa. "The addition of our Grade A warehouse in Goa will strengthen our expanding warehousing network and deliver customers in the region with a seamless supply chain experience. This facility enabled with advance warehouse management systems will serve as a pivotal hub, providing customers with links to multiple markets within the country, thereby driving trade growth at local and national level." This facility adds to DP World's warehousing network of over 5 million sq ft in India, strategically spread across more than 60 locations. The Grade A warehouse in Loutulim will benefit chemical goods traders in Goa by providing them with customisable storage solutions, assured hygienic storage conditions, facility design and development, secondary distribution services, and complete visibility of shipment with reports and documentation like dashboard of stock available. Additionally, customers will also benefit from DP World's seamless logistics solutions that will optimise their supply chain for maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness in Goa and beyond. ◆

Arnab Banerjee, MD & CEO, **CEAT Ltd**, has been elected as the new chairman, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA), the national industry body for the automotive tyre sector in India. Having joined CEAT in the year 2005 as vice-president, sales & marketing, Banerjee has shouldered several responsibilities and was the COO at CEAT since 2018 prior to taking over his current role. "Tyre industry is a crucial segment in India's automotive sector supporting mobility and a nation on the move. Indian tyre industry has been tirelessly embracing technological advancements and innovation in manufacturing processes, product design and performance standards. Indian made tyres are exceeding customer expectations globally for durability, safety and efficiency. During my tenure as Chairman ATMA, I would wish to leverage different forums for communicating the unique strengths of the resilient and vibrant tyre industry which is driving India on to the road of progress," said Banerjee. ◆

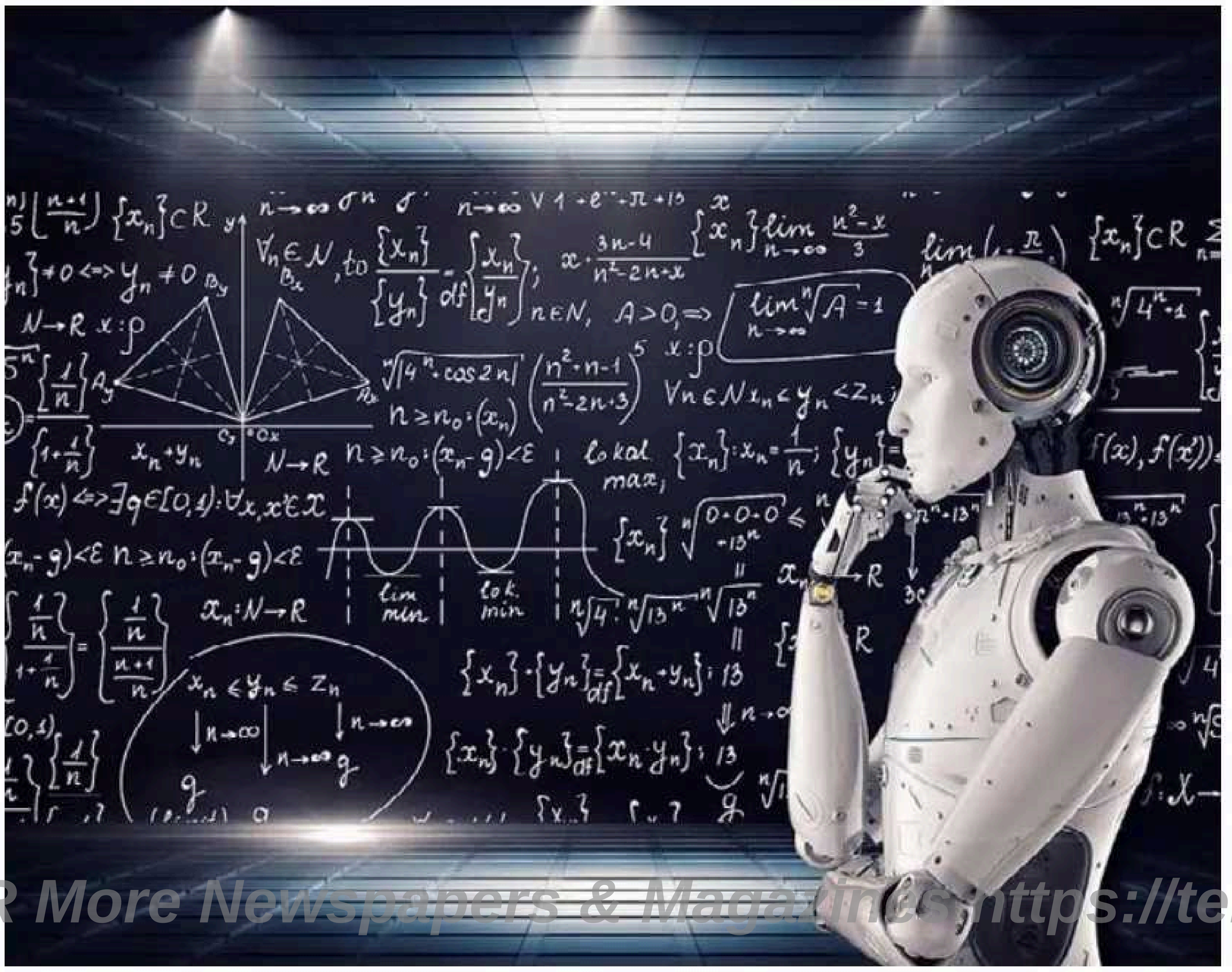


Luxury hospitality major **Raffles Udaipur** has announced the appointment of **Kartik R. Bhat** as the director, talent & culture. With over two decades of exemplary experience in Human Resources within the hospitality sector, Kartik brings a wealth of expertise and strategic vision to his new role. In his previous engagements, including his tenure as general manager, HR/L&D, Red Apple (Toscano & SALT), Kartik displayed unparalleled leadership and transformative initiatives. His contributions extend beyond conventional HR realms, with instrumental involvement in landmark events such as the FIFA World Cup 2022 and Dubai Expo 2020, where his leadership played a pivotal role in project success. As director, talent & culture, Raffles, Udaipur, Kartik is poised to redefine excellence within hospitality HR. Embracing the ethos of Raffles Udaipur, Kartik is dedicated to fostering a culture of excellence, wherein talent is nurtured, and employee well-being takes centre-stage. His track record of consistently enhancing Engagement scores and implementing innovative programmes aligns seamlessly with Raffles Udaipur's commitment to delivering unparalleled service and crafting unforgettable guest experiences. "I am truly honoured to join the prestigious team at Raffles Udaipur," said Kartik. "I am excited to lead the Talent and Culture department and contribute to the legacy of excellence that defines the Raffles brand. Together, we will continue to uphold the highest standards of hospitality while nurturing a culture of inclusivity, growth, and unparalleled service." ◆

The Eighth edition of **Children, Baby, Maternity Expo India** (CBME India) recently concluded in Mumbai. The event returned after five years, with renewed vigour and strategic understanding of the dynamic market, reclaiming its position as India's foremost sourcing event for Child Baby Maternity Products. The Indian baby care products market is poised for a substantial growth, which is estimated at $4.42 billion in 2024, and is expected to reach $7.71 billion by 2029, growing at a CAGR of 11.76 per cent during the forecast period (2024-29). "We've been part of CBME India since its inception, and our commitment remains strong as we restart this year. We believe there's immense potential for child and baby care products in India, where awareness and penetration are still in their early stages. Chicco being a leading global brand in this space, with roots in Italy, we've witnessed the evolution of the industry first-hand. Over our 14 years in India, we've ensured that parents have access to a wide range of differentiated products", said **Rajesh Vora**, CEO, Chicco India. "CBME India embarked on a journey in a sector catalysed by rising income, increased awareness of maternal and child health, and a cultural shift towards self-care during pregnancy and beyond", added Yogesh Mudras, MD, Informa Markets in India. ◆

Leading from the front

India ranks highest for global implementation of AI projects



Nasdaq-listed NetApp, an intelligent data infrastructure company, has released its second annual Cloud Complexity Report, which analyses the experiences of global technology decision makers deploying AI at scale and shows a stark contrast between AI leaders and AI laggards. This year's report provides global insights into the progress, readiness, challenges and momentum made since last year's report, what we can learn from both the AI leaders and AI laggards and the critical role of a unified data infrastructure in achieving AI success.

India heads the pack as an AI leader, with 70 per cent of companies having AI projects up and running, or in motion, in stark contrast with the global average of 49 per cent. Additionally, the report found that 91 per cent of India-based companies will use half or more of their data to train AI models in 2024.

"The world today is driven by AI and data plays a critical role in enhancing AI capabilities," says Puneet Gupta, vice-president & managing director, NetApp India/ SAARC. "India is a country of huge data sets. No surprise then, that India leads the world and corporations are embracing AI to further their IT agenda. We are partnering with a diverse group of customers to build an intelligent data infrastructure that spans multiple environments and is the backbone of all AI projects. Clearly, the more unified and reliable your data, the more likely your AI initiatives are to be successful."

The report reflects a clear divide between AI leaders and AI laggards across several areas including regions, industries and company size. About 60 per cent of AI-leading countries (India, Singapore, the UK, the US) have AI projects up and running or in pilot, in stark contrast to 36 per cent in AI-lagging countries like Spain, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Japan.

Technology leads with 70 per cent of AI projects up and running or in pilot, while Banking & Financial Services and manufacturing follow with 55 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. However, healthcare (38 per cent and media & entertainment (25 per cent) are trailing.

Larger companies (with more than 250 employees) are more likely to have AI projects in motion, with 62 per cent reporting projects up and running or in pilot, versus 36 per cent of smaller companies (with fewer than 250 employees). Both AI leaders and AI laggards show a difference in their approach to AI. Globally, 67 per cent of companies in AI-leading countries report having hybrid IT environments, with India leading (70 per cent) and Japan lagging (24 per cent). About 87 per cent of Indian companies have optimised IT environments for AI and some AI-lagging countries also have AI-ready IT environments: Germany (67 per cent) and Spain (59 per cent).

AI leaders are also more likely to report benefits from AI, including a 50 per cent increase in production rates, 46 per cent in the automation of routine activities and a 45 per cent improvement in customer experience. "The rise of AI is ushering in a new disrupt-or-die era," says Gabie Boko, chief marketing officer, NetApp. "Data-ready enterprises that connect and unify broad structured and unstructured data sets into an intelligent data infrastructure are best positioned to win in the age of AI."

Despite the divide, the report has found there is notable progress among AI laggards in preparing their IT environments for AI, but the window to catch up is closing rapidly. A significant number of companies in AI-lagging countries (42 per cent) have optimised their IT environments for AI, including Germany (67 per cent) and Spain (59 per cent). Companies in some AI-lagging countries already report they see the benefits of a unified data infrastructure in place, such as: Easier data sharing: Spain (45 per cent, Australia/New Zealand (43 per cent) and Germany (44 per cent); increased visibility: Spain (54 per cent and Germany (46 per cent).

According to the report, rising IT costs and ensuring data security are the two of the biggest challenges in the AI era, but they will not block AI progress. Instead, AI leaders will scale back, cut other IT operations, or reallocate costs from other parts of the business to fund AI initiatives.

About 53 per cent of India-based companies reported being more likely to scale back or cut other parts of IT operations to make room for AI projects. About 71 per cent of Indian enterprises feel cyber-security is the biggest challenge for managing the increasing complexity of data across cloud or multi-cloud environments. This is followed by 52 per cent of tech leaders reporting increased scepticism over cloud and 37 per cent worrying about going over-budget.

NetApp report says that Security, AI and CloudOps will drive the 2024 Cloud investments. As global companies, whether AI leaders or AI laggards, increase investments, they are relying on the cloud to support their goals. Increasing data security investments is a global priority, jumping 25 per cent from 33 per cent in 2023 to 58 per cent in 2024. About 82 per cent of Indian companies reported plans to improve security within their company's public cloud usage in 2024, followed by cost management and automation of processes at 66 per cent each and resource inventory and utilisation at 52 per cent. ◆

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KITCHEN APPLIANCES

Smart assistants

The first week of April saw Mumbai-based kitchen appliances-maker, Wonderchef Home Appliances Private Limited, launch an appliance called Chef Magic. The company says Chef Magic is a kitchen robot. This appliance is even for those who do not know how to cook. This appliance has been fed with 200 odd recipes. A person has to first select the recipe, then tell the appliance how many individuals to serve, the appliance then lists out the ingredients needed and the quantity. These ingredients have to be poured into a jar. And the appliance will issue instructions to be followed till the food is ready to serve.

Chef Magic	Upliance
4.7 litres cooking jar capacity	2 litres cooking jar capacity
Induction Heating	NA
200+ Recipes	500+ recipes
7 inches touch screen	8 inches touch screen
Weight = 7.5 Kg	Weight = 6.9 Kg
Price = ₹59,999	Price = ₹23,999

Before the advent of Chef Magic, Bengaluru-based React Labs Private Limited, launched a product called upliance last February. The company calls it a smart cooking assistant. In effect, Chef Magic is the second similar appliance to appear in the market.

upliance says it has 500 plus recipes under its belt unlike 200 plus by Chef Magic. According to Wonderchef, Chef Magic can execute 18 of the most common functions in cooking. While React Labs puts the number at 16. In general, these appliances can blend, chop, fry, heat, knead, rinse, saute, steam, stir and whip. It is for cooking aficionados to list out the 16/18 most common functions in cooking.

Without getting into

company-specific details, in general, the accessories which are given with this appliance includes chopping blade, kneading blade, measuring spoons, saute blade spatula, steamer and whipper/whisker. Both the appliances have weighing scales. And, these appliances can be connected to the internet.

It needs your help too! However, with all this help, the appliance cannot replicate all the functions. For example, if one wants to make carrot halwa, then the carrots have to be peeled, washed and then cut into the size as mentioned by the appliance before putting it in the cooking jar. Similarly, if one wants to cook prawns pulao. The rice has to be soaked and then fed into the cooking jar. More importantly the appliance cannot peel and devein prawns (considered an art by itself) besides the peeled and deveined prawns have to be marinated before it can be put into the cooking jar. Both the companies say the appliance is ideally suited to serve four. This implies that this appliance is not suitable for mass cooking.

According to press reports, React Labs so far has sold 1,000 units. Wonderchef officials claim that the company expects to garner revenues of ₹100 crore in 2023-24 from this newly launched cooking appliance. ◆

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CONFERENCES

Future leaders

It was a significant milestone in the academic journey of the graduating students at the Indian Institute of Management, Kashipur (IIM-K), marking the culmination of their dedication and hard work in completing various programmes offered by the institute. These programmes include flagship two-year MBA, MBA Analytics, Executive MBA, and Doctoral programmes. The IIM-K also demonstrated its commitment to creating future leaders to showcase their skills in today's dynamic and competitive business landscape.

The first batch of Executive MBA Analytics were conferred with degrees

under various programs. A total of 438 students were awarded their respective degrees, of which 30 per cent were women. The 2023–25 batch of the MBA (Analytics) registered an impressive 69 per cent female students, bridging the gap of gender diversity in management.

Addressing the students, Yazdi Nagporewalla, CEO, KPMG India, said: "Today marks a rare and momentous occasion where we celebrate the achievements of the future leaders of our nation. Let us extend our heartfelt congratulations to each graduate, recognising the unwavering support of proud parents and the dedication of the esteemed faculty. As you step into the world, remember the profound significance of education and the values it instils. Your degree is not just a symbol, but a passport to a world of opportunities. Embrace your journey with anticipation and resilience, for success is earned through continuous learning, hard work, and adaptability. Never shy away from challenges, for in chaos lies opportunity. Embrace technology, invest in your skills, and always uphold the values of integrity and respect." He added: "In Korea, people think of 'Nation first, company second, family third, and self fourth'. We need to learn from them."

The institute witnessed the conferral of degrees upon 438 students at its 11th convocation. During the ceremony, 232 graduating cohorts received MBA degrees, 87 MBA Analytics degrees, 83 EMBAA degrees, and 21 Executive MBA degrees. Fifteen scholars from the Doctoral Programme also received their degrees. The first batch of Executive MBA Analytics was conferred with degrees. The institute also offers a slew of online courses. There are as many as 17 short online certificate programmes and eight one-year executive/postgraduate certificate programmes, including hospital management, rail management, and design thinking and innovation for business strategy. There are also three diploma programmes.

Women power IIM-K has recently been witnessing exponential growth in terms of female students across all programs. In the 2019-21 batch, it recorded 11 per cent female students, while in the 2021-23 batch, this surged to 30 per cent. "As we celebrate this convocation day, let us reflect on our journey of excellence. IIM Kashipur's 19th rank in NRF 2023 echoes our commitment to unparalleled standards. Our diverse student body, including 69 per cent female representation in MBA (Analytics), underscores the evolving landscape of education. We take pride in supporting economically and socially challenged students and fostering an inclusive environment. Today, as we bid farewell to our graduates, we stand poised to shape the future with innovation and inclusivity," Sandeep Singh, Chairman, Board of Governors, IIM-K, stated.

IIM-K is closely working with the Uttarakhand government to support and uplift the local population. With its Foundation for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development (FIED), Management Development Programs (MDP) for industry, and Design and Innovation Centre (DIC), IIM Kashipur has produced successful business leaders and job creators.

"Despite market challenges this year, we saw the active participation of 200+ student organisations, extending 270 offers to the MBA and MBA (Analytics) batch. Besides regular recruiters such as ICICI Bank, KPMG, Capgemini, Bank of America, Gartner, Tiger Analytics, TATA Capital and Delloite, several new organisations came, such as Barclays, Accenture Strategy, Swiggy and Carelon," said a beaming prof Kulbhushan Balooni, Director, IIM-K.

IIM Kashipur's training programmes are designed to address industry trends, with sessions focusing on topics like Industry 5.0, emotional intelligence, leadership development, and women's leadership, ensuring participants stay updated with the latest developments in their fields. The institute collaborates closely with state governments on various developmental areas such as sustainability, health, disaster management, and public policy, showcasing its commitment to contributing to broader societal issues.

To support more students, the institute is also planning to expand its Dehradun campus. ◆

SM BOOTHEM

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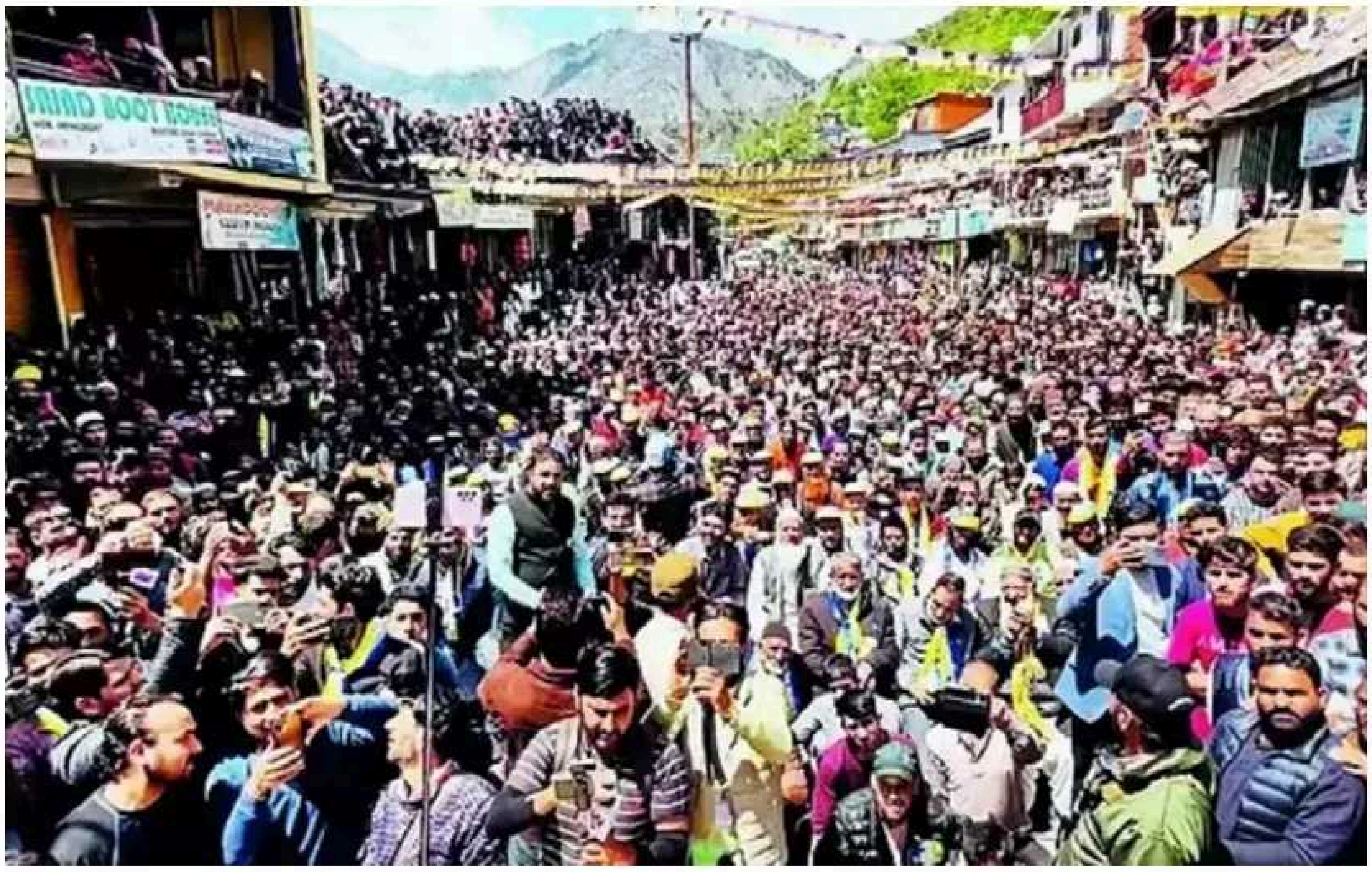
Kashmir fiasco

BJP's failure to field candidates



Election in the Valley: where is the BJP?

The BJP's decision not to field any candidates in the ongoing general election in Kashmir – the first in the region since the abrogation of Article 370 – has come as a surprise to many. While the party has put up candidates in two seats in Hindu-majority Jammu, it has skipped the three seats of the Muslim-majority Kashmir valley. The party's decision to cede ground has caught off-guard many of its local members, who say they had been preparing for the polls since 2019. Political pundits feel that the BJP would have served national objectives better by fielding candidates, even if they lose.

Ironically, the BJP has been milking the Article 370 abrogation issue in speeches all over the country. Also, the hands-off approach towards the Kashmir elections is not total. BJP leaders in Jammu are asking the voters not to vote for the National Conference and the People's Democratic Party, the two main players in the valley.

Interestingly, the NC and the PDP, which are a part of the INDIA bloc, consider the Lok Sabha elections a referendum on the revocation of Article 370 and the subsequent division of the state into two Union Territories. While both parties are fighting against each other, they are also engaged in a bitter battle with the Apni Party, founded by former PDP leader Altaf Bukhari, and Sajad Lone's People's Conference. They call Bukhari and Lone 'BJP proxies'.

The Modi government has claimed that Kashmir has been transformed economically since it was stripped off its semi-autonomous status. During a visit to Kashmir before the elections were announced, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told a gathering of people at Srinagar's Bakshi stadium, "People used to ask who will tour Jammu-Kashmir; now, thousands are. Friends, Jammu & Kashmir is touching new heights of development, because it is breathing freely now. This freedom has come after the removal of Article 370, which had been a barrier." He also announced projects worth ₹6,400 crore to support local agriculture and tourism.

But, while there has been a toning up of the administration, locals and Opposition leaders say that several other factors have also increased the sense of alienation among people. This includes high unemployment rates, the absence of local representation in politics and alleged violation of human rights.

The BJP's spokesperson in Jammu & Kashmir Sunil Sethi claims that elections are not a priority and their main objective is to win the 'hearts of the people'. "It took us 75 years to fully integrate Kashmir with the rest of the country and we don't want (to create) an impression that we have done this exercise just to win seats," he said.

Scared to contest?

But critics say this is because the party leadership realises that securing victory in the region would not have been easy. While the 'achievement' may sell among the faithful in other states and among its cadres, removing the special status hasn't gone down well with the people in the valley.

"If people were happy with the abrogation of Article 370, the BJP wouldn't have hesitated to fight," says Omar Abdullah, former chief minister & leader, NC. "But they don't want to expose themselves, and to save their face, they have decided not to contest."

Abdullah says that if the BJP had put up candidates in the valley, they would have lost their deposits. "The party in power at the Centre snatched away our identity and land rights," he said at a rally in Batwara, Srinagar, while campaigning for Agha Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, the NC candidate for Srinagar. "Instead of establishing colleges, universities and schools, they opened liquor shops. They are pushing our youth into drug addiction." Omar questioned the lack of progress on projects like the Batwara-Lasjan bridge, which was approved by the NC government a decade ago. On 16 April, six people lost their lives after a passenger boat capsized in the Jhelum. "Where is the development they speak of? We have not seen any bridges, health centres or schools being constructed," he said.

In Jammu, however, the BJP's campaign is centred on the abrogation of Article 370, the restoration of peace and the suppression of separatism. The party is also targeting 'dynastic' politics in Jammu & Kashmir. Indeed, the contrasting narratives regarding the scrapping of Article 370 have come to define the campaigns of the key players. ◆

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Green taxonomy soon?

Climate change impact on inflation

Extreme weather events or climate shocks are affecting food inflation. The growing fear is that it is already having a broader impact on the natural rate of interest, thereby influencing the economy's financial stability, as the RBI's latest Monetary Policy Report (included in its April Bulletin) points out.

The report goes on to warn that the 'long-term (economic) output' could be lower by about 9 per cent by 2050 in the absence of any climate mitigation policies. It ominously adds that "if inflation hysteresis gets entrenched, it may lead to a de-anchoring of inflation expectations, and the undermining of the central bank's credibility would warrant higher interest rates to curb inflation, leading to greater output loss".

Given this looming challenge, experts believe that the RBI should follow its peers in advanced economies, most notably the European Central Bank, in helping the formulation of a green taxonomy for the entire Eurozone's economic value chain. A green taxonomy is a framework to assess the sustainability credentials and possible ranking of an economic activity.

Experts have weighed in with diverse suggestions. Ajay Tyagi, former chairman, SEBI, feels that the foremost thing that is needed to facilitate foreign capital into India's green sector is to define green taxonomy. "While SEBI's regulations of 2023 define green security, it is of limited use. In green bonds, the amounts that have been raised are almost outdated – hardly ₹4,000 crore in written terms. So, unless you define taxonomy, investors would not be sure where their investments are going. Apart from greenwashing concerns, it's also our responsibility towards the investors to see where they are investing," he said. For instance, foreign institutional investors planning to invest in India would always compare India's green taxonomy with, say, that of the EU.

The formulation of a taxonomy

India's steel sector stands responsible for 12 per cent of the country's carbon emissions

code is essential in the context of interest rates set by the RBI. Natural, or neutral, rate of interest refers to the central bank's monetary policy lever, which allows it to maintain maximum economic output, while keeping a check on inflation. The report mentions a 'New-Keynesian model that incorporates a physical climate risk damage function' being used to estimate the "counterfactual macroeconomic impact of climate change vis-à-vis a no climate change scenario".

Beginning with its July 2022, discussion paper on 'climate risk and sustainable finance', the RBI has made incremental progress to address the transition to a green economy, even while admitting that India requires over $17 trillion to achieve its net zero ambitions by 2070.

Green securities

Experts feel that the RBI and the Finance Ministry, after a new government takes over, should take inspiration from the developing world, especially the ASEAN region, where a layered green taxonomy as a living document keeps getting updated with sectoral views of possible sustainable trajectories. While the issuance of ₹16,000 crore worth of Sovereign Green Bonds and expanding the resource pool by allowing FIIs to participate in future green government securities are welcome steps, the RBI now needs to step on the gas.

For instance, it can undertake a thorough-going assessment on the quantitative and qualitative impact on economic and financial stability due to climate change. It must encourage administrative consultation to begin populating a layered green taxonomy that is reflective of India's fragmented developmental trajectories. The effort should be to mitigate the transitional risks to the financial system as the economy moves towards a sustainable future, experts aver.

Within the government, the idea is slowly dawning on various key departments. For example, steel manufacturing's inherent carbon-intensive nature presents a colossal challenge. India's steel sector stands responsible for 12 per cent of the country's carbon emissions. The emission intensity, at 2.5 tonnes of CO_2 per tonne of crude steel production, overshadows the global average of 1.9 tonnes.

Resource constraints compound these issues. Restricted natural gas availability, reliance on a more inferior grade of iron ore, and a 22 per cent usage of scrap for steel production (compared to a 35 per cent global average) position it at a relative disadvantage. As part of its push for sustainable growth amidst a booming economy, India is now taking steps to develop taxonomy for green steel, aiming to foster both a market and global standards for eco-friendly steel production. The move is important as India is now the world's second-largest crude steel producer.

As for the steel ministry, it is hoping that creating a standardised taxonomy will bolster our carbon emissions monitoring, solidify policy-making, and truly incentivise the carbon markets. However, a national taxonomy code is a prerequisite for achieving that goal. ◆

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Green issues

Will voters get swayed?

At a time when freak heatwaves, droughts and floods are a recurring feature and poisonous smog blanks most Indian cities during winter, climate and environmental issues should have swayed the electorate and should have been the topmost priority of mainstream political parties. However, it is the freebies like free electricity for farmers, free transport for women and cooking gas price cuts that are a recurring feature of election manifestoes that most voters look forward to.

Aditya Valiathan Pillai, fellow, Sustainable Futures Collaborative co-ordinating climate adaptation & resilience research, says on one side you have welfare and developmental projects as a 'balancing factor' for climate shocks. On the other side, "It's about gas cylinders, energy access, cheaper electricity...all of that is climate. It's just that it's not 'Extinction Rebellion'-style climate politics".

"I think we see climate politics as the sort of existential, titanic fight for the future of humanity where climate progressives arm wrestle climate deniers. It's not. There's a much greater diversity in climate politics. The core difference is the politics of gain and the politics of loss, and we are in the politics of gain in India because it's such a low baseline of development. In the West, it's the exact opposite."

Climate and environmental issues may not exactly sway the voters but on paper they have been on the promise list since 2019. That was the year when the BJP set out an ambitious renewable energy target of 175 gigawatts (GW) by 2022 and Aam Aadmi Party campaigned on its air pollution and electric vehicle policies in Delhi. The Congress, in turn, pledged to bring back protections against deforestation and land-use change. The Bahujan Samaj Party promised to deploy clean energy to 'destroy caste discrimination', as "an over-dependence on coal directly impacts tribal populations who are constantly under threat in the name of power-generation".

Political parties pay only lip service to climate issues

This year, however, climate change is mentioned in all national party manifestos published so far, along with commitments to promote renewable energy and, for the first time ever, critical minerals. For example, the BJP and Congress manifestos both emphasise working towards achieving net-zero by 2070.

The BJP manifesto promises the country 'energy independence' by 2047 through "a mix of electric mobility, network of charging stations, renewable energy production and improving energy efficiency". It also sets out a 500GW renewable energy target – although it does not specify when this goal would be met.

Big promises

If voted in again, the Modi government says it plans to achieve this through setting up 'mega' solar and wind parks and a clean energy corridor, with aims to turn India into a global renewable energy manufacturing hub. The manifesto emphasises scaling up bioenergy and green hydrogen production, developing small modular nuclear reactors and incentivising private investment in large-scale battery storage.

In the run-up to the elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced a rooftop solar scheme and promised farmers in the critical election state of Uttar Pradesh to turn India's sugarcane belt into a biofuel belt. However, while the BJP's manifesto pledges to support India's automobile industry transition to electric vehicle manufacturing, it fails to mention coal even once or to outline how heavy industry will be decarbonised, beyond its existing Green Credit Programme.

In an election where unemployment is set to be a key voting issue, the Congress pledged a 'Green New Deal Investment Programme' and a 'Green Transition Fund'. It pledges to generate millions of jobs in renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure and mining critical minerals. Its renewable energy plans lack specific targets, but remain strongly focussed on decentralised power and job generation in rural India, with incentives for village councils and farmers to set up solar grids.

The Congress is the only national party promising to increase allocations to the National Adaptation Fund and wants to create an independent environment authority akin to the US Environmental Protection Agency. Both Congress and CPI have promised to look into landslides caused by floods that caused severe crop losses last year and to reverse 'anti-people' amendments to the forest and environmental laws made under the Modi government.

The CPI is the only national party to explicitly mention coal in its manifesto, calling for unexplored private coal blocks to be returned to state-run Coal India. Similarly, it is the only party, however, miniscule its presence, to pledge a participatory 'just transition plan' to protect communities and coal workers 'affected in the process of transitioning to renewable energy from fossil fuel(s)'. Its manifesto promises to end private monopolies in renewable energy, seeking to establish the government's 'decisive stake' in the sector.

It remains to be seen whether the heat, deforestation or renewable jobs sway Indian voters as they step out to vote over seven phases this scorching summer. ◆

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A lot of catching up to do

India is mostly so poor that it needs Modi's benevolent schemes for years to come

BRIJ KHINDARIA

The forthcoming Indian elections have captivated the Western world. Many are observing in awe the march of nearly a billion people to the polls. Some are wide-eyed in admiration; others plot and scheme in trepidation to counter India's new self-affirmation. The thoughts everywhere are: Is Prime Minister Narendra Modi a consummate politician who deserves emulation by others dedicated to democracy or an autocratic Hindu-majoritarian wolf in sheep's clothing?

This will be a momentous election and an inflection point in India's growth trajectory and place in the world. Like any powerful leader, Modi is both adored by many who hope to finally encounter prosperity, self-respect and better lives and reviled by others who see an assault on the democratic, governance and moral values they treasure.

By 2028, India, currently the world's fifth largest economy, is expected to overtake Germany and Japan to rank third after the US and China. India can achieve at least 6 per cent average annual growth soon, while long-term potential growth of 8 per cent is also achievable. But Modi and his successors may still be unable to lift India to developed country status by 2047 to celebrate its first century as a free nation.

Since his rise to power in 2014, Modi has surprised governments and intellectual elites in the US and Europe by caring little for their assertions on how he should behave to be in line with their ideas on steering world affairs. Since the 1970s, Western nations have worked forcefully to promote values and norms based on 18th century 'Enlightenment' in France that are now embedded in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and rules governing relations among Nation States.

The Enlightenment's central doctrines were individual liberty and religious tolerance, in opposition to an absolute monarchy and the power of religious authorities. These ideas spread after the French revolution (1789-99) that led eventually to the separation of Church and State. After the Second World War, these ideas were entrenched in international norms promoted by the US and its allies through the UN system.

They emerged from European history, particularly the 150 years of religious wars in Europe over 'true' Christianity after the Protestant Reformation upended Roman Catholic supremacy. They were capped by the 20th century's catastrophic European First and Second World Wars, the end of Europe's empires and colonies, and the rise of dooms-day nuclear weapons.

The UN helped to proclaim most Enlightenment ideas to be 'universal values' for all humankind. It is through these 'liberal' prisms that Western think-tanks and policy makers stand in moral judgement of modern India and find that Modi falls grievously short.

Western liberals look upon Modi with distaste as a Hindu-leaning theocratic authoritarian. But they also admire him for doubling India's GDP, attracting unprecedented investments from global companies and opening pathways for local entrepreneurs to become dollar millionaires and billionaires. These liberals profess values like inclusion, diversity and equality but are having trouble in sharing the world with previously quiescent populations like Indians, who now prefer to live by their own values rather than as acolytes of the religious and cultural histories of Europeans.

On the world stage, Modi's rise asserts the difference of Indians from other civilisations. This is causing apprehension because Western elites are used to being followed. They are perplexed that Modi's India now emphasises partnership in all matters and leadership in some instead of being an ingratiating disciple as often in the past.

If Modi returns as expected with greater electoral and political capital, American and European leaders will have to make further compromises to treat India as an equal partner. Ahead of that, almost in panic, major Western think-tanks and human rights watchdogs have taken to loudly finding flaws in Modi's political, social and religious attitudes.

They have branded Indians as being 'partly free' despite the nation's robust electoral democracy and vociferous civil society. They are denigrating India for curbing freedom of expression and association despite its ferocious trade unions, press and media. By some estimates, India has 400 television channels and over 100,000 print outlets in multiple languages, which far exceeds any country in the West.

Modi has many flaws but the views of many Western intellectuals and policy makers may just reflect their habitual inability to share the world of ideas more equitably. That said, Modi has a lot of catching up to do. Nearly 800 million Indians are so poor that they need the government's free food grain scheme for another five years. ◆

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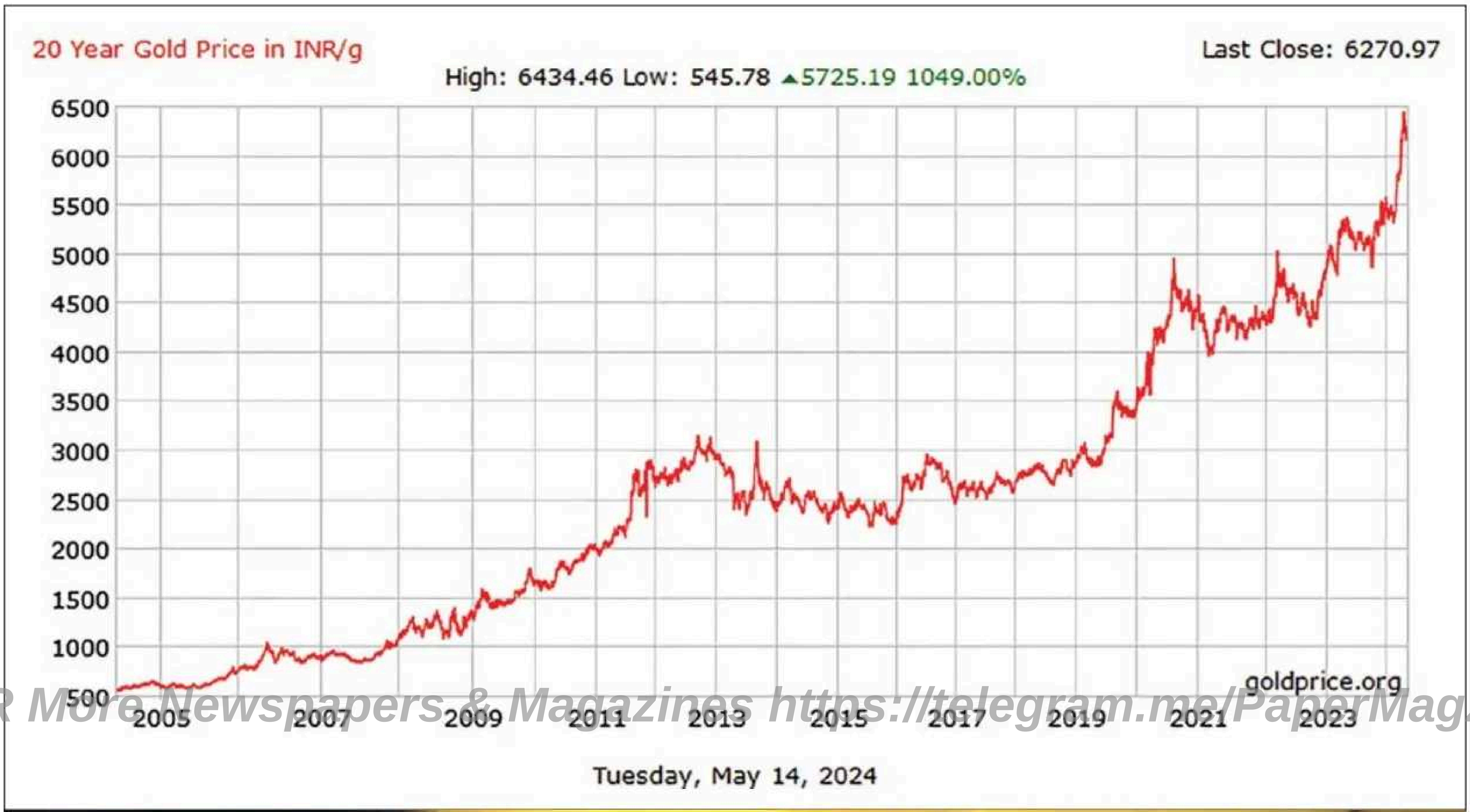
An unshakeable b



ull market

Gold is becoming the new currency of the world and the overarching reason why gold demand has been high is the fear of uncertainty, globally. Meanwhile, the glittering metal is all set to triple from the current levels

Over the last few days, the yellow metal prices have been erratic – between ₹71,000 and ₹73,000 (per 10 gram) – but experts feel that if the price continues to triple from its current level, gold could surpass the ₹2 lakh mark. "While gold prices corrected almost 5 per cent from their recent peak, this is a good opportunity to enter a long position for medium to long term investors. While short-term traders should wait for long entry, prices are likely to correct further from the current level, and $2,250 to $2,265 is a good level for long entry where the risk-reward is favourable," explains Anuj Gupta, Head of Commodity & Currency, HDFC Securities looking at an unshakeable bull market.

Gold prices have nearly tripled over the past 9 years, rising from ₹24,740 in 2015. However, investors are keen to know how long it will take for the price to reach this milestone. So, when will gold prices hit the ₹2 lakh mark?

What experts say

Even as gold prices touch new highs this year, one wonders when the yellow metal will hit levels of ₹1 lakh, or even ₹2 lakh? What does historical data on the movement of gold suggest and what should investors do? Here's what experts say on the gold rate outlook. Gold prices have had a stellar run over the past 6 years. It was quoted at $1,821/oz on 10 October, 2023 and is now higher by 31 per cent at $2,397/oz as of today. From $1,821/oz on 2 January, 2024, gold is now higher by 16 per cent.

"For the last 20 years, gold has given almost 12 per cent CAGR return and in 2024, it surged 18 per cent between the beginning of March and 12 April, rising around $400 and hitting new all-time highs of $2,448 on escalating Middle East tensions, a Chinese gold rush, record purchases by central banks, concerns over sticky inflation, and the soaring US government debt as well as continued fiat debasement. In the next 2-3 years, prices are expected to trade above $3,000 factoring in the current and future monetary policy and economic situation," says Prithviraj Kothari, MD, RiddiSiddhi Bullions Ltd (RSBL). Predicting the next 6-7 years is challenging, he says, as economic factors change every year.

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>
> **Prithviraj Kothari**
> MD, RiddiSiddhi Bullions

"Before the pandemic, gold prices were mostly stable. There was a sharp rise on each of the occasions like the pandemic, and the outbreak of geopolitical tensions. Further, gold gained traction due to its treatment as a hedging tool and also central banks of various countries adding more gold to their reserves. Considering these factors gold seems poised to be in an upward trend," says Sanchay Sinha, CGM – Retail Banking Department, South Indian Bank.

"Gold prices were expected to go up in recent times for three reasons. First, if we plot the returns from gold over the last three decades, it has comfortably beaten inflation, at least in the Indian context. This should hold true for other economies also. Secondly, the US Federal Reserve is expected to cut interest rates in the long term, notwithstanding its current stance of maintaining status quo. As you know, gold prices are inversely correlated with US bond yields. As the Fed cuts rates, US bond yields are expected to decline and gold prices should increase. Finally, gold prices will get support from continued central bank buying as they want to diversify forex reserves away from the dollar. Therefore, in all likelihood, gold prices are expected to stay strong and closer to $3,000 per troy ounce by 2030," observes V P Nandakumar, MD & CEO, Manappuram Finance.

Geopolitical conflicts

"The value of gold will continue to rise in the same exponential way in the next 5 to 6 years also. It is most likely to reach historic highs. Geopolitical conflicts internationally are not likely to subside anytime soon and will be the major trigger for high gold prices. Inflation is also another reason that will contribute to an increase in gold prices. Dollar's strength against the Indian rupee will also contribute to the increase in gold prices.

Alternative investment: Gold versus equity

Gold and equity are two very different types of investments, each with its own set of characteristics, advantages, and risks. Gold has been a cherished asset for Indian households, consistently delivering impressive returns compared to other investment options.

Gold has played an important role in the history of mankind as it has been widely used as a store of value and medium of exchange. Currently, apart from its shine and usage for jewellery, the precious metal is widely seen as a safe-haven asset investment, meaning that it is considered a good investment at all times but more during turbulent times. Gold is also widely seen as a hedge against inflation and depreciating currencies as it doesn't depend on any specific issuer or government. Indian households and temples have the maximum gold reserves. "Over 20 years, gold has surged by 1,150 per cent, while the Sensex has seen a 1,250 per cent increase – a neck-and-neck competition. Sensex's CAGR return is around 15 per cent, while gold's CAGR return is 12 per cent, so I think similar returns are expected in the future too," adds Kothari of RSBL. Historically equity has outperformed gold in the long run. But equity indices like the Dow Jones have given 10 per cent annualised returns in the last decade whereas gold has just given 5 per cent annualised returns in the past 10 years. But rising geopolitical tensions make gold an ideal investment option for better risk adjusted return in the medium-term perspective. It will also be good over the years for the gold loan market. Says Jain of the World Gold Council: "Historically, gold and equity have had an inverse relation. A fall in equities attracts investment in gold. But currently, we are witnessing a broad rally across asset classes in India. A rally in equities depends on corporate earnings, fund flows, etc."

Chakravarti of Shriram Finance says: "Based on a 10-year chart, gold has consistently shown a lag effect compared to other investment asset classes, especially the equity segment." In the last 10 years, gold has provided a 5 per cent annualised return compared to the Dow Jones' return of 12 per cent per annum. "This decade, which commenced with a six-sigma event like Covid-19, followed by geopolitical tensions such as the Russia-Ukraine war, and Middle East issues like the Israel-Iran crisis/China-Taiwan tensions, has propelled gold to break the consolidation of the last decade and move higher to a current range of $2,200-plus. The relative underperformance of gold in the last decade will likely lead to a better allocation for gold as an asset for investment. Thus, the historical 8 per cent return in dollar terms can potentially be surpassed with a 10 per cent plus dollar return in this decade. We strongly believe gold as an investment

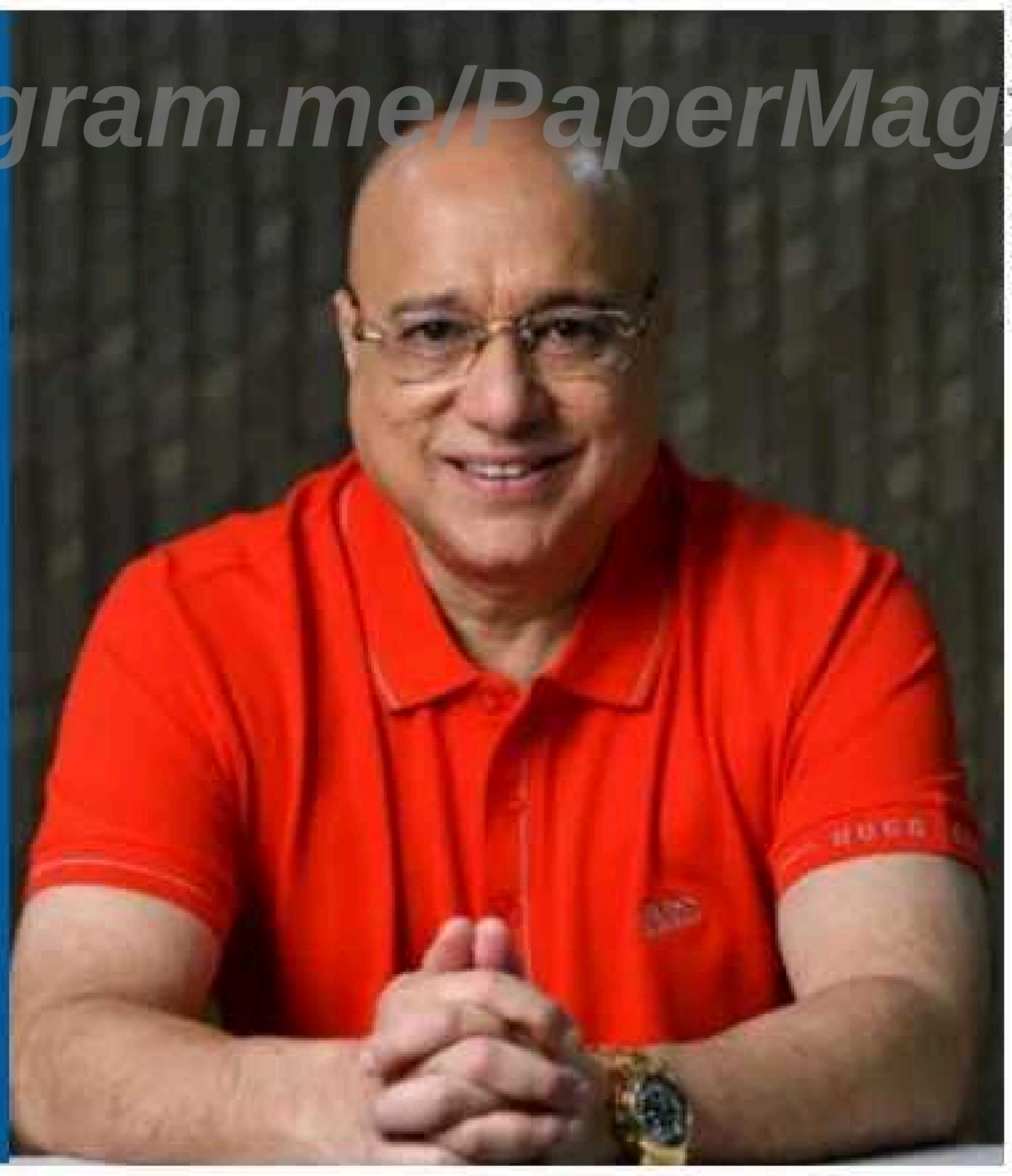
Yet another factor influencing the price of gold is ruling interest rates," says Kiran Kumar, CMD, Chennai based Lalithaa Jewellery.

Gold is an international commodity and its price trajectory depends on a lot of factors. "Since gold is traded in USD, the dollar index and USD price impact it primarily; a lower interest rate scenario increases the appeal for gold, and lastly it is considered a safe haven, attracting funds during times of uncertainty. While we cannot forecast gold prices, factors point towards a rising trend in the medium to long term. In the short term, the demand for gold may be muted due to the elevated prices," says Sachin Jain, Regional CEO, India, World Gold Council.

Importantly, the rise in the prices coincided with dollar strength and falling inflation expectations. The latest phase of rise has also coincided with stronger and more resilient data from the US, that has enabled the markets to start pushing out the start date of the Fed rate cuts. "The ECB has signalled for a rate cut sooner rather than later, given the lower inflation trajectory in the region," says YS Chakravarti, MD & CEO, Shriram Finance.

Dollar's strength against the Indian rupee will contribute to the increase in gold prices. Yet another factor influencing the price of gold is ruling interest rates

Kiran Kumar
CMD, Lalithaa Jewellery



SANJAY BORADE

US bond yields and DXY Index

"Gold prices have challenged their historical negative relationship with US bond yields and the DXY Index," says Indranil Pan, Chief Economist at Yes Bank, pondering what is driving gold. He adds: "Strong demand – the latest driver for gold prices has been the demand-side story – is mainly driven by central bank buying for their reserve assets. This also signifies waning confidence in holding USD as reserve assets. Secondly, the rising demand for gold and silver for industrial use – specifically for circuitry manufacturing in the electronics sector. Thirdly, rising retail demand from China. This has helped neutralise money flowing out of gold ETFs (exchange-traded funds). China's retail demand is strong due to the uncertain economic environment – leading residents to hedge risks and park funds in safe-haven gold."

The overarching reason why gold demand has been high is the fear of uncertainty globally. The uncertainty relates to both macroeconomic factors and geopolitical tensions, such is a good option in the current scenario."

Sinha of South Indian Bank believes that while equities have the potential for strong returns, they also come with higher volatility and risk compared to gold, which is often considered a safer haven during times of uncertainty. "Diversification across asset classes, including both equities and gold, can help manage risk and optimise investment returns in different market conditions. Also, many people in rural and urban pockets in India believe purchase of gold is traditional, auspicious and for the future requirements of the family, rather than as an investment which brings returns. Also, there is a rise in the sections of society which is now looking at gold as an opportunity for returns due to the significant appreciation of its value during the last few years," says Sinha. To be honest, as an asset class, equity has given better returns than gold over the medium to long term. However, we need to appreciate that equity is a highly volatile asset class and losses can be huge at times. Gold has lower volatility though it is also not entirely free from price fluctuations. "Due to the relative stability of gold as an asset class, several experts are in favour of increasing gold allocation in one's portfolio from 10 to 20 per cent. So, while equity indeed gives better returns than gold over the longer term, it is much more volatile than gold as an asset class," observes Nandakumar of Manappuram Finance.

"Even during the Covid-19 crash, equities corrected by 20 per cent-plus whereas we saw gold appreciating during that period as well. Gold will continue to remain an important asset class for investors looking to diversify their portfolio. Sovereign Gold Bonds offering an annual interest rate of 2.5 per cent, and no capital gains tax if held till maturity, are an attractive option to participate in gold," observes Vijay Kuppa - CEO, InCred Money. "In a period where asset allocation would be key for generating alpha, we would advise allocation to gold in the overall portfolio which would fit the bill in terms of hedge against the rising uncertainty in the global marketplace. Based on a combination of factors discussed, we would not be surprised to see gold trading around $2,700/oz in the next one year, implying an upside of about 17 per cent from current levels. We feel that physical demand on any price dips would keep the shine of the yellow metal intact in the medium to long term," concludes Manish Chowdhury, Head of Research at StoxBox.

Be as it may be, equity as an asset class may outshine gold over a period of time but that comes with a lot of volatility and drawdown which is not seen in gold. And equity and gold will continue to be key components of any healthy investment portfolio. While the adventurous fancy equity, the common and conservative investor will continue to depend on gold for stability and sustained returns.

While equity indeed gives better returns than gold over the longer term, it is much more volatile than gold as an asset class

Nandakumar
MD & CEO
Manappuram Finance

as the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Red Sea crisis, etc. "Global relationships have seen greater degrees of confrontation, polarisation and a move away from global cooperation. The macro-outlook remains uncertain even as the world has shown significant growth resilience. Risks to election outcomes (64 counties representing a combined population of 49 per cent go to elections in 2024) coupled with macro uncertainties, can shape policy making," adds Pan.

Amit Goel, Co-Founder & Chief Global Strategist, Pace 360, a SEBI registered multi-asset PMS & Cat III AIF says: "Gold has moved up by about 30 per cent from its low of $1,811 in early October 2023. Gold was, until last year, one of the most despised asset classes in the world because of the rising dollar index and US bond yields. With bond yields softening since then and the Fed becoming more dovish, the macroeconomic backdrop was much better for gold to move up. Now at levels close to $2,320 per troy ounce, gold may be a little overextended for now, but the evolving global macroeconomic backdrop is very positive for gold." Goel expects gold to be sideways in a range for some more time before it starts moving up again.

"Continued buying by central banks will also be a tailwind for gold. We anticipate the dollar to lose its appeal in a multi-polar world over the next 5-7 years, which will further bolster the gold narrative. We project that gold will reach ₹1,50,000 by 2027, and it may rally up to ₹2,00,000 by 2028-2029. Gold's upward movement will be propelled by a US-led global recession, a deflationary downturn in the US economy, and the risk-off environment in financial markets. While all risky assets may enter a bear market, gold will establish itself as the most attractive haven asset," adds Goel.

According to the World Gold Council, 24 per cent of central banks intend to increase their holding reserves in the next 12 months. Central bank net demand totalled 290 tonnes in the first quarter of FY25 the strongest start to any year on record and RBI grew its gold reserves by 19 tonnes during the first quarter, exceeding last year's annual net purchases (16 tonnes). Thus, continuous central bank purchase will support gold price reaching

Chinese influence

China's gold acquisition leading the market rally

The World Gold Council describes two countries – China and India – as 'super consumers' of gold.

Thirty years ago, China and India accounted for about 20 per cent of annual consumption of gold. Today, these two countries make up nearly 50 per cent of gold demand with the Chinese economy stabilising and India being the fastest growing economy. As a result, we believe their strong demand will continue in this decade, thus supporting the price of gold.

Chinese retail demand is strong due to its uncertain economic environment – leading to residents hedging risks and parking funds into safe-haven gold. China is one of the biggest players in the gold markets and holds considerable influence over market dynamics. This influence has only strengthened since gold prices increased by nearly 50 per cent since late 2022.

During the last month, gold prices surged, even though the Federal Reserve indicated a 'higher for longer' interest rate stance, sending yields surging and keeping the US dollar stronger compared to almost every other major currency. One of the key factors leading to this surge is high demand for the precious metal in China.

One of the major buyers of gold in China is the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank. Over the past 17 months, the bank has consistently increased its gold reserves. In the previous year, it acquired almost 225 tonnes of gold, surpassing the purchases of any other central bank in the world. By the end of 2023, China's gold reserve had reached 2,235 tonnes, marking a 225-tonne increase from the previous year's level of 2,010 tonnes. This represents a significant boost of more than 11 per cent in a single year.

"China has been purchasing higher prices in the coming years.

"We have data indicating that not just the central banks of China and India; many others like Singapore, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Turkey have been increasing their gold reserves. This indicates a noticeable policy shift by many banks to increase their reserve allocation to gold gradually and hence their demand is likely to continue in the coming months," says Ravi Gehani, Fund Manager, DSP Mutual Fund.

The ECB has signalled for a rate cut sooner rather than later, given the lower inflation trajectory in the region

YS Chakravarti
MD & CEO, Shriram Finance

Investment option

When choosing a gold investment option, factors such as liquidity, storage costs, taxation, safety and investment horizon are typical considerations. Inflow into Gold ETF recorded significant increase during and post the pandemic. Preference for gold during times of adversity is also notable from the investment inflow into Gold ETFs during 2020 when the world was engulfed by the Covid pandemic.

From an analysis for the period between 2019 and 2023, yearly growth in assets under management of Gold ETFs has been on the rise. Gold ETF AUM increased by around 150 per cent from ₹5,527.76 crore in December 2019 to ₹13,819.39 crore in December 2020 during the pandemic period. The AUM in Gold ETFs has been on a growth trajectory since then. As of December 2023, the AUM in Gold ETFs is valued at ₹25,959.02 crore, which is a substantial growth of 27.29 per cent from December 2022 and 87.84 per cent from December 2020, states an ICRA Analytics report.

According to Vishal Jain, CEO, Zerodha Fund House, "investing in gold ETFs offers unparalleled advantages including liquidity, cost-effectiveness, and security. By investing in gold ETFs like Zerodha Fund House's Gold ETF (NSE, BSE symbol - GOLDCASE), investors can eliminate the hassle of storage, purity concerns and insurance associated with physical gold, while enjoying the flexibility of investing on the stock exchange."

So, it is always good to have gold in one's portfolio. "Whether physical gold or Sovereign Gold Bonds or ETF, that will be a personal choice based on one's socio-economic background and evolution as an investor. In India, people prefer physical gold because they look at the asset as a 'storage of wealth', 'passing on to the next generation' or 'emergency recourse' rather than an investment. Only in the last 10-15 years has the mindset changed in the semi-urban and urban population," says Shashank Pal - Chief Business Officer, PL Wealth Management, at Prabhudas Lilladher Pvt Ltd on the gold prices.

Big trigger

"The next big trigger for gold, taking prices to $3,000 in the next 2-3 years would be the US debt crisis. One should pay close attention to the most important factor of alarmingly high US debt levels, which is above $34.5 trillion in April 2024 and rising $1 trillion every 100 days. Concern about the rapidly rising US government debt is also one of the main reasons for elevated gold

gold to diversify its reserves and decrease its reliance on the US dollar, which has traditionally been the most important currency in the country's forex reserves. China has been reducing its holdings of US Treasury for more than a decade. As of March, China had about $775 billion worth of US debt, down from about $1.1 trillion in 2021," says Chintan Mehta, CEO, Abans Holdings

Central banks worldwide, including the Chinese Central bank, have begun acquiring gold after the US Treasury Department and other American allies froze Russia's dollar holdings and imposed sanctions on Moscow following the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This has made countries cautious about the risks associated with dependence on the dollar. Another significant source of demand for gold in China comes from investment demand. Gold investment has become more attractive as traditional investments have turned lacklustre. China's real estate sector, traditionally a destination for household savings, remains in crisis. Meanwhile, investor confidence in the country's stock markets continues to dwindle.

"China, along with India, has always been the biggest consumer of gold. The consumption demand for jewellery, bars, and coins in China jumped from 825 MT in 2022 to 959 MT in 2023, resulting in a 16 per cent increase in consumption demand. China's demand for gold jewellery rose by 12 per cent, while the demand for Chinese bars and coins surged by 26 per cent," adds Mehta.

Recent positive signs in the Chinese economy and improving consumer sentiment, along with a weak property market, will positively affect gold demand in China. Worsening geopolitical tensions, including the war in the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, have significantly increased the demand for gold, as has the prospect of lower US interest rates, all supporting the rally in gold prices. The combination of these factors will keep the demand and prices of gold high in international markets.

Gold gained traction due to its treatment as a hedging tool and also central banks of various countries adding more gold to their reserves. Considering these factors gold seems poised to be in an upward trend

Sanchay Sinha
CGM – Retail Banking Department
South Indian Bank

prices in 2024," avers Kothari, pointing out that US debt crossed the $34 trillion mark in 2024, with interest payments projected to reach $870 billion in 2024, underscoring the urgency of fiscal management. In the US, debt is growing faster than the economy and the debt-to-GDP ratio is above 125. "The US will be unable to pay its debts if it defaults, disrupting the world's financial markets, and leading to catastrophe. Investors will probably keep turning to gold in the case of a debt crisis in order to protect their capital from the consequences," suggest Kothari.

Real money

What is the trend for gold telling us? It is quite obvious when you do the math that there is a massive devaluation of currencies happening all around the world. One by one, every single currency has broken down and is losing value relative to 'Real Money'. Look at the trend for gold priced in various currencies and there is a pattern: as the lines ascend, there is an increasing worthlessness of the underlying currencies in the real world.

And now in 2024, the US dollar has also fallen victim to this same global phenomenon. The US dollar had managed to hold its ground better than all the other currencies. But this year the dollar has broken down as well.

This story is just beginning to unfold. Investors have barely even recognised that it's happening. The recent gold rise is primarily on account of investors seeing gold as a hedge against inflation, rising geopolitical uncertainty in both Ukraine and the Middle East (Gaza). There is also an expectation that the dollar may not be the best bet for a country's foreign exchange reserves on account of excess printing and the easing of US interest rates. The former would have

Data indicates a noticeable policy shift by many banks to increase their reserve allocation to gold gradually and hence their demand is likely to continue in the coming months

Ravi Gehani
Fund Manager, DSP Mutual Fund

While we cannot forecast gold prices, factors point towards a rising trend in the medium to long term. In the short term, the demand for gold may be muted due to the elevated prices

Sachin Jain
Regional CEO, India
World Gold Council

long-term consequences for the value of the dollar, while the latter could cause the dollar to weaken in the short term. Many central banks are also purchasing gold, thereby impacting prices.

Where is the next stop for gold? We think there could be still some scope for gold to rise unless there is clarity on uncertainties – both geo-politics and macro. Given our belief that both central bank and retail buying can continue, there remains a scope for gold to move to the $2,450-2,500/oz.

"Indian gold demand seems robust given the stable macro economy, rising incomes (also rural) and a younger population resulting in a heightened demand for 'wedding gold'. The advent of digital modes of investment in gold has also reignited investor interest, especially amongst the Gen Z and millennials," adds Jain.

"We expect the dollar to lose its appeal in a multipolar world over the next 5-7 years, and that will also add to the gold story. We believe that gold will reach ₹1,50,000 by 2027, and it may rally up to ₹2,00,000 by 2028-2029. Gold's up move will be driven by a US-led global recession, a deflationary bust in the US economy, and the risk-off environment in the financial markets. While all the risky assets may go into a bear market, gold will establish itself as the most attractive haven asset. Our prediction is gold will reach $5,000 on COMEX and ₹160,000 on MCX by 2027 and $6,500 and ₹200,000 on MCX by 2029," hints Goel suggesting to the investors it will be well advised to buy gold on every downside over the next 3 months and then hold on for about 5 years. "We expect gold to outperform every other asset class on the planet by a mile," sums up Goel. ◆

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Banking on gold

Gold loan NBFCs gear up to meet with recent challenges in the industry

GEORGE ALEXANDER MUTHOOT

Gold loans have been the oldest form of lending in India, deeply rooted in the country's cultural and economic fabric. For decades, traditional gold loan NBFCs have been pivotal in monetising 'idle gold,' serving as a trusted avenue for credit access while incentivising productive use of 'idle gold'. Amidst the pandemic upheaval, gold loan NBFCs emerged as lifelines, financing underserved groups, women and self-employed entrepreneurs, bolstering livelihoods, addressing medical needs, supporting education and job creation.

India is the world's second largest gold importer, and industry estimates, households hold over 25,000 tonnes of gold, yet less than a fifth, is pledged for loans. Notably, about 60 per cent of this market remains outside the formal financial system, underscoring the vast untapped potential in the gold loan sector. The untapped opportunity coupled with recent surge in gold prices at over ₹66,600 per 10 grams has also led to rising competition.

Regulatory scrutiny & co-lending conundrum: India's gold loan sector has been in the eye of the storm post the recent ban by RBI on gold loan business by a prominent NBFC. Additionally, the Department of Financial Services, has urged public sector banks to comprehensively review gold loan accounts opened since 1 January 2022, including evaluation of all processes right from assessing collateral value, analysing collection charges, etc.

The co-lending model, popular across sectors, presents distinctive opportunities. Recently, this model has extended into the realm of gold loans. However, in gold loans, the disproportionate risk-sharing (80:20) between banks and NBFCs can potentially lead to overvaluation and compromise due diligence.

While the RBI observed certain material concerns at the said NBFC – serious deviation in assaying and certifying purity of gold, deviation in loan to value both leading to overvaluation of gold at the time of loan sanction, thereby leading to lower value realisation at the time of auction. In a co-lending model, this can lead to serious asset quality concerns, as 80 per cent of the loan is given by banks and 20 per cent by the NBFC. Besides, it harms the customer confidence in the entire gold loan ecosystem and necessitates the need for reassessment of the co-lending model. This was also one of the key reasons for the finance ministry asking PSU banks to comprehensively review their gold loan portfolio.

Some of the challenges have always existed in the way the business is done: Gold loan business is operationally intensive and ensuring the physical security of pledged gold has become even more critical necessitating investments in robust infrastructure. The recent surge in gold prices boosts collateral value, however it also demands a meticulous approach by the lenders to safeguard against sudden market fluctuations and mitigate potential risks.

The new entrants into gold financing lend for shorter durations of 3-6 months and exit the loan after due date by auction, disregarding the 20 per cent jewellery making charges and the sentimental value attached to the gold ornaments pledged. In contrast, the traditional Gold NBFCs give the loan for a longer duration of 12 months, and use auction only as a last measure to recover dues. Adoption of best practices and a thoughtful approach can go a long way in safeguarding customer confidence in the gold loan ecosystem.

Competition and the glitter of gold: There has been rising competition from NBFCs, fintechs and especially from banks, as gold loans are backed by collateral, and hence banks do not need to set aside much capital, while 100 per cent weightage is applicable for capital adequacy of NBFCs. NBFCs have to maintain an LTV (loan to value) of 75 per cent on all gold loans. However, for gold loans for agricultural purposes, banks have no such LTV cap and are given priority sector status. A level playing field will go a long way in supporting the NBFCs operating in the sector.

Large NBFCs are no longer shadow banks and regulatory support remains vital for the sector's resilience

Long-term sustainable growth hinges on both regulatory compliance and support: The recent issues in gold loan sector, has cast a long shadow over the gold loan NBFC sector; however, these isolated incidents shouldn't stain the entire industry. Large NBFCs are no longer shadow banks and regulatory support remains vital for the sector's resilience, especially considering its role in monetising idle gold assets in India.

While the recent regulatory scrutiny may slow growth, it also offers an opportunity for focussed players to strengthen their business models. Regulatory compliance and regulatory support both will go a long way in ensuring gold loan NBFCs continue with its role of driving financial inclusion and economic prosperity for the underserved India. ◆

The author is MD, Muthoot Finance

Will Modi's 'Mission South' suc

Either way, the 2026 delimitation could be a headache

The BJP's war cry of 400-*paar* (400 seats-plus) for the NDA alliance is predicated on its electoral performance in the southern states. Making a breakthrough into the southern states, among the richest and the best-educated in the country, is crucial to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitions to gain an even larger parliamentary majority in this election and extend the reach of the BJP to every corner of the country. In the build-up to the six-week, seven-phase election, which began in April and will continue till 4 June, the BJP has been focussing its campaign machinery and financial resources on winning south Indian constituencies.

While this is no easy feat, top BJP leaders are exuding confidence that they are heading for a huge victory in the southern states. Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu account for 109 seats, of which the BJP won 29 last time – 25 from Karnataka and four from Telangana. In both Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu the BJP failed to win any seat. The party also came a cropper in Kerala, which has 20 Lok Sabha seats.

The south has always been a tough nut for the BJP to crack because they are primarily viewed as a north Indian, Hindi-speaking party that does not represent regional southern interests, particularly around language and culture. Though the BJP made headway in Karnataka, it has lost power in the state every alternate term due to misgovernance. This time the stakes are higher.

The BJP, battling the Congress-led INDIA bloc for a third consecutive term, is hoping that the bulk of its 400-plus will likely come from its Hindi heartland base – including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Gujarat, etc – which has over 200 seats. In 2019, the party swept these states, winning over 190 of these seats. It will need a similarly strong result this time and a much-improved score from the southern (and eastern) parts to hit its target.

The BJP will have to hit this target sans any significant alliance in Tamil Nadu; its biggest partner, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, walked out last year after internal squabbles. It has forged an alliance with N Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh but the share of seats it is contesting in the state has gone down drastically.

Amit Shah, Union home minister, and the Prime Minister have led the BJP's fight in the southern states, with Modi making over a dozen visits to Kerala and Tamil Nadu alone this year, and senior leaders deployed in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Shah was in Karnataka's Haveri recently and declared to a news agency, "We will get more seats than Congress in the five states in South India."

The Congress secured, in fact, fewer seats than the BJP in these five states last time; like the BJP, the party was routed in Andhra Pradesh (the ruling YSR Congress Party won 22 of the 25 seats, while N Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party picked up the other three) and got just one in Karnataka. The Congress' big score came from Kerala, where the party won 15 seats, while the BJP got zero.

Battle for the South

The battle for South India has thus rapidly become one of the big headline points in this election, particularly since the Congress produced two thumping wins in the Karnataka and Telangana Assembly elections, defeating the BJP and the Bharat Rashtra Samithi of K Chandrasekhar Rao.

The BJP's claim of 'best ever showing' in the southern states is riding largely on the Prime Minister's supposed popularity in the region. It believes that, for the first time in South India, Modi's popularity has grown to an extent that it can get the votes and seats. Top leaders point to increased vote share between 2014 and 2019 as another sign that the BJP's reach in South India. In Kerala, the BJP got about 10 per cent in 2014 and 12.93 per cent five years later while, in Telangana, this jumped by over 10 per cent. In Karnataka, this

ceed?

The BJP's claim of 'best ever showing' in the southern states is riding largely on the Prime Minister's supposed popularity in the region. It believes that, for the first time in South India, Modi's popularity has grown to an extent that it can get the votes and seats

increased by 8.38 per cent.

It was the reverse in Tamil Nadu, however, where in 2014 the BJP polled 5.5 per cent of the votes, which fell to less than 3.7 in 2019. Similarly, in Andhra Pradesh, the vote share fell 7.54 per cent between 2014 and 2019,

Revanth Reddy, Telangana Chief Minister, has cast serious doubts over the BJP's big 'Mission South' claim, saying he expects the party to win fewer than 15 seats from the region. "Across the south there are 130 seats... BJP is going to get hardly 12-15. The rest will go with INDIA," Reddy said.

Delimitation woe

Like Reddy, the chief ministers of the southern states have emerged as some of Modi's fiercest critics and accused the BJP of depriving them of tax income and investment to punish and undermine their governments. Many in the south fear that the gulf between India's north and south could worsen after 2026, when India's electoral map is due to be redrawn according to population growth through the delimitation process. India's poor, more populous north – the stronghold of the BJP – is likely to gain parliamentary seats, while southern states, which successfully brought down their populations years ago through progressive welfare and education policies, are likely to lose significant parliamentary representation.

To put the controversy in the political context, the largest gainers under delimitation would be the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, which would go from their current 174 seats to 284 seats (a 63 per cent increase) in the new larger Lok Sabha. The NDA won 156 of these 174 seats, an impressive strike rate of 90 per cent in the 2019 election. At these strike rates, the NDA would receive 255 seats just from these 4 states after delimitation – much of the way to the new majority mark of 377 seats.

In contrast, the states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Kerala would go from their current 101 Lok Sabha seats to 107 seats (just a 6 per cent increase) in the new larger Lok Sabha after delimitation.

Across the south there are 130 seats... BJP is going to get hardly 12-15. The rest will go with INDIA

Revanth Reddy, Chief Minister, Telangana

The worry is equally palpable in the matter of distribution of resources – and this explains the pushback by the opposition CMs. Since 2014, there has been marked political and fiscal centralisation in India. And the BJP has been openly campaigning on a platform of 'double engine *sarkar*' in state elections – an explicit promise of political patronage and party bias in fiscal transfers from the Centre. The concerns around delimitation for the South are not just about losing a few parliamentarians. Rather, there is the real possibility that the fact that the South has a different political culture – along with better development outcomes and lower fertility rates – than the North, will result in the systematic loss of fiscal support from the Centre.

While there is talk that the concerns of southern states will be taken care of during the delimitation of Lok Sabha

Modi's outreach also needs to be bolstered by a ground level network of party cadres, which is evident in Karnataka but absent in most of the other southern states

constituencies by developing a mechanism that they continue to get a proportionate representation, the states are not impressed.

While the delimitation problem may emerge as a major administrative and political challenge for any government at the Centre, the immediate question is whether the political scenario in the South has changed dramatically for the BJP. Traditionally, the BJP has not been able to make much headway in the southern states, where regional parties or alliances are strong. Modi has been trying to gain acceptability in the South by projecting the development mantra and promoting the notion of a common national ethos.

Southern states contribute significantly to the country's GDP (31 per cent), boasting of robust industrial sectors, thriving IT hubs, and a strong services economy. Recognising the region's economic potential, Modi's initiatives aim to play to these strengths like promoting investment, boosting starts-ups and infrastructure development.

Modi's temple run and other gestures

Cultural symbolism also plays a crucial role in Modi's South push. The Prime Minister has made efforts to engage with the unique cultural identities and sensitivities of southern states, fostering a sense of inclusivity and representation. From participating in regional festivals to promoting local languages, these gestures resonate with the populace, contributing to a sense of connect and belonging. He made multiple visits to southern temples before the Ram Mandir *'Pran Pratisthan'* ceremony in Ayodhya in January 2024.

He has projected the installation of the 'sacred *sengol'* (sceptre) in the new Parliament building as an attempt to draw inspiration from the model of good governance that the Tamil heritage has given the country, in an apparent attempt to woo the people of the key southern state.

These are not bad goals themselves but they do not mitigate fears about Modi being a politician with a pro-Hindi bias, which works against people in the southern parts. From all indications, the PM so far has not been able to establish a strong emotional connect with the South. Lingual and cultural diversity, entrenched regional identities and historical political affiliations present hurdles to the BJP's expansion efforts. His outreach also needs to be bolstered by a ground level network of party cadres, which is evident in Karnataka but absent in most of the other southern states.

Electoral alliances could have made up for some organisational deficiencies but this is not happening in any significant way, except in Andhra Pradesh. The BJP thinks it has pulled an ace in the form of the articulate K. Annamalai, who has enthused large sections of younger Tamilians but it remains to be seen how the former police officer fares.

Holding up funds?

The southern leaders have taken up Modi's challenge and have propagated alternate agendas that focus on northern domination and discrimination by the Modi government. There are a number of real concerns here, and the southern leadership has decided to articulate and manipulate them to their advantage. In Kerala, for instance, Pinarayi Vijayan, the veteran CM, has blamed the Modi government for allegedly holding up development funds. Kerala's demands were endorsed by the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu leaderships.

Fortunately, Modi is not playing the Hindu card in the South but the nationalistic card. Whether that will work or not is anybody's guess. However, most observers feel that while the BJP might not be able to dramatically increase its seats in the South, it will be lucky to do better than before, at least in terms of vote share. What is likely is that, unlike in the last Lok Sabha elections, this time the BJP will pick up a couple or more seats. In Andhra Pradesh, where the ruling Jagan Mohan Reddy government is facing headwinds, the BJP's alliance with the TDP is certain to yield seats in this state for the first time. The BJP's vote and seat share in Telangana is also certain to rise while Karnataka, as in the past, is expected to support the BJP in pockets.

While precise numbers are impossible to predict, the overall upswing is sure to be a symbolic boost to Modi as even a partial victory in the southern states could weaken if not break the notion that his charisma is restricted to mainly the Hindi belt and parts of western India. On the other hand, a stellar performance will establish him as a pan-India leader of the stature of Jawaharlal Nehru or Indira Gandhi. ◆

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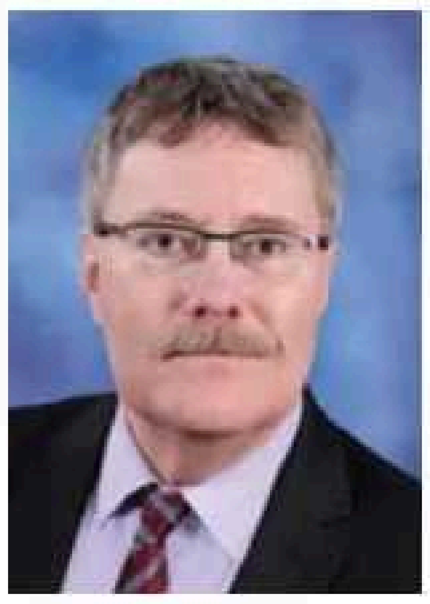
Changing for the better

Boards search not for the number of 'likes' you have, but the details of your successes

Dr M. MUNEER



RALPH WARD

Traditionally board roles are always decided on the basis of who knows who and who is best to nod their heads to the owners. Finding qualified candidates to fill board positions has been riddled with limitations.

A high reliance on networks, especially limited to finding passive candidates, has been problematic for better governance. Traditional search often relies on the existing networks, which can be homogenous and exclude qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Many high-performing executives are not actively seeking board positions, making it difficult to identify such folks, even if the owners want professionals. Prioritising candidates who fit a pre-defined mould or have existing relationships with the company leads to a lack of objectivity in the selection process.

Traditional board searches can be very time-consuming, often taking months to complete. This leads to delays in important decision-making and the resultant board's ineffectiveness. Most often the selection is based on 'check-the-box' qualifications. Overemphasising a candidate's past experience in similar industries, potentially overlooks individuals with transferable skills and fresh perspectives.

The decade of the 2020s is perhaps a third over, but we've already seen at least ten years-worth of change in business, society, politics, work and all the other elements of our worlds and our lives. The processes, best practices (and worst practices) for gaining a board seat have shifted a lot over the past five years. Here are some examples.

Board diversity has accelerated from being important to being a must, especially for larger, international companies. Quotas for gender and ethnic diversity on boards have solidified in much of Europe and Asia. Legal challenges have set back formal quotas in the US, but informal bolstering of boards with more women, ethnic diversity, and younger members has surged. This opens opportunities for fresh demographics, and also speeds up the pace of learning and career development one will need to become board-ready. Older, white males already had plenty of boardroom exposure by the time they made it, but if you're a younger Ms. Exec, you'll need to seek out this seasoning earlier. Volunteer for company board support roles, and seek non-profit board gigs.

The extended Covid lockdowns, and continuing remote work have hit many of the networking opportunities board wannabes enjoyed a decade ago. Covid changed things in more ways than imagined. We may be back in person now, but good networking takes time – not months but years. Nothing beats connections, and if you didn't keep your networks alive, and make meaningful connections, that harms your chances of finding a board seat. Make a conscious effort to revitalise your personal networking with a board angle in mind, and don't just hop on a Zoom call if you can meet for a cup of coffee.

The rule that a great majority of board seats are filled via social networking is still true, but the percentage going through search firms continues to rise. The number of boutique head-hunters specialising in board work, and specialty board practices at the big search firms, is also growing. Much of this is driven by diversity demands, which means that female or minority board wannabes should assure their head-hunter contacts are aware of their board interest and skill (and that you add the specialty board head-hunters to your network).

We wrote about the value of LinkedIn and other social media in these columns a while back, but

The rule that a great majority of board seats are filled via social networking is still true, but the percentage going through search firms continues to rise

today, your digital footprint – especially on LinkedIn – has become your de facto calling card. A few years ago, no one except celebs or CEOs would hire a digital branding consultant. Now, anyone with a rising career (or who wants it to rise) is smart to tap some professional advice on assessing and improving his or her online footprint. This can help fine-tune and boost the elements that buff your strong board candidate image. It's not necessarily the number of 'likes' you have, but showing your successes and personal impact. The potential of your online trail to harm your board seeking efforts has amplified over the past few years. If a search of your name brings up an industry chat site where former employees bitched about you a few years back, assume any board vetter is going to find it too.

Here is an additional LinkedIn tip for board wannabes – Never put that you are looking for a board role in your bio. It takes a board role to get a board role, and if you're telling me you're open, you're saying that you don't know the rules. ◆

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Why Gandhinagar and not Mumbai for GIFT city?

Mumbai is more suited as an international financial services centre (IFSC)

Why has Mumbai, in Maharashtra, not already been designated an International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) status or a GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City) component like Ahmedabad in Gujarat? Business analysts are positive that India will progress to become the world's third-largest designated economy, but this can only happen after establishing several IFSCs encompassing free trade zones. These IFSCs should not be limited to Mumbai alone, which already boasts a natural business ecosystem, but should also be incubated in cities like Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mangalore, and other states, each respectively designated as dynamic International Financial Services Centres.

Much like Kolkata, which once proudly held the title of India's corporate capital, hosting offices of most major business groups until the late 1960s before witnessing a decline in industrial presence that shifted outside present-day Kolkata – is Mumbai on a trajectory towards a similar fate of business relegation? This concern persists, especially in light of recent business project plans exiting Maharashtra, underscoring the need for strategic interventions to safeguard Mumbai's status as a thriving business hub.

A senior official from the Maharashtra secretariat (Mantralaya) acknowledges that Mumbai is facing accelerated losses, particularly following the second phase of additional concessions, incentives, and relaxations in laws introduced in Ahmedabad's GIFT City. Speaking anonymously, the official states: 'If Mumbai is to become an IFSC or acquire its own GIFT City component, no land parcel other than BKC will be suitable for Maharashtra. We have effectively split our existing resources in two. We are all complicit in Mumbai's failure to consistently secure IFSC status, whether under PM Manmohan Singh's regime in 2004 or during the announcement of Ahmedabad as India's only GIFT city, now being nurtured and consolidated into an international business services centre. While it may take 10-15 years to materialise, it remains their favoured project, even as Mumbai faces an apparent downturn in business amid India's economic recalibration."

Political helplessness

He adds: "GIFT cities are not merely an urban planning concept of brick and mortar but a government policy decision. Mumbai is still competing with Dubai at its respective level to attract trade and investment into Maharashtra, leveraging the natural ecosystem of Mumbai. There is a sense of political helplessness in publicly addressing the issue today, despite the will and full awareness of the urgency to bolster India's economy with more IFSCs." A senior CMO official cited state government limitations, stating it was a national policy issue, and declined further comment on why Mumbai faces the prospect of business relegation.

The Gujarat International Finance Tec-City, also known as GIFT City, is a central business district currently under construction in the Ahmedabad

district of Gujarat, serving as India's only greenfield IFSC. Mumbai initially missed its opportunity in 2004 when the proposal to establish it as India's first IFSC was rejected by the Reserve Bank of India. This decision came during the tenure of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, an economist who led the country's political and international finance affairs.

Dr Joseph Thomas Kanayamplakal, Head of Research at Emkay Wealth Management, commented: "Things have improved significantly. When discussing the need to compete with Dubai and Singapore, it's important to remember that Dubai established the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) approximately 20 years ago. India is now attempting something similar through the GIFT City in Gandhi Nagar. They plan to expand it from the current 800 acres to around 3,500 acres, incorporating residential areas, universities, parks, and other amenities. This marks just the beginning of the GIFT City concept, which offers numerous benefits, ease of doing business, and facilities. Consequently, many financial brokerages and portfolio management firms have opted to relocate to GIFT City rather than remain in Singapore.

He added: "A significant number of individuals have relocated to the GIFT City in Ahmedabad, and the Indian government's vision for the future entails establishing more GIFT Cities. About six months ago, I attended a presentation centred on this precise objective, outlining plans to expand the current GIFT City into a full-fledged International Financial Services Centre. This expansion would encompass entertainment and dining options, places of worship, residential accommodations, gaming zones, and more".

India is undoubtedly poised to establish similar GIFT Cities in other major cities, potentially including Chennai and Kolkata. However, there was some apprehension surrounding the GIFT City in Ahmedabad, with concerns raised about it being Gujarat-centric. Questions were posed about whether Prime Minister Modi intended to relocate the entire Mumbai IFSC to Ahmedabad. In response, it was highlighted that the PM's vision encompasses enhancing connectivity between Ahmedabad and Mumbai through initiatives like the bullet train and additional flights.

"I believe the plan is much broader, and other cities will eventually have their own GIFT City. However, I anticipate it will take at least another decade for the GIFT City concept to expand to other regions, given that even the GIFT City in Ahmedabad, specifically Gandhinagar, is still in its early stages of development. Nevertheless, it is experiencing rapid growth, with numerous firms having already relocated there. Nearly every prominent firm in India has established a presence, albeit small, in GIFT City. Additionally, we can anticipate the launch of numerous India-centric products from GIFT City in the future." ◆

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Delivering excellence

Tribeca Developers is ramping up its presence in the luxury residential market

Started its realty journey in 2012, Tribeca Developers, in a short span of time, has positioned itself quite strongly in the luxury residential market. The Mumbai-headquartered company has pioneered the concept of branded residences in India by bringing the Trump brand to the country where it is currently putting up two Trump branded luxury residential towers – one each in Gurgaon and Kolkata.

Today, Tribeca is the largest developer of Trump properties in the world, second only to the Trump Organization. In India, apart from its ongoing two Trump-branded properties, the company previously also licensed Trump brand to the Lodha Group's existing iconic residential project -- Trump Tower in Mumbai's plush locality of Worli as also to Panchshil Realty for its Trump Towers project in Pune. This apart, the company is currently also developing a global YOO branded luxury residential project (YOO ONE) in Pune.

Tribeca has recently tied up with the Tejukaya Group to build its first luxury residential project in Mumbai. The 400-odd unit project will come up in Mumbai's Parel micro market with an estimated investment of around ₹1,000 crore.

So far in most of these projects, Tribeca has followed an asset light Development Management model, where its partners bring in the land and bear the cost of construction, while Tribeca implement the entire project (design to construction) and takes care of sales & marketing for a share of revenue, share of profit or a management fee. Following such a model has helped Tribeca expand its portfolio/business quickly and thus proved its mettle in the fast-growing Indian residential market. However, having revisited its strategy, the

Mehta: product-centric approach

company in the changed market scenario, is now also looking at JVs and will even act as a full-stack developer, acquiring land.

Currently, Tribeca, backed by HDFC Capital, Tata Capital, ICICI Bank and Aditya Birla Capital, is developing over 6 million square feet of branded residential projects in India with a sale value of ₹6,000 crores, and has a development pipeline of over 4 million square feet. Tibeca's branded properties are commanding a premium ranging from 15 per cent to as high as 40 per cent in the luxury residential market. In 2019, Tribeca along with HDFC Capital formed a ₹500-crore residential investment platform which through a combination of debt and equity, invest in projects that Tribeca develops.


Tribeca is building aesthetically designed luxury residences

Scaling new heights

Buoyed by its recent success in the booming residential market, the company is aiming for sales revenue of ₹2,500-₹3,000 crore in the next 3-4 years. This year the company is expected to clock a topline of around ₹ 1,500 crore, even as the luxury residential market has continued to maintain its momentum.

"Over the years, the Indian realty market has undergone a big transition. Today's aspirational buyers are more demanding than ever before and ready to pay any premium for good products. Adequately-designed good products have always in short supply in this evolving Indian market and that is where Tribaca intends to play its role. We aim to fill that void with our product-centric approach. In fact, we want to position ourselves as a good product developer which can serve the market with its world-class residences,"says Kalpesh Mehta, 46, founder, Tribeca Developers who would initially just license the Trump brand to local developers (Lodha Group and Panchchil) but later decided to develop these branded properties on its own. He realized that in India most of the developers were focusing on the land element not the product and hence there was a gap to be filled up.

"The seeds for Tribeca were sown during my time at Lehman as I was dealing with a lot of developers. I had just come back from New York and what I saw in India was that the products being delivered were actually terrible as compared to what I was used to in New York. We were paying the same price here but the quality was horrible. It was not that India was not capable of developing high quality products. We were developing 5-star hotels which were of quite good. That was when I decided to put up a development business which could be purely product centric. In New York all those years, while investing I could see how good quality products were easily commanding a much higher premium despite being in the same micro market," recalls Mehta.

He previously, as vice president of Lehman Brothers Real Estate Private Equity Fund, closed some of the largest transactions in the Indian real estate sector and managed a portfolio of over $400 million in equity, which was invested in assets valued at more than $3 billion. Before that, he worked with the Carlyle Group Real Estate Private Equity, NYC, where he invested and managed luxury residential developments in Manhattan worth over $3 billion, including one of the largest luxury development projects in Manhattan's Upper West Side. Mehta is an MBA from Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania (dual major in real estate & finance) and BA Computer Science from University of Texas.

Moreover, Mehta belongs to a family of architects, where his father, uncle and cousins all are in the field of architecture. Their firm, J P Parekh and Son is a leading architectural design firm established in 1935. It provides comprehensive planning, architectural and project management services. The firm has been involved in several major projects like Peninsula Business Park, Godrej Platinum and Saifee Hospital in Mumbai.

"So now you know that I come from a family of architects. I kind of grew up on construction sites so to speak and always had an affinity to build buildings. So, now you know why I have that fine taste in design," explains Mehta.

Trump Tower Kolkata is the shimmering skyscraper with a strikingly elegant façade of black and silver glass, surrounded by lakes and greens in the heart of the city. The tower is located on EM Bypass, the city's main arterial road and has some of the finest luxury hotels of Kolkata in its neighbourhood. The project host an exclusive collection of super luxury amenities including a private rooftop, fine dining space abutting a lavish infinity pool and outdoor deck for intimate gatherings, spa and fitness centre with sauna, steam and massage rooms, library, lounge, games room, children's play area, and business centre.

Reflecting the project's location, at the intersection of old and new Kolkata, buyers in this project are able to

Tribeca has pioneered the concept of branded residences in India

customize their residences by picking between classic and contemporary styled interiors designed by Matteo Nunziati, an Italian interior designer who has previously worked with the Trump brand.

Launched in 2017, the Trump Tower Kolkata project with around 135 apartments (current price: ₹10,000-12,000 per sq ft) is almost 80 per cent sold out. In fact, 70 per cent of the apartments were sold out in the very initial stage of development even as the overall market was subdued. Coming up at a project cost of around ₹ 500 crore, the project has a JV partner in Kolkata's Unimark Group, owned by Harsh Patodia.

In 2018, Tribeca launched Trump Towers Delhi NCR in Gurgaon in partnership with Gurgaon-based realty group M3M. This ₹1,400 crore project (all glass façade twin towers, 250, 3 & 4 bed luxury residences) is almost ready and the delivery will start in first quarter of next year. The project is a beautifully designed residency that spans over a prime land of sixty acres located at the Golf Course Extension Road in Gurgaon. The breath-taking project (current price: ₹25,000-30,000 sq feet) is set out to be the most dominating premium residency standing over at a magnanimous height of two hundred metres that is determined to rule the skylines of the National Capital Region.

Here, all apartments will have one family lounge and one private lounge in Master bedroom. There is 22 feet double height ceiling in living area in 4 BHK duplex apartments and every room features floor to ceiling windows. There are private elevators, a glass-enclosed infinity edge pool, multi-cuisine restaurant as also aerobics, yoga and dance studio as also a reflexology garden.

"Even in a sluggish market situation, both our Trump branded properties generated extra-ordinary response. In fact, we would command a good deal of premium due to our product quality and amenities. Now, post-Covid, the market for such luxury properties is booming and we at Tribeca is all geared up to monetise the condition," says Mehta who is looking to expand its Trump branded properties to even cities like Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai going forward.

Re-visiting strategy

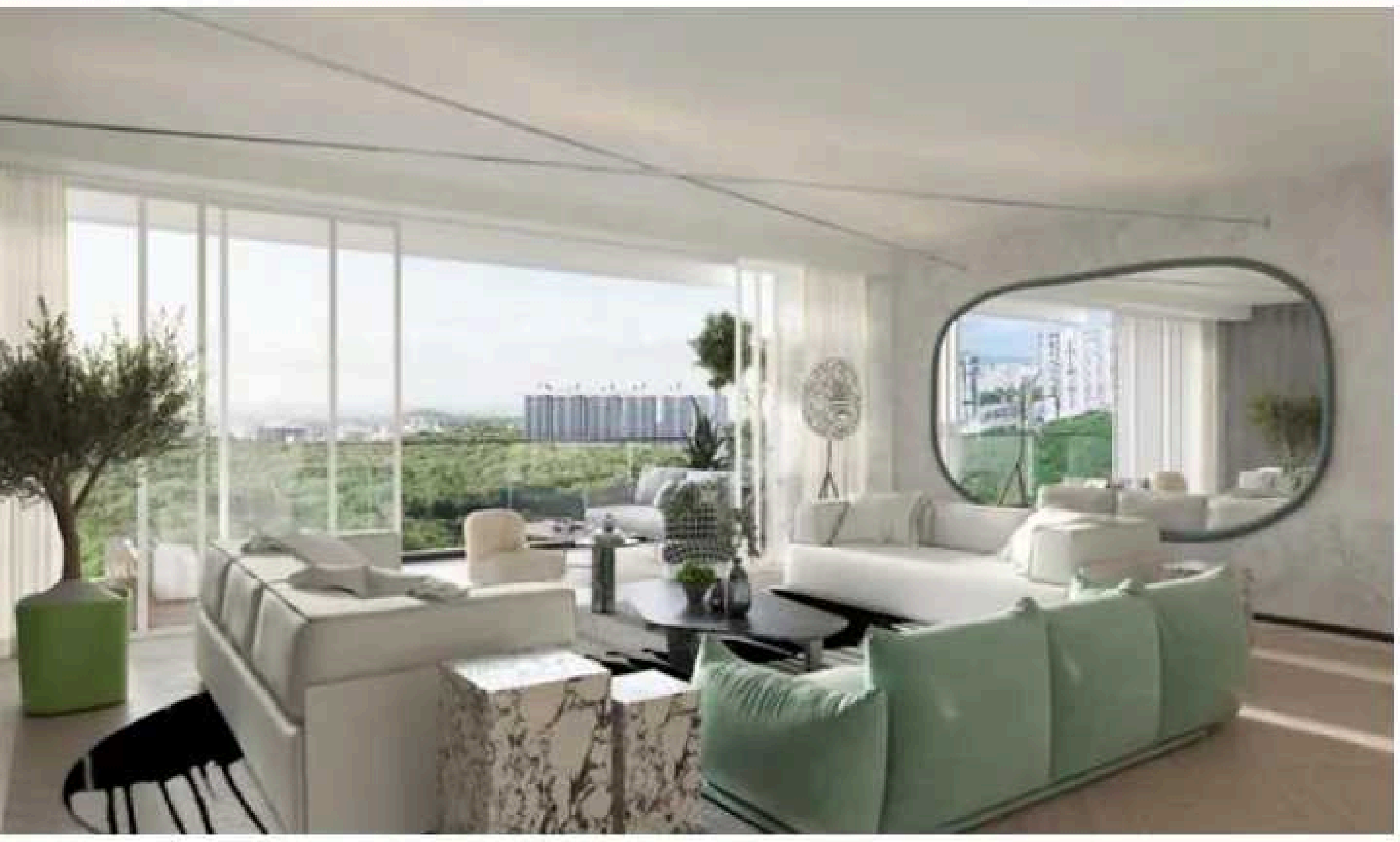
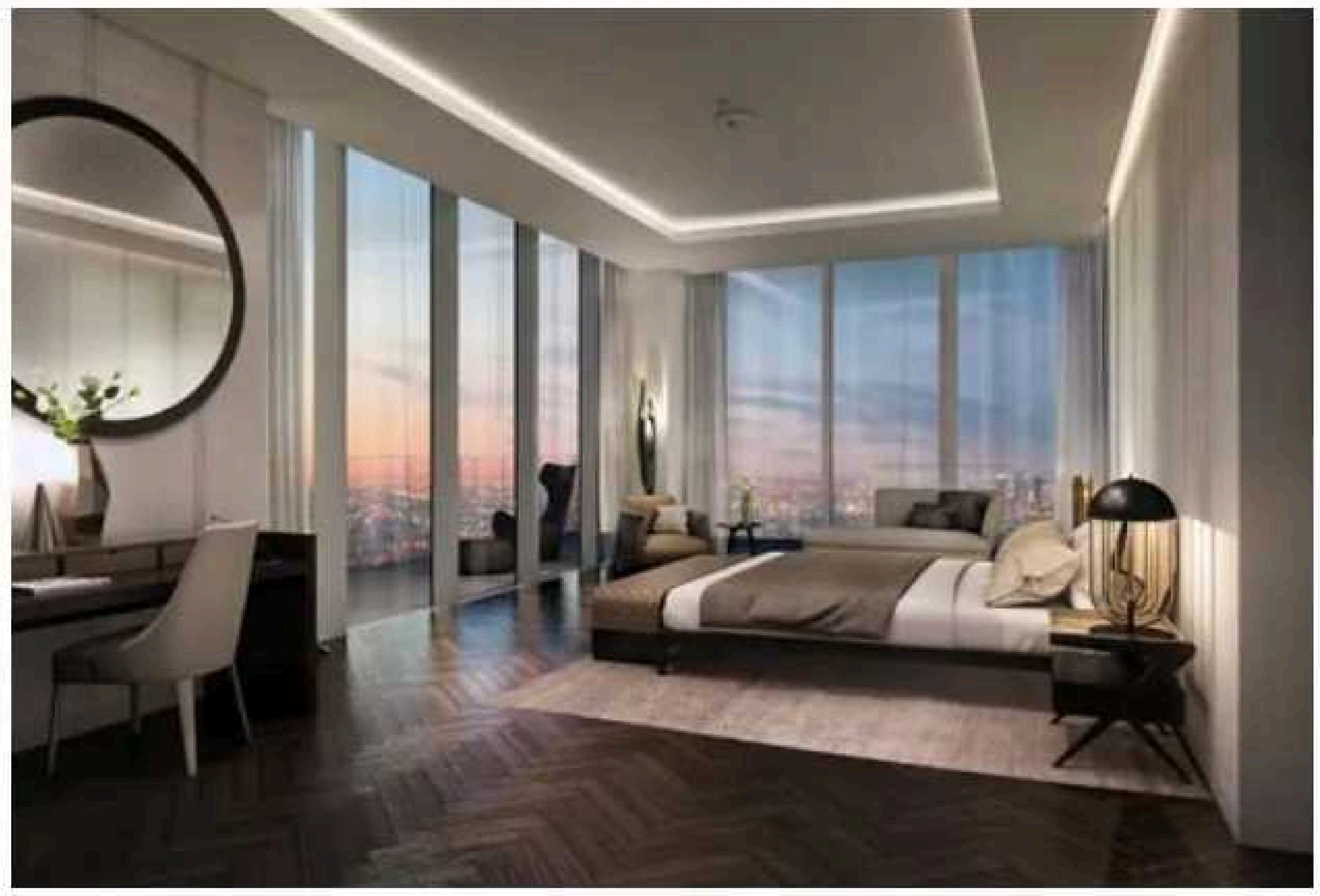
These Trump Branded projects will be carried out in a partial stack format (partial DM) in partnership with strong local developers. Here, Tribeca will only bring in the brand, involve in designing and sales & marketing, without being involved in construction. However, as a full stack developer, the company will only focus on three geographies – NCR, Mumbai and Pune. In these, geographies, going forward, the company is now also looking for JVs (not just DM). In fact, Tribeca having revisited its strategy, is now also looking at acquiring land parcels.

"Two things which have really worked for us in all these initial bad years, is first, Tribeca has been extremely financially prudent, and that has really paid off in good as well as bad times. Second, the tremendous amount of focus which is there on product and customer. Even in bad times, Tribeca was able to sell, when lot of other people were not able to sell. We try to do the best, when the markets are the worst. So, it hasn't really mattered so far for Tribeca. Even in bad markets, we were able to sell. Customer had the faith in the product and it got sold off. It got sold off very well in the bad times in 2019, and it is selling off very well right now in this good market," states Rajat Khandelwal, Group Chief Executive Officer, Tribeca Developer who joined the company last year. Khandelwal comes with 19 years of professional experience. Previously, he served as President – Central Park in Delhi NCR; CEO – West India of Ozone Group and COO of Omkar Developers.

Tribeca's The Ark, Pune is a luxury residential masterpiece, designed to be visually spectacular on the outside, and aesthetically appealing within. The Ark, an engineering marvel, promises tranquility and greenery for those who wish to escape the urban chaos. Located on NIBM Road spanning over a 12-acre expansive land and flanked by 200 acres of protected forest, the ₹600-crore project backed by ICICI Bank, offers Pune's first terrace deck. Launched in 2021, this JV project with Pune's Acropolis Group, has five towers (240, 3&4 BHK residences; ₹6,000-8,000 per sq feet) of which, three towers have already been delivered, while the 4rth & 5^{th} towers will be delivered next year. Under this project Tribeca is also planning to launch one more tower soon.

YOO ONE is Pune's most revered bespoke luxury residence. Located in NIBM Road, the ₹400-crore project is a joint creation by the pioneers of branded residence – Tribeca, Pune's foremost new age developer – Tricon, and India's top interior designer – Sussanne Khan. Launched in 2022, the project, funded by Aditya Birla Capital (294 residences; ₹6,000-8,000 per sq feet) comprises six magnificent towers and a 1.5-acre rooftop terrace that is distinctively designed for the connoisseurs of luxury.

Besides, Tribeca's portfolio also has Pune's largest High street retail – Tribeca Highstreet. Located in the

The developer has shown a fair degree of agility and adjusted to the different market conditions

NIBM area, the Pune's largest high street has developed into the city's top destination for entertainment, dining, and shopping. Launched in September 2022, this 300,000 sq feet retail development is currently 70 per cent functional with 50+ brands (including Starbucks, McDonald's and Westside) already leased out.

On being asked how he managed to convince his buyers despite being a new player, Mehta says: "Because we've delivered. Number one is delivery. We have two projects delivered in Pune, which are trading at big premiums to everyone else. We have some of the most conservative lenders, like HDFC and ICICI, who've taken a bet on us. We have an organization like Trump, taking a bet on us. Around five years ago, when we didn't have any delivery, look who all have bet on us. So, you can trust us because as they trusted us. But now we've actually delivered."

"The luxury residential market has flourished post-COVID due to the wealth effect and a shift in living preferences. As stock markets and asset values rose, high-net-worth individuals had more disposable income to invest in real estate. Additionally, the pandemic's impact on remote work led people to seek larger homes with dedicated spaces for work and recreation," says Ambar Maheshwari, CEO, Indiabulls Investment Management Ltd.

"Demand for both luxury and ultra-luxury properties has surged since the pandemic, with HNIs and ultra-HNIs buying such homes for investment, personal use, or both. The upsurge in demand for ultra-luxury homes can also be traced to the reshuffling of HNI investment portfolios amid the anticipated volatility in the stock market due to the existing geopolitical tensions. Not surprisingly, leading Grade A developers have also been scaling up their new supply in the ultra-luxury category. Among wealthy Indians, there is a very distinct FOMO aspect to securing the most desirable options before someone else does," states Anuj Puri, Chairman, ANAROCK Group.

According to the recent CBRE report, the luxury segment housing (units priced ₹4 crore and above) recorded a 10 per cent Y-o-Y sales growth during Jan-March 2024. The percentage share of the luxury segment in the overall residential unit sales stood at about 5 per cent during the quarter. The report further points to around 64 per cent Y-o-Y increase in new launches of luxury segment units during Jan-March 2024.

Resurgence of demand

City-wise, the report states that Mumbai recorded the highest surge in unit sales during the review quarter, registering a 15 per cent Y-o-Y increase in luxury segment residences. This was followed by Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad and Pune. Hyderabad and Pune saw sales activity increasing by more than 2x and 4.7x Y-o-Y, respectively. The resurgence in India's luxury residential real estate has spurred robust growth, as about 45 per cent of the overall luxury stock was injected in the last five years alone. The segment has also grown at a CAGR of over 9 per cent since 2019 across the gateway cities.

Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO - India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE, says, "The Indian luxury real estate sector demonstrates robust fundamentals for sustained expansion, underpinned by consistent increases in household income and consumer spending power. These factors are anticipated to cultivate a segment characterized by discerning buyers prioritizing quality, financial prudence, and a desire for an elevated living experience. Going forward, capitalizing on the positive sales trend, developers nationwide are ramping up activity and are expected to launch new units in the segment."

With all these developments in place, Tribeca Developers is positioning itself strongly in the luxury residential market. In a short span of time, the developer has managed to win over the trust of buyers who in the last decade or so have become more discerning and demanding. The company has shown a fair degree of agility and adjusted to the different market conditions quite seamlessly. During the initial years of its realty journey, it consciously decided to follow the asset-light model to expand its business in a subdued real estate market. However, now having established itself in the market with branded residences, the company is now revisiting its strategy and looking to explore the booming luxury residential market even as a full stack developer. ◆

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Embracing failure and moving ahead

Building products in cyber security is the way ahead

SANJAY BORADE

Singh: undeterred by setbacks

"The value of a failed entrepreneur is seldom realised by others. Having travelled through the road unsuccessfully provides one with a premium certificate to be an advisor!"

One does not often hear about an entrepreneur talking about his own failures.

Binod Singh, founder and chairman of Cross Identity, a leader in Identity and Access Management (IAM) is not your archetypal entrepreneur. Unlike those who have a bright idea during college days and build up a start-up which subsequently becomes a unicorn, Binod Singh had to face a lot of challenges before he built a world-class company. Cross Identity has been in existence for over 2 decades and provides complex IAM implementation covering multiple technology platforms.

It was not a one-way street to success for Binod Singh. Before he became an entrepreneur, Singh took up multiple jobs and, early in his career, faced many challenges. The jobs spanned across companies in consulting, hardware, systems and software. Having completed his master's in Industrial Management from IIT Kharagpur in 1978, Singh started at Tata Steel where he topped the graduate test, which all trainees had to then undertake. However, he was appalled by the sea of humanity which waded in and out of the Jamshedpur factory, when the siren blared, when the shift was over and a new one began. Singh did not relish the thought of becoming a cog amongst the 50,000-strong crowd. Consciously or unconsciously, Singh felt he had to do something innovative.

His first real job was with Forbes Forbes and Campbell as a consultant in the eastern part of India. His job entailed studying various businesses including power plants, manufacturing units, etc. Even then Singh tried to add value to the reports which he submitted, something which formed the bedrock of his jobs in later years. He reported directly to the regional manager.

Computers had not yet made their public appearance in India. However, institutions like the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research had developed the TIFR automatic calculator, and the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) had installed computers for complex computations. In fact, ISI is credited with developing a computer as early as 1953-54. Despite these advancements, the general public remained largely unaware of computers. DCM and HCL emerged as pioneers in this field, initially focusing on hardware and later expanding into software. HCL actively sought Singh to join their team. "I refused three times," Singh recalls, "and when they still persisted, I asked them when they would stop. They said, 'Not until you join us!'" At that time, HCL had a small team, and Shiv Nadar personally conducted monthly reviews. Singh acknowledges: "I learned a lot from Nadar." He joined as the regional manager for East India and, on Nadar's instruction, relocated to Bangalore (as it was then known) with the specific task of building HCL's corporate image in the southern region. "Nadar had some good plans," Singh reflects, "and I played the role of an executor."

Personal computers had just come to India; it was a volume game and Singh played a good role in growing the volume of PCs. During his tenure at Wipro, from 1986-90, Singh was entrusted with the task of marketing PCs. Singh built up channel partners across India to drive sales. It was also the first time that PCs were sold through channel partners in India. Singh was regarded as the originator of channel partners for PCs in India.

Just as the seeds of liberalisation were being sown in the country, Singh made the decision to join an MNC. With a proven track record in building channel partnerships, Singh ventured into Unisys in Europe. He embarked on extensive travels across Eastern and Western Europe as well as Africa to establish distributors and forge joint ventures for large computers in Geneva. During this time, India had yet to gain recognition for its software prowess and was not prominent on the global IT stage. The acknowledgment of India's software capabilities came later, during the Y2K period.

"I was too much of an Indian and despite moving across several countries I realised that my heart was still in India." On his return to India Singh joined Digital Equipment as the vice-president for systems business. Digital was at that time known for making minicomputers for laboratories and research institutions. It was subsequently taken over by Compaq in one of the biggest deals of that time ($9.6 billion). Compaq was later taken over by HP for $25 billion.

While Digital Equipment, also popularly known as DECK, specialised in mini-computers, Computer Associates focussed on large frame computers. Singh was the first CEO of Computer Associates India Private Limited. A subsidiary of the US company, the US technology service company marketed enterprise software to mainframe computers besides providing software support.

Around 2000, Singh made the bold decision to leave everything behind and become an entrepreneur. He was determined not to follow the well-trodden path. "As a professional, you can only write a paragraph or a page in a book. I wanted to write a book, not just rewrite someone else's," he remarked. Driven by a passion to create something original, Singh focused on the area of Identity and Access Management (IAM) solutions. He founded Ilantus in Texas, USA, with the aim of providing organisations with solutions to identify and regulate access, thereby safeguarding user identities.

Boot-strapped and problems

Ilantus started as a bootstrapped venture, initially with 12-15 professionals. However, shortly after its formation, the dot-com bubble burst, forcing Singh to tap into his personal savings. To bolster funds, he utilised his culinary skills, supplying breakfast and meals to Air Deccan, a low-cost, no-frills airline. "Those were tough days indeed," recalls Singh, "but we were determined." Ilantus emerged as the first dedicated company in cybersecurity for access management. While IBM offered similar services, for them, it was just another offering. Drawing on his over 2 decades of experience, Ilantus honed its expertise in the IAM domain by providing applications to major brands, including 12 Fortune 500 companies.

From the outset, Singh was resolute in his vision that Ilantus would not be just another service company. He emphasised that while service companies typically focus on growth through volumes, he believed that creating a platform was the way forward. Ilantus continuously introduced innovations to enhance its services. In 2015, Gartner advised the company to venture into cloud services. However, Singh misjudged the market and believed that the product would be better suited for larger corporations. In contrast, Okta, another company in the same space and listed on the Nasdaq, correctly anticipated that small companies would be the future. As a result, Okta is currently valued at $15 billion.

Undeterred by the setback, Singh proceeded to develop a unique product called Compact Identity. This converged product allowed clients to access all services within a single product, eliminating the need to purchase different services separately. Currently, in addition to access management, the company offers identity governance and administration, along with cloud infrastructure and preliminary access management.

Subsequently, this product gained recognition from leading analysts globally and is listed in Gartner's Magic Quadrant. Emphasising value addition rather than volume, Ilantus secured rates 4-5 times higher than typical service companies. Over the years, the company has expanded its presence to Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Australia, Singapore, Mumbai and Bengaluru. It maintains offices in India and the US, with India contributing slightly more to the market than the US.

With the rapid acceptance of Compact Identity, managing two businesses became increasingly challenging for Singh. Ilantus housed both the services and product business, including Compact Identity. To address this, the product was spun off into a separate company within Ilantus. In February 2023, the services business was divested to Network Intelligence, allowing Binod Singh to focus his full attention on developing the product. Despite the proliferation of competition over the years, Singh remains confident in his team's talent and their ability to offer a differentiated product to stay ahead in the game.

The cybersecurity solutions industry is projected to reach $26 billion by 2026, and Singh has invested significant efforts to elevate his company, Cross Identity, to its current level. He aims to continue adding more value-added services to maintain the company's enviable position. "What I could not do in 2000, I can do now," he asserts.

Beyond business, Binod Singh is an avid yoga practitioner, enjoys writing blogs, and is a proficient speaker. In India, as AI gains rapid acceptance, posing a threat to the Indian IT industry, it will be software products that propel the country to the next level of growth. ◆

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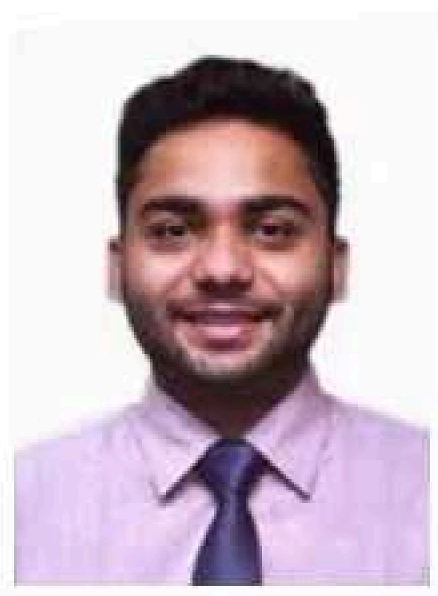
Expanding horizons

An early conclusion of India-Australia CECA will solidify a robust alliance in the Indo-Pacific region

ALFIYA ANSARI



SIDDHARTH NEMA

Following the recent conclusion of the second India-Australia 2+2 Defence and Foreign Ministerial Dialogue, both nations are aiming for deepening the engagements on wide array of strategic, defence and security issues. Despite the strides in bilateral engagements, the Comprehensive Economic Co-operation Agreement (CECA) remains a platform for additional considerations in their evolving relationship.

India and Australia established a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2020, upgrading from the 2009 bilateral strategic partnership, with a focus on expanding defence and security collaboration through innovative initiatives. Subsequently, the signing of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (AI-ECTA) in 2022 marked a significant milestone, facilitating Indian access to the Australian market and fostering trade growth. Negotiations are underway to transform AI-ECTA into CECA, building upon the 77 per cent reported utilisation rate by Indian exporters during the initial nine months of the ECTA, especially in sectors such as iron and steel products, linens, agricultural products, and electrical conductors. This expansion holds the promise of even greater gains for Indian exporters.

As part of India's green energy strategy, 20 critical mineral blocks, including lithium are set to be auctioned, following reforms to boost private sector involvement in mineral exploration. Australia's global leadership in mineral exploration aligns with India's emission reduction goals, creating opportunities for robust supply chains. India's scale and low-cost manufacturing, coupled with Australia's raw material strengths, will lead to mutually beneficial outcomes for both countries. Australia's advanced upstream-midstream rare earth facility can enhance India's mining efficiency, fostering collaboration in mining equipment, technologies, services, investments, and technology transfers. To maximise these opportunities, India must expedite and deepen cooperation under existing commitments in the India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership, signed in 2022. There is a call to expand the collaboration's scope under the CECA. Encouraging Business to Business collaboration, particularly with MSMEs, to drive transformative investments in critical mineral technologies and processes is deemed crucial. Exploring joint investment opportunities to leverage advanced mineral processing facilities in Australia can prove to be strategic move. Contemplating a more open and free trading and investment arrangement for critical minerals through a trilateral partnership with other countries possessing technical expertise in downstream processing would position India to play a significant role in the Australian mining value chain, optimising benefits from the growing demand for critical minerals.

In the India-UAE CEPA, India for the first time has included government procurement as a part of the agreement. Australia presents a huge government procurement market for India. In 2022-23, there were 83,625 published contracts with a combined value $74.8 billion. Under Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), Australia has committed to opening of government procurement for the member signatory countries. This obligation does not mean that government can only use open tendering. Australian government may use pre-qualified tendering (where suppliers are pre-qualified for contracts on a registration system) or limited tendering (where only a few suppliers are considered for contracts), but only in specific circumstances outlined in the government Procurement Chapter of CPTPP. The commitment under CPTPP ensures that there is no discrimination against foreign suppliers when assessing tenders and awarding contracts. If India under the India-Australia CECA can negotiate similar benefits in the line of commitments offered by Australia under CPTPP, it would create a fresh market for Indian businesses to compete for international projects.

In Australia, innovation has been a key driver of economic growth, technological advancement, and societal progress. Under CECA, there exists significant potential for India to enhance collaboration with Australia, particularly in key sectors such as agricultural innovation, renewable energy, and digital trade. Such collaboration holds the promise of providing innovative solutions to everyday challenges, leveraging the expertise and advancements stemming from both nations. Through joint efforts, India and Australia can harness the power of innovation to address mutual concerns and foster economic growth.

The resultant increased transactions from the liberalisation can also be gauged through the settlement of trade payments in local currencies. Following the introduction of the rupee settlement system for international trade on 11 July 2022, India and Australia can encourage mutual settlements in their respective national currencies as part of the CECA. The central banks of both

The authors are economists with India Exim Bank. Views expressed are personal.

Under CECA, there exists significant potential for India to enhance collaboration with Australia, particularly in key sectors such as agricultural innovation, renewable energy, and digital trade

countries can collaborate on determining the modalities, particularly by establishing the Rupee-Australian dollar exchange rate for bilateral trade in consultation with both governments. This measure would minimise currency risk for Indian businesses.

Further to economic partnership, India and Australia are also strategically positioned in the Indo-Pacific region. The upkeeping of the region is not only important for developing trade but also for the geopolitical stability and geo-strategy. Both India and Australia recognise having an enduring interest in a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region. With a shared maritime geography and a deep and long-standing friendship, India and Australia are natural defence partners to work together towards realisation of this shared vision. Evolving geo-political landscape calls for cementing this relationship by solid commitment under CECA through programmes and projects of co-operative exchange of data, research and development, production, procurement, and logistics support to achieve specific national defence requirements and objectives of mutual concern while taking into consideration national priorities.

Thus, given the shared interests and concerns of India and Australia, the resolution can only be achieved through collective action and a strengthened partnership. A comprehensive assessment and negotiation of these opportunities within CECA have the potential to be transformative, elevating India-Australia relationship to a new and deeper level.

Setting trends

PHOTOS: SAJAL BOSE

The Guptas: knitting the business well

Ashiana redefines the concept of happy living

The senior living housing segment has been gaining popularity in India's realty market. The demographic shift is driving the demand for senior living space in India and as per projections, by 2050, the country is expected to have 20 per cent of its population in the category of senior citizen – above 60 years – which is almost double from the lot in 2022. The rise of nuclear family, increased mobility, need for security and medical care, convenience and wellness are some of the major factors aiding the growth of senior living space. At present, India has 18,000 senior living units, a penetration rate of 1 per cent, which is set to grow.

Delhi-based prominent housing developer Ashiana Housing Limited (AHL), a listed entity promoted by the Guptas, has quietly built its reputation in the senior living space. The Guptas' well thought-out business sense and holistic approach have helped the company to remain a leader in the 'senior living' segment in the country. The company has consistently ranked as the number one in the senior living space for the seventh consecutive year by Track 2 Realty. The other key players include Antara, Columbia Specific, Paranjape, Primus Life and Covaicare. "Ashiana's senior living communities offer a compelling solution, built on a legacy of trust, excellence and a deep understanding of senior needs," claims Vishal Gupta, managing director, AHL. "Ashiana's senior living facilities have helped me spend my second innings happily and independently, without bothering my children who are settled abroad," says Sridharan staying in Ashiana Senior Living, Chennai.

While continuing to enjoy dominance in senior living market, Ashiana also offers kid-centric homes, premium homes and elite homes as well as maintenance of property. Present across five states and nine key cities in India, Ashiana Housing has constructed and delivered over 28 million sq ft over 17,000+ families. The company also manages and maintains more than 19 million sq ft area under a lifetime service contract.

Known for its out-of-the-box thinking, Ashiana has, over the last four-and-a-half decades, established a reputation as a builder, with landmark projects like Utsav, Town, Nirmay,

Rangoli: the largest project of the company

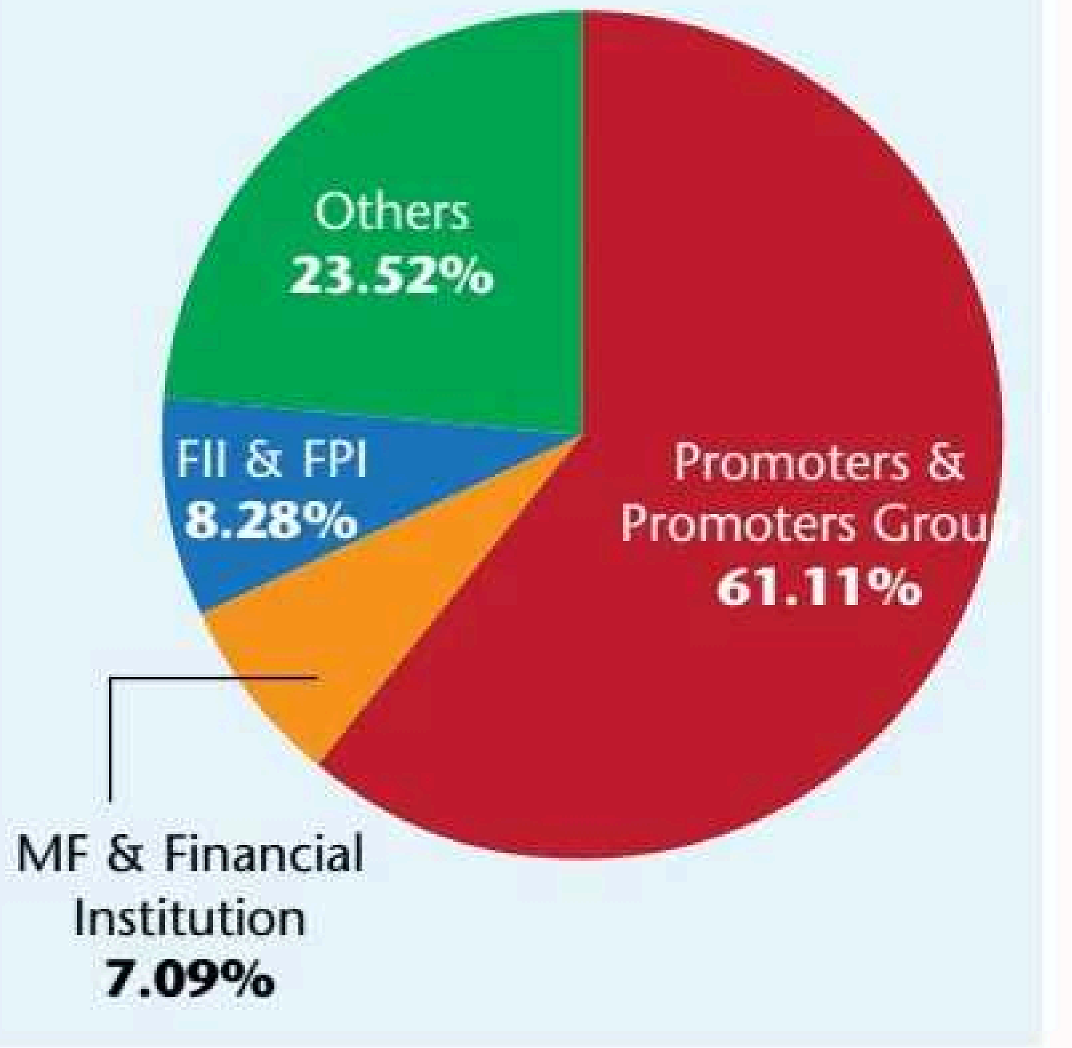
Aangan, Tarang, Shubham, Antara, Woodlands, Dwarka, Amarbagh and Rangoli Gardens, among its Ashiana residential projects. The venture was started in 1979 by the late Om Prakash Gupta, born into a Marwari business family. His father owned flour mills in Patna. After obtaining his engineering degree, he decided to set up his own business venture, instead of joining the family business. Initially, he and his six partners set up an engineering unit for manufacturing precision blanking called Ashiana Engineering. But the company failed to reach the expected performance level, and so, the partners split amicably.

By then, Gupta had realised that the middle class was desperate for good quality housing. With his canny business sense, Gupta felt that this was an opportunity and hence established Ashiana Housing.

Doing things differently

Gupta wanted to do things differently. He, along with his family, shifted to Delhi. This was the time when small local builders used to rule the market. There was hardly any concept of quality living or provision of amenities on offer from these dubious developers, who would perpetually deliver projects behind schedule or end up in litigation. Gupta's creative mind decided to make a difference in the way people live – by building homes that are more than just four walls. The company did not look back thereafter.

Shareholding pattern (%)



While he was studying engineering in the US, Gupta had come across several senior living projects. He observed how the elderly were being cared for, with special medical, recreational and other facilities geared to their needs. "My father replicated what he learned in the US and set up the first senior living project called Utsav in the country in 2003 in Bhiwadi, NCR," recalls Ankur Gupta.

Today, Gupta's three sons – Vishal, Ankur and Varun – are the driving force of the company's growth. While Vishal, 50, is the managing director responsible for designing, construction, purchase and HR, Ankur, 46, is joint managing director, looking after sales, marketing, facility management and IT, while Varun, 40, a whole-time director of the company, is involved in finance, legal, land and new business development. They are also bringing new initiatives and looking at opportunities for the growth of the company. The company's holistic approach to community living has made Ashiana an admired player in the segment. It has recorded revenues of ₹425 crore in 2022-23 and employs over 950 people. The promoters hold 61.11 per cent stake in the company.

The 1,665-apartment housing

Financials (₹ crore)

Particulars	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	Dec 23 9 months
Sales	350.63	317.55	259.31	233.59	425.19	669.56
EBITA	47.26	0.72	18.20	2.89	45.78	91.72
PAT	13.78	(30.24)	1.72	(7.04)	27.88	66.02

The company is a pioneer in senior living housing in the country

colony Rangoli Gardens in Jaipur, which is built in a partnership with Manglam Builders, is the largest project of the company. The project was completed in 2017. Spread across 26 acres close to Ajmer by-pass, it has large open areas, with 8.8 acres of landscaped parks with flower beds, sit-outs, walking tracks and water features. The greenery is created and maintained to give an essential touch of garden living. It has modern club facilities, with swimming pools, gyms, outdoor and indoor games, community halls, reading lounges and kids' play areas.

It is now setting up Advik, Tarang (Bhiwadi in NCR), Ekansh (Jaipur), Malhar (Pune), Amodh (Pune), ONE44 (Jaipur) and Amarah (Gurgaon) and many other projects. The company will build 10 million sq ft of residential space over the next five years, Varun informs.

Bhiwadi in the Delhi NCR region is experiencing a surge in real estate activity, driven by robust infrastructure developments and enhanced connectivity. With multinational corporations investing in the region and the implementation of major transportation projects, Bhiwadi is poised for significant growth. The town offers essential amenities, excellent connectivity and affordable housing options, making it an attractive destination for home-buyers and investors alike. As the demand for residential properties continues to rise, Bhiwadi presents promising prospects for real estate investment, particularly with projects like Advik, Tarang and Town, offering quality living spaces and modern amenities. "We always put special emphasis on design and aesthetics that offer a unique experience for homebuyers," says Vishal. "It has always strived for architectural excellence in all its projects. Almost 65 per cent of our sales are through referral."

Redefining senior living

Advik, the active senior living project in Bhiwadi (NCR) is thoughtfully designed to make it safe for senior citizens, with practical and accessible facilities that ensure ease of living. The round-edge walls, skid-resistant tiles and grab rails in washrooms ensure safety. The 16 plus acres area has a total of 900 units, including 37 villas. The luxury design beautifully blends aesthetics with an environment-friendly approach and offers a bouquet of recreational activities. The large open-to-the-sky spaces landscaped to connect the green spaces with the residential towers and villas would make it a happening community when ready.

Earlier, the misconception among many was that senior living is same as old age homes. That has now changed. "Seniors require specialised attention. Thus, well-planned communities, which are built to cater to the needs of senior citizens, give them exceptional quality of life," says Shantanu Haldule, senior vice-president of the company. "Now, it has become an acceptable lifestyle choice for many affluent people and also essentially large part of the middle-income group. People are selling floors in Vasant Vihar and coming to us to stay." Southern states have witnessed a higher concentration of senior living population and the highest old-age dependency in India. "The attraction of this place is such that, despite having a house in Palam, my wife and I have decided to come into retirement here," says O.P. Singh, who is living in Utsav.

In an incredible market response, Ashiana Housing sold out the entire Phase III of its project, Amarah, within 15 minutes of launch last month, which has stunned the industry. Amarah is a kid-centric home project, comprising 224 flats in 3 BHK configurations and is located in Sector 93 of Gurugram, Haryana. The project has a total saleable area of 377,000 sq ft, with a total sale value of ₹440.32 crore.

"We are happy with the unprecedented response to Amarah's Phase

Ashiana has gained reputation of out-of-the box thinker

III launch. We started registration at 11 am and we received 800 cheques for 224 units by 11.15 am – a four-time over-subscription in 15 minutes. This reflects people's faith in the quality of our offering and the brand value of the company. Our novel kid-centric concept is also working. People want their children to be brought up in better places, with better amenities and quality of life and that is what Amarah is promising," says Ankur. Ashiana is also planning to launch Phase IV.

Ashiana Housing has adopted an asset light model. "Some 80 per cent of our land deals are done through joint venture. It is simpler and less risky and gives us cost advantage," says Ankur. Also, the company wants to stick to developing residential spaces only.

The Indian real estate sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience and continues the growth momentum on the back of strong end-user residential demand. Shift in consumer preference towards spacious homes mainly due to improved affordability and positive buyer sentiments, flexibility to shift to peripheral areas of the city, availability of affordable finance, reverse migration due to re-opening of offices and improving rental yields have led to this uptick in demand.

Despite the upward trend in interest rates and price hikes, the residential real estate sector has exhibited robust demand. "The mid-range and premium housing segment continued to rule the roost in Q1 2024, covering nearly 59 per cent of overall sales share," explains Anuj Puri chairman, Anarock Property Consultants. Rising land prices, along with higher interest rates, are likely to accelerate industry consolidation in favour of organised players having lower cost of capital and stronger brand positioning. "The residential property sector today has swelled in terms of both sales and new launches. The supply constraints as against the demand helping the industry's growth," says Varun.

Robust demand

Ashiana recorded a turnover of ₹425.19 crore in 2022-23, as against ₹239.59 crore in 2021-22. The net profit rose to ₹27.88 crore in 2022-23, as against a loss of ₹7.04 crore in 2021-22. For the nine months ended December 2023, the company achieved revenues of ₹669.56 crore and profit of ₹66.02 crore. The company's share price is hovering around ₹346.45. "During the last four years, our run rate had nearly tripled. That has reflected in our stock price too, which has gone up by 98.44 per cent in the last one year. The overall investor interest in the sector has also been rising," Varun describes.

"Ashiana is a prominent player in senior living, with a great team of people working under the leadership of the Guptas. The company always work hard to understand the customers' needs and fulfil them without any compromise on quality," says Adarsh Narahari, managing director, Primus Lifespaces, a Bengaluru-based senior living developer. During the last few years, Ashiana has been growing consistently and its average sale price has increased, adds Narahari.

"We have set a target to build 4.5-6 million sq ft floor area a year, as against 2.5-3 million sq ft at present," Vishal informs. This year, it is looking at Bengaluru and has taken two projects in Chennai; it is also adding Mumbai to its list.

Ashiana has showed its ability to remain a significant player in the segment. As the real-estate segment is continuing to rise in the country, the company is well-placed to double its turnover in the next 4-5 years. ◆

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Going pan India

Sengupta: the care model we have established is unique

Nephro Care India is looking to expand its presence across the country by setting up holistic renal care units here

Kolkata-headquartered Nephro Care India, which has grown from just one unit at Salt Lake in Kolkata to five comprehensive renal care units in West Bengal, in a span of less than 3 years, is looking to set up 22 such high-end facilities across the country by March 2026. A majority of these units will come up in the smaller towns and cities so as to deliver comprehensive renal care to regions where such essential services are scarce.

However, aspirations do not end there. With foresight spanning over the next decade, plans are in motion to launch 300 comprehensive renal care clinics, catering to nearly one-million patients grappling with chronic kidney disease nationwide. It is a monumental endeavour, one fuelled by a steadfast commitment to serve and heal.

Nephro Care was founded in 2014 by Dr Pratim Sengupta, in Kolkata, with the objective of providing comprehensive medical services for renal patients. It currently offers a wide range of clinical and lifestyle solutions and renal insufficiency treatment to patients. The treatment framework covers the entire range of lifestyle, physiological and spiritual aspects of wellness. The company posted a revenue of ₹19.90 crore and earned a profit after tax (PAT) of ₹3.40 crore during the first nine months of FY2023-24, compared to a revenue of ₹17.09 crore, with a PAT of ₹1.94 crore in FY2022-23.

According to Sengupta, Founder & MD, Nephro Care India: "Nearly 2.20 lakh patients develop end-stage renal disease (ESRD) annually in India, which calls for close to 34 million dialysis treatment sessions each year. The Million Death Study estimated a 50 per cent increase in deaths due to chronic kidney disease (CKD) between 2001-2003 and 2010-2013. Kidney disease is considered a significant public health concern in India, with high morbidity and mortality rates."

Though haemodialysis is the preferred mode of treatment for patients suffering from end stage renal disease, cost constraints and lack of availability of sufficient infrastructure forces more than two-thirds of patients to leave without receiving full treatment. Estimates suggest that there are around 7,00,00,000 patients suffering from various chronic kidney diseases. However, the existing renal care infrastructure in India is abysmally low at around 5,000 dialysis centres (including 1,353 centres under the PMNDP).

It was this steep gap between demand for quality renal care and supply that prompted Sengupta, a senior nephrologist who has been associated with several premier multispecialty hospitals in West Bengal, to set up Nephro Care India in 2014.

India adds close to 2.2-lakh new patients to the pool of people requiring dialysis every year. The market is growing exponentially and there are a few key reasons for this steep spike in the number of CKD patients. With close to 82-million diabetic patients, India is going to be the Diabetic Capital of the World. Nearly 32 per cent of patients with diabetes are likely to experience renal issues at some point in their lives.

"Moreover, the prevalence of hypertension is very high in this country because our national salt consumption is 2.5 times higher than the international average. So, diabetes and hypertension are together a fertile ground for renal failure and on top of that one of the biggest challenges is OTC (over the counter) medications. We have no regulation for painkillers, antibiotics and hence the burden of kidney disease is increasing exponentially in this country. A survey from WHO shows the point prevalence for CKD in India is 118 per million while for the rest of the world it is 82 per million which means every 10th person in this country suffers from kidney disease. Given these circumstances, being a nephrologist myself, I felt the urgent need to create an infrastructure where we can serve CKD patients in a holistic manner," adds Sengupta.

Going public

Nephro Care India recently filed its draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) papers with NSE Emerge to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The SME (small and medium enterprise) IPO is backed by banking veteran and former HDFC chairman Deepak Parekh. According to DRHP, the company intends to utilise net proceeds from the IPO to set up a multi-speciality hospital – Vivacity Multi Speciality Hospital – at Madhyamgram in Kolkata, West Bengal.

"The new hospital will be a unit of Nephro Care and is proposed to include 100 inpatient beds, including a 30-bed Critical Care unit with ICU, HDU, RTU and NICU facilities. Vivacity will offer treatment services in various disciplines such as cardiology, medical oncology, gastroenterology, gynaecology and many others, including an advanced renal transplant unit in East India," says Sengupta.

Nephro Care closed the pre-IPO funding round in December 2023. Deepak Parekh and other ace investors including Bharat Shah, HDFC Securities chairman and Macleods Pharmaceuticals founder and MD Rajendra Agarwal, have invested in the company. Corporate Capital Ventures Pvt Ltd is the sole book-running lead manager to the issue.

Renal care service

Explains Sengupta: "While there are many hospitals and clinics which have dialysis machine, none of them currently provide a holistic renal care programme. That is what sets Nephro Care India apart from some of the other players in the industry.

Nephro Care is not merely a dialysis service providing company but a renal care service provider which focuses on prevention of kidney disease, early intervention so as to ensure that the patient does not require dialysis and if somebody is at an advanced stage then we also provide dialysis and transplant services. So, we provide the entire A to Z of kidney care through a structured programme."

The company has rolled out a flagship medico-yoga programme called 'Mukti' which takes care of the overall well-being of the patients and helps improve quality of life through a blend of modern medicine and ancient yogic wisdom. Developed by Sengupta and Subhabrata Bhattacharya, 'Mukti' aims to address all discomforts of the patients which hamper the overall quality of life through customised asanas.

A patient receiving care at Nephro Care India clinic

The programme, which is delivered both through offline and online channels by professional trainers, has benefitted more than 1,500 patients so far.

Says 36-year-old CKD patient Suman Barui: "Ever since I started the Mukti programme, my weight has reduced by close to 2 kg and my systolic blood pressure level has also come down to around 130 as compared to over 150. Earlier I used to worry about my health all the time and that was impacting my overall well-being, but Nephro Care doctors made me realise the need to focus on health through structured interventions and yoga programme. Now I am not only much healthier but also more relaxed and calmer."

While 'Mukti' has been designed to address the issues faced by kidney patients, this programme of holistic healing can benefit everyone as it is customised for each participant according to their physical and mental health as per their medical history and assessment of the top team of doctors at Nephro Care and is also supported by a 24x7 call centre.

Mukti, which is a scientifically implemented Yoga programme, is like an elixir of life. Once followed properly, it can help control hypertension, and bring about positive metabolic changes leading to improved energy levels.

Growth journey

Nephro Care, which came into existence in 2014, primarily offered dialysis and renal OPD services delivered, till 2021, through the third-party facilities of hospitals. However, in December 2021, the company set up its own day care unit at Salt Lake with facilities offering a wide range of services. Its revenues during FY22 stood at ₹3.42 crore, reflecting full-fledged operation of the unit for less than 3 months of FY22.

In FY23 the company operated its flagship unit for the full year and leveraged all its facilities in a more optimised manner, significantly expanding the scope of operations from only dialysis and renal OPD to a wider range of services including dialysis, pathology, pharmacy, lifestyle support, non-lab investigation, diet advisory and general consultation accessed by an increased number of patients.

For the nine months ended 31 December, 2023, the company's revenue stood at ₹19.90 crore, driven by several factors including the introduction of several other services including Mukti and home dialysis/home care; optimised utilisation of its existing facilities at the flagship unit; setting up of a satellite dialysis unit at Salt Lake; increase in patient footfall through the extensive social media presence of Sengupta through his YouTube channel and extensive digital and physical marketing drives, among others.

"Our USP is our model, the care model we have established is unique. If somebody suffers from kidney disease they go to a doctor and are either given medicine or suggested dialysis. But under our care model we first start working on the possibility of reversing the need for dialysis because I feel adding life to the person is more important than adding a few years," adds Sengupta.

Way forward

Having established a 'perfect' model to provide holistic care, Nephro Care is now poised to grow further, driven by the steep gap between demand and supply. Despite a sharp upturn in demand, the haemodialysis market in India is at the tip of the iceberg. It has the potential to grow threefold so as to bridge the current unmet demand.

While Sengupta understands the need for establishing more such holistic centres across the country, he is not in a hurry to spread out too thin. He rather plans to take time and establish a firm presence in one market by going deeper into the various districts before moving into the next. This will be crucial to provide value to the customers or patients, he feels. The company plans to adopt a hub and spoke model and is looking to rope in partners to support its growth plans across the country.

"If you want to become a banyan tree then you have to make your roots very strong. My philosophy is simple. I want to become a banyan tree. I want to take the due time to expand because healthcare is totally connected with someone's life and death and I want to deliver value to my patients," sums up Sengupta. ◆

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For a brighter tomorrow

Tailored skilling programmes help acquire critical skills across different levels

BIMALJEET SINGH BHASIN

In today's rapidly evolving professional landscape, the demand for highly skilled individuals exceeds industry boundaries. Whether in banking, BFSI, sales, or technology; enterprises share a common goal: to enhance productivity and performance. This pursuit of efficiency underscores the importance of skill development as a catalyst for career advancement and organisational success.

Businesses are progressively emphasising the need for employees to demonstrate higher productivity year after year. The ability to deliver results swiftly and effectively has become a hallmark of success in modern workplace.

At the core of this imperative lies the recognition that theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient to drive productivity. Practical, purpose-driven skilling programs are essential to bridge the gap between potential and performance.

The journey towards enhanced productivity begins with identifying and acquiring critical skill sets. However, the path to proficiency is not uniform across career stages. Entry-level employees require foundational skills such as time management and digital literacy to thrive in the workplace. Mid-career professionals face different challenges, necessitating a focus on strategic thinking and leadership development. Meanwhile, senior executives must sharpen their decision-making abilities to steer their organisations towards success.

Amidst this diversity of needs, tailored skilling programs serve as a beacon of empowerment. Central to the success of tailored skilling programmes is a culture of continuous learning. Organisations must champion learning as a strategic necessity, integral to both individual development and business performance. By fostering an environment where learning is not just encouraged but actively nurtured, enterprises can cultivate a workforce that is agile, adaptable, and future-ready.

In the existing job market, the ability to demonstrate expertise is immensely important. Employers actively look for concrete proof of proficiency, covering areas like digital innovation, customer engagement and leadership.

Although organisations could offer various knowledge-based courses, what truly matters is the capability to apply the knowledge acquired from the courses. To give an example, a software developer may take several courses on creating software or may read hundreds of books. Nevertheless, it will still be essential to not just have the theoretical knowledge about a domain but also understand other areas, including the potential users (consumer behaviour), the software's end use (product management), and the market landscape. At the core, fundamental areas of expertise must be focussed on by both individuals and organisations to upskill.

In conclusion, it's evident that tailored skilling programs are essential to empower professionals at every career stage, enabling them to excel in a fast-paced and competitive landscape. By prioritising purpose-driven initiatives that match organisational objectives, businesses can guarantee ongoing development and prosperity for their employees. Furthermore, cultivating a culture of learning, closely linked to business outcomes, is crucial for optimising the effectiveness of skilling initiatives. As work environments constantly change, it's essential for individuals to adopt a mindset of lifelong learning to stay relevant and flexible. By focussing on developing their skills and embracing new learning methods, professionals can prepare themselves for success in specialized positions and make valuable contributions to organisational advancement.

In essence, the journey towards career excellence begins with a commitment to continuous learning and skill development. Through tailored skilling programmes and a culture of learning, individuals and organisations alike can navigate the complexities of the modern workplace with confidence and resilience, unlocking new opportunities for growth and innovation.

Empowering careers through personalised skilling initiatives goes beyond mere strategy – it's a journey of transformation towards excellence and success in the digital era. As we navigate the possibilities and hurdles of tomorrow, let's leverage the force of learning to sculpt a future where every individual possesses the tools and abilities to flourish.

It's time to embark on this journey of empowerment, innovation and growth, unlocking the full potential of individuals and organisations alike. The future belongs to those who embrace learning, adaptability, and evolution, paving the way for success in an ever-changing world.

By incorporating personalised skilling programmes and maintaining a steadfast dedication to lifelong learning, we can create a future where every professional is poised to succeed and flourish. Together, let's seize the opportunity to shape a brighter tomorrow, where the potential of each individual is fully realised, driving innovation, growth and prosperity in the global economy. ◆

The author is president, Enterprise Business India, NIIT Limited

Empowering communities

Hindustan Zinc's CSR initiatives deliver sustainable impact at grassroots

Hindustan Zinc, a subsidiary of Vedanta has prioritised Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a focal point for its inclusive growth strategy. Through its focus on strengthening the local economy and improving the quality of life, in alignment with UN Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) and its national development goals, it has deepened its footprint in the areas of education, sustainable livelihoods, community asset creation, environment & safety, women empowerment, health, water & sanitation and sports & culture.

The company's operations involving lead-zinc mines, hydrometallurgical zinc smelters, lead smelters, pyro-metallurgical lead-zinc smelters are clustered in north-west India, in five districts of Rajasthan (Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara, Rajsamand and Ajmer) and one district of Uttarakhand. The company is India's largest and only integrated zinc, lead, and silver producer. In fact, it is the world's second-largest integrated zinc producer and the fifth largest producer of silver.

Its CSR programmes are aligned to community needs, national priorities and the United Nation's SDGs and the projects are carried out in close partnerships with the government, local communities, and credible NGOs. The CSR policies and systems are framed and implemented in an efficient manner to ensure deployment of resources to deliver sustainable impact at grassroots.

"Our commitment to community development at Hindustan Zinc is not just about numbers," says Priya Agrawal Hebbar, chairperson, Hindustan Zinc & non-executive director, Vedanta. "It's about creating a tangible impact that resonates with our core philosophy of 'transforming for good'. We firmly believe in social investments that go beyond transforming communities; they contribute to national development and create lasting value".

Positive impact

"Our unwavering commitment to CSR forms an integral part of our growth strategy, intricately woven into the framework of the UN Sustainability Development Goals. For over two decades, our initiatives, spanning education, sustainable livelihoods, healthcare, and overall community development, have become integral to Hindustan Zinc's identity. We are proud to have positively impacted the lives of 1.73 million individuals across 237 villages," adds Hebbar.

The company's initiatives are holistic, addressing key areas such as reducing malnutrition, promoting education, livelihoods, and infrastructure development. Importantly, it has played a pivotal role in establishing strong community institutions that empower local residents, ensuring sustainable progress. Its outreach efforts have expanded significantly, experiencing 3-4 times increase since 2019-20. The growth highlights its dedication to reaching people across varied age groups and diverse demographics.

"We have gone beyond obligatory spending," Hebbar acknowledges. "We have dedicated a substantial sum of Rs276.34 crore to transformative programmes. This investment is strategic and aimed at addressing critical areas, creating a ripple effect that goes beyond immediate beneficiaries".

Hebbar: creating a ripple effect

"At Hindustan Zinc, our commitment to inclusive growth is deeply ingrained in our initiatives that span across education, sustainable livelihoods, women's empowerment, health, and more," she goes on to explain. "We believe in empowering communities through institution development, and our projects Gauam, Daichi, and Upaya have made significant strides in this direction. Through these initiatives, we have reached an impressive 2.3 million lives across 2,800+ villages".

The company has established legal institutions such as Farmer Producer Companies & Federations, fostering community-led development. One of its notable projects, Samadhan, has benefitted 184 villages through integrated farming and livestock development, while Zinc Kaushal provides market-led skill training. Together, these initiatives have positively impacted the lives of 0.59 million people.

In the realm of education, the targeted initiatives like Khushi Nand Ghar, Shiksha Sambal and Unchi Udaan, along with women empowerment programmes like Sakhi self-help groups and microenterprises, have collectively impacted 0.32 million people. These programmes are designed to uplift and provide opportunities for growth,

Hindustan Zinc's unwavering commitment to CSR forms an integral part of its growth strategy

especially for women and youth.

The community development initiatives, covering health, water and sanitation, community asset creation, environment and safety and the promotion of culture have touched the lives of 1.33 million individuals. These efforts are pivotal in addressing the holistic needs of the communities it serves.

The Zinc Football Academy, a marquee initiative capturing the local communities' passion for sports in Rajasthan, is a testament to its commitment to youth empowerment through sports. The AIFF accredited three-star elite academy has produced two players in U16-17 teams and 11 invited for national trials last year alone. These football stars are shining bright, symbolising the transformative power of sports in the lives of the youth.

"Our efforts at Hindustan Zinc are not just about numbers but about creating opportunities and pathways for individuals and communities to thrive, fostering inclusive growth, and transforming future," explains Hebbar. At Hindustan Zinc, its commitment to sustainability is not just about achieving global recognition; it's about building a sustainable future that reflects our responsibility towards the environment and society. Recently, the company secured the highest score of 85 in the S&P Global Corporate Sustainability Assessment, making it the Global ESG Leader in the metals and mining sector and placing it in the topmost quartile of sustainable development.

Towards net zero

"Our collaborative efforts towards achieving 'net zero' emissions have been instrumental in propelling us forward on our journey to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and decarbonise our operations. These targets, validated by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), underline our commitment to aligning our climate strategy with global standards," says the company spokesperson.

In the realm of transportation, the company has introduced LNG-run vehicles and electric vehicles (EVs) for both finished goods and concentrate transport. This strategic move not only enhances operational efficiency but is a key facilitator for our net-zero roadmap, contributing significantly to the reduction of scope-3 emissions.

Waste management is a critical aspect of the company's sustainability initiatives. It has commissioned India's first fumer plant, utilising advanced technology for waste reduction at the source. This ground-breaking initiative showcases its dedication to minimising the environmental impact of our operations. Furthermore, its commitment to responsible water usage is reinforced by the commissioning of zero liquid discharge plants at its mines and smelters. This aligns with the company's vision to achieve 5x water positivity by 2025.

The company's waste management practices are intricately aligned with the '4R' strategy – 'reduce, reuse, recycle and reclaim'. The company believes in the gainful utilization of mine and smelter waste, including tailings, jarofix, jarosite, etc. This involves recovering minor metals and utilising waste in various industries, such as cement and road construction. The integration of these principles into the company's business model ensures that waste becomes a valuable resource, contributing to sustainable practices.

"By aligning our climate strategy with national and global commitments and frameworks, Hindustan Zinc continues to set benchmarks in environmental stewardship," informs Hebbar. "Our initiatives not only ensure the sustainability of our operations but also contribute to broader goals of a cleaner and greener future. In essence, our journey toward sustainability is an ongoing commitment, and each of our initiatives is a testament to our vision of leading the way in responsible and environmentally conscious mining practices".

Equity and inclusion lie at the very heart of Vedanta, and Hindustan Zinc is unwavering in its commitment to ensuring inclusivity and promoting diversity throughout its organisation. The company's robust recruitment strategy serves as a cornerstone in creating a workforce that is diverse and inclusive.

The company has now engaged 501 women employees across various streams, including 146 women engineers, contributing to a gender diversity ratio of 19.5 per cent. It is resolutely working towards reaching a target of 30 per cent at the earliest. It's essential to note that women are actively contributing and flourishing in key functions, ranging from driving large mining vehicles to operating plants and working night shifts.

In terms of women in leadership roles, the company's commitment to diversity is evident in the composition of its Executive Committee, where 21 per cent are women. Moreover, out of the nine board members, five are women. As a pioneering move, Hindustan Zinc takes pride in having commissioned the industry's first all-women's rescue team, showcasing our dedication to breaking barriers and fostering an inclusive work environment. ◆

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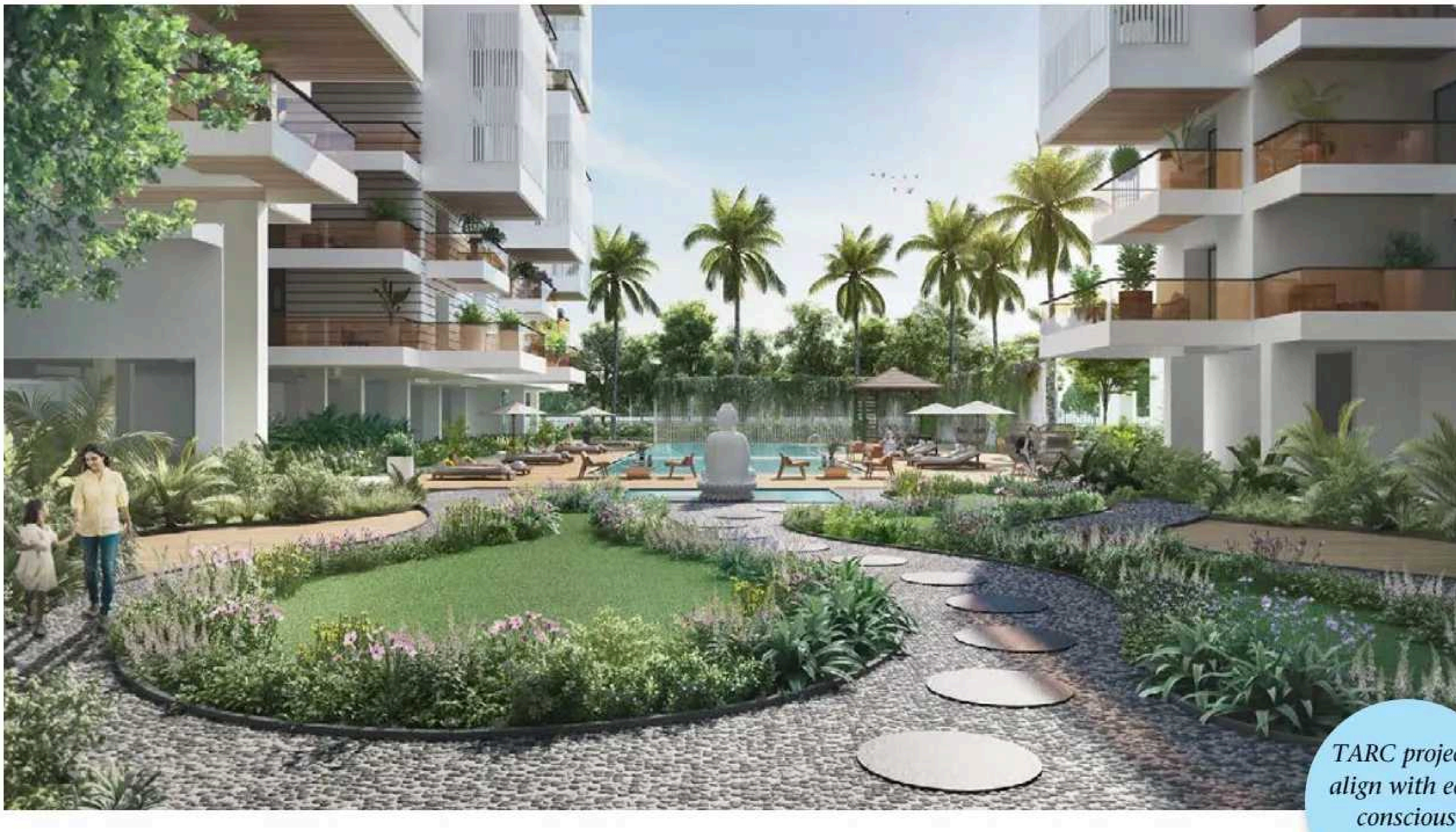

TARC projects align with eco-conscious principles

Sustainable approach

TARC pursues responsible development practices across its projects

TARC Ltd, a leading New Delhi-based NSE & BSE-listed luxury real estate developer, known for developing exceptional living experiences for its customers, now has under its portfolio three luxury residential projects in New Delhi and Gurugram, known for its sustainability initiatives. The developer, which has achieved its highest ever pre-sales revenue of ₹1,612 crore in 2023-24, has woven a tapestry of sustainability initiatives into its projects, meticulously crafted to harmonise with both global environmental standards and the unique local requirements. These multifaceted endeavours span a spectrum of sustainable development facets encompassing energy efficiency, water conservation and the adoption of eco-friendly building materials.

Within its projects, TARC has diligently implemented pivotal sustainability measures to pave the way for a greener and resilient future.

"Sustainability is not just a buzzword today," says Amar Sarin, CEO & managing director, TARC Ltd. "We pioneer a new era of responsible development by carefully embedding sustainability into the fabric of our projects. From energy-efficient designs to innovative water-saving measures and the use of eco-friendly materials, our commitment to sustainability is visible from the moment you step into one of our projects. With its unwavering commitment to sustainability, TARC has not only redefined the norms of the industry but has also set a new standard for responsible development practises by carefully aligning global environmental standards with India's diverse needs".

"At the centre of TARC's ethos is an unwavering commitment to integrate sustainability into every facet of its projects," adds Sarin. "From the initial idea to the finishing touches, sustainability is not just a box ticking exercise but a guiding principle embedded in the DNA of every project".

The New Delhi-based developer has pursued green building certifications, including those provided by the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC), which span from Certified to Platinum levels, tailored to meet the unique demands of each project. A stand-out example of this dedication is the TARC Kailasa project, a flagship endeavour striving for the esteemed IGBC Platinum certification by carefully meeting over 100 sustainability parameters.

Holistic approach

The company pioneers the integration of cutting-edge features to curtail energy consumption throughout its projects. This holistic approach encompasses the utilisation of top-tier rated appliances and fixtures. HVAC systems have been engineered for peak efficiency. Besides, there is seamless incorporation of alternative energy sources like solar panels.

TARC champions water conservation through the integration of innovative technologies in its projects. These advancements include dual plumbing systems for water reuse, low-flow plumbing fixtures that optimise water usage without compromising performance and sophisticated water management systems, designed to promote sustainable water use and conservation. "By embracing these cutting-edge solutions, we not only minimise water wastage, but also set a benchmark for responsible resource management in the real estate industry," explains Sarin.

Pursing its ESG goals, the company also prioritise sustainable building materials with minimal carbon footprints, ensuring its projects align with eco-conscious principles. Additionally, it mitigates the heat island effect through thorough site planning and the strategic incorporation of reflective and soft materials. These efforts extend beyond tangible elements, aiming to deliver a premium luxury living experience to its customers, while also upholding its commitment to environmental responsibility and sustainable development.

In fact, the realty player goes beyond conventional development paradigms, crafting projects that enrich the surrounding ecosystem, while delivering unparalleled value, quality and satisfaction to our customers. Its developments are conceived to foster vibrant community living, integrating amenities like community gardens, bicycle lanes and electric vehicle charging stations. These features not only elevate residents' quality of life but also instil a culture of environmental stewardship.

Moreover, TARC's projects are designed to cultivate connections among neighbours, promoting a sense of belonging and camaraderie. With emphasis on seamless commutes and versatile communal spaces, the company prioritise convenience and comfort. Safety and security measures further underscore its commitment to ensuring a holistic and gratifying living experience for all residents.

At the centre of TARC's ethos is an unwavering commitment to integrate sustainability into every facet of its projects

Amar Sarin
CEO & Managing director, TARC Ltd.

The company's construction and operational strategies focus on measures to improve indoor air quality, recognising its pivotal role in safeguarding the well-being of occupants. Through detailed planning and implementation, all its projects aim to create environments that foster clean and healthy air, promoting optimal living conditions for its residents. ◆

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Power of AI

Boosted by artificial intelligence, Samsung's new bespoke appliances enter Indian homes

India is one of the major markets for several global players, with Samsung India already offering a variety of products to Indian customers. The latest innovation by the Korean giant is its entry into the premium home appliances segment. Samsung India is now taking technology to the next level, with its premium products, including refrigerators, air-conditioners, microwaves, and washing machines, available in the Indian market. Samsung recently showcased bespoke appliances powered by AI, demonstrating the future of connected and sustainable homes. Samsung aims to exceed customers' expectations in the fast-growing premium appliances market. With built-in Wi-Fi , internal cameras, and AI chips, Samsung's products featuring its 'Bespoke AI' seamlessly connect and provide convenient home management with easy-to-access controls through the SmartThings Application.

Park: smarter living for Indian homes

"We are introducing Bespoke AI, our next big innovation in home appliances which will ensure smarter living for Indian homes and reduce energy consumption, contributing to a greener planet. With our Bespoke AI-powered home appliances, consumers will be able to customise their choices, get easy controls for elders and kids, and receive a seamless diagnosis for their home appliances," said JB Park, President & CEO, Samsung, Southwest Asia.

AI also helps increase the longevity and sustainability of these appliances, with users being notified when their refrigerator is due for a water filter replacement or the air-conditioner needs a filter change through the SmartThings App. With the introduction of AI, Samsung aims to reduce the time required to manage these appliances.

"With AI, appliances can now be smarter and help reduce users' time and energy spent on home chores. Through enhanced connectivity and AI capabilities, these appliances take the consumer experience to the next level by revolutionising the smart home experience. Our objective is to further strengthen our premium portfolio and increase our share in the premium appliances segment," said Saurabh Baishakhia, Senior Director, Digital Appliances, Samsung India. "At Samsung, we believe in a consumer-centric approach, and our products are a direct reflection of that belief. Through research, we found that 62 per cent of users feel that owning AI-based ecosystem devices and appliances will give them pride of ownership. 55 per cent believe that AI will help reduce their energy consumption smartly. 50 per cent of consumers expect AI to manage their homes through inter-device communication, and 49 per cent of people want usage recommendations from AI," adds Baishakhia.

With a smart food management system, users can get to know when a specific food item in the refrigerator is about to expire. Furthermore, an enhanced single camera allows a wider view in different lighting conditions. With wider coverage, not only refrigerator shelves but door bins are also captured, creating a 'view inside' of the refrigerator from anywhere. AI Geo-fencing allows users to set commands, and the SmartThings application will send a notification to start or turn off appliances within a specified range. The specified range is between 150 meters and 30 km. The microwave helps personalise diet recipes and automatically customises the recipe to a 'low-fat' version. With AI control, the washing machine learns laundry routines over time and evolves its wash cycles to suit users' habits, automatically adjusting to the most-used wash settings.

Smart operations

"I'll take you through what the future holds for your homes as we work in R&D to improve the lives of everyday users. Our journey usually begins with learning from consumers – their patterns, their preferences, and their well-being. Today, globally, we are launching this Bespoke AI. Like my colleagues were saying, enough of you caring for devices. Now it's time the device cares for you", explains Dipesh Shah, MD, Samsung R&D Institute, Bangalore.

Samsung is not only dedicated to presenting a better home experience but also committed to creating products that can help build a better future for the environment and society at large. With SmartThings Energy, users can easily monitor and control the amount of energy consumed by connected Samsung appliances.

According to Expert Market Research (EMR), the Indian home appliances market size reached a value of approximately $77.74 billion in 2023. The market is further expected to grow at a CAGR of 5.70 per cent between 2024 and 2032, reaching a value of $127.07 billion by 2032. Currently, both local and global companies offer home appliances to Indian customers. With its new technology and premium products, Samsung India is set to increase its market share.◆

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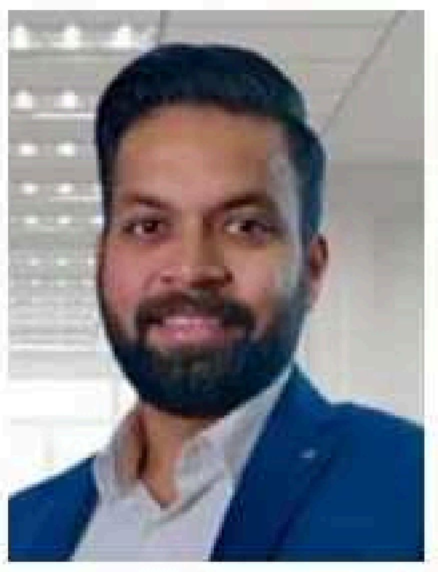
Seeking excellence

AI will usher in a new era of innovation, efficiency and productivity in workspace design



SANJEEV BHANDARI

In the world of commercial interiors, aesthetics have long been the primary focus. Sleek designs, trendy furniture and captivating colour schemes have traditionally taken the spotlight. However, as the landscape of office spaces evolves, there's a growing recognition of the importance of functionality alongside aesthetics. In this paradigm shift, Artificial Intelligence (AI) emerges as a powerful tool, offering innovative solutions to enhance not just the look, but the efficiency and productivity of commercial interiors.

Gone are the days when interior design was solely about choosing the right colours, textures and furniture. Today, businesses are increasingly recognising the importance of creating spaces that not only look good but also serve their intended purpose efficiently. This is where AI steps in, offering a plethora of tools and technologies to enhance functionality in commercial interiors.

One of the most significant ways AI is transforming commercial interiors is through space optimisation. AI-powered algorithms can analyse vast amounts of data to determine the most efficient layout for a given space. By taking into account factors such as foot traffic patterns, employee workflows and spatial constraints, AI can suggest optimised floor plans that maximise productivity and usability. This not only ensures that every square foot is utilised effectively but also creates a more ergonomic environment conducive for the well-being of occupants.

Moreover, AI-enabled sensors and IoT devices are revolutionising how commercial interiors are managed and maintained. These smart systems can monitor various environmental parameters such as temperature, humidity and air quality in real time. By continuously analysing this data, AI algorithms can optimise building systems to create a comfortable and healthy indoor environment. For instance, AI can adjust HVAC settings based on occupancy levels or outdoor weather conditions, leading to significant energy savings and improved occupant satisfaction.

In addition to space optimisation and environmental control, AI is also enhancing safety and security in commercial interiors. Facial recognition technology powered by AI can be used for access control, allowing authorised personnel to enter restricted areas, while keeping unauthorised individuals out. Furthermore, AI-powered surveillance systems can analyse video feeds to detect anomalies or suspicious behaviour, enabling proactive security measures to be implemented promptly. By leveraging AI for safety and security, businesses can create a secure work environment for their employees and assets.

Further, AI is revolutionising the way commercial interiors are designed and customised to meet the specific needs of businesses and their employees. Designers can now harness the power of generative design algorithms to explore countless design possibilities and iterations rapidly. By inputting parameters such as spatial requirements, budget constraints, and aesthetic preferences, AI can generate design options that strike the perfect balance between form and function. This iterative design process not only streamlines decision-making but also enables designers to create highly personalised and tailored spaces that reflect the unique identity and culture of the business.

By analysing historical project data and predicting potential bottlenecks or delays, AI can help ensure that commercial interior projects are delivered on time and within budget

Beyond the design phase, AI is also playing a crucial role in project management and execution. Project management platforms powered by AI can streamline workflows, optimise resource allocation and mitigate risks throughout the entire project lifecycle. By analysing historical project data and predicting potential bottlenecks or delays, AI can help ensure that commercial interior projects are delivered on time and within budget. This level of efficiency and predictability is invaluable for businesses seeking to minimise disruptions and maximise RoI on their interior investments.

In a nutshell, the era of prioritising aesthetics over functionality in commercial interiors is rapidly coming to an end, thanks to the transformative power of AI. By leveraging AI technologies, businesses can achieve functional excellence in their interior spaces, optimising layouts, enhancing environmental quality, improving safety and security and delivering highly personalised design solutions. As AI continues to evolve, its impact on commercial interiors will only grow, ushering in a new era of innovation, efficiency and productivity in workspace design. ◆

The author is founder & CEO, AirBrick Infra, Gurgaon, which transforms commercial interior design through tech and AI innovations

Gaining traction

Senior housing in India surges with rising interest from institutional players

The median age of the country is likely to gradually increase from about 29 to 38 years by 2050. Similarly, the proportion of aged people (above 60 years) is likely to increase from about 11 per cent in 2024 to 21 per cent in 2050. At the global level, over the next three decades (by 2050), India would account for a 17 per cent share of the 2.1 billion people above 60 years, indicating a significant demand growth for senior care, including housing in the country, says a Colliers report.

"Like most emerging market economies, the demographic pattern of India is undergoing a steady yet definite shift," says Badal Yagnik, CEO, Colliers India. "The population pyramid of the country will slowly but surely transform from the expansionary stage to a more stable state in the next few decades. The current nascent senior living market presents a lucrative opportunity for private organised developers to capitalise on the untapped market. With rising interest from institutional players and leading real estate developers, senior housing in the country is set to be almost 5x over the current levels by 2030".

With the rise in ageing population, the demand for senior living services including medical, insurance, housing, etc, has been steadily increasing. Factors like rising life expectancy, nuclearisation of families, higher income levels, increasing importance of a stable post-retirement life and changing lifestyle are driving the demand for senior living especially in urban areas. With increased focus on health and wellness, seniors today are more active and engaged than previous generations – looking for senior living options that offer amenities such as fitness centres, recreational activities, and cultural events to support a vibrant and fulfilling lifestyle. Colliers estimates the current demand for senior housing at 1.8-2 million units, which is likely to increase significantly in the next five-six years. This growing demand creates lucrative opportunities for real estate developers and institutional investors.

With close to 20,000 units in the organised sector, current availability of senior housing in India translates into a 1 per cent penetration rate, indicating a huge demand supply gap. In contrast, countries like the US, the UK and Australia have established senior living markets with 6-7 per cent penetration rate. Moreover, a lower population base also means significantly less demand supply gap in these matured markets.

"While currently the senior living market size in India is estimated to be about \$2-3 billion, it is expected to witness a CAGR of more than 30 per cent and reach about \$12 billion by 2030," says Vimal Nadar, senior director & head, research, Colliers India. "Although the demand supply gap will remain high even in 2030, the penetration in senior living market has the potential to improve significantly in the long-term. All in all, the senior living market in India is likely to witness accelerated growth in the next few years and embark upon an eventual transition into maturity with changing demographics".

Senior living in India is being offered by private developers through apartments, ranging from 1-3 BHK or villas, in two formats – independent living and assisted living. Independent living facilities are typically preferred by seniors who can manage their daily activities independently but seek the convenience of community living. The average ticket size of independent senior living in India is ₹1-2 crore, largely depending on the city and location. Currently, there are few developers that focus on the senior living segment in India. Some of the major organised developers include Ashiana, Columbia Pacific, Paranjape, Anatara and Primus Senior Living. A significant portion of the supply side is concentrated in southern cities, leaving substantial room for growth and development in other parts of the country.

Assisted living

At the same time, the concept of assisted living is picking pace, where developers provide additional facilities like housekeeping in individual units, medical coordinators, physio-therapists, on-premise nursing attendants, emergency panic alarm response and professional society maintenance and management services as well.

Senior living has been gaining traction in Tier II cities led by preference for slower pace of life, ease of living and lesser population-related infrastructure stress. Ahmedabad, Surat, Coimbatore, Kochi and Panaji are preferred cities for senior living accommodation. The segment is also witnessing a boom in places of pilgrimage such as Vrindavan, Ayodhya, Dwarka and Rameswaram. According to the Association of Senior Living India (ASLI), about 60 per cent of the senior living demand emancipates from tier II cities. Limited senior housing inventory in these cities presents immense potential for private developers looking to diversify their portfolio

With increased focus on health and wellness, seniors today are more active and engaged than previous generations

across the country.

Currently, organised senior living supply in India mainly caters to upper-mid and high-end segment. Moreover, specific design and construction elements often translate into high construction costs for developers. Amidst rising cost of construction and project profitability targets, developers are unable to cater to low and mid-income senior living projects. Advancements in construction technology such as Building Information Modelling (BIM), 3-D printing, usage of robotics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), etc, has the potential to permeate in senior living projects and make them accessible for residents across income categories by reducing labour costs and enhancing efficiency.

Due to comparatively high price points, potential end-users often face financing challenges to invest in housing purpose built for senior people. Banks and financial institutions have a critical role in the evolution of senior living products in the country, particularly in mid and affordable segment. Funding schemes specially curated for older citizens may involve refinancing of loans and revolving credit facilities. Furthermore, lower interest rates can facilitate seniors to purchase age-appropriate dwelling and facilities associated with senior living. Bank tie-ups with senior housing projects can fast-track the entire credit appraisal process in senior living disbursements. Additionally, insurance players can explore partnerships with developers leading to reduction in fixed component outflow for the cost-sensitive end-user, says the Colliers report

Improving quality of living

Enhanced policy support for development of senior living facilities will provide a thrust to developers and institutional investors to increasingly foray into the particular segment. Existing government schemes like Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY), aims at providing financial assistance to eligible organisations for running and maintenance of Senior Citizen Homes to improve the quality of life of senior citizens. Further, provision of tax-based incentives, relaxation in development charges, increased ground coverage and inclusive land use zonal permits will encourage developers to take up more such projects. Moreover, states such as Maharashtra have recently drafted model guidelines for senior living housing projects through MahaRERA to ensure senior living facilities are built as per the needs of senior citizens.

Interestingly, few leading developers are considering a portion of apartment towers within townships to be dedicated for senior living housing. Such an integration not only makes senior living more vibrant and livelier for the elderly, but increases feasibility and profitability for developers, creating a win-win situation for everyone. Few branded developers like Wadhwas, Adani Realty and Max Estates have already announced their plans to launch integrated senior living projects across major cities in the next few years.

Institutional investors in search of opportunities in alternative real estate assets are increasingly realising the untapped potential of senior living asset class. With rising senior population, the demand for senior living will consistently rise across the country. With global players coming into the Indian market, the segment is likely to witness significant innovation in terms of offerings, business models and pricing strategies as well. As and when the senior living market matures in India, alternate models are likely to gain momentum. Operator-based model – similar to co-living and coworking spaces – is likely to gain traction in the future. ◆

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On a fast track

Sheerdrive is fully geared to capture the potential used vehicle market

Set up in 2020, Sheerdrive is a digital AI/ML pre-owned vehicle platform that deals with all the key elements required to run an effective used vehicle program. The company showcased its products and services at the recently concluded Bharat Mobility Show 2024 in New Delhi. Starting with a small team in 2020, Sheerdrive currently has a total of around 170 employees spread across the country.

For Ravi Mehra, CEO and Founder, Sheerdrive, it has been a long but challenging journey. He spent more than 18 years in the digital auto space, both in India and overseas. His first stint was with eBay Motors, in the business of auctioning off used vehicles, followed by a 10-year stint at Cartrade. Since then, there has been no looking back for Mehra.

"I took up an assignment for a Swiss firm in Cape Town dealing in second-hand cars in Africa. I came back due to Covid. When I returned to India, I realised there was a huge gap in the supply chain here. The organised share of the used vehicle market, which was 18 per cent, had managed to move to only 20-23 per cent," recalls Mehra.

A significant portion of the pre-owned or used car vehicle space, typically managed by new car dealerships through exchanges, was unorganised. Keeping this in mind, Mehra discovered that the best approach to this was to create technological tools and approach new car dealerships to establish efficient used car operations. Mehra seized this business opportunity and it was an instant success with car dealers. That›s how Sheerdrive came into existence.

In October 2020, Sheerdrive commenced operations. "We were fortunate to create a product and present it to one of India's largest new car dealership chains, Group Landmark, led by Sanjay Thakkar, which operates multiple brands. They were highly impressed with the product and were prepared to invest in Sheerdrive. Consequently, we accepted seed capital of ₹5 crore," explains Mehra. With his personal investment of ₹1 crore and Landmark's ₹5 crore, Sheerdrive was fully prepared for action. Over the past 3 years, it has acquired close to 30,000 vehicles and sold them. Achieving approximately ₹750 crore in sales within a short timeframe has instilled confidence in the business.

To speed up the evaluation process, Sheerdrive decided to build a product capable of evaluating a car, providing a repair estimate, and offering a price – all within 15 minutes. As a result the company started investing significantly in AI and machine learning, integrating service history into its program. Sheerdrive succeeded in developing a product capable of evaluating a car in less than 15 minutes. Currently, Sheerdrive works with 120-odd new car dealerships across India. Its operations are spread across Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra.

Road ahead

Currently, the company is engaged with approximately 110 new car dealerships and 9,000 used car dealers. These 9,000 used vehicle dealers subscribe to some of the company's products and also purchase vehicles from auctions. The objective is to increase the number of new car dealerships from the current 110 to nearly 550 by the end of the next fiscal year. Additionally, the company aims to double the number of used vehicle dealers to 18,000. Sheerdrive generates revenue from subscription packages, profits on car sales, transaction fees, and income from auction sales. The company's business model has transitioned from a capital-intensive business to a software-selling business.

Our vision would be that at least 40 per cent of new car dealers use our products and another 40 per cent of used car dealers also engage with our products

Ravi Mehra
CEO & Founder
Sheerdrive

In developed economies, 25 per cent of a new car dealership's profits come from pre-owned cars. In India, this figure stands at only 3 per cent. Given the evolving landscape of new car models in the market, new car dealerships will need another source of revenue. Sheerdrive is ready to capitalise on this opportunity.

"Our vision would be that at least 40 per cent of new car dealers use our products and another 40 per cent of used car dealers also engage with our products. And I think that will unlock value for the end customer who's selling and upgrading the car," concludes a confident Mehra. ◆

SM BOOTHEM

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Expanding portfolio

Sincere Developers is ready to add three ultra-luxury Taj hotel properties in the next 3 years

Sincere Developers Pvt Ltd is betting big on the rapidly-growing luxury segment of the domestic hotel industry. The New Delhi-headquartered developer, the owner of the Taj Hotel & Convention Centre property in Agra, is looking to set up three ultra-luxury hotels (average room tariff: ₹30,000-40,000 per night) in the next 3 years. The developer, a part of the Lucknow-based ₹10,000 crore Ladhani Group with interests in real estate, hospitality, and beverages (the flagship company, SLMG Beverages, is one of the largest bottlers of the Coca-Cola Company in India), is currently in the process of finalising the locations. These three properties are expected to come up at tourist destinations like Jim Corbett in Uttarakhand, Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh, and somewhere in the North East.

With a total investment of around ₹1,000 crore, these ultra-luxury properties will have approximately 450 keys (around 150 keys each) under the Taj brand by Indian Hotels Company Ltd. Sincere entered the hospitality sector in 2011 by establishing a 140-room property under the Radisson Blu brand in Agra, which was later converted to the Taj Hotel & Convention Centre with 240 rooms in 2018. The luxury Agra property is currently undergoing a makeover. The company, aiming to build one of the top luxury hotel portfolios (7-8 super luxury properties in as many years) in the country in the next 10 years, is looking to achieve a top line of around ₹650 crore in the next 5 years.

Ladhani: leveraging aspirations

Paradigm shift

"The luxury hotel industry in India is witnessing a paradigm shift, driven by changing consumer preferences and the growing demand for premium experiences. Post Covid, we are witnessing a new trend where even Indian travellers have become more aspirational and ready to pay any premium for staying in quality/luxury accommodation. This behaviour change has suddenly surged the demand for luxury hotel properties in not only major tourist locations but also in places which are yet to be fully explored. We are already seeing how the demand for luxury residences has gone up in the last couple of years. We as developers would like to position ourselves strongly in this segment of the hotel business and here the Indian hotel brand Taj will be our preferred partner," says Paritosh Ladhani, joint managing director, Sincere Developers.

Meanwhile, IHCL, India's largest hospitality company, marks yet another year of accelerated portfolio expansion in FY2024 with 52 signings and 34 openings. Pacing ahead of its market guidance under Ahvaan 2025, IHCL has achieved a portfolio of 300+ hotels including an industry leading pipeline of 90+ hotels.

"With the pace of growth increasing year on year, FY2024 set new benchmarks with 52 signings, one contract a week. Apart from the signing of new projects in international locations, on the domestic front, key signings included large format hotels at international airports in New Delhi, Cochin and MOPA Goa as well as strengthening our leisure and spiritual portfolio across locations like Alibaug, Bekal, Naukuchiatal, Ayodhya and Haridwar," says Suma Venkatesh, Executive Vice President - Real Estate & Development, IHCL.

"With India's rising affluence and growing appetite for travel, IHCL will tap into emerging segments with newer offerings like upscale full-service hotels. Our next phase of growth will also be marked by harnessing our existing partnerships for multi-hotel projects," she adds.

According to a JLL report, India is becoming a top destination for luxury and ultra-luxury hotel companies, driven by a surge in domestic travel and the growing affluence of the Indian middle and upper classes. The emergence of India as an ultra-luxury hotel destination can be attributed largely to the domestic market. Rising disposable incomes are being spent on travel within the country. Post Covid, the domestic travellers are calling shots. ◆

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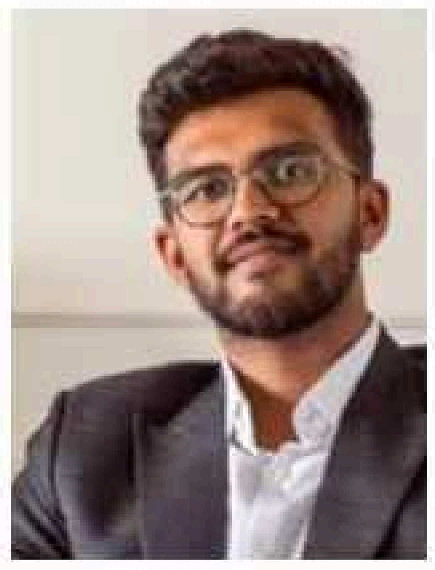
A compelling solution

Fibreglass rebars revolutionise the concrete reinforcement industry



JAYMIT SHAH

Fibreglass rebars have captured the attention of multiple market segments, with pultruded fiberglass rods and rebars emerging as sought-after alternatives to steel rebar in various construction projects. From roads and highways to bridges and tunnels, fibreglass rebars are making their mark, revolutionising the concrete reinforcement industry.

The global FRP (fibreglass reinforced polymer) rebar market has experienced significant expansion, reaching a value of $10.2 billion in 2023. Forecasts suggest this figure will rise to $15.6 billion by 2030, highlighting the growing demand for fibreglass rebars in the foreseeable future. In India, the fiberglass market was valued at $779 million in 2018 and is expected to achieve a CAGR of over 8 per cent, reaching $1.2 billion by 2024. The projected market growth can be attributed to the widespread utilisation of fiberglass, particularly in the construction sector.

With the government's extensive plans for infrastructure development in the near future, the fibreglass rebar segment holds significant potential for growth in the Indian market. These initiatives may include incentives, subsidies, or regulatory measures designed to encourage businesses to incorporate fiberglass in their operations. As fibreglass offers numerous benefits such as durability, versatility and cost-effectiveness, its increased usage can lead to significant advancements and improvements across various sectors including construction, automotive, aerospace, marine and renewable energy. For businesses operating in the fiberglass market, these government initiatives represent promising opportunities for growth and expansion, as they can capitalise on the rising demand for fiberglass products, driven by supportive government policies and regulations.

Considering the Indian geographical situation, FRP rebars have a huge potential to grow as a product in the local market, because of its corrosion resistance, long service life and durability. Additionally, businesses may also benefit from increased investment in research and development initiatives aimed at further enhancing the properties and applications of fiberglass materials, thus opening new avenues for innovation and market penetration. Overall, the active encouragement from governments in the Asia-Pacific region is expected to foster an environment conducive to the fiberglass industry, paving the way for enhanced market opportunities and sustainable growth.

Exceptional properties: FRP rebars have gained significant popularity, owing to their exceptional properties – firstly, they boast exceptional corrosion resistance, making them ideal for structures in coastal areas or humid environments prone to corrosion; secondly, FRP rebars offer a high strength-to-weight ratio, providing the same strength as steel but at a much lighter weight, making them perfect for lightweight construction projects like bridges and highways; and, thirdly, their non-magnetic and non-conductive properties make them suitable for specialised applications in hospitals, laboratories, and more.

In addition to their strength and durability, fiberglass rebars contribute to sustainability in construction. Unlike traditional steel rebars, FRP rebars

Considering the Indian geographical situation, FRP rebars have a huge potential to grow as a product in the local market, because of its corrosion resistance, long service life and durability

are non-corrosive and non-toxic, offering an eco-friendly alternative. Their long lifespan and recyclability further reduce the carbon footprint of construction projects, aligning with the growing demand for environmentally responsible building materials.

As India continues its rapid urbanisation and infrastructure development, the need for advanced building materials is paramount. Fiberglass rebars offer a compelling solution, combining strength, durability and sustainability. By embracing the innovative potential of fiberglass rebars, India can pave the way for construction projects that are not only robust and resilient but also environmentally conscious and aesthetically inspiring.

In conclusion, the burgeoning utilisation of composites in construction and automotive sectors is driving market growth. With continuous technological advancements and product innovations, the future of the fiberglass rod market looks promising, with new avenues emerging, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy and infrastructure development. ◆

The author is CEO, business development, Everest Composites Pvt Ltd

ALTERNATE INVESTMENT

Creating wealth

India's financial renaissance is a story of innovation, fuelled by reforms

India's path to wealth creation through innovation shines brightly with the rise of fintech pioneers, vibrant capital markets and visionary entrepreneurs. Steady increase in financial literacy, burgeoning middle class, rising income levels of predominantly young population and penetrative reach of the internet over last few years have encouraged investment participation in capital markets, more specifically through mutual funds and other financial products.

GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City) showcases India's stride forward in the direction of becoming prominent global investment destination, emphasising on harmonising regulations with other international centres and inviting prominent foreign investors to its shores. "Achieving alignment between various regulators in other investment destinations and IFSCA, the GIFT regulator is crucial for enhancing foreign investors' trust and attraction towards the GIFT City," says Abhishek Bansal, founder & chairman, Abans group, which manages assets over ₹2,500 crore, who praises the pivotal role of regulatory coherence by IFSCA (GIFT City regulator) in promoting investments through GIFT City. Bansal's Abans Holdings Ltd, listed on both NSE & BSE, has been built brick by brick with a foresight that increasingly Indian investors will need the expertise of financial assets management companies to manage investments across various asset classes. "IFSCA's approach has ensured the implementation of investor-friendly policies that align with global standards, fostering of confidence and interest among foreign investors in GIFT City," adds Bansal.

In recent years, India's AIF industry has experienced substantial growth. Investors, ranging from institutions to high-net-worth individuals, are increasingly attracted to alternative investments, seeking diversification beyond traditional assets.

According to Bansal, specialised funds concentrating on sectors such as

Bansal: robo-advisors stand out in risk management

technology and healthcare have become popular, providing targeted exposure and potentially lucrative returns. The sector has bolstered confidence through positive performance, successful exits, and attractive returns, thereby encouraging more investors to allocate funds to alternate investment opportunities.

Hedging paramount

Bansal emphasises the importance of utilising derivatives to hedge and mitigate a range of risks, including market volatility, currency fluctuations, and unexpected events. "At Abans, there is a significant focus on identifying and managing risks as a fundamental aspect of the wealth generation process through hedging strategies and mechanisms. This emphasis on derivatives is in line with a wealth generation approach that prioritises risk awareness, highlighting the central role of comprehending and addressing potential downsides in the endeavour to build and safeguard wealth for Abans' clients," explains Bansal, while talking about the evolution of Indian markets across asset classes has been profoundly influenced by technology, particularly through the advent of robo-advisory platforms. These platforms leverage cutting-edge algorithms to analyse data, identify patterns, and execute algorithmic trading strategies with remarkable accuracy, thus enhancing trading efficiency.

"Moreover, robo-advisors stand out in risk management with their sophisticated algorithms, offering round-the-clock market surveillance for enhanced monitoring," Bansal remarks. "Furthermore, they can integrate behavioural analysis, providing a nuanced understanding of market dynamics. In essence, the utilisation of robo-advisory platforms not only enhances precision in trading strategies but also augments risk management capabilities, making them an enticing proposition for market participants in India".

Meanwhile, over the next five years in India, he anticipates a transformative evolution in wealth creation characterised by several pivotal trends. Primarily, there will be a pronounced shift towards digital financial services, with an increasing dependence on fintech platforms for a wide array of financial activities spanning banking, investments, and financial planning. Another significant trend involves the growing significance of environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria in investment decisions, reflecting investors' broader commitment to sustainable and responsible investing practices, and aligning portfolios with ethical considerations.

"Regarding investment strategies, a surge in interest in alternative asset classes like private equity, venture capital, and real estate is expected, as investors seek diversification beyond traditional options to explore avenues with potentially higher returns," Bansal feels. "Personalised financial planning is poised to take centrestage, responding to the escalating demand for customised solutions. By leveraging data analytics and artificial intelligence, financial planning will be tailored to individual needs, offering more precise and effective strategies".

Finally, the collaborative landscape between traditional financial institutions and fintech companies is set to deepen, aiming to enhance services, streamline processes, and introduce innovative financial products. This collaboration will ultimately broaden access and deliver a more seamless, tech-driven wealth creation experience. ◆

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Good Samaritan!

Raised in a Maheshwari Marwari Hindu family in a single-room apartment in Mumbai, D-Mart promoter **Radhakishan Damani** had hogged the headlines for buying a house in Mumbai's posh Malabar Hill area worth Rs1,000 crore in 2021. The billionaire investor is once again making news, though for a good cause this time. Damani's foundation recently announced construction of a 400-bed **Damani Multi Super Specialty Hospital** at Magathane at Borivli East, in Mumbai. The announcement was made by the foundation's trustee, Abhay Chandak, in the presence of Union minister and Mumbai North BJP candidate Piyush Goyal and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. The hospital will come up on an 8.8 acre plot that Damani bought from CCI Projects for over ₹500 crore. Chandak said he aims to complete the hospital in four years. Goyal, however, requested him to finish it before 17 September, 2026, and also requested him to increase the capacity to 1,000 beds. "The foundation will spend around ₹6,000 crore," said Goyal. Damani is widely recognised as the 'Retail King of India' for his excellent success in the retail industry. Under his leadership, DMart has grown from a single store in Powai in 2002 to a vast chain with over 250 stores across India. ◆

Defining wellness

The multifaceted entrepreneur **Rajshree Pathy** has recently launched a new, holistic beauty brand: **Qi Ayurveda**. Qi brings together ancient Ayurvedic traditions with advanced scientific research from Switzerland. The formulations work at a cellular level to transform, restore, rejuvenate and replenish your skin. The brand takes inspiration from the vital energy, 'Qi', also identified with 'prana' in Sanskrit. Combining ancient Ayurvedic wisdom with modern Swiss innovation, Qi Ayurveda presents highly potent and radically transformative formulations for skin and hair. Pathy has a strong bond with Ayurveda since her childhood. "I remember visiting the 'vaidya' with my mother as a little girl. Sundays in our home were spent with hot oil massages and herbal baths of steeped eucalyptus leaves and vetiver roots, heated over firewood in old copper vessels. The power of herbs and plants, combined with the ritualistic nature of these practices, became my definition of wellness," she reminisces about the sweet childhood memories. Qi Ayurveda has four product ranges for hair, all of which include hair oil, shampoo, and conditioner. They include Restore (Chemparatyadi), which comes infused with hibiscus extracts; Wellness (Chandanadi), formulated with sandalwood oil; Hydrate (Dhurdhurpathradi), that has olive leaf and jujube extracts and Nourish (Bringamaladi),

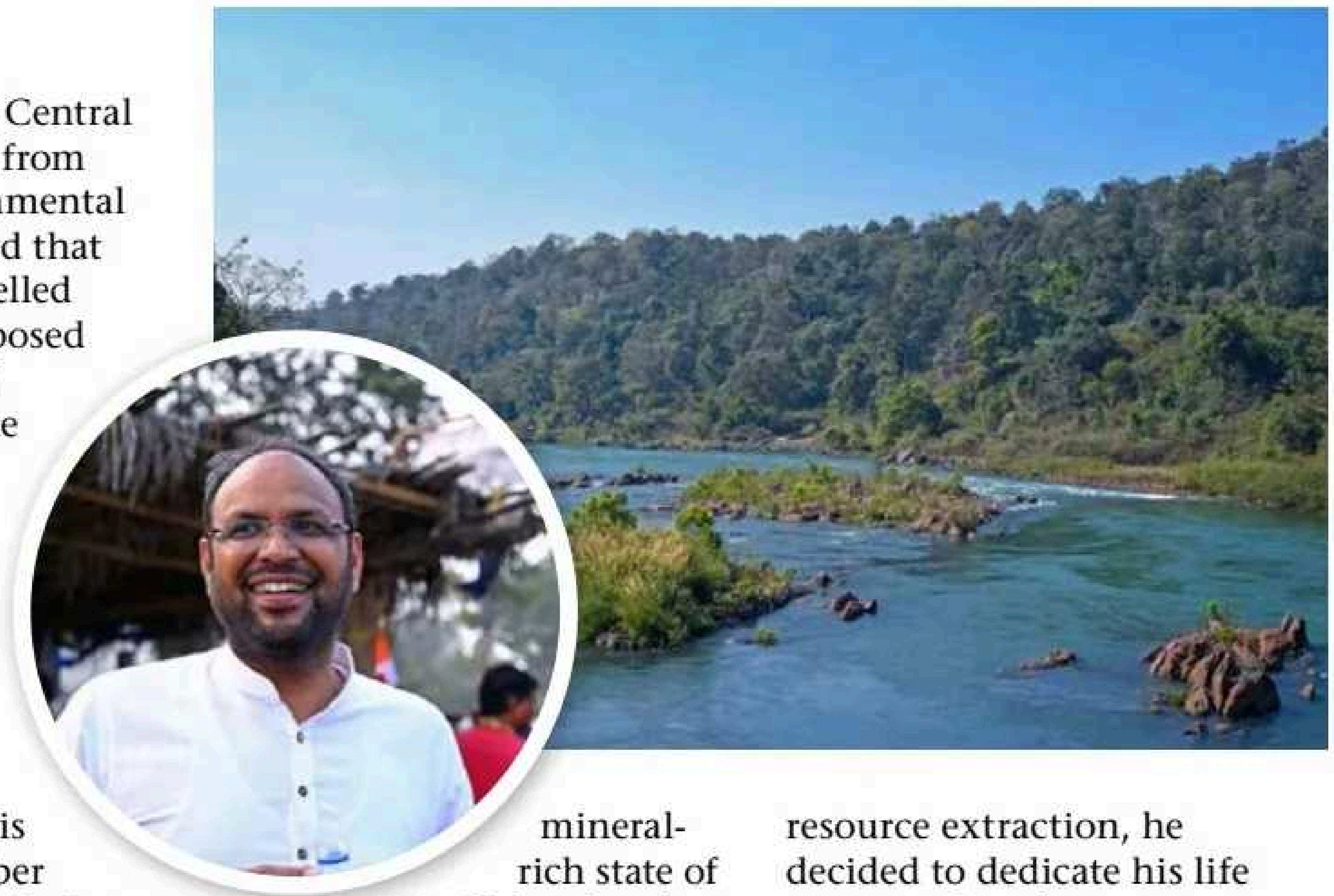
with false daisy extracts. The products come infused with plant-based Swiss-certified actives that are delicately fragranced. One of the founding members of the globally renowned brand Kama Ayurveda, and a founder of the India Design Forum, Pathy posted on LinkedIn. "The Qi Ayurveda beauty brand has been launched from my hometown Coimbatore, and will be available for online sale on our website www.qiayurveda.com." ◆

Helping future generation

Nand Ghar, which aims to transform 1.4 million anganwadis across India, has unveiled a national movement – *Agar Bachpan Se Poocha Khaana Khaya, Toh Desh Ka Kal Banaya* with actor **Manoj Bajpayee**. This movement by Nand Ghar is aimed at nourishing India's future generation by ensuring holistic healthcare, quality nutrition and ensuring best-in-class preschool education for children. "Project Nand Ghar is a national movement that supports the overall well-being of children and women with a focus on health and nutrition. We are delighted that Manoj Bajpayee has extended his support to this growing movement. His personal life story deeply resonates with Nand Ghar's cause to nourish and transform the lives of our future generations," said **Anil Agarwal**, chairman,

Vedanta. "As someone who has lived with hunger pangs, I understand the deep impact it can have on physical, mental and emotional well-being. That's why initiatives like Project Nand Ghar are so crucial. It not only ensures that children receive proper nutrition but also brings hope, opportunity, and a chance for a brighter future. Let's all join hands with the Nand Ghar movement to ensure that we nourish the potential of children, and together, prepare for a brighter India", said Bajpayee. ◆

Environmental hero



Alok Shukla, 43, a convener with Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan (the Save Chhattisgarh Movement), an informal alliance of grassroots movements across Chhattisgarh, has been awarded the 2024 **Goldman Prize** from Asia, often referred to as the 'Green Nobel'. His remarkable achievement lies in leading a successful community campaign that saved 445,000 acres of biodiversity-rich forests from 21 planned coal mines in Chhattisgarh. The Goldman Prize recognises grassroots environmental heroes from roughly the world's six inhabited continental regions – Africa, Asia, Europe, Islands & Island Nations, North America and South & Central America. A statement from the Goldman Environmental Foundation mentioned that the government cancelled the auction of 21 proposed coal mines in Hasdeo Aranya, whose pristine forests – popularly known as the lungs of Chhattisgarh – are one of the largest intact forest areas in India. The alliance is member-driven, without any paid employees. Alok is also a founding member of the Hasdeo Aranya Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (Save Hasdeo Aranya Resistance Committee), a grassroots movement uniting forest-dwelling villagers across the region. Growing up in the mineral-rich state of Chhattisgarh, Alok witnessed the profound environmental and social devastation wrought by extractive industries. Acutely aware of unsustainable resource extraction, he decided to dedicate his life to protecting the water, forests, and land of central India, as well as supporting Adivasi tribes, which are the traditional stewards of the land. ◆

Futuristic design

Asahi India Glass Ltd (AIS) has announced the winners of the fifth edition of '**AIS Design Olympiad**'. This year, the Olympiad saw a significant increase in participation from architectural colleges across India that culminated in a grand finale with the top eight finalists making their presentations to an esteemed jury panel recently at Taj, Santacruz, in Mumbai. AIS is India's leading integrated glass solutions company and a dominant player in automotive and value-added architectural glass segment. The final of the AIS Design Olympiad was judged by a distinguished National Jury panel including architects, such as Vivek Bhole from Vivek Bhole Architects, Mumbai; Karl Wadia from Hafeez Contractor, Mumbai; Paul Moses from RSP, Bengaluru; and Avinash Nawathe from ANA Associates, Pune. Announced at the grand finale were Rachna Sansad Academy of Architecture, Mumbai, as the winner; Deenbandhu Chotu Ram University of Science & Technology, Murthal, Sonipat, Haryana, as the first runner-up; and SMEF Brick School of Architecture, Pune, as the second runner-up. Speaking about AIS Design Olympiad 5.0, **Vikram Khanna**, COO, Consumer Glass & Architectural Institutional Business, CMO, Asahi India Glass Ltd said, "We are thrilled to announce the winners of AIS Design Olympiad, showcasing the immense talent and creativity of budding architects. Our overarching philosophy for AIS Design Olympiad 5.0 was 'Innovation; Futuristic Design; Sustainable Architecture'; and we are proud of what the students achieved this year through their designs." ◆

New brand ambassador

Savsol Lubricants has announced the launch of a pioneering lubricants range with cutting edge technology – Savsol Ester 5 – that is set to transform its product lines and the lubricants market. Alongside this significant event, the company has signed Bollywood actor **Sidharth Malhotra** as Brand Ambassador. "I am delighted to partner with Savsol Lubricants and further its commitment to offering consumers a distinctive automotive driving experience. The collaboration with an innovative brand such as Savsol aligns with my pursuit of excellence, and I look forward to embarking on this journey together," said **Vishal Sood**, president, lubes, Savsol Lubricants. "At Savsol, we constantly strive for continuous improvement and excellence in the automotive industry. This partnership with a Bollywood star of Sidharth Malhotra's calibre reflects our intent to provide exceptional lubricant technology products to customers, and drive forward a new era of innovation and distinction in the automotive space." ◆

Positive momentum

The forging industry has always been a major growth driver of the Indian manufacturing sector. The Association of Indian Forging Industry (AIFI), plays a major role in the success of the automobile, power, and engineering sectors in the country. AIFI encourages proactive dialogue between the industry and the government for the benefit of all stakeholders. India is the second-largest producer of forgings globally, next to China. Vikas Bajaj, President, AIFI shared his views and plans with S M Boothem.

Tell us about AIFI and its activities

The AIFI is a pivotal organisation for forging firms in India. Established in 1965, it aims to advance the interests of the forging industry within India's manufacturing landscape. AIFI promotes trade, technological advancement, and global competitiveness through various initiatives. It facilitates access to crucial information, collaborates with vendors, addresses trade barriers, and advocates for the adoption of the latest technology. AIFI organises workshops, seminars, and training programs to disseminate knowledge about technological advancements.

With manufacturing activity gaining momentum across sectors, how will the forging industry benefit from this positive outlook?

Forging is indispensable to the success of the manufacturing industry due to its unique ability to enhance material properties, provide cost-effective solutions, and meet the stringent demands of various applications. The positive momentum in manufacturing across sectors in India bodes well for the forging industry, offering increased demand for forged components in automotive, aerospace, construction, and power generation. This surge presents growth opportunities for forging firms. India's position as a manufacturing hub is strengthened, promoting global competitiveness for the forging industry through improved standards and collaboration opportunities with other sectors and international partners.

How competitive is the Indian forging industry, in terms of products, innovation, and technological advancements?

The Indian forging industry is increasingly competitive, particularly in terms of products, innovation, and technological advancements. In response to market demands and evolving customer needs, forging firms are continuously diversifying their product offerings and investing in innovation. Technological advancements are being adopted to enhance manufacturing processes, improve product quality, and increase efficiency. While challenges such as cost pressures and global competition exist, the Indian forging industry strives to maintain its competitiveness by leveraging advancements in technology and innovation to stay abreast of international standards and meet the demands of a dynamic market.

Challenges and opportunities of the industry in the emerging market

The forging industry encounters several critical challenges that could affect its growth and operations. Fluctuations in raw material costs, particularly steel and alloys, pose a risk to the industry's cost structure and competitiveness. High energy expenses, essential for the forging process, can strain profitability amid rising energy costs. Adherence to stringent environmental regulations necessitates investments in cleaner manufacturing practices, potentially impacting operational expenses. Shortages in skilled labour present hurdles to maintaining production efficiency and quality, while the adoption of advanced technologies like automation requires substantial investments and careful implementation to avoid disruptions. The increase in freight costs for exports has also been significant and reduces the cost competitiveness of the industry. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for the forging industry to sustain its growth trajectory and remain competitive in the evolving market landscape.

The industry is poised to capitalise on significant opportunities across various industrial sectors. In automotive, the demand for lightweight, high-strength components positions forging as a competitive choice. The defence sector's promising outlook, driven by the 'Make in India' initiative and restrictions on defence spares imports, underscores forging's role in supplying superior strength components. Additionally, in railways and renewable energy, forging companies can contribute essential components.

What are the forging industry's expectations from the government?

The forging industry looks to the government for support in addressing key challenges. This includes stabilising raw material costs, mitigating energy expenses, and providing guidance on complying with environmental regulations. Additionally, the industry seeks initiatives to develop skilled labour through vocational training programs and educational reforms. Government support for technological adaptation, including incentives for advanced manufacturing technologies, is also crucial. ◆