INTERVIEW WITH ACE INVESTOR RAAMDEO AGRAWAL

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Business Today

March 17, 2024 ₹200

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A BT-PwC STUDY

INDIA'S BEST CEOs

SUNIL BHARTI MITTAL
FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN,
BHARTI ENTERPRISES

BUSINESS ICON OF THE YEAR

DL (DS)-04/MP/2022-23-24, RNI No. 53481/92 ■ FARIDABAD/145/2023-25 BPC Faridabad ■ Date of posting: Tue, Wed & Thursday


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बड़ी खबरें
लाइव टीवी


WORLD AIRLINE
WINNER
SKYTRAX
AWARDS 2023
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ORYX ONE
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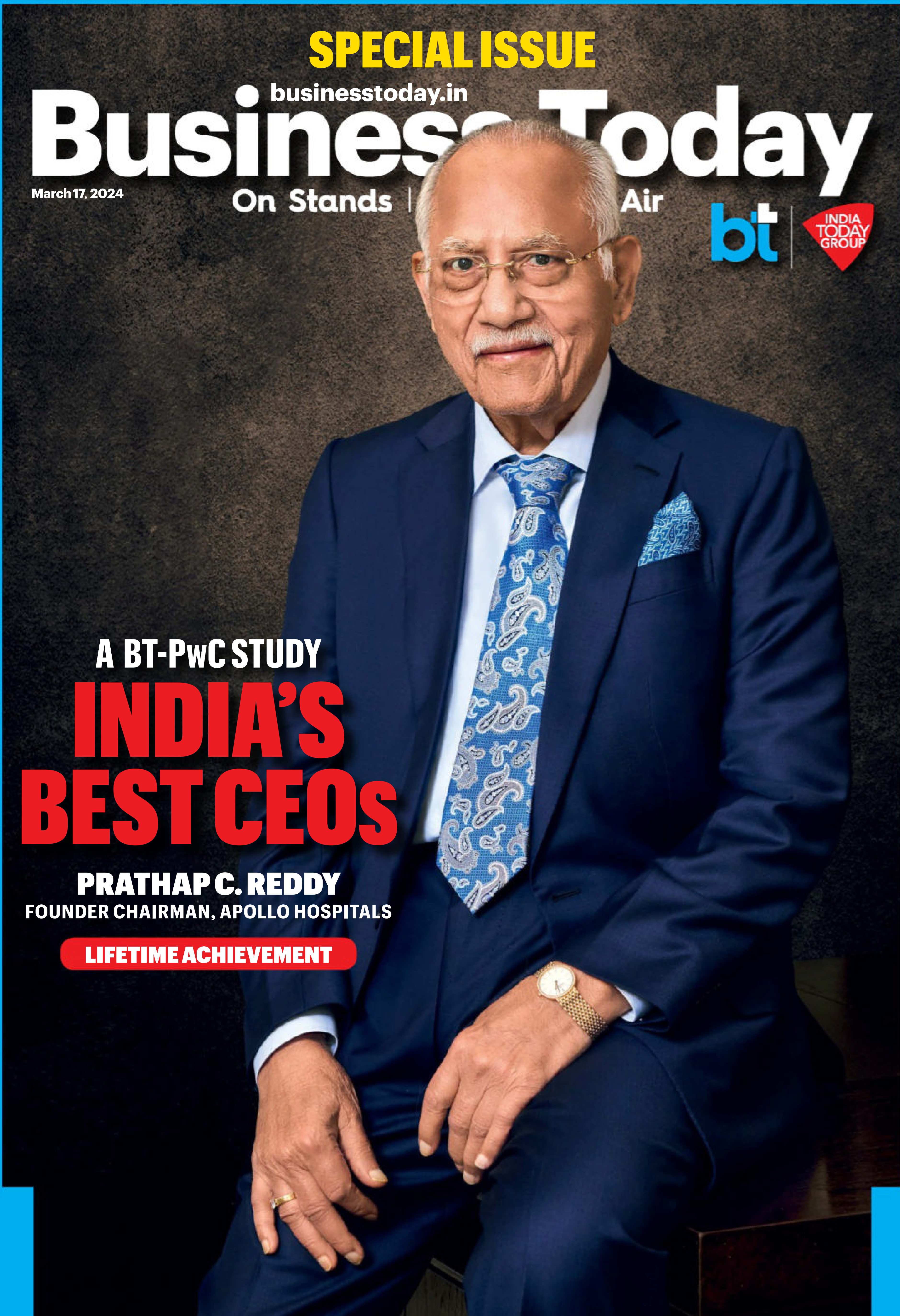
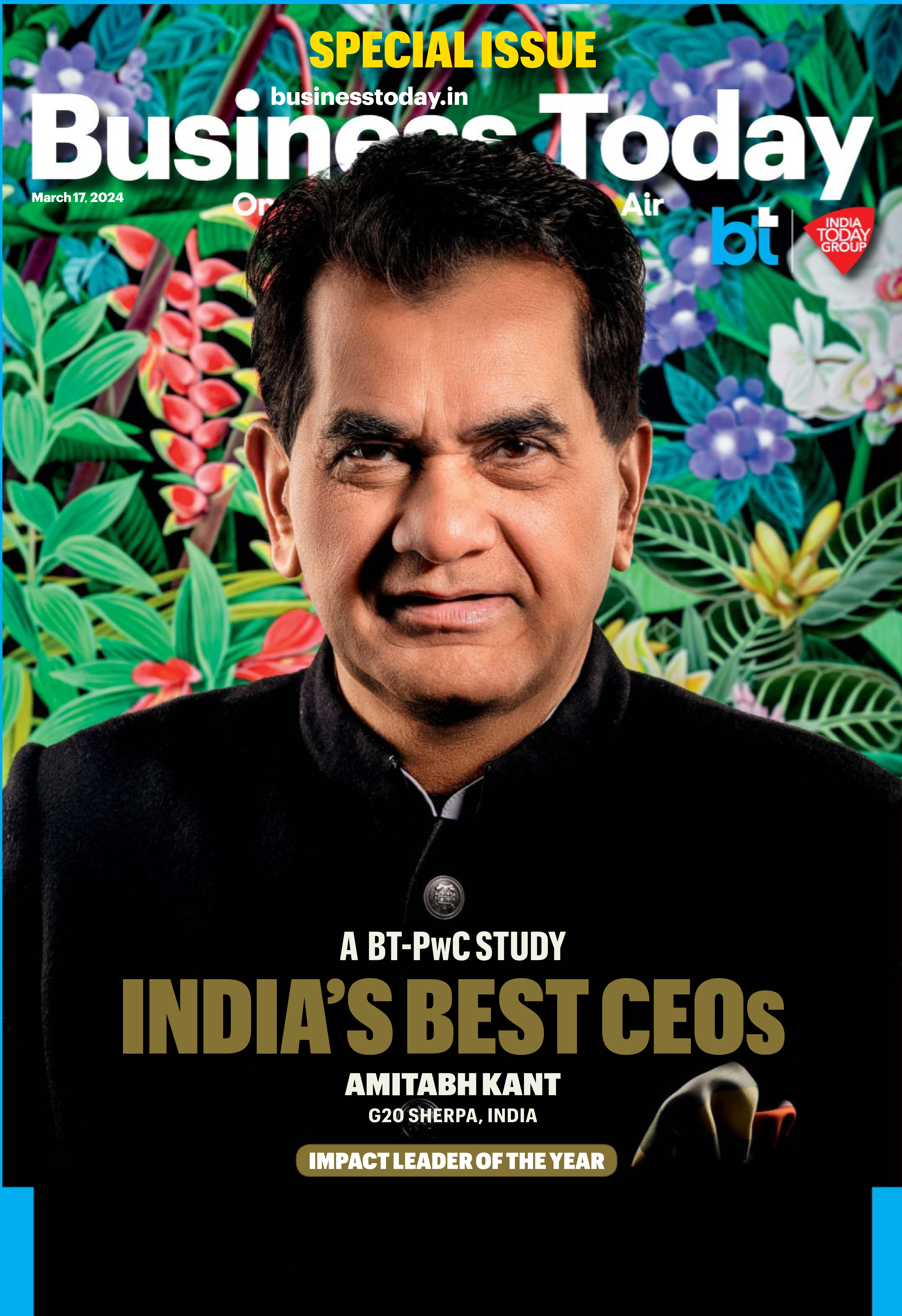


A BT-PwC STUDY

INDIA'S BEST CEOs

PRATHAP C. REDDY
FOUNDER CHAIRMAN, APOLLO HOSPITALS

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT



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Business Today

March 17, 2024

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A BT-PwC STUDY

INDIA'S BEST CEOs

AMITABH KANT

G20 SHERPA, INDIA

IMPACT LEADER OF THE YEAR

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March 17, 2024

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SANJIV PURI
CHAIRMAN & MD, ITC LTD
BEST CEO-LARGE COMPANIES

SATISH PAI
MD, HINDALCO INDUSTRIES
BEST CEO-SUPER LARGE COMPANIES

A BT-PwC STUDY

INDIA'S BEST CEOs

Leadership by Example

I f there ever was a time that is both interesting and challenging for corporate leaders, it is now. Interesting, because of the winds of change sweeping through the business-, economic- and technological landscape, where leaders who are nimble can grab opportunities for growth. And challenging, because seldom has such a cocktail of events manifested itself at the same time—geopolitical tensions and wars, the tendency of global economies to turn more inward-looking, supply chain problems, and more. Just as the world was recovering from the crippling effects of the pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas face-off meant that CEOs had to go back to the drawing board, regroup and come up with new strategies.

Amidst all this, India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, stands out as a beacon of hope. The government is pushing economic growth and front-loading capex to ensure private investment is crowded in, and the robust domestic market provides companies a massive cushion when overseas markets turn challenging. Not surprisingly, PwC's recent 27th Annual Global CEO Survey showed that India has risen to No. 5 as an investment destination for global CEOs, up from No. 9 in 2023. Nine out of 10 Indian CEOs believe the country's economy will improve, and seven out of 10 feel confident about their companies' revenue prospects. But, there is a need for constant reinvention. The advent of Generative AI, cybersecurity risks, climate change and health risks are key challenges. It is against this background that we bring you this year's *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs list—a line-up of India's sharpest and most effective business leaders who have guided their companies through choppy waters and remained resilient in the wake of unforeseen challenges. The winners were picked by a jury chaired by Uday Kotak, Founder and Director, Kotak Mahindra Bank; Rajat Dhawan, Senior Managing Partner, McKinsey & Company in India; Ramnath Krishnan, MD, ICRA; R.M. Vishakha, MD & CEO, IndiaFirst Life Insurance; and Amit Tandon, Founder & MD, Institutional Investor Advisory Services.

We have also introduced seven new categories this year—Unicorn, PSU, Resilient CEO, Glocal CEO, Travel, Best Deal and Clean Energy. While Sunil Bharti Mittal, Founder & Chairman of Bharti Enterprises, was chosen as the Business Icon of the Year for how he has grown Bharti Airtel despite heavy odds, the jury conferred the Lifetime Achievement Award on Dr Prathap C. Reddy, Founder Chairman of Apollo Hospitals, for his enormous contribution to healthcare in India. The jury also decided to give a special Impact Leader of the Year award to India's G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant for the brilliant way in which he guided India's G20 presidency last year. The stories of all the winners demonstrate the indomitable entrepreneurial spirit that defines the Indian business landscape. More power to them. BT

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THE POWER OF STILLNESS: DOING NOTHING TO CREATE WEALTH

Mr. Naveen Gogia
Executive Vice President & Co-Head - Sales & Distribution
HDFC Asset Management Co. Ltd.

In the world of investing, the phrase **bias for action** implies a tendency to act and change your position frequently in the belief that it would improve your chances of success. This is in contrast to inaction, which is an option, and may possibly be the right choice. Human beings often mistake activity for productivity, something which is visible in the tendency to switch lanes in a traffic jam – or trying to honk your way through it.

Taking action in complex situations make us feel better irrespective of the outcome. In case of a positive outcome, action bias helps us attribute success to our actions. In case of a negative outcome, we feel that at least we tried! In either case, the story can be spun in our favour. We live in a world where narrative is more important than the truth. A study from the sporting world makes it amply clear.

An interesting study by Bar-Eli et al. (2007) of 286 football penalty kicks in top events showed the downside of action bias. This study showed that the distribution of kick's direction was fairly split between left, right and center. The penalty takers kick went 32% of the times to the left, 38% to the right, and 29% in the center. At the highest levels, one would expect the goalkeepers' dive directions to be similarly distributed. Surprisingly, goalkeepers' dive direction is highly skewed towards left and right, while staying in the center only 6% of the time. What could explain this discrepancy? A possible reason is action bias. Justifying a failed dive towards left or right is easier than conceding a goal after staying centered. In fact, the study suggests that staying in the center more often could lead to better outcomes for the goalkeepers. This example demonstrates the power of stillness as a strategic approach.

Heavy skew in dive directions, while kick's direction split is equal

Split of 286 penalty kicks and dives

	Left	Center	Right
Kick	92 (32%)	82 (29%)	112 (39%)
Dive	141 (49%)	18 (6%)	127 (45%)

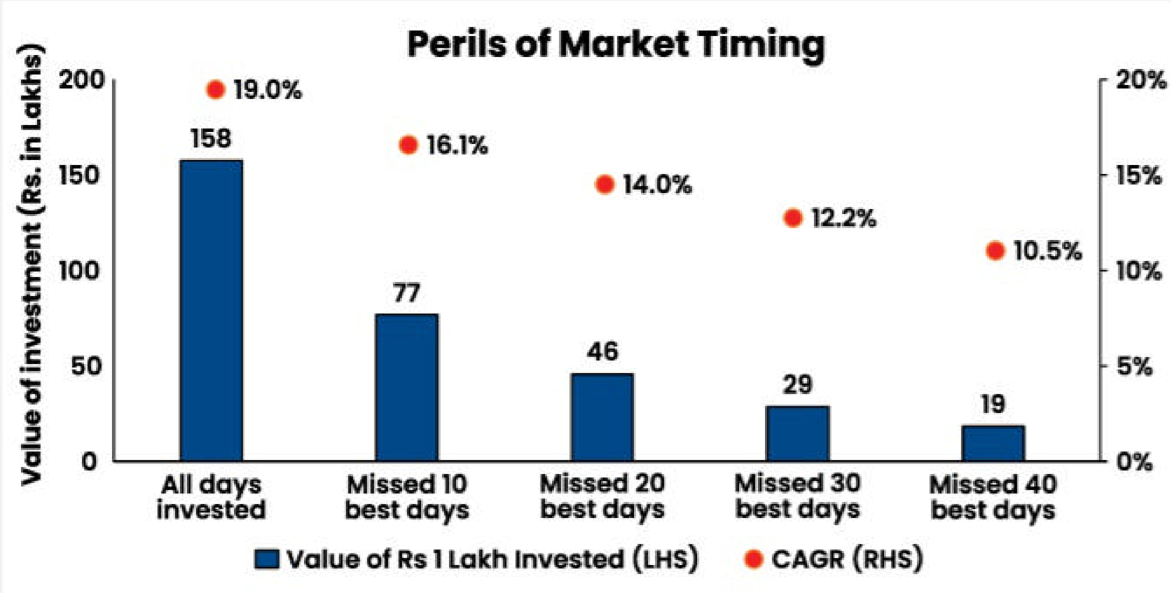
Source: Action Bias among Elite Soccer Goalkeepers: The Case of Penalty Kicks, Michael Bar-Eli and Ilana Ritov (2007)

In investing, the power of stillness translates to allowing investments the time to mature, instead of tinkering with them. This approach has historically yielded better returns in the long run. While action is often celebrated, stillness can sometimes be a very potent strategy. As decision-makers, we must remember that taking no action is also a decision, and often, it can be the best one. **Patience is not just a virtue, it's a strategy**.

This concept and its significance for investors becomes extremely clear if we take the example of **HDFC Flexi Cap Fund**. While an amount of Rs. 1 Lakh invested at inception would have turned to Rs. 1.58 crores as on February 15, 2024 (19% CAGR), just missing the 10 best days in its 10,000+ day journey would have made the final amount to Rs. 77 Lakh (16% CAGR) – a drop of more than 50%! Outsized share of just 10 days in a 10,000 day (0.1% of days) journey shows how difficult it is to time the market. There are two ways to gain from these: 1. Time the market perfectly and invest for those 10 days – each with a 0.01% probability (and a combined probability of near impossible); or 2. To stay invested. The second choice from a probability point of view is a no-brainer but unfortunately, most attempt the first. Therefore, few investors make the most of this remarkable journey of wealth creation.

In today's markets, as market levels may appear high, investors could be tempted to reduce equity exposure. If history has taught us well, such actions could prove detrimental to one's wealth creation journey. As the famous investor Charlie Munger said: **"The first rule of compounding is to never interrupt it unnecessarily!"**.

The power of stillness is a simple but powerful strategy for investors. By not making frequent changes, you can let your investments grow over time. The power of stillness allows you to harness the power of compounding. The next time you feel the urge to act, pause and ask yourself: Is this action necessary, or is it just my bias for action led by emotions? You might be surprised by the answer.



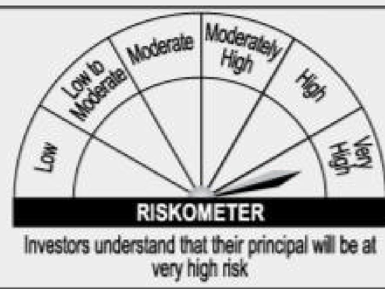
A. HDFC Flexi Cap Fund – Performance^ - Regular Plan - Growth Option				NAV as on January 31, 2024		₹ 1539.884 (per unit)
Period	**Scheme Returns (%)**	**Benchmark Returns (%) #**	**Additional Benchmark Returns (%) ##**	**Value of ₹ 10,000 invested**		
				Scheme (₹)	**Benchmark (₹) #**	**Additional Benchmark (₹) ##**
Last 1 Year	35.56	33.81	24.35	13,556	13,381	12,435
Last 3 Years	28.84	21.79	18.15	21,419	18,085	16,510
Last 5 Years	19.58	18.34	16.29	24,462	23,216	21,276
Since Inception§	18.90	12.53	11.78	15,39,884	3,10,112	2,55,385

#NIFTY 500 (Total Returns Index) ##NIFTY 50 (Total Returns Index). §Inception Date: January 01, 1995. The scheme is managed by Ms. Roshi Jain since July 29, 2022. As NIFTY 50 TRI data is not available since inception of the scheme, additional benchmark performance is calculated using composite CAGR of NIFTY 50 PRI values from January 1, 1995 to June 29, 1999 and TRI values since June 30, 1999.

B. Performance^ of Other Funds Managed by Ms. Roshi Jain, Fund Manager of HDFC Flexi Cap Fund (who manages total 3 schemes)		Returns (%) as on Janaury 31, 2024		
Scheme	**Managing Scheme since**	**Last 1 Year (%)**	**Last 3 Years (%)**	**Last 5 Years (%)**
HDFC Focused 30 Fund	January 13, 2022	34.97	30.53	19.51
Benchmark - NIFTY 500 (Total Returns Index)		33.81	21.79	18.34
HDFC ELSS Tax saver	January 13, 2022	38.70	27.05	17.74
Benchmark - NIFTY 500 (Total Returns Index)		33.81	21.79	18.34

Common notes for the above tables: Past performance may or may not be sustained in future and is not a guarantee of any future returns. Returns greater than 1 year period are Compounded Annualised (CAGR). Load is not taken into consideration for computation of above performance(s). Different plans viz. Regular Plan and Direct Plan have different expense structure. The expenses of the Direct Plan under the scheme will be lower to the extent of the distribution expenses/commission charged in the Regular Plan. The above returns are of Regular Plan - Growth Option. ^As on January 31, 2024.

HDFC FLEXI CAP FUND is suitable for investors who are seeking*: • To generate long-term capital appreciation/income • Investments predominantly in equity & equity-related instruments
*Investors should consult their financial advisers, if in doubt about whether the product is suitable for them.

Name of scheme(s)	Name of Benchmark	Riskometer#
HDFC Flexi Cap Fund HDFC Focused 30 Fund HDFC ELSS Tax saver	NIFTY 500 (Total Returns Index)	

#For latest riskometer, investors may refer to the Monthly Portfolios disclosed on the website of the Fund viz. **www.hdfcfund.com**

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MUTUAL FUND INVESTMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO MARKET RISKS, READ ALL SCHEME RELATED DOCUMENTS CAREFULLY.

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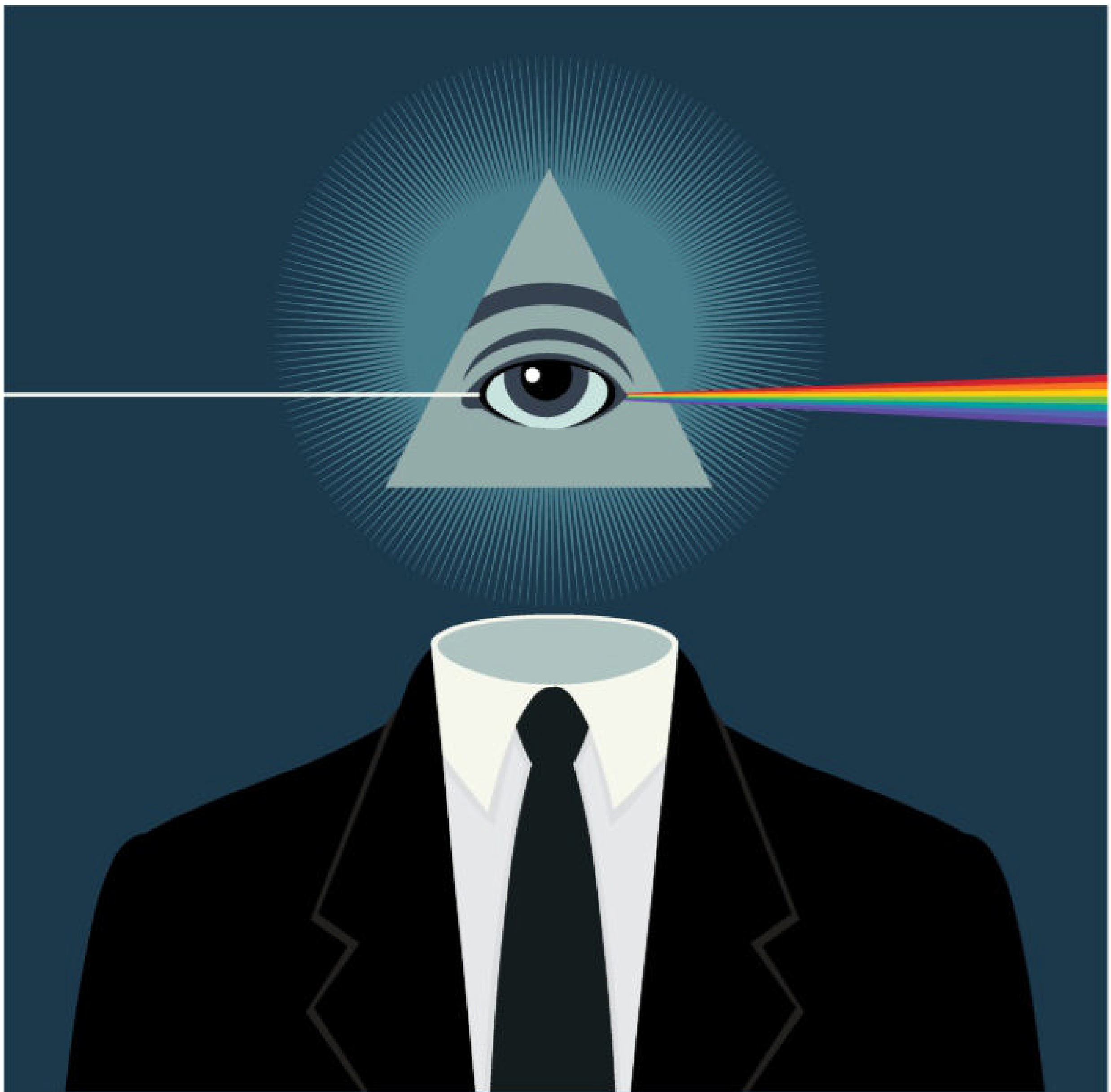

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A BT-PwC SURVEY

INDIA'S BEST CEOs

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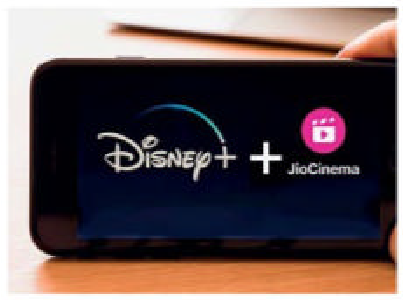

INDIA'S BEST CEOs

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Heavy Mittal

Sunil Bharti Mittal has spent a lifetime in telecom, creating a mammoth called Bharti Airtel. Now, he is backing OneWeb for a higher trajectory

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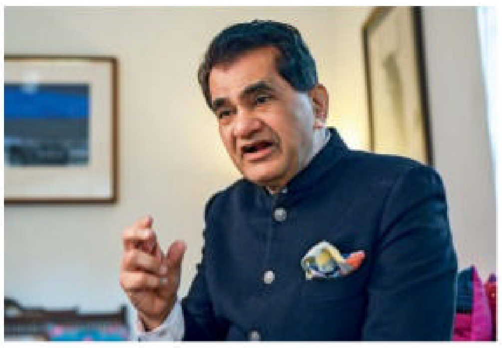
Healer Extraordinaire

Apollo Hospitals' Prathap C. Reddy pioneered the private healthcare industry in India and transformed the health ecosystem. Reddy reminisces about his life and times



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Amitabh Kant, an expert policy-maker known for his clarity of vision and hard work, was a key player in making India's G20 presidency a resounding success as its Sherpa

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Metal Man

Satish Pai has set Hindalco up for long-term success. There is a lot of traction left in the aluminium space and there is the emerging opportunity in copper

For the latest updates and analysis, log on to *businesstoday.in*

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LARGE COMPANIES

Turbocharged

Sanjiv Puri has broad-ened ITC's reach well beyond cigarettes. The demerger of its hotels business shows the firm's push to keep the growth engine well oiled

FOCUS / An IMPACT Feature

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Date: 1st March 2024

Manoj Sharma
Signature of Publisher

bt Photographik

Photo by **ARUN KUMAR**; Text by **RAHUL OBEROI**

Shops at a spice market in Faridabad, Uttar Pradesh

Data as of February 21, 2024 **SOURCE:** CMIE ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

HOT AND SPICY

THE STEEP RISE IN PRICES OF CERTAIN SPICES AND CONDIMENTS IN THE DOMESTIC MARKET HAS MADE YOUR BELOVED CURRY MORE EXPENSIVE. HERE'S WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

307%
Surge in the average price (wholesale) of garlic in the past year—from ₹4,479 per quintal on February 21, 2023, to ₹18,228 per quintal on February 21, 2024

79%
The rise in the average price (wholesale) of ginger during the same period—from ₹4,977 a quintal to ₹8,914 per quintal

70%
Jump witnessed in the average price (wholesale) of turmeric in the past year—from ₹6,231 per quintal on February 21, 2023, to ₹10,571 per quintal now

THE POINT

VIEW FROM THE TOP

THE YEAR 2024 IS PROMISING FOR INDIAN BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRY LEADERS ARE UPBEAT, ACCORDING TO PwC'S '27TH ANNUAL GLOBAL CEO SURVEY: INDIA PERSPECTIVE'. INDIA HAS CLIMBED TO THE FIFTH SPOT AS A PREFERRED INVESTMENT DESTINATION, UP FROM NINTH IN 2023. THE FOLLOWING CHARTS SHOW C-SUITE EXECUTIVES' VIEWS ON INDIA AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY. READ ON

By **RAHUL OBEROI** and **PRINCE TYAGI**
Graphics by **RAJ VERMA**

61%

OF CEOs GLOBALLY BELIEVE THE PE SPACE WILL SEE A 5% INCREASE IN HEADCOUNT. AND 56% OF CEOs BELIEVE THAT THE HOSPITALITY & LEISURE, ENGINEERING & CONSTRUCTION AND TECHNOLOGY SECTORS WILL SEE A 5% RISE IN HEADCOUNT

71%

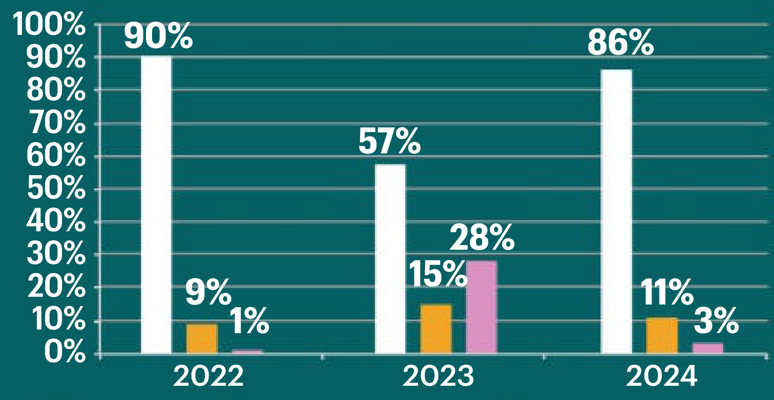
OF INDIAN CEOs EXPECT GENERATIVE AI (GEN AI)TO INCREASE EMPLOYEE EFFICIENCY OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

NOTE PwC SURVEYED 4,702 CEOs ACROSS 105 COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES, 79 OF WHOM WERE FROM INDIA.

BULLISH OUTLOOK

THE MAJORITY (86%) OF INDIA'S CEOs ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC GROWTH IN 2024

(CEOs' views on India's economic outlook)



IMPROVE ● STAY THE SAME ● DECLINE

SOURCE PwC'S 27TH ANNUAL GLOBAL CEO SURVEY

LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

GLOBAL CEOs SEE INDIA AS ONE OF THE TOP FIVE INVESTMENT DESTINATIONS

(CEOs' views on the top investment destinations for revenue generation, other than their own country, over the next 12 months)

INVESTMENT DESTINATION

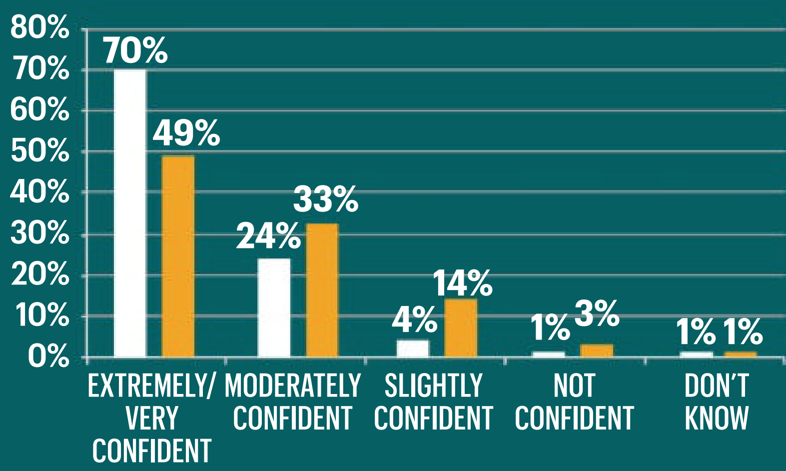
COUNTRY	2023	RANK	Country	2024
US	40%	1	US	29%
China	23%	2	China	21%
Germany	18%	3	Germany	15%
UK	18%	4	UK	14%
Australia	11%	5	India	8%

SOURCE PwC'S 27TH ANNUAL GLOBAL CEO SURVEY

POSITIVE PROGNOSIS

70% OF INDIAN CEOs ARE CONFIDENT OF THEIR COMPANY'S REVENUE GROWTH PROSPECTS OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS

(CEOs' views on their company's revenue growth)



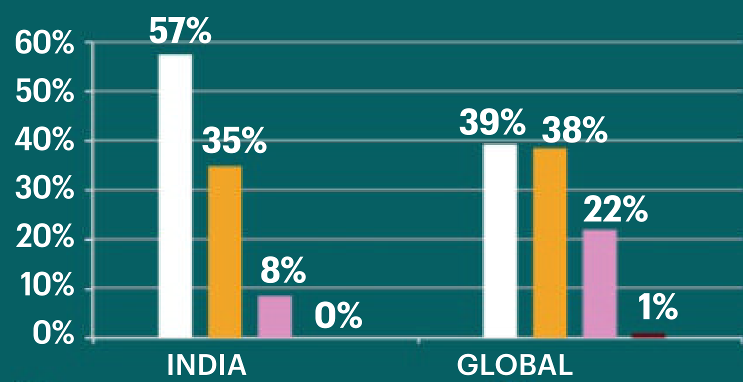
● INDIA CEOs ● GLOBAL CEOs

SOURCE PwC'S 27TH ANNUAL GLOBAL CEO SURVEY

MORE JOBS

MORE THAN HALF OF THE CEOs IN INDIA ARE CONTEMPLATING A 5% INCREASE IN HEADCOUNT IN 2024

(CEOs' views on hiring)



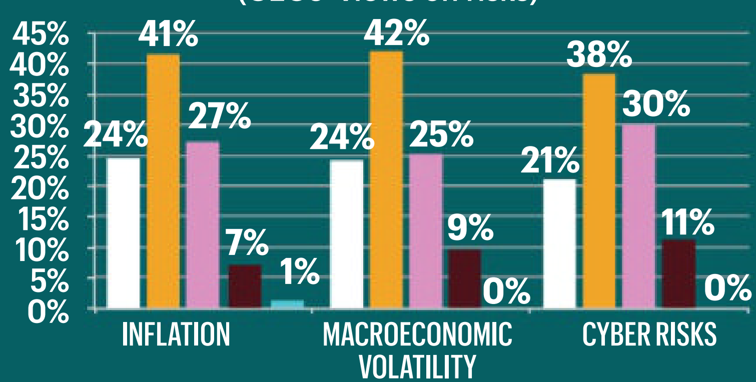
● INCREASE (BY 5% OR MORE) ● LITTLE TO NO CHANGE (BETWEEN 5% INCREASE AND 5% DECREASE) ● DECREASE (BY 5% OR MORE) ● DON'T KNOW

SOURCE PwC'S 27TH ANNUAL GLOBAL CEO SURVEY

BIGGEST THREATS

GLOBAL CEOs SEE INFLATION AND CYBER RISKS AS THE BIGGEST THREATS OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

(CEOs' views on risks)



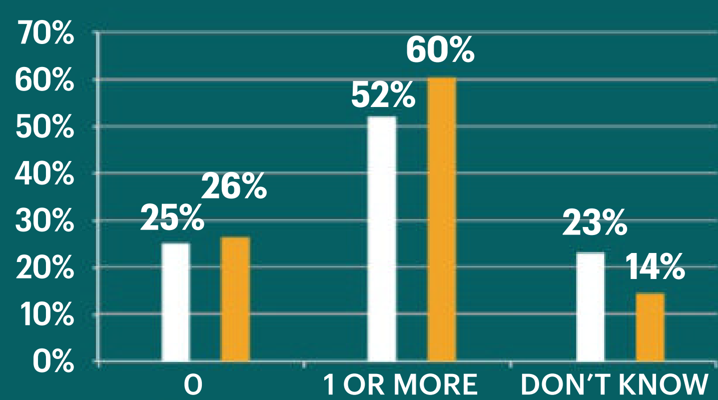
● EXTREMELY/HIGHLY EXPOSED ● MODERATELY EXPOSED ● SLIGHTLY EXPOSED ● MINIMALLY EXPOSED ● DON'T KNOW

SOURCE PWC'S 27TH ANNUAL GLOBAL CEO SURVEY

DEAL STREET

MORE THAN HALF OF INDIAN CEOs ARE LOOKING TO MAKE ACQUISITIONS OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS

(CEOs' views on acquisitions)



● INDIA ● GLOBAL; NOTE: X-AXIS SHOWS THE NUMBER OF ACQUISITIONS

SOURCE PWC'S 27TH ANNUAL GLOBAL CEO SURVEY

BYJU'S

BATTLE LINES DRAWN

Promoters and investors of Byju's are on collision course as the firm confronts multiple challenges

BY **KRISHNA GOPALAN**

PHOTO BY **GETTY IMAGES**

BYJU'S INVESTORS VOTED TO OUST FOUNDER & CEO BYJU RAVEENDRAN AT A RECENT EGM, WHICH THE LATTER HAS CALLED ILLEGAL

▶ **EVEN THE MOST** conservative observers will concede that the Byju's saga has barely unfolded. The once-storied edtech unicorn has seen a dramatic drop in its valuation and has witnessed a very combative relationship between its promoters and investors. Plus, it is trying to address its precarious financial situation.

Things came to a head earlier this year when Byju's, once valued at $22 billion, said it would raise $200 million through a rights issue. The company has said that the issue was oversubscribed, without disclosing details. It has been known for a while that the Bengaluru-headquartered entity has been looking to raise at least $1 billion. For the investors, if they did not participate in this issue, they could end up losing almost all their holdings in Byju's.

Faced with this situation, the investors called for an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) on February 23, where they voted to remove Founder & CEO Byju Raveendran and restructure the board, which has his wife and Co-founder Divya Gokulnath and brother Riju Ravindran. Raveendran has called this action illegal. This was followed by four investors—Prosus, Sofina, GA, and Peak XV, who hold around 25% stake together—filing an oppression and mismanagement suit against the promoters before the Bengaluru bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT). They have asked the tribunal to declare the promoters unfit to run the company, appoint a new board, declare the rights issue void, and conduct a forensic audit, among other reliefs. The bench has directed the firm to keep the proceeds of the issue in an escrow account till the disposal of the plea. Another issue is the failure of Byju's to file detailed financial results for FY23 with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

Quite clearly, the announcement of the rights issue did not go down well with the edtech firm's investors. "It [has been] implemented in a manner of arm-twisting the existing shareholders to subscribe. Investors get a Hobson's choice, either to infuse funds or see their shareholding get significantly diluted," says Shriram Subramanian, Founder and Managing Director of InGovern Research Services, a corporate governance advisory firm.

What's not clear is why investors have expressed displeasure at this point. "They infused funds despite that and were well aware of the shortcomings of the company, be it the lack of financial discipline, mis-selling, questionable ethics, aggressive accounting, etc. Besides, the board members and investors knew that Byju's did not have a full-time CFO, and the aggressive and expensive acquisitions also show bad capital allocation decisions," Subramanian says. He adds that the edtech will need to raise funds "just to pay off liabilities and keep its operations going."

Meanwhile, Raveendran has called the EGM illegal. According to Ashish Kumar, Managing Partner at Capstone Legal, everything will depend on what is outlined in the shareholders' agreement and the articles of association (AoA) of the company. "The provisions can vary significantly if there are foreign investors, especially those who invested in the initial stage of the company. Also, the contents of the AoA are not publicly known in the case of Byju's."

$200 million

THE RIGHTS ISSUE OF BYJU'S, WHICH WAS FULLY SUBSCRIBED, PER THE COMPANY

On the possibility of the investors taking over Byju's using the NCLT route, he says this is a drastic step and one that is difficult to execute in the Indian business landscape. "Besides, there is no regulator in place for the edtech sector to specifically say if something has gone wrong. The company law then becomes the only way to move on the issue, and it could take a lot of time to reach a conclusion," adds Kumar. "It will be a hard-fought, long-drawn battle in the NCLT and the courts," says Subramanian.

What's clear is that Byju's has a very tall mountain to climb. BT

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RELIANCE-DISNEY DEAL

A Behemoth is Born

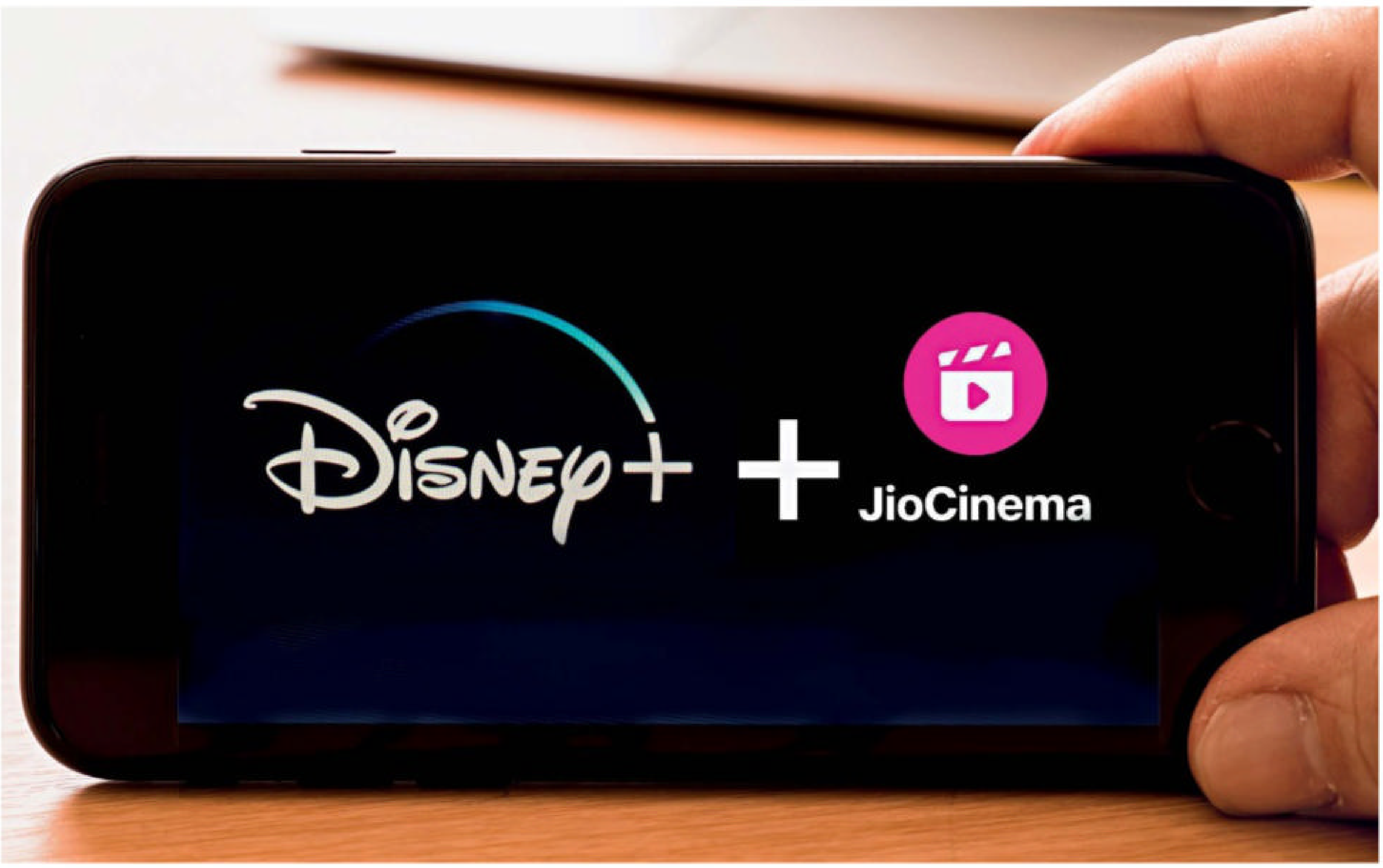
The merger between the media business of Reliance Industries and The Walt Disney Company's India entities has created a new giant in the entertainment space

BY **VIDYA S.**

BILLIONAIRE MUKESH AMBANI'S Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) and The Walt Disney Company have agreed to merge their digital streaming and television assets in India, creating an $8.5-billion media behemoth spanning at least 100 channels across entertainment and sports, and two digital streaming platforms. The entity also has exclusive rights to sporting events like the Indian Premier League (IPL) and Disney films and productions in India, as well as a diverse international content library.

The former rivals, who were locked in an intense battle over IPL rights until recently, have agreed to form a joint venture (JV) that will solidify RIL's position in the Indian M&E space and reduce Disney's presence in the country amid intense competition.

This JV between RIL, its broadcast division Viacom 18 and Disney will bring together TV channels such as Colors, StarPlus, StarGOLD, Star Sports and Sports18 as well as streaming apps JioCinema and Disney+ Hotstar. The deal will combine the businesses of Viacom18 and Star India, where the media undertaking of Viacom18 will be merged into Star India Private Limited. The JV will be controlled by RIL. Under the terms of the deal, RIL will own 16.34%, Viacom18 will own 46.82%, while Disney's share will be 36.84%. Disney may also contribute certain additional media assets to the JV, subject to regulatory and third-party approvals. RIL will invest ₹11,500 crore



MEDIA TITANS UNITE

The merger of Reliance's media business with The Walt Disney Company's India entities will reshape India's media landscape

The merger consolidates assets, including 100 TV channels, and the Disney+ Hotstar and JioCinema apps, along with rights to sporting events

Reliance will own 16.34% stake, Viacom18 will have 46.82%, and Disney's share will be 36.84%

Nita Ambani has been named the Chairperson of the JV, with Uday Shankar, Co-founder of Bodhi Tree Systems, as the Vice Chairperson

(or approximately, $1.4 billion) into the JV for its growth strategy. Nita Ambani will be the Chairperson of the JV, while Uday Shankar, Co-founder of Bodhi Tree Systems, which owns a stake in Viacom18, will be the Vice Chairperson. Shankar, a former Disney India chief who has also led Star India, will provide overall strategic leadership.

"Despite being the larger of the two, Disney's Star India has seen its valuation drop to roughly $4 billion, accounting for the anticipated loss from its sports business," says Abneesh Roy, Executive Director (Research), Nuvama Institutional Equities. Viacom18 was valued at roughly $4 billion when Reliance Industries and Bodhi Tree infused over ₹15,000 crore into the company in April 2023, he adds. Initially, Disney reportedly valued the India business at around $10 billion, whereas Reliance's valuation of the assets was a purported $7–8 billion.

Disney's linear TV and streaming businesses in India have been hit over the past few years. Disney+ Hotstar, particularly, has bled 23 million subscribers since losing the IPL digital streaming rights to JioCinema. In fact, since mid-2022, Viacom18 has been collecting several properties that once had a home at Disney in India—whether it is the IPL digital rights, rights to bilateral India cricket matches or HBO content.

Vivek Menon, Managing Partner of media and entertainment debt fund NV Capital, notes that Disney has encountered a turbulent period on the global stage over the past few years. The company's stock price has plummeted from a peak of $200 to about $100 now. "In India, they needed to pump additional capital because of the high cash burn on IPL broadcasting rights and Cricket World Cup rights on digital. A merger fits their strategy to conserve cash as well as dilute their holding to raise capital from their India franchise," he adds.

The merger marks Disney's fourth avatar in India, following partnerships with the K.K. Modi Group in 1993 and Ronnie Screwvala's UTV Software Communications in the mid-2000s. Disney's expansion continued with the acquisition of 21st Century Fox in 2018 for $71 billion, incorporating Indian operations under Disney Star (earlier Star India).

Analysts say the combined FY23 revenue of ₹25,000 crore, which gives the merged company a 40% market share in linear TV and OTT sectors, could draw scrutiny from the Competition Commission of India (CCI) as the entity will become the single largest player in the field. The merger also reinforces their dominance in sports, with rights valued at nearly ₹55,000 crore for major cricket properties over the next four to five years, projecting an 80-90% share of cricket advertising revenues in India. The deal also comes just before the commencement of IPL's 2024 edition.

Uday Sodhi, former head of SonyLIV and Founding Partner of Kurate Digital Consulting, says JioCinema has aggregated content from HBO and NBC Universal. The merger will add Disney content also to the mix, he says, as the JV now has the licence to more than 30,000 Disney content assets. "This is great for the consumer. Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and the other OTT players will have to now face a stronger competitor and will have to up their game," he adds.

This is the second big-ticket merger in the Indian media and entertainment sector, following the high-profile announcement of a deal between Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI) and Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited (ZEEL) in September 2021. However, the Zee-Sony merger ultimately fell through last month, after numerous twists and turns.

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BITCOIN

Back in the Game

Bitcoin has surpassed $60,000 for the first time in more than two years and is expected to sustain its upward trajectory with an upcoming halving of reward for mining Bitcoin in April

BY **TEENA JAIN KAUSHAL**

FEBRUARY 28 MARKED a significant moment for the popular crypto asset Bitcoin as it surged past $60,000, achieving the milestone for the first time in more than two years. In November 2021, the price of Bitcoin skyrocketed to nearly $69,000 (intra-day) but later plunged by half due to regulatory concerns and high interest rates, diminishing its appeal as an asset class.

The surge last time was driven by the liquidity in the world economy after governments eased monetary policy in the wake of Covid-19. However, this time around, the crypto market has rallied due to factors like the expected rate cut by the US Federal Reserve, the increasing popularity of Bitcoin exchange-traded funds (ETFs), and the anticipation of Bitcoin halving in April.

The resurgence "signifies a pivotal moment in the crypto landscape," says Raj Karkara, Chief Operating Officer (COO) of ZebPay, a crypto exchange. "It not only demonstrates the resilience of digital assets, but also underscores the growing mainstream acceptance of Bitcoin," he says. "The approval of ETFs has played a significant role in expanding the investor base, contributing to the positive sentiment," he adds.

Bitcoin ETFs were listed on highly regulated US stock exchanges starting in January 2024. The listing has been well-received as the ETFs are subject to close supervision, adding an extra layer of protection for investors. Moreover, Bitcoin ETFs offer the benefit of investing in a robust and regulated market. This is important considering scandals in the past where many individuals lost their assets due to compromised wallets or sudden closure of companies.

The Bitcoin halving is another event that is generating a lot of excitement. It takes place every four years when the reward for Bitcoin mining is reduced by half. The purpose is to limit supply, so when the reward decreases, it positively impacts prices. There will only be 21 million Bitcoins, and nearly 19 million have already been mined.

Historically, halvings have driven Bitcoin prices to new highs. The first halving took place in November 2012, and in just over a year, the value of Bitcoin surged from $13 to $1,152 by December 2013. The second halving occurred in July 2016, leading again to a significant increase in Bitcoin price—from $664 to $17,760

STAGING A COMEBACK

- The Bitcoin price has surged 3.8 times since January 1, 2023
- It touched an all-time high of $68,789* on November 10, 2021

*INTRA-DAY; **SOURCE** INVESTING.COM

by December 2017. The third halving took place in May 2020, and the price of Bitcoin rose from $9,734 to $68,789 by November 2021, reaching its peak one year and six months after the halving, explains Ryan Lee, Chief Analyst at Bitget Research, which looks at cryptocurrencies.

"The fourth halving will occur in April 2024. It is expected that the price of Bitcoin will rise and peak one year and five months after the halving. A similar trend has been observed with the previous three halvings, with prices increasing over time to hit a new all-time high," says Lee. "There are approximately 60 days until the Bitcoin halving in April 2024, which could potentially push the cryptocurrency market to new highs," says Shivram Thakral, CEO of digital asset exchange BuyUcoin.

The Bitcoin price has surged 3.8 times since the beginning of 2023, indicating sustained growth this time around. Standard Chartered Bank has predicted that the Bitcoin price could reach $120,000 by the end of 2024.

Post February 1, 2022, trading volumes on crypto exchanges in India had plunged by more than 90% due to the introduction in the Union Budget of a flat 30% tax on profits from crypto and 1% TDS (tax deducted at source) on sell transactions. Indian crypto exchange founders have been fighting for survival for the past couple of years. They embraced varied strategies. These include exploring alternative revenue sources, implementing workforce reductions, and cutting marketing expenditures. Some have diversified their businesses, while others have migrated to more crypto-friendly locations.

However, the US Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) approval of the first Bitcoin ETF in the US has boosted crypto worldwide and increased demand for the oldest virtual currency. Bitcoin has risen more than 16% so far this year. The crypto market has started heating up in the past few months, thanks to improving macroeconomic conditions and in anticipation of rate cuts by the US Fed. Crypto trading platform CoinSwitch saw a 200% sequential growth in trading volumes in Q32023. Coinbase Global Inc., the largest US crypto exchange, saw net consumer transaction revenue in Q42023 rise 60% over a year ago, according to a letter to shareholders.

Although there are positive signs suggesting Bitcoin's rise, there is scepticism surrounding it due to the unpredictable nature of this asset class. Market participants are looking forward to April now—to see if the halving will drive up Bitcoin prices. BT

@teena_kaushal

EYES FIRMLY ON THE FUTURE

BY KRISHNA GOPALAN

THE BT-PwC INDIA'S BEST CEOs RANKING HONOURS THE BEST BUSINESS LEADERS. THEY ARE LOOKING PAST IMMEDIATE CONCERNS TO LAY A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR THE LONG TERM

ILLUSTRATION BY **ANIRBAN GHOSH**

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THE MUCH-AWAITED *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking for this year has winners from diverse fields. It reflects the challenging phase India Inc. has faced, with increasing geopolitical tensions being one of the most prominent risks. This underscores the need for companies to have robust business models that can withstand the shocks.

What is clear from conversations with these industry captains is that they place equal emphasis on growth strategy and the need to be agile to face any unexpected event. That event could be a policy change, or a war, or trade-related issues, or even extreme weather events. This is a time when India Inc. is clearly intertwined in the global economy and every decision has ramifications greater than what it was, say, a decade or two ago. Of course, it helps to operate from a country that has remained resilient unlike so many others, and provides a plethora of opportunities to those quick enough to spot them.

Another aspect that becomes clear is the CEOs' ability to keep their eyes fixed firmly on their goals. When the funds were gushing in, it might have been easy to make a big-ticket acquisition. At that point, liquidity may not have seemed much of a problem. But just a couple of dramatic changes in the business environment can unravel that strategy. This is an oft-repeated story that underlines the importance of a long-term outlook. For, it is a truth universally acknowledged that blips for a quarter or two seldom make a difference to a good firm. The skill of those who head them lies in picking the trends—local and global—and working to convert them to opportunities.

This year's list of best CEOs reflects that trend. It has stories of resilience, smart conservatism, doggedness and an insatiable appetite for success. The takeaway is clear: Success stems from the ability to think long term, regardless of what prevails in the present.

In the following pages we bring you these stories of leaders who have steered their firms, and the country, through the tough times. BT

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What is clear is that [these CEOs] place equal emphasis on growth and the need to be agile to face any unexpected event... [be it] a policy change, or a war, or trade-related issues...

HEAVY MITTAL

SUNIL BHARTI MITTAL HAS SPENT A LIFETIME IN TELECOM, CREATING A MAMMOTH CALLED BHARTI AIRTEL. NOW, HE IS BACKING ONEWEB FOR A HIGHER TRAJECTORY

By **Krishna Gopalan**

PHOTO BY **BANDEEP SINGH**

▶ **SUNIL BHARTI MITTAL** admits to not being the best person to lead a company in peaceful and good times. "That is why I leave it to people like Gopal [Vittal, MD & CEO, Bharti Airtel] to do that. But when there is a crisis, you'll find me right in the centre of action because I can bring a lot of stability," he says. Look back at the growth of Mittal's telecom business, and you note that the Founder and Chairman of Bharti Enterprises has weathered many storms, including regulatory regimes, cut-price competition, and quicksands in Africa.

Mittal—whom the jury that decided the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs picked as the Business Icon of the Year—is the only survivor from the mid-1990s when he was one of the pioneers of mobile telephony in India. Other pioneers sold out (one to him), big international names came and left, and the technology changed from bulky handsets with outrageous call rates to smartphones with dirt-cheap data used by everyone. Not a small achievement for a man with no background in telecom.

UP AND DOWN START

When Bharti Airtel went public in 2002, it was the first from the nascent mobile telephony sector to get listed. There was no 'data' story; the first smartphones and today's ubiquitous Android operating system were five years away. Today, it is hard to find an Indian without a mobile number, a prerequisite to getting linked to government welfare schemes.

Bharti Airtel's stock tanked to ₹19 about a year after listing from an offer price of ₹45. Apart from a large retail base, the company's marquee investors were Singapore Telecommunications (Singtel) and Warburg Pincus. Then, Reliance Communications (RCom) launched its mobile services in December 2002 with aggressive tariffs and handsets at a throwaway ₹500.

Crisis. At Airtel's Agra conclave in 2003 with 40-odd top officials, the view was that it should go all out to fight the challenge. Recalling that discussion, Mittal says he thought differently since the new entrant "was too strong for a company of our size to deal with". But convincing his team was not easy. "The best thing for us is to wait it out. Let's just lie on the ground and let this storm pass," he stressed. Focus on getting close to the customer by building quality, he said. "That's exactly what happened in 12 months. They started to make mistakes, and our share price went to ₹1,100-1,200 in 18 months."

Hemendra Kothari, Chairman of DSP Investment Managers, one of the bankers to Bharti Airtel's public offering, recalls: "It was difficult to market the issue, but Mittal convinced the investors. Today, it is a very different company with enormous scale." Kothari gives Mittal credit for bringing in "high-quality investors" like Singtel and Warburg Pincus. "He has the ability to

Business Icon of the Year

SUNIL BHARTI MITTAL

FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN, BHARTI ENTERPRISES

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	1,39,144.8
	9MFY24	1,12,383.3
Profit before tax	**FY23**	16,560.7
	9MFY24	9,901
Profit after tax	**FY23**	12,287.4
	9MFY24	6,489.8
	FY23 RoE (%)	17.08
	Market Cap	6,80,717.6

● Data is on a standalone basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023

● M-cap as of February 23, 2024

● **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

Epic Ride

❶ Bharti Airtel commenced cellular operations in 1995 by launching in the Delhi circle

❷ The company went public in 2002 and the share price tanked to less than half its offer price; currently, it is one India's most valuable companies. The stock closed at ₹1,126.70 as of February 23

❸ It withstood by the aggressive launch of Reliance Communications in late 2002 and again in 2016 by Reliance Jio

❹ Mittal's calm management style has steered the company through many a crisis

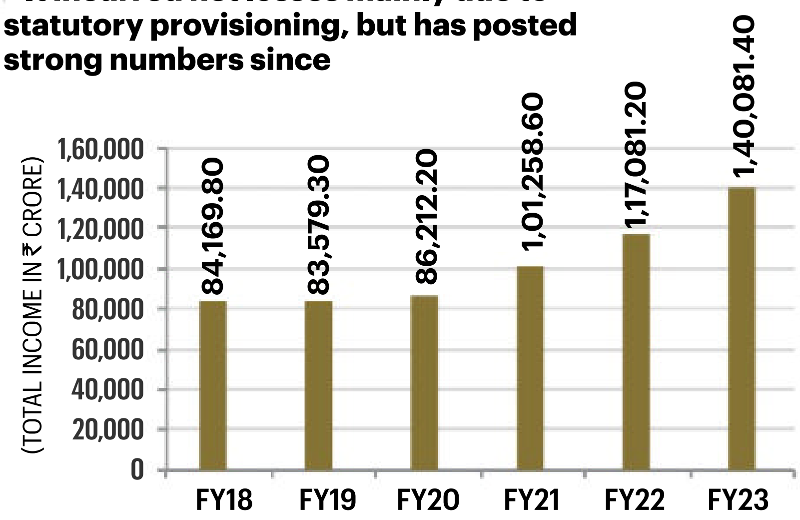
❺ His ability to plan ahead, think out of the box, and invest in people have often helped to keep the company ahead of its peers

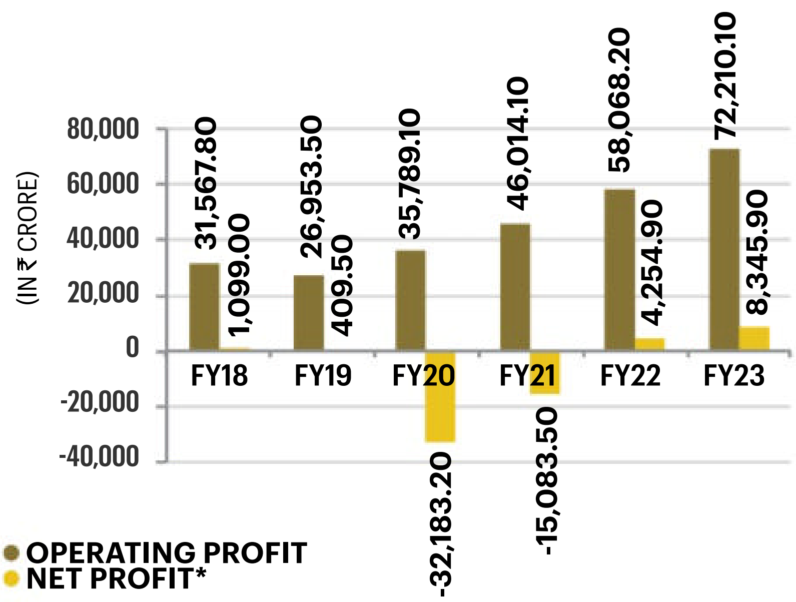
❻ Mittal's next bet is OneWeb—a network of more than 600 small satellites for communications—that he calls the last frontier

BACK TO PROFITS

▸ Airtel has seen its total income consistently rise since FY20

▸ It incurred net losses mainly due to statutory provisioning, but has posted strong numbers since

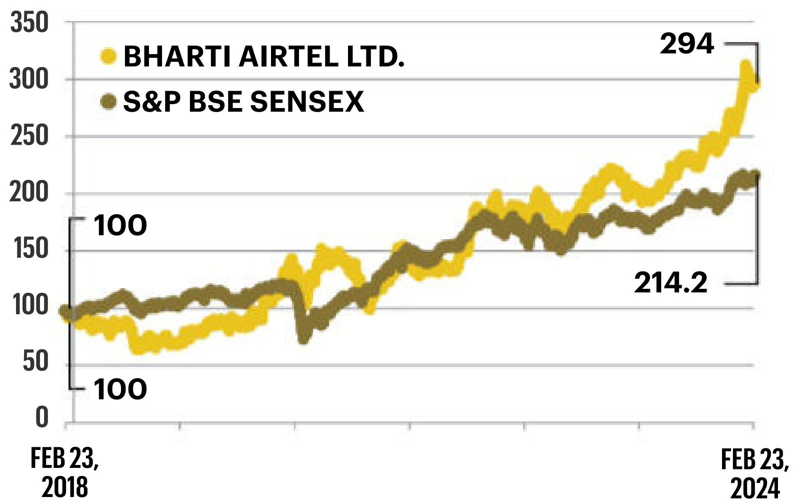




*ATTRIBUTABLE TO OWNERS OF THE PARENT
SOURCE ACE EQUITY

GOOD RETURNS

▸ The Airtel stock has outperformed the BSE Sensex in recent years
▸ The company has delivered good returns on the back of a pan-India state-of-the-art network



DATA HAS BEEN INDEXED TO 100 **SOURCE** ACE EQUITY

make people comfortable, and that is a good skill."

Calling Mittal a "fabulous entrepreneur," Deepak Parekh, Chairman of HDFC Life Insurance and HDFC AMC, says he also has the human touch. Having sat on the Singtel board for six years, Parekh saw Mittal from close quarters. "No one ever doubted his intentions, capability, or leadership skills. He dared to expand his Africa operations despite stiff competition and stuck it out."

THINKING DIFFERENTLY

Mittal, 66, can think ahead and has kept the business on a sound technological footing, often ditching conventional models. A case in point is when Airtel entered a strategic partnership with IBM for managed services. Romal Shetty, CEO of Deloitte South Asia and someone who has known Mittal for a long time, says telecom operators manage all aspects of their networks. "IBM's expertise in managing IT infrastructure brought efficiency and cost-effectiveness to Airtel's operations." Airtel also got Ericsson to manage its network infrastructure.

Mittal recalls it was tough for a mobile operator to attract the best engineers, who would make a beeline for a Nokia, Ericsson, Siemens, or Motorola. Mittal took time to understand large telecom organisations globally, and though he did not have the scale, it was possible to do it indirectly. "In the deal with IBM, we gave them a share of the revenue. Their incentive was for us to succeed; over time, revenues went through the roof, and they made much more money than a regular contract would have made," he recalls. Airtel could now focus on its core competencies. "Be it customer service, network expansion, or innovation, it allowed them to streamline operations and allocate resources more efficiently," says Shetty.

Investors, too, have been a happy lot. Warburg Pincus made a return of 5.5x. According to Vishal Mahadevia, the company's MD & Head of Asia Private Equity, Mittal had the foresight to make early technology adoption calls and build a cutting-edge network nationwide. "The Bharti Group, under Sunil's leadership, has distinguished itself by always being consumer first and creating innovative offerings. Most importantly, he has treated his partners (including us) well, with a singular focus on corporate governance and business building."

MAKING THE BRAND

Today, Airtel has strong equity and recall, but that has not been easy. The brand name was thought of in barely a fortnight. The logic was simple—air is telecom, and it sounded good. "We went ahead with it; today, it's one of the most renowned brands," Mittal says.

Then, there was the not-so-small issue of building a network across India. How did Airtel become a pan-India operation from its base of a one-circle operation in

"No one ever doubted his [Sunil Mittal's] intentions, capability, or leadership skills... He puts in a lot of hard work"

DEEPAK PAREKH
CHAIRMAN, HDFC LIFE INSURANCE AND HDFC AMC

"It [the Airtel IPO] was difficult to market... but Mittal convinced the investors. Today, it is a very different company with enormous scale"

HEMENDRA KOTHARI
CHAIRMAN, DSP INVESTMENT MANAGERS

Delhi? With a grin, Mittal says Airtel's risk-taking ability was greater when the company was small. "Today, there are a lot of committees, and I look back at what we went through with some disbelief," he says. One example: when the fourth operator licences were up for bidding in mid-2001, Airtel had to decide whether to bid for Kolkata or buy incumbent Spice Cell. Spice Cell's Dilip Modi was in the Airtel office late one evening and decided to close the deal that night. "We wrapped it up early in the morning before going home," says Mittal. Buyouts followed in other regions. "By 2002-03, we started to ratchet up our presence. There were 12-13 mobile rollouts and another five or six from fixed lines apart from domestic and international long-distance and satellite nodes. Things got pretty tough since RCom came from nowhere," recalls Mittal. Surviving that storm was a bigger miracle than the launch of Jio in 2016.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

Airtel began eyeing Africa in 2008 and tried to buy South Africa's MTN Group, but that deal fell through. In 2010, Airtel acquired Kuwait's Zain Group, which had operations in 15 countries in Africa. The $10.7-billion acquisition, completed in 2013, gave Mittal a huge footprint, but Zain's operations were steeped in losses. Mittal knew how to stop the bleeding, and it is profitable now.

Today, Airtel is at the forefront of the digital economy, says Deloitte's Shetty. As 5G technology takes root, Airtel is everywhere: from manufacturing, mobility, and logistics to healthcare and IoT. It already has over 31 million 5G phones on its network, and Shetty sees a CAGR of 43.8% for India's 5G market over 2023-31, to $178 billion.

Then, there is OneWeb, a network of over 600 small satellites for communications, which Mittal calls the last frontier. About 2 billion people live in "dark radio areas" where there is no signal because it does not pay to set up towers there. But this dark area is also a huge market for satellite broadband, which Shetty says can grow 36% annually to reach $1.9 billion by the decade's end.

Satellite-based telephony services go back to the late 1990s when the Iridium satellite network made voice calls possible from any place on Earth. But Iridium sank under the cost of the satellites. Today, the world is watching OneWeb, which has put these communication satellites in orbit. "Just imagine them circling the globe in 12 planes at 25,000 km an hour and covering every square inch of land, water, and earth. That's really powerful," Mittal says enthusiastically. He believes the new service will complement mobile telephony, not replace it.

Mittal builds the trust of people around him. Parekh says people stick with him for years. "He puts in a lot of hard work." Parekh recalls how Mittal reached out to him for someone to chair the audit committee. "I gave him two or three names, and he asked me, 'Who would I take?'" Parekh suggested V.K. Vishwanathan, then with Bosch. "'If you have recommended someone, it must be the right choice,' Mittal said," he recalls, adding that success has not gone to his head.

Success to Mittal means becoming more responsible. "Now, there are a lot of stakeholders. As the organisation's founder, you feel a little heavier on the shoulders. I would let that be assessed by people who deal with me or work with me, though I personally feel that I remain more or less in the same orbit," he says.

Winning in an industry where Airtel was given very little chance is a good feeling. "It was good to win against a very formidable force, and had I been in an industry without this kind of highs and lows, the joy of success would not have been at the same level," he says. Without a doubt, Mittal is looking at another round of success. BT

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Q&A

"AIRTEL BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE WHO WORK THERE"

Sunil Bharti Mittal, Founder and Chairman of Bharti Enterprises, talks about Airtel, lessons from diversification, and more

BY **KRISHNA GOPALAN** • PHOTOS BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

FOR SUNIL BHARTI MITTAL, 66, a crisis is nothing new and it brings out the best in him. The winner of the Business Icon of the Year award, he has built a telecom business that is among the best in the world. With a subscriber base of just under 400 million, there is a lot to be happy about. In an interaction with *Business Today*, the Founder and Chairman of Bharti Enterprises reveals the reason for his success, among other things. Edited excerpts:

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It has been a long journey for you in telecom. What are the key things you got right?

One is our absolute focus on the customer... what the customer needs, and I think that has served us well when there was [a] very serious upheaval in the industry. We had a massive following of customers even when we were not anywhere close to the pricing of [the] competition. When the service was being offered free, our customers still stayed with us and that says a lot [about how] close we are to them. Be it in 2002-03 (when Reliance Communications was launched) or in 2008 when 10-12 licences were given away in each circle or again in 2016, when [Reliance] Jio entered the market.

Then there is our strength in investing in [the] network beyond our capabilities... The [telecom] business... is only about three things... network, network, network. If your network is doing well, the pressure on customer care goes down with limited churn and higher loyalty. Conversely, if you don't have a good network, you will just not succeed... [so] we invested heavily in [our] network. In 2012, we put [out] our first 4G network and that was four years before Jio. People told us we were too early and that a lot of money was being spent. A lot of people within the company were unhappy with that... History has now shown we made the right decision. Had we not put in that money in 4G, we could have been completely trampled over. The same is the case with 5G, where we had to be out in the market for our customers.

The third most important pillar is people. This is a company that belongs to the people who work here—not to me, nor our shareholders... our customers and employees are really the focal point of this organisation. When they [employees] come to work, they feel they're coming to work for their own company.

When I ask people who have moved on what they miss the most about working for Bharti Airtel, it comes down to one word, and that is empowerment. It is unparalleled anywhere in the world and I am talking about people who come from the US, the UK, Singapore or anywhere [else]. There is no other company where people can take decisions

freely and fearlessly—and I am speaking of big decisions.

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You did an interesting thing on seeking talent by reaching out to the FMCG sector...

That was actually a learning from my JV partners. We had partnerships with AT&T [and] Siemens, to name a few. When I visited their headquarters, I used to be amazed at how nobody knew each other. There were thousands of people, and the senior management were in hundreds. It was an indication of how empowered [they were], and these are not family-led companies. I always had a fascination to create a western model-based company in India. Once that was clear, talented professionals took precedence.

The thinking was that telecom companies need an engineering mindset and only technical people can run it. The truth is you need marketers and people who understand brand, customers, and distribution. We changed the game and looked at FMCG and now it has become a lexicon with everyone doing it. We brought people from Hindustan Unilever and told them Airtel was like an MNC—much more empowering and less bureaucratic than Unilever. Today, we have people who spent time in HUL, Airtel and [were] poached by industry. The CEO of Domino's [India] is from Airtel, and so are the CTOs of Jio and Vodafone Idea. We became a combination of Unilever [and] Bharti, where you get the experience of working for an MNC and [also at] an entrepreneurial [company].

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You did move into other businesses as well...

I would say the idea at that point in time (about 14-15 years ago) was for Bharti to be one of the most transformational conglomerates creating a positive impact. There was a JV with AXA for life and general insurance, with Del Monte for a food and beverage business, fruits and vegetables with the Rothschilds [with ElRo Holdings, an investment arm of the family], plus a real estate business. But the fact is we were almost always caught up with a lot of storms in our core business and that did not allow us enough time and attention for other things. The businesses did make some money but could not scale up to the level that we've been able to do with telecom. Unlike many other companies, we don't do everything from Airtel and that includes insurance, food, and real estate. They were separate verticals within the Bharti ecosystem. But I would say, they didn't go to plan and there are no regrets.

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Tell us about the Africa experience...

It really comes down to being a restless organisation and people wanting to do more. We were debt-free in 2009-10 and making enough returns on capital. The question was, 'Where do you go from there?' Our shareholders were always saying, 'grow, grow, grow' and probably you could have grown a little bit faster in India, especially with more fibre or more fixed lines. But everybody felt that we should look at opportunities in the mobility space, where the future lay.

We looked at the US and Europe, but we then said that we are good with these emerging markets where ARPUs [average revenue per user] are low... Africa became the [opportunity] and we tried [with] MTN twice before we got the opportunity with Zain, who were ready to sell out. We went into difficulties immediately after buying it because for the first two years we mindlessly built the network like in India, thinking customers will come. That didn't happen and the market was not as elastic as we thought [it is] in India. I would say [the first] four to five years were very tough and there was a feeling of regret that we rushed into it too fast. It was going across a continent into 16 countries (at that time) in one go. MNCs become what they are over a 100 years, and here we just woke up to 16 new markets—so probably we had some indigestion. **BT**

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Q&A

HEALER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Prathap C. Reddy, Founder Chairman of Apollo Hospitals, pioneered the private healthcare industry in India, and changed forever the country's health ecosystem. Reddy reminisces about his life and times

BY **NEETU CHANDRA SHARMA** AND **KRISHNA GOPALAN**

THE PLAYBOOK IS well worn: (i) Move abroad for higher studies; (ii) work overseas; (iii) identify a problem statement in India and devise a solution; (iv) move back; (v) build a successful company. These are the five steps to success for many recent Indian entrepreneurs. Dr Prathap C. Reddy, 91, winner of this year's *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs award for Lifetime Achievement, did something similar, but 50 years ago!

Reddy completed his MBBS from Chennai's Stanley Medical College and then trained in the US. He then had a flourishing practice as a cardiologist. One day, a letter arrived from his father, which had a profound impact. Reddy and his family decided to return to India in the early 1970s. Back in Chennai, his practice flourished, but he also faced a stark reality: a lack of medical infrastructure. He was forced to refer most of his patients who needed complex surgeries to friends in the US. Many were referred to pioneering heart surgeon, Dr Denton Cooley.

Around 1979, Reddy referred a patient to the US. But the man's family could not raise the money required. And despite Reddy's best efforts, he did not survive. Reddy then decided to set up a cardiac care hospital in India.

But nobody had set up a corporate hospital in India before. Undeterred, he sought the government's support, making several trips to Delhi to meet ministers and bureaucrats. On one such trip, he

PHOTO BY **GETTY IMAGES**

The Medicine Man

❶ Prathap C. Reddy's vision was to create an integrated healthcare ecosystem. Under him, Apollo Hospitals has become the world's largest integrated healthcare provider, with 71+ hospitals, 10,000+ beds, nearly 6,000 pharmacies, 200+ clinics and diagnostic centres, and 150 telemedicine centres

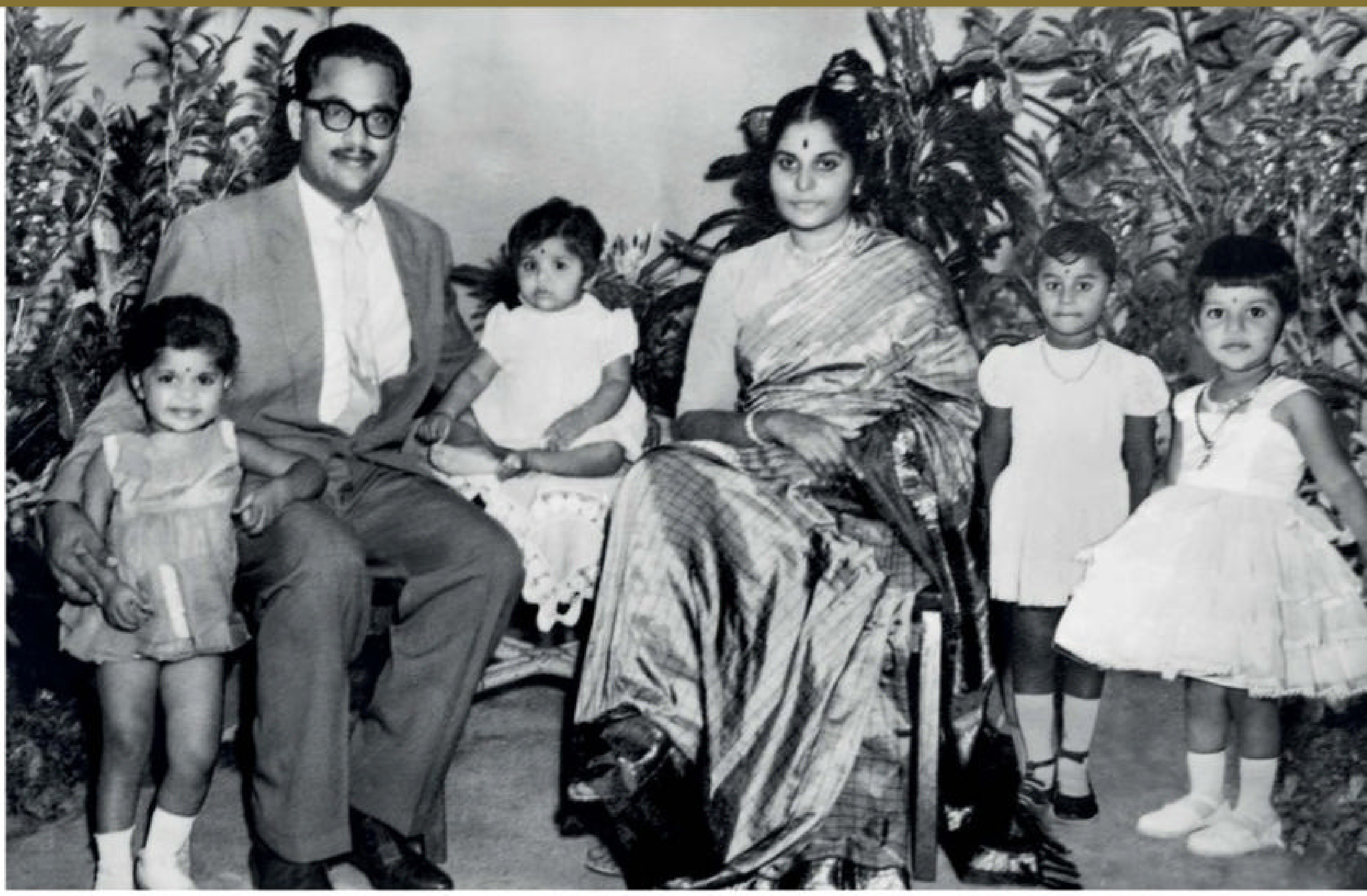
❷ He advocated for mandatory health insurance, initiating a ₹1-a-day insurance project, laying the groundwork for India's universal health insurance programme


STAYING HUMBLE According to Dr Prathap C. Reddy, Founder Chairman of Apollo Hospitals, after becoming successful, it is essential to remain humble and do even more for the country

❸ He introduced preventive healthcare programme Master Health Check in the mid-1970s, conducting over 30 million health checks to date. He also leads the Billion Hearts Beating Foundation, promoting heart health awareness

❹ Reddy played a pivotal role in shaping healthcare policy, founding organisations like NATHEALTH, fostering a shift in healthcare mindsets and policies. He has been honoured with the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian award

managed to meet then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Finally, with the government's support, he opened the first Apollo hospital in Chennai. Over the years, through strategic alliances and advocacy for systemic reforms, Apollo Hospitals has risen as a beacon of hope, offering world-class medical services for Indians. For Reddy, collaboration, compassion, and quality care are the cornerstones that have shaped Apollo. In an exclusive interaction with *Business Today*, he talks about his journey, challenges, and the way forward. Edited excerpts on the remarkable life of Dr Prathap C. Reddy, in his own words:



FROM THE FAMILY ALBUM Dr Prathap C. Reddy and Sucharitha Reddy with their daughters (*from left*) Shobana, Sangita, Suneeta, and Preetha

What was the driving force behind your decision to return to India and establish Apollo Hospitals?

During my time in the US, one of the most memorable moments was receiving a letter from my father on my birthday. He expressed that whatever I was doing, it brought him and my mother joy. The essence of the letter was clear: bringing happiness to those at home through my actions. This sentiment resonated deeply with me. Although it didn't explicitly suggest returning [to India], my wife (Sucharitha) and I decided to go back. Fortunately, with four daughters under the age of 12, there was little protest. Upon my return, I was shocked to witness the stark lack of medical infrastructure. People often resorted to seeking medical treatment abroad... That's why I used to refer my patients to doctors overseas...

One day in 1979, I recall treating a patient [who could not afford to travel to the US]. Sadly, despite our efforts, he passed away. It was heartbreaking, considering his relatively young age of 38. Witnessing such tragedies made me question why we couldn't provide adequate cardiac care locally.

APOLLO'S STORIED JOURNEY

1983

Apollo Hospitals set up in Chennai; later, it expands to Hyderabad

1991-2000

Expands to Delhi, Madurai, and Visakhapatnam; ISO accreditation for Apollo Hospitals, Chennai

2000-2005

Apollo Hospitals, Delhi, first in India to receive JCI accreditation; expands to Bilaspur, Mysuru, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata; launches nationwide emergency number, 1066

STARTING OUT Zail Singh *(centre)*, then President of India, inaugurates the first Apollo hospital in Chennai in 1983. To Singh's right is Dr Prathap C. Reddy

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What were the challenges you faced in India?

There were many challenges. Back then, the hospitals struggled to secure loans from banks and were not recognised as an industry, making access to funds difficult. Medical equipment was often treated as luxury items [and were] subject to 100% duty. These disparities compelled me to take action.

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The name 'Apollo' carries profound significance in healing. How did you decide on it?

The credit goes to Suneeta, my second daughter. Initially, I assumed she referred to the Apollo moon landing, but she clarified that it was inspired by the Greek god Apollo, known for his healing abilities. I decided on 'Apollo Hospitals' to convey a global message, signifying India's prowess in healthcare. My vision extended beyond a single hospital, aiming to establish many.

One achievement was connecting my village [to a doctor for the world's first teleconsultation] during [US President] Bill Clinton's visit to India in 2000. A child from my village underwent examination by a doctor via satellite link... and [was] successfully treated at my hospital. This initiative received international recognition and paved the way for similar projects worldwide.

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Could you shed light on Apollo's evolution and expansion and how it has contributed to the Indian healthcare landscape?

From the seed of an idea, the hospital has blossomed into a global healthcare leader. We envision India becoming a central source of skilled professionals, benefitting both the nation and the world... I believe that when you encounter a

2006-2013

Enters Bengaluru; launches CyberKnife robotic surgery system in Chennai; becomes the world's busiest solid organ transplant centre; performs more than 130,000 cardiac surgeries

2014-2016

Introduces AskApollo and Apollo Diagnostics; launches Apollo Medical College

2017-2023

Completes more than 1,500 bone marrow transplants; launches Apollo ProHealth; delivers 8 million+ vaccinations

PHOTO BY **SIPRA DAS**


1

PHOTO BY **M ZHAZO**


2

Apollo Hospitals has blossomed into a global healthcare leader. We envision India becoming a central source of skilled professionals

new idea, you should assess whether it's a good thing or not. If it's positive, we should wholeheartedly pursue it. On the flip side, if you fail, it's not the end. Instead, you should reflect on why you failed and what can be done differently. Similarly, when we achieved success, [and] the hospital became one of the best in the world, we didn't let it go to our heads. It's essential to remain humble and think about doing even more.

Several other hospitals approached us, requesting assistance in managing their technology, providing manpower, and collaborating on innovation and data management. I did this because it's not just about competition; it's about contributing to the betterment of healthcare in India. [I was] criticised for paying too much for medical equipment, but I challenged that by advocating for innovation and local manufacturing. We should follow the example of China and strive to be even better.

I believe in the internal drive and culture of India. The Chairman's influence can't match the self-motivation of [say] the housekeeping staff. It's about driving oneself to excel. There's nothing that cannot be achieved with proper planning and practicality. Our focus should be on helping others, and in the case of healthcare, it's about saving lives.

I take pride in what we achieved during the pandemic. India—whether it's public or private hospitals [or] doctors in intensive care units—all worked tirelessly. We managed to convert hotels into healthcare facilities, offering a unique solution. Mortality rates in India are among the lowest globally, thanks to the dedicated work of healthcare professionals.

While I'm not opposed to raising funds from the public, it should happen when the need arises, primarily for funding expansion. Currently, we have a cash reserve, and there's no urgent need [to raise funds]. However, if it helps in building more hospitals and positively impacting healthcare, I'm open to it. [But] the focus should be on the larger goal of improving healthcare in India.

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How has your family contributed to the success of Apollo? How do you effectively balance family involvement with professional management?

My strength is *stree shakti*

SNAPSHOTS
(From the previous page)

1. Dr Prathap C. Reddy *(right)* receives the Padma Vibhushan from the then President Pratibha Patil

2. A 2017 photo of Reddy at the operation theatre of Delhi's Indraprastha Apollo

3. *(From left)* Shobana Kamineni; Sangita Reddy; Dr Prathap C. Reddy; Prime Minister Narendra Modi; Sucharitha Reddy; Preetha Reddy; and Suneeta Reddy

(women power), and I'm grateful for the unwavering support from my wife and four daughters. Among them, Preetha and Shobana serve as Vice Chairpersons, while Suneeta holds the position of Managing Director. Of particular mention is my fourth daughter, Sangita, [who] as the Joint Managing Director, leads our technological endeavours and has admirably steered the development of ProHealth, our pioneering healthcare platform that harnesses AI for personalised wellness and medical care .

Their collective passion and expertise have been instrumental in propelling Apollo's success. Balancing family involvement with professional management has been essential [at Apollo] and we've meticulously recruited skilled professionals and provided necessary training to ensure seamless operations. Collaboration between family members and professionals remains the cornerstone of Apollo's mission. Our Board diligently reviews and advises, often refining proposals for better outcomes. For instance, when introducing ProHealth, clarifying its necessity was paramount and I personally clarified that ProHealth offers more than just a product—it provides a lifetime health record and identifies risk factors for timely diagnosis. Credit is due to the exceptional boards across all our hospitals [Apollo and its subsidiaries].

The professionals effectively manage the entire hospital. However, we, the family members, and my excellent Board—a truly phenomenal Board—meticulously review and provide advice.

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As you look towards the future, what is your vision for Apollo's role in shaping the landscape of healthcare in India and globally?

The only legacy I would want is the recognition of the importance of health for people. You may be born healthy, but you can become unhealthy. Therefore, health should be prioritised over wealth. I recall a quote that stated, 'Medical expenditure is not an expenditure; it's an investment in your health'. People must remember the importance of health right from the beginning... Focussing on health will ensure that both health and happiness go hand in hand.

Apollo has been an incredible journey, and I cannot think of anyone else who has returned to India to establish a healthcare business from scratch. It wasn't initially my plan to become a businessman, but circumstances led me down this path.

I believe that providing essential services such as healthcare, fills a crucial need in society... I see my role as taking Indian healthcare to the global stage, and I believe that India is leading the world in healthcare advancements. **BT**

@neetuc_sharma, @krishnagopalan

DATA CENTER TO DEFENCE: ADANI GROUP ANNOUNCES PROJECTS ACROSS STATES TO BOOST GROWTH, CREATE JOBS

INVESTMENTS WERE ANNOUNCED IN THE FIRST MONTH OF THIS YEAR

The year started with a series of major announcements related to investments in long-term projects that will not only boost growth but also help create employment opportunities across India.

At the recently concluded World Economic Forum in Davos, Maharashtra and Telangana pledged to bring in investments to foster sustainable development. The projects include data centers, cement plants and products for the defence forces. Both states signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the Adani Group for these projects.

At the 10th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024 in Gandhinagar, it was announced that over the next five years, the Adani Group will invest more than Rs 2 lakh crore in Gujarat. The record investment will help create over 1,00,000 direct and indirect jobs.

In his address, Adani Group Chairman Mr. Gautam Adani said in the previous edition of the summit, an investment of over Rs 55,000 crore by 2025 had been announced. The Group had surpassed Rs 50,000 crore investment across various sectors and exceeded the target of 25,000 direct and indirect jobs. The Group is expanding green supply chains, including solar panels, green ammonia, hydrogen electrolysers and wind turbines while creating an integrated, renewable energy ecosystem. It is setting up the world's largest green energy plant in Khavda, spread over 725 sq km and having a capacity of 30 GW.

In Tamil Nadu, the Adani Group will invest more than Rs 42,700 crore. It signed MoUs at the Tamil Nadu Global Investors Meet, which was also held in January, in the presence of Chief Minister Mr. M.K. Stalin, industries minister Mr. T.R.B. Rajaa, and MD of Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) Mr. Karan Adani.

Adani Green Energy will invest Rs 24,500 crore in three pump storage projects (PSPs) over the next five to seven years. Adani Connex will invest Rs 13,200 crore in a hyperscale data center in the next seven years. Ambuja Cements will invest Rs 3,500 crore in three cement grinding units while Adani Total Gas will invest

Rs 1,568 crore over eight years.

The Adani Group has a strong presence in Tamil Nadu across sectors like ports, power, edible oil, city gas distribution, data centres, green energy, and cement manufacturing. APSEZ operates the Kattupalli and Ennore ports, and the Group has invested Rs 3,733 crore in Tiruvallur district. The cumulative investment in Kattupalli and Ennore is likely to exceed Rs 20,000 crore and they will provide direct and indirect employment to around 10,000 people. Expansion plans for Kattupalli port are in the pipeline.

Adani Green Energy plans to invest in PSPs: hydroelectric energy storage systems that use the force of gravity to generate electricity. The clean energy project will create over 4,400 jobs across the state, with the company investing around Rs 25,000 crore.

The city gas distribution network covers Cuddalore and Tiruppur through Adani Total Gas. The network serves over 5,000 homes with piped gas and has over 100 km of pipelines on an investment of Rs 180 crore. The company plans to scale up its investment nine-fold to expand offerings in city gas distribution, liquefied natural gas and electric vehicles. The initiatives will create over 2,000 jobs.

One of the world's largest single-location solar power installations, with a generation capacity of 648 MW, is in Tamil Nadu. The Kamuthi Solar Power Project was commissioned in 2016 on an investment of over Rs 4,500 crore. The project, spread over 2,500 acres, was completed within a record eight months. It is connected to a 400 kV substation of Tamil Nadu TRANSCO, powering 2,65,000 homes with clean, affordable and sustainable energy.

Ambuja and ACC have invested Rs 550 crore to build an annual capacity of 1 million tonnes. These would be ramped up to 14 million metric tonnes. An amount of Rs 3,500 crore would be invested to set up three plants – in Madukkarai (2 million tonnes capacity) and in Kattupalli and Tuticorin (6 million tonnes each). The plants will create over 5,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities.

The Adani Group operates Chennai's most advanced data centre. With 33 MW capacity, the Adani-EdgeConnex data centre is a network neutral facility powered by renewable energy. It acts as a gateway to a global network of data centres, along with access to other data markets in India. Its capacity will be enhanced to 200 MW on an investment of Rs 13,200 crore, which will be one of India's largest single-location investments in digital infrastructure.

At the World Economic Forum, an MoU was signed in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Mr Eknath Shinde and Mr Gautam Adani to set up 1 GW hyperscale data center infrastructure on an investment of Rs 50,000 crore over the next 10 years.

The data center infrastructure will be set up in key locations like Mumbai or Navi Mumbai and Pune and will be powered by renewable energy, which will enhance the green energy infrastructure in Maharashtra. The project will provide direct and indirect employment to 20,000 people. The Adani Group also intends to make deemed distribution investments to power the planned 1 GW hyperscale data center infrastructure.

Telangana also signed four MoUs for investment of over Rs 12,400 crore at the World Economic Forum in the presence of Chief Minister Mr Revanth Reddy and Mr Gautam Adani. Adani Enterprises Limited (AEL) will invest over Rs 5,000 crore in a 100 MW data center, powered by renewable energy, over the next five to seven years. AEL will work closely with local micro, small and medium enterprises, and startups to develop a globally competent supplier base for the project, which will create employment opportunities for about 600 people.

Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL) will invest more than Rs 5,000 crore to set up two PSPs – of 850 MW capacity at Koyabestagudem and 500 MW capacity at Nacharam. Ambuja Cements will invest Rs 1,400 crore to set up a 6 MTPA plant in the next five years. The unit will be set up across 70 acres and will significantly enhance Ambuja's capability. The project will provide employment to over 4,000 people.

Adani Defence Systems and Technologies will invest over Rs 1,000 crore in 10 years to set up a comprehensive ecosystem for the research, development, design, manufacturing and integration of counter drone and missile systems at Adani Aerospace Park. The ecosystem will significantly enhance the defence capability of the country, and would provide employment to more than 1,000 people.

BEST CEOs • **IMPACT LEADER OF THE YEAR**

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

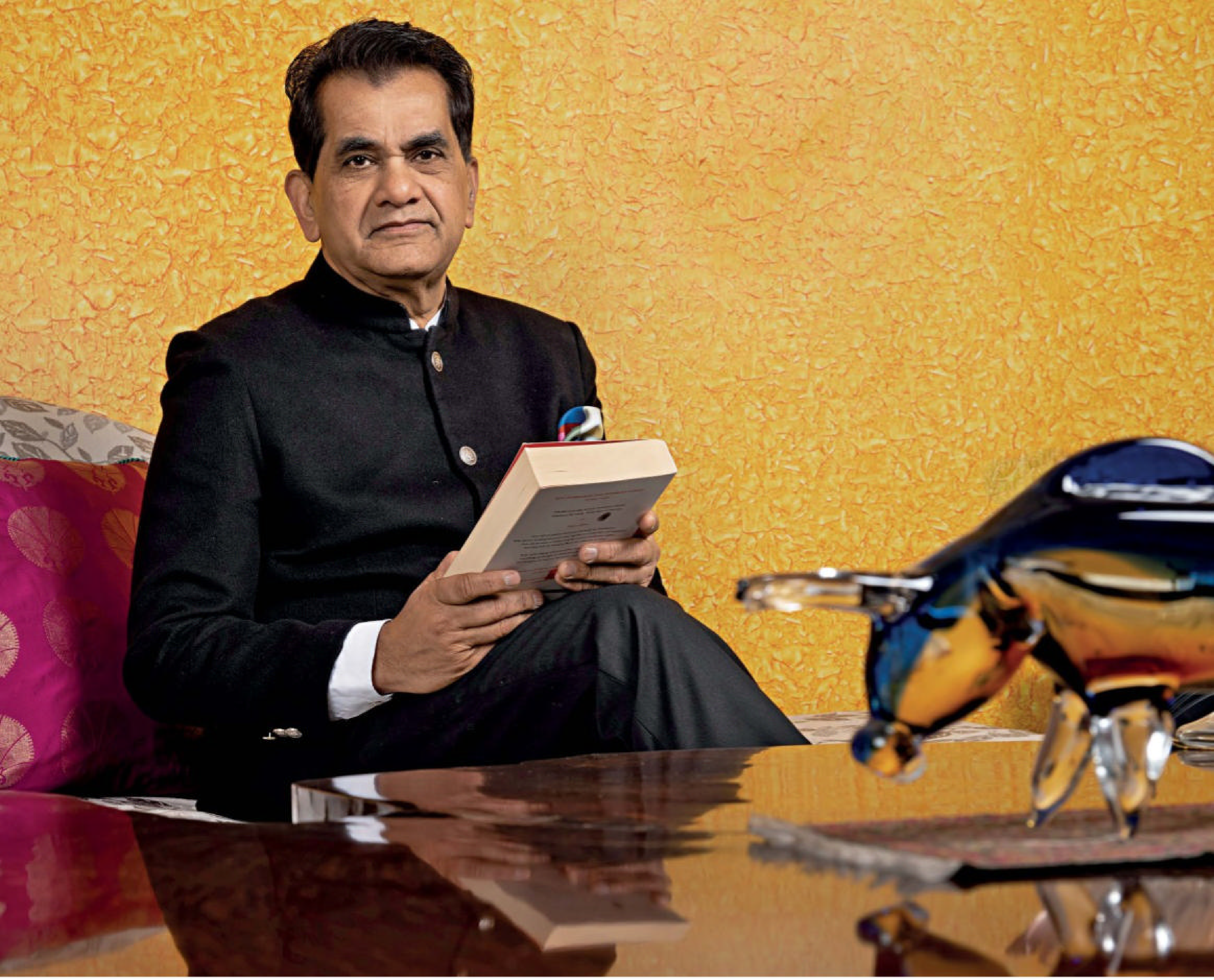
AMITABH KANT, AN EXPERT POLICYMAKER KNOWN FOR HIS CLARITY OF VISION AND HARD WORK, WAS A KEY PLAYER IN MAKING INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY A RESOUNDING SUCCESS AS ITS SHERPA

By **Surabhi**

PHOTOS BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

VERY FEW PEOPLE can boast of a career spanning more than four decades that has seen them soar from one zenith to another, taking on bigger challenges in each successive assignment. But that's natural progression for Amitabh Kant. India's G20 Sherpa was also responsible for the Incredible India tourism campaign in the early part of this millennium and played a driving role in the country's pursuit of becoming a global manufacturing hub with the Make in India initiative.

A retired 1980-batch Indian Administrative Service officer from the Kerala cadre, 67-year-old Kant is known for being an administrator par excellence, who has managed to thrive in diverse assignments. Known as a decisive thinker and clear speaker with a 'can do' attitude, he has worked across various ministries in his state cadre as well as at the Centre. His list of assignments includes Secretary, Kerala Tourism; CMD, India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC); and Joint Secretary, Tourism in the Government of India. He has also worked as Chairman of the Delhi-Mum-



THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE For Amitabh Kant, reading is a passion. He likes to keep himself updated with the latest trends and learn new things

bai Industrial Development Corporation (2009-14); Secretary, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (2014-16); and the Chief Executive Officer of the NITI Aayog (2016-22).

Throughout his career, he has helped mould and take forward flagship national initiatives such as Startup India, Make in India, Incredible India, Kerala: God's Own Country and the Aspirational Districts programme.

But perhaps his most successful stint has been as India's G20 Sherpa. Kant was appointed to the role in July 2022, months ahead of India assuming the presidency of this multilateral forum from December 1, 2022, to November 30, 2023. He took over from Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, when the need was felt for a full-time G20 Sherpa.

BRINGING G20 TO THE PEOPLE

When India assumed the G20 presidency, not many in the country were aware of what the G20 was or what the role of the Sherpa entailed. But by the end of India's presidency, G20 was a household term with meetings being held in as many as 60 locations across the country. And the presidency is considered a bona fide success, delivering the Delhi Declaration at the Leaders' Summit in New Delhi in September despite concerns and a sharp global divide over the Russia-Ukraine war.

Kant recalls that there were a number of challenges when India took over the presidency. "There was a global slowdown—75 countries were in a debt crisis; it was the post-Covid era and only 12% of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) were on track. And there was the huge challenge of climate action and climate finance, and both SDGs and climate finance required a reorientation of the multilateral financial institutions," he says.

But it was also an opportunity to highlight India's achievements in digital public infrastructure (DPI) and its stellar growth story. Kant says that Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted the presidency to be inclusive, decisive, ambitious, and action oriented. And unlike other presidencies that were restricted to the capital or cities like Delhi and Mumbai, the PM wanted this one to be taken to all the states.

"So, we ended up doing about 220 meetings in all the states and Union Territories. He wanted it to be a people's presidency," Kant says, adding that this required huge logistics and students from schools and colleges had to be involved. "This was the first time that foreign policy was taken to the people of India," he adds.

The next big challenge was arriving at a consensus as multilateralism had taken a back seat. "We struggled with it throughout the year... all ministerials had failed. But in the final round, we were able to build a consensus on all key issues—with 83 paras and 217 outcomes!" Kant says, adding that the most important of these was reaching a consensus on the Russia-Ukraine conflict paragraph—something that even the UN had failed to do. This paragraph took "about 300 hours of negotiations, about 250 bilaterals and 17 drafts", he shares.

No wonder then that the high-powered jury that picked the winners of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year recommended that he be given a special Impact Leader of the Year award.

KANT WHO CAN

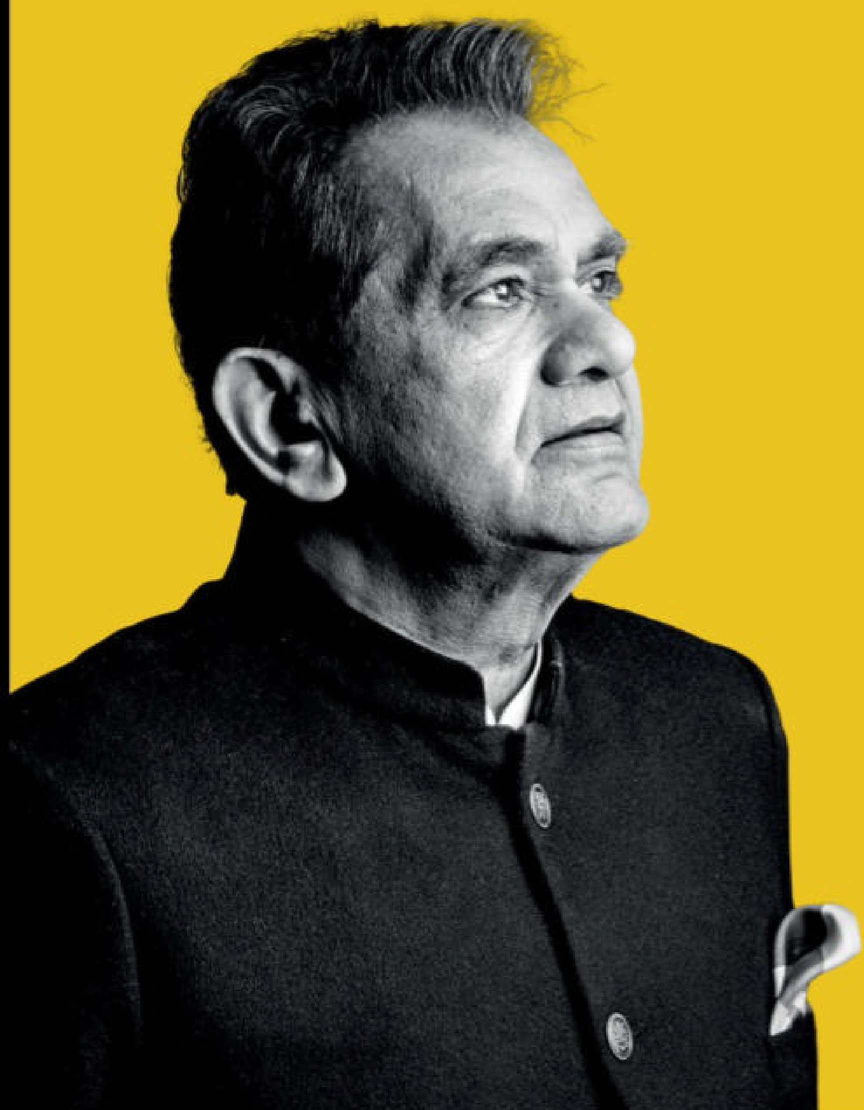
Those who know Kant say he has great clarity of mind and is a decisive speaker with a proactive approach, who works as hard—if not harder—than his team. He is also known to be extremely generous and helpful.

"Amitabh is a brilliant guy and a wonderful human being, and we both reach out to each other when we need advice on something," says Piyush Pandey, Chief Advisor of Ogilvy India, who has known Kant for 50 years.

The advertising veteran, who was the G20 Sherpa's batchmate at Delhi's St. Stephen's College, says they did not know each other too well in college as he was a cricketer, while Kant was more academically oriented. But later, they worked together on

A FINE ACT

- Amitabh Kant was appointed as India's G20 Sherpa in July 2022
- This was months before India's year-long presidency of the G20 started, from December 1, 2022, to November 30, 2023
- He played a key role in taking G20 meetings across the country
- He has been an ace negotiator and managed to help bring consensus for the Delhi Declaration
- Kant is currently working on taking forward India's agenda during Brazil's presidency and assisting the South American country as part of the G20 troika (Indonesia is the third member of this grouping)



THE RIGHT MAN FOR TOUGH JOBS

- Kant worked on several tourism campaigns, including Kerala: God's Own Country and Incredible India
- During his tenure as DIPP Secretary, he worked on Make in India and Startup India and drove the Ease of Doing Business initiative
- As CEO of NITI Aayog, Kant was associated with the Aspirational Districts programme, the PLI scheme, India's National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage, and SDGs
- He also served as Chairman and CEO of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation

NAVIGATING INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY

- A global slowdown and Covid-19 had impacted economies when India took over the G20 presidency
- Kant, as the G20 Sherpa, also had to deal with the twin challenges of climate action and climate finance
- He successfully navigated the challenge of making the G20 more inclusive
- He was able to highlight India's achievements like its economic success story and DPI
- Despite the Russia-Ukraine war impacting multilateralism, Kant was instrumental in the G20 reaching a consensus on various issues

the Incredible India campaign in 2002, where O&M was the ad agency, with V. Sunil as the Creative Director. "Amitabh was able to take it through to the government and then Tourism Minister Jagmohan and convince them to use it even though it was so different from other government campaigns that had a lot of copy," Pandey recalls.

"We have all seen the fantastic job he did at NITI Aayog as well as what he achieved in India's presidency of the G20. I credit him with also improving my English vocabulary as I did not know that a Sherpa can be someone apart from the person who helps another person climb a mountain," adds Pandey.

When asked about the secret of his success, Kant credits his out-of-the-box thinking and leadership skills to his mindset and hard work. "My view always has been that you need to think about 30 years ahead on how you want to shape the country or the particular sector that you want to work in. Don't be a status quoist; you need to be a visionary. Second, always study and see how the world is changing," he says, adding that it is essential to keep abreast of new technologies and keep reading.

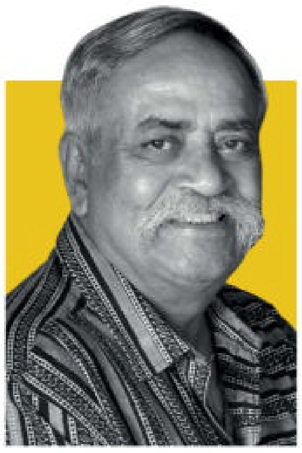
Kant's passion for knowledge is evident from the fact that he has constantly worked to refresh his views and learn more. A master's from Jawaharlal Nehru University, he is also a Chevening Scholar. He has undertaken a mid-term course with the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and IIM Ahmedabad.

An experienced policymaker, he also believes in taking his team along and striving for excellence. "I believe, in government, that you have your good days [and] bad days; but you should always take your team along. Taking your team along is very critical; they must be a part of your whole strategy of growth," he says, adding that he believes in always working with young people.

"They bring in a lot of fresh ideas and creativity. And lastly, I would say that I've never worked with mediocrity; I will always work with the best people," Kant underscores.

So, even as India was winning global accolades for clinching the Delhi Declaration, Kant took out time to thank his colleagues across the G20 Secretariat for their work in reaching consensus on the communiqué; officers of the Finance Track; as well as the Indian Foreign Service officers who assisted in drafting the paragraphs on the Russia-Ukraine war.

"Phenomenal team of young officers who delivered the #G20. Tremendous energy, vibrancy, dy-



“We have seen the fantastic job he did at NITI Aayog and what he achieved during India’s G20 presidency... He is what our Founder David Ogilvy called ‘a gentleman with brains’”

PIYUSH PANDEY
CHIEF ADVISOR, OGILVY INDIA

“As PM Modi’s emissary, he steered India’s G20 presidency... he not only spearheaded pivotal reforms but also left a mark on the landscape of national initiatives”

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE
DIRECTOR GENERAL, CII

namism and always raring to go. All of them bright, brilliant and determined to succeed. Has been a real pleasure working with them...,” said one of his posts on X (formerly known as Twitter).

A STELLAR SHERPA

Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General of trade body Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), has known Kant for years and worked closely with him during the G20. Banerjee says that as the G20 Sherpa, Kant played a pivotal role in highlighting India’s strengths, as well as the interests of the Global South.

“As PM Modi’s emissary, he steered India’s successful G20 presidency, facilitating the unanimous adoption of the ambitious New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration. He guided the CII Business20 (B20) India Secretariat in advocating for policies benefitting Indian and global businesses, while also aligning B20 objectives with broader G20 goals and priorities,” he says.

Kant’s contributions as India’s G20 Sherpa were instrumental in driving global economic collaboration and fostering inclusive and sustainable development, elevating India’s influence and leadership on the world stage, adds Banerjee. “Kant has not only spearheaded pivotal reforms but has also left an indelible mark on the landscape of national initiatives,” he notes.

A multi-faceted personality, Kant is also a regular contributor of opinion pieces in newspapers. He is also an author with a number of titles under his belt; a recent one is *Made in India: 75 years of Business and Enterprise*, which came out last year and was longlisted for the 2023 Tata Literature Live! Business Book of the Year award. His latest book—co-authored with Amit Kapoor—*The Elephant Moves : India’s New Place in the World*, was released recently.

Apart from writing, he enjoys reading. He is also a keen golfer and a fitness enthusiast who spends at least an hour and a half daily on exercise. “Physical fitness is the key to mental and intellectual fitness. I believe in sweating. And I believe that every young officer must sweat and keep physically fit,” he says, adding that all young people must have one sport that they love and one extracurricular activity that they enjoy.

This also forms a part of his advice to the new generation of bureaucrats. “My advice to all UPSC aspirants is that they must read a lot and constantly keep abreast of new trends. Second, always think ahead, think of the future, and never look at the past. The past may be a guide to the future. But always think of how you want to shape the country. And third, if you are knowledgeable, if you are convinced, you should be able to work with your political masters and tell them that this is how the country needs to grow and change,” he underlines.

Pandey brilliantly sums up Kant’s personality. “He is a true gentleman. He is what our Founder David Ogilvy called ‘a gentleman with brains’,” he says. That, for you, is Amitabh Kant. BT

@surabhi_prasad

"INDIA'S GROWTH IS A FUNCTION OF THE GROWTH OF ITS STATES"

G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant says that as a part of the G20 troika, India continues to work with Brazil to take forward its agenda

By **Surabhi** • PHOTOS BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

INDIA'S G20 SHERPA Amitabh Kant, 67, has won laurels for the way he handled the country's G20 presidency as an ace negotiator. An expert policymaker with previous tenures as DIPP Secretary and NITI Aayog CEO, he has a finger on the pulse of the economy. In an interview with *Business Today*, he speaks about the further reforms that are needed and says states must take up initiatives on sustainable urbanisation and ease of doing business. Edited excerpts:

▶▶▶

How do you plan to take forward India's agenda during Brazil's presidency of the G20?

We have had our discussions with Brazil. Most of the issues like women-led development and Sustainable Development Goals are being taken forward by Brazil in a more invigorated manner. We are a member of the G20 troika, we work in partnership with Brazil, and we will take these issues vigorously forward with them.

▶▶▶

There are a number of geopolitical pressures, including the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas conflict, and the Red Sea crisis. How will the G20 take forward the economic agenda in such a divided world?

There are challenges and we were lucky that the Israel-Palestine issue had not come up during India's G20 Presidency... The Russia-Ukraine crisis was a major challenge for the whole year of India's presidency. I think Brazil will have this challenge; we will have to work with them because eventually this is a geopolitical challenge. If you look at the world today, there are three severe challenges—the Israel-Palestine issue, the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and then there's a separate economic challenge of China and the US on how the global economy needs to grow. In all these issues, one key factor will always be the US, and therefore, a lot will depend on how the American election shapes up.

▶▶▶

What is your view on the current economic prospects and challenges?

India is on the cusp of growth. It needs to sustain this growth over a three-decade period. We will be a very major driver of the global economy. By around the 2040s, one in every fourth working person in the world will be from India. Therefore, we need to skill our population... Skilling India will be a very critical driver of India's growth story.

India aspires to be the third-largest economy in the next few years. What are your policy prescriptions going forward? What further reforms are needed?
The government has carried out a lot of reforms such as GST, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, RERA 2016, as well as reduction of the corporate tax rate. The major reforms have all been carried out. To my mind, two key reforms that are still important and that will probably be carried out after the General Elections [are] related to labour and the customs duty regime to boost manufacturing. If India has to become a major manufacturing nation and become a driver of growth, then its customs duty regime must enable it to become a major manufacturer and exporter of goods. The third big growth factor will be sustainable urbanisation, which every state has to drive... Lastly, a lot of ease of doing business has been done by the Government of India; the next lot of measures has to be done by the state governments. India's growth is a function of the growth of its states.

What measures are required so that the customs duty regime can boost manufacturing?
My belief is that we need to lower input costs. If we are an exporter, the global value chain works when we lower our import duties. Then one can become competitive on inputs and components and then over a period of four to five years, one can manufacture those components domestically. That's how global value chains work.

Do you think enough has been done for ease of doing business and the manufacturing sector?
States are very critical to India's growth. It can't be that only the southern and western parts grow; we need the eastern part of India—Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar—that are very rich in mineral resources to grow as well. Uttar Pradesh (UP) is now a driver of growth and is growing rapidly. It is focussed on infrastructure. UP is a highly populous state and there's a belief that if it was a country, it would be the fifth-largest country in the world. If UP can do this and it is doing this under the leadership of its Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, then all other states should also be able to do so. If all other states in the eastern part of India grow, then India will grow at double digits.

India is working on a number of trade deals. What is your expectation on how they will impact the economy?
My view is that if we have to be a part of global value chains, we should work towards having free trade agreements (FTAs) with some of these countries. We should look at pushing this rapidly forward because that will increase the size of our market. It should not just be a domestic market. Some of our industries like vehicles would also benefit from these FTAs as they will help them to export to global markets. BT

@surabhi_prasad

METAL MAN

Satish Pai has placed Hindalco firmly on a long-term growth trajectory. There is a lot of traction left in the aluminium space and there is the emerging opportunity in copper

By **Krishna Gopalan**

PHOTO BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

▶ **LIKE MANY ENGINEERS** before him, Satish Pai headed for foreign shores after picking up a degree in mechanical engineering in 1985 from IIT Madras. For 28 years, he worked for the US-based oilfield services company Schlumberger.

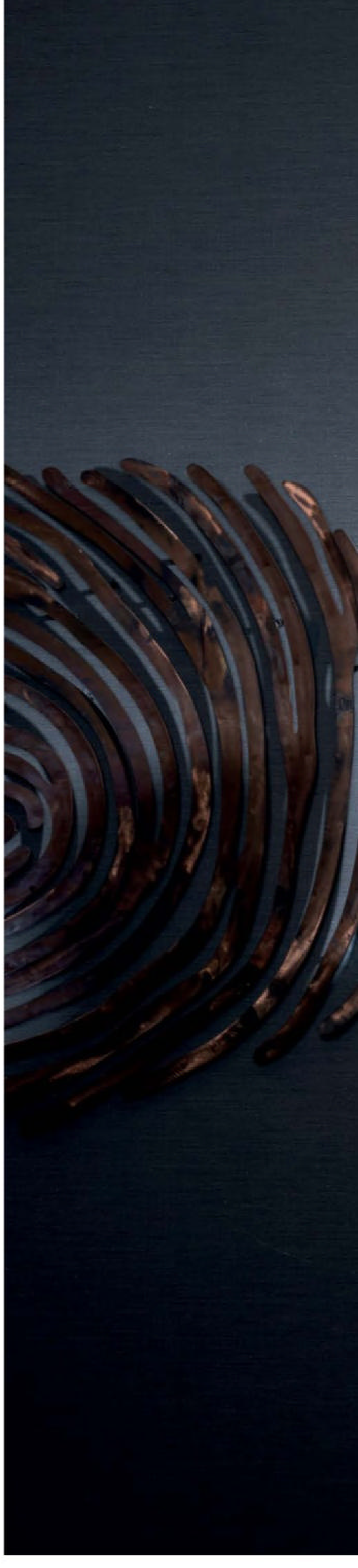
In 2013, he returned to the country of his birth to take charge of Hindalco's aluminium business. Working for the Aditya Birla Group, a diversified $65-billion conglomerate, promised to be an interesting experience. And surely, it hasn't disappointed him, since Pai, Managing Director of Hindalco Industries, has had to navigate the company through many twists and turns across markets. He is looking to position the company as a downstream value-added player, even as it looks to ramp up its play in copper.

But Pai, winner in the Super Large Companies category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year, walked into a major crisis in India. In 2014, the Supreme Court cancelled the allocation of coal blocks to public and private enterprises in light of the coal scam. It was a hugely challenging time.

"Till then, we worked on a model where input costs were zero, and it helped us make a substantial amount of money," says 62-year-old Pai. A changed scenario meant paying the market price. "Indian manufacturing needed to face global competitive standards and had to get very efficient."

Putting on his thinking cap, Pai looked for India's big advantage. Brain power stood out and so he pushed hard on downstream—engineering products and solutions—and eventually led to a thrust on value-added products. "Today, Hindalco products are a lot more visible in buses and aircraft, and we did not realise how much of an impact downstream would have," explains Pai.

To Pai, coming up with a strategy is not a eureka moment but a response to the environment. "The coal block issue was a shock, and Hindalco's shares were down to ₹70 (it is around ₹570 now), but we needed to make things work.



SNIFFING OUT OPPORTUNITIES
Satish Pai, Managing Director, Hindalco Industries

Since then, revenue, Ebitda, and our share price have all taken off." Maintaining that it is a very resilient company, he says with half a smile that "only the paranoid survive". Meanwhile, net debt to Ebitda (the ability to repay debt assuming net debt and Ebitda don't change) is down from seven times to zero. "In every way, the 2013–14 crisis taught us a lot," he says. Today, he runs a strong ship that is embarking on a rather interesting journey. "We will be sitting down for a strategy session [soon]," says Pai. The move to position the company as a downstream value-added player will take time, but it is one that must be done, he says. As the world changes, so will Hindalco's core aluminium business, and there is a huge opportunity to stand out. Pai clearly does not want to let that one pass.

The desire to position Hindalco as a downstream player is part of the larger game plan. "Upstream (mining and refining) is important, but growth and differentiation bring us closer to the consumer," he says.

The acquisition of Novelis in 2007—it recently filed documents for a proposed initial public offering in the US—for $6 billion gave Hindalco access to the can and beverage and automobile markets. The next step was

Super Large Companies
SATISH PAI
MD, HINDALCO INDUSTRIES

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	2,23,202
	9MFY24	1,59,968
Profit before tax	**FY23**	13,241
	9MFY24	9,876
Profit after tax	**FY23**	10,097
	9MFY24	6,981
	FY23 RoE (%)	11.65
	Market Cap	1,16,462

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Data Source** BSE, ACE Equity

Firm Footing

❶ The downstream market, people, and digital form the three pillars of Hindalco's strategy

❷ The company sees a huge opportunity in downstream aluminium

❸ The acquisition of Novelis in 2007 gave Hindalco access to the can and automobile markets

❹ Expanding in the US will need to take the organic route following the buyout of Aleris

❺ Copper can be the next big story for Hindalco as it looks to expand aggressively

❻ This is especially so because of electrification, which will lead to an increase in copper requirement

The move to position the firm as a downstream value-added player will take time, but it is one that must be done, Pai feels. As the world changes, there is a huge opportunity for Hindalco to stand out

to develop the Indian downstream business. Another component of the strategy has been to make manufacturing more interesting and appealing. "Our attempt is to take the brawn out and put more brain into analytical activity. For instance, modern smelters have nothing lifted physically but are around analysing data." Three areas really define Hindalco's strategy—the downstream market, people, and digital.

With his earlier employer, Pai was quick to learn how critical people were. He picks out Jim Collins's best-seller from 2001, *Good to Great*, to elaborate on this point. "It is based on a simple premise that if you get the right people on the bus, it will go to the right place," he says.

Recalling his initial days at Hindalco, Pai says something as basic as a daily report would first go to someone from the plant before he saw it. "Digital was not very important, and the first step was processes and standardisation. Traditional manufacturing was hierarchical, and digital today has flattened the organisation with information coming live." It also meant the skillset requirements had changed. In the past, a person straight out of school could do paperwork, but those jobs don't exist anymore, with at least a diploma in engineering being a must today. There is also a focus on making the firm inclusive, and that starts at the base of the pyramid, with 40% of the workforce being women.

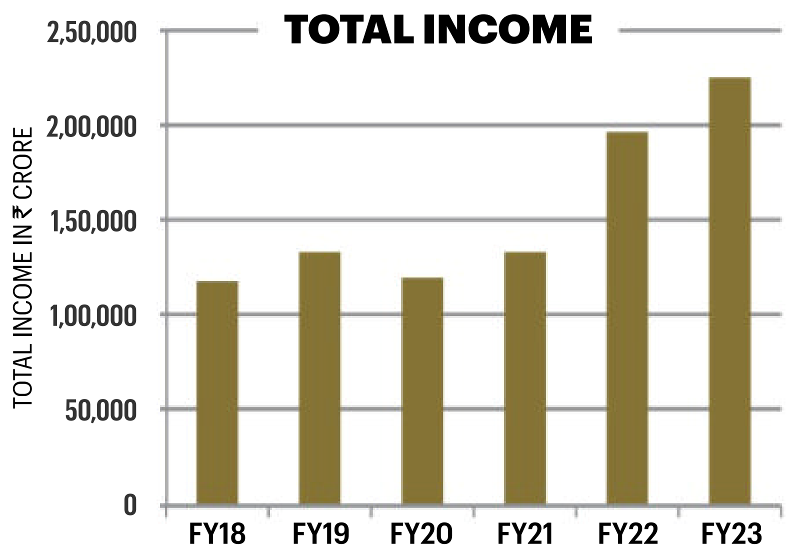
All these changes seem well timed. Most people in manufacturing are convinced that this is India's moment. Of course, it has been a long road—in aluminium, India started smelting in the 1950s, while China got on to it in the 1990s, and today it produces half of the global volumes. "Just imagine; we buy technology from them," says Pai in utter disbelief.

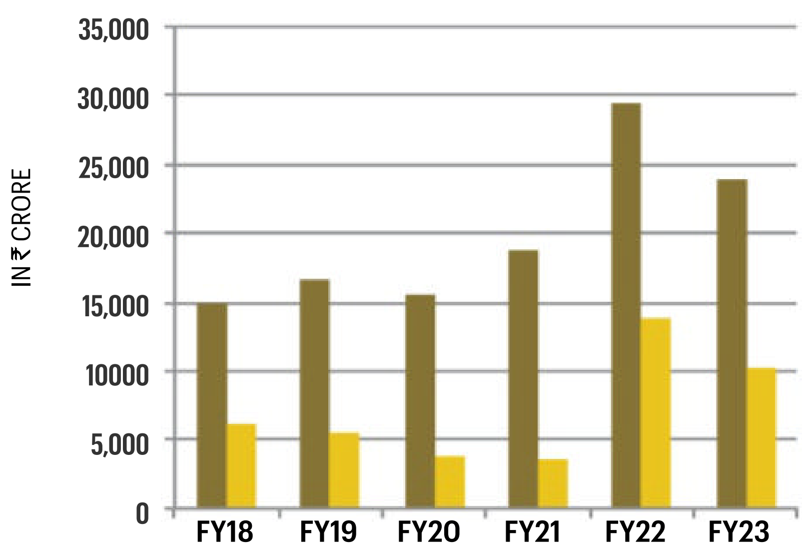
On the downstream strategy, Aditya Welekar, Senior Research Analyst at financial solutions firm Axis Securities, says it derisks Hindalco from volatile global aluminium prices. According to a Hindalco investor presentation, the firm expects domestic consumption to double from 4.5 million tonnes in FY23 to 9 million tonnes in FY33. "Building and construction, packaging, lightweight, and EVs in auto and electrical applications provide tailwinds for that. A scenario of fewer integrated aluminium producers and Hindalco's presence in both integrated upstream and downstream supply chains, coupled with a first-mover advantage, is a clear runway to capture the downstream market," says Welekar.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

▸ **Hindalco's income has been on an upward trajectory after the dip during the pandemic**

▸ **However, its profit dipped slightly in FY23 compared with FY22**





CONSOLIDATED RESULTS **FIGURES** IN ₹ CRORE
SOURCE: ACE EQUITY

● **OPERATING PROFIT** ● **NET PROFIT**

"The buyout [of Ryker Base] places Hindalco among the world's top three copper rod players outside of China"

SANJAY MOORJANI
RESEARCH ANALYST, SAMCO SECURITIES

"A scenario of fewer integrated producers and Hindalco's presence in both upstream and downstream... is a clear runway to capture the downstream market"

ADITYA WELEKAR
SENIOR RESEARCH ANALYST–METALS AND AUTO, AXIS SECURITIES

On manufacturing globally, the buyout of rolled products maker Aleris (in April 2020 for $2.8 billion) was strategic, but there was also a need to divest two large plants in line with anti-trust regulatory conditions. Consequently, only organic expansion is possible in the US. In the domestic market, the investment will be in extrusion, rolled products and expanding alumina upstream. "The time is right to invest in India with battery foils, electric buses or your mobile phone. Everything you touch today has aluminium or copper."

The business is not just aluminium and what is not widely known is that copper is equally large for the company. And the way things are starting to move, the latter is at a stage where sharp growth is more than likely.

"We manufacture copper tubes for air conditioners and also a copper magnesium alloy for high-speed railway lines. Copper is quite an underrated business, and it consistently does an Ebitda of ₹2,000 crore," points out Pai. The hitch is it is environmentally complex—it meant the plant in Dahej took four years—and one has to be top-notch on the requirements.

Speaking of complexity, the manufacturing process for copper is three to four times more complex than that for aluminium in terms of ensuring purity and quality. "Your home has electric wires where quality is key. The next step is branding copper," says Pai. That means working on a product-branding strategy under Hindalco. An obvious opportunity is electrification, and that inevitably will lead to an increase in copper production. "There is no factory today in India for making copper tubes that go into the air conditioners," he says. Though there is a production-linked incentive scheme for the finished product, like air conditioners, there is no such scheme for the parts that go into it.

Sanjay Moorjani, Research Analyst at brokerage Samco Securities, estimates that about three-fourths of the total copper use goes into power transmission and generation, building, wiring, telecommunications, and electrical and electronic products. "In the next 10 years, global copper consumption is expected to double. Copper products play an important role in expanding markets such as electric vehicles and renewable power, where exceptional electrical conductivity is essential."

Hindalco has made some moves on this front, like acquiring copper wire rod manufacturer Ryker Base, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Polycab India, which has a plant in Gujarat. "The buyout places Hindalco among the world's top three copper rod players outside of China," says Moorjani. Another initiative is the plan to invest ₹2,000 crore to establish a copper and e-waste recycling facility.

In terms of challenges, Pai outlines green energy. "We need a steady source of power. In France, it is nuclear, and in Norway, it is hydroelectric," he says. The downstream operation requires much less power than smelting. "In the West, most of the smelters have shut down. The Middle East has nuclear plants like China and Germany, and we must look at that option in India." It is a challenge that needs to be addressed, given the thrust on sustainability across the world.

The next round of growth for Hindalco will have no paucity of opportunities and challenges. It promises to be a busy time for Pai. BT

@krishnagopalan

TURBOCHARGED

Sanjiv Puri has broadened ITC's reach well beyond cigarettes. The demerger of its hotels business shows the firm's push to keep the growth engine well oiled

By **Sourav Majumdar** & **Krishna Gopalan**

PHOTO BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

▶ **DESPITE A BUSY** work schedule, Sanjiv Puri is particular about two things: he begins each day with 30 minutes of meditation and ends it with 45 minutes of yoga, regardless of where he is.

The meditation and yoga help Puri, 61, the Chairman and MD of ITC, steer the company's diverse businesses. Since he took charge as MD in May 2018 and Chairman a year later, ITC has grown rapidly across segments, be it on revenue, profitability, or market share. The ITC stock, which the markets did not warm up to for many years, has surged over the last 24 months by 86.18%. For a company primarily associated with cigarettes, the growth in its FMCG business has placed it in the industry's top deck. Last year, ITC announced the much-expected demerger of its ₹2,600-crore hotel business, allowing investors to participate in another business.

Other pieces in the ITC story—agri, paperboards, paper and packaging, and information technology—are interestingly poised. The synergy between businesses often becomes a strategic differentiator. The ability to innovate and build on a robust backend is expected to write the next chapter of ITC's growth story.

Large Companies
SANJIV PURI
CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR, ITC LTD

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	76,518.2
	9MFY24	57,394
Profit before tax	**FY23**	25,866.1
	9MFY24	20,278.3
Profit after tax	**FY23**	19,476.7
	9MFY24	15,560.7
	FY22 RoE (%)	30.1
	Market Cap	5,13,703

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Data Source** BSE, ACE Equity

CONSUMER TECH

One loses count of the times Puri mentions "digital" during our two-hour conversation. In his elegant room at ITC's Virginia House headquarters in Kolkata, he says digital has to be mainstreamed. "For us, it must be as pertinent as any manager looking at his email. Everyone must be upskilled, and we already have the infrastructure," says Puri, winner in the Large Companies category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking.

How is ITC taking to digital technology? *Namma Chakki* (any of the 12 types of grains ground to order)

DIVERSE PLAY
Sanjiv Puri, Chairman & MD, ITC Ltd

is one example of mass customisation. ITC buys agricultural produce through Astra, an artificial intelligence and machine learning platform that helps in smart sourcing or strengthening "our supply chain with digital", he explains. The impact of digital is now palpable. In the all-critical sales function, ITC taps 12,000 variables. For instance, a salesman has a Generative AI app that points towards trends in his area: it could even be a country fair where the snacks portfolio can be pushed.

Not only is a lot of time saved, it is also put to better use. And the insights are invaluable. Puri says concepts can be tested online with tools such as Unnati, ITC's B2B app, and Sixth Sense, a sensing engine. That is the first stage. "Our factories have simulation tools, and once a product is ready for launch, the question of when you do it is decided by an algorithm," he says. That needs to be spaced out well, given the pipeline—in FY23, ITC launched 90 products and over 100 this year.

The best example was Savlon during the pandemic, he says, when people made handwashing an extreme habit. "We scaled manufacturing to move to disinfectants, and it was launched in five to six weeks," says Puri. In winter, that opportunity came through disinfectant aerosols for clothes. "Now, the use of disinfectants and sanitisers has dropped, but it gave a lot of momentum to Savlon," he says.

INNOVATION AND BEYOND

ITC emphasises R&D, driven by its Life Sciences and Technology Centre, the innovation base. For Puri, innovation and product quality are key focus areas. A recent launch was Aashirvad Besan, and, as he puts it, while it looks like a simple product, the challenge was to avoid lump formation when water is added to form a batter. "To get the right taste, you need the right *channa*, and that's where our agri backend comes in."

Shirish Pardeshi, Co-Head (Research) at Centrum Broking, believes the "cutting-edge technology-backed innovation" has helped ITC launch 300+ differentiated products in its FMCG basket. "It has enabled them to define new vectors of growth and reflects in the success of initiatives in cream biscuits, value-added *atta*, milk and beverages. It will help them improve throughput in D2C channels, including modern trade and quick commerce platforms."

Be it any business, Puri says the aspiration is to be the leader not just in financial performance but also in product quality. Sometimes there are glitches, as in cigarettes where ITC is No. 1. But it says the legal market is 8-9% of the total consumption basket. The rest comes from smuggled cigarettes. "Taxation is ex-

Big Pie

❶ The diversified ITC's businesses are FMCG-cigarettes, FMCG-others, agri, paperboards, hotels, and IT

❷ A core part of the strategy is digital, and the impact is being felt across its businesses

❸ With an agri backend, the company is in a strong position to launch innovative products

❹ The demerger of the hotel business is a recent development as it gears up for the next round of growth

"It (cutting-edge technology-backed innovation) has enabled them (ITC) to define new vectors of growth"

SHIRISH PARDESHI
CO-HEAD (RESEARCH), CENTRUM BROKING

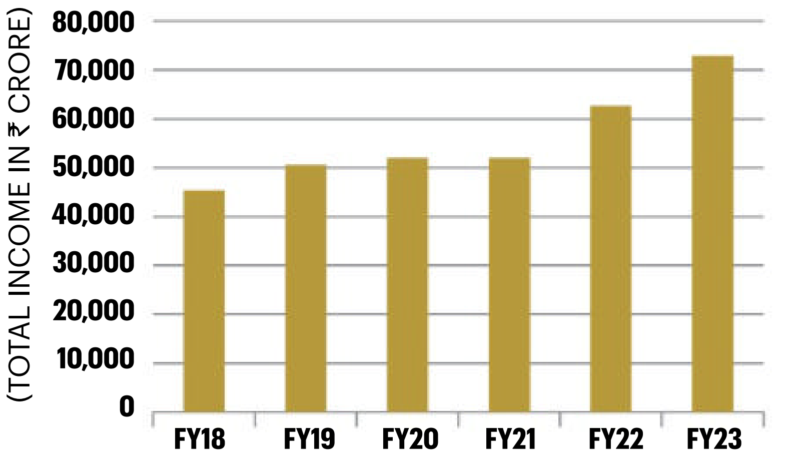
"ITC's product launches and innovation become entry barriers for competition. It has been very aggressive on both"

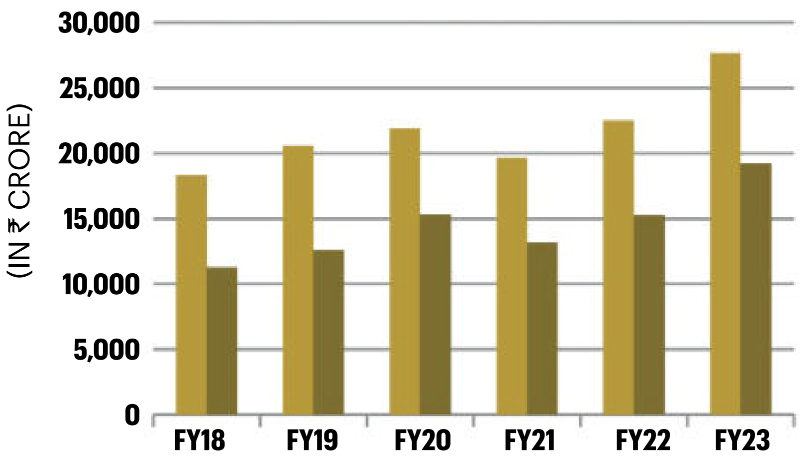
ABHIJEET KUNDU
SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT OF RESEARCH, ANTIQUE STOCK BROKING

PROFIT SURGE

▶ As cost efficiencies gather momentum, they are reflecting on both revenue and profit

▶ Many businesses have reached scale and are individually well-placed



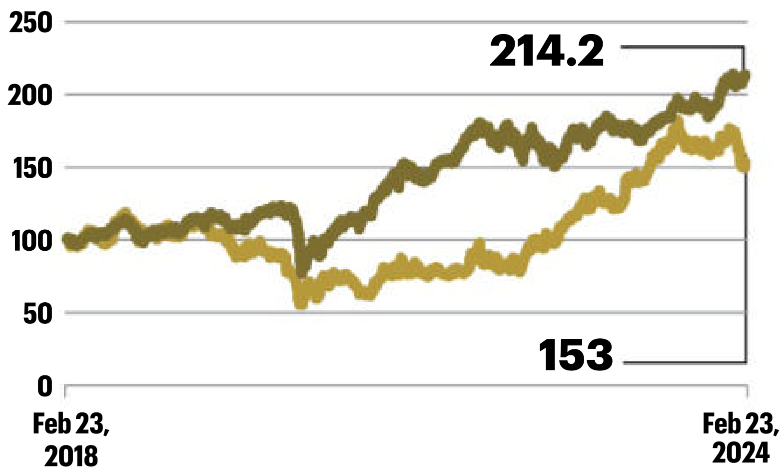


● OPERATING PROFIT ● NET PROFIT
Consolidated results **Source** ACE Equity

TRAILING THE BENCHMARK

▶ The ITC stock was subdued for many years before gaining momentum in the recent past

▶ Analysts see the innovation piece as a key trigger



● ITC LTD ● BSE SENSEX

Data has been indexed to 100
Source ACE Equity

treme, and consumption swings to illicit, but some stability has enabled the industry to claw back. We have strengthened the portfolio," says Puri. Today, the non-tobacco revenue is two-thirds of the total.

On cigarettes, Abhijeet Kundu, Senior Vice-President of Research at Antique Stock Broking, says ITC's product launches and innovation become entry barriers for competition. "ITC has been very aggressive on both. Plus, the drop in illicit consumption has helped." It is perhaps more obvious in the case of foods, a more visible category. "Take the case of millets and it is clear they are investing for the future. The success in FMCG [the company estimates the addressable market to be ₹5 lakh crore] has been driven by foods and we are also seeing traction in ITC's personal products portfolio."

A meeting with Puri is never complete without a spread of ITC's snacks. We dig into *paneer pakodas*, millet cookies (something he is very kicked about) and two versions of Aashirvaad ready-to-eat halwa. To wash it down, he offers B Natural, a natural juice brand ITC bought in 2014. "We have placed a lot of emphasis on the supply chain, which led to the creation of our ICMLs," he says, referring to ITC's integrated consumer goods manufacturing and logistics facilities. "It was important to be close to the market, and much of this was tweaked post-Covid to bring agility."

To him, FMCG is about choosing categories to grow in, using the penetration logic and the transformation from unbranded to branded, while ICML facilities have been built for scale.

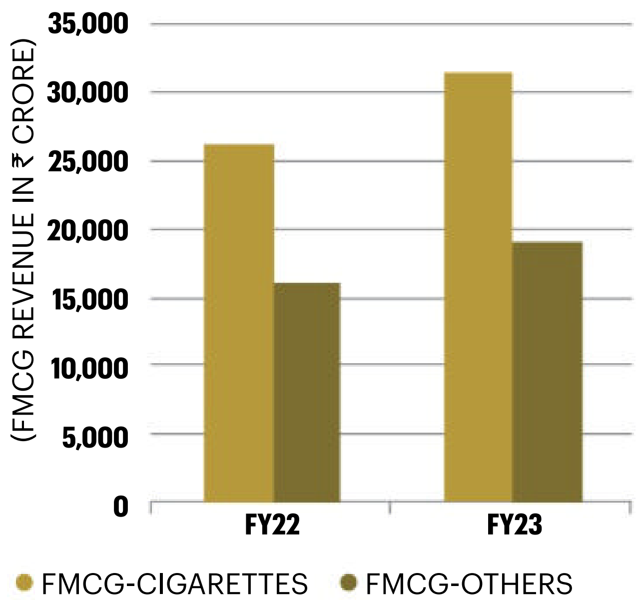
SUSTAINING GROWTH

Cut to the paperboards business, where per capita consumption in India is 14 kg against a global average of 55-60 kg. Puri speaks of looking for a new site and sustainable packaging as a significant opportunity. ITC is also growing its agribusiness, focussing on value-added products. "Agriculture is the business of tomorrow because of challenges in food security," says Puri. From an investor point of view, the demerger of the hotel business was a big story, and he says the timing is right since it has matured. "Institutional synergy is critical here concerning brands, and much work is taking place." There are more than 120 properties across 70 locations, totalling 11,600 room keys.

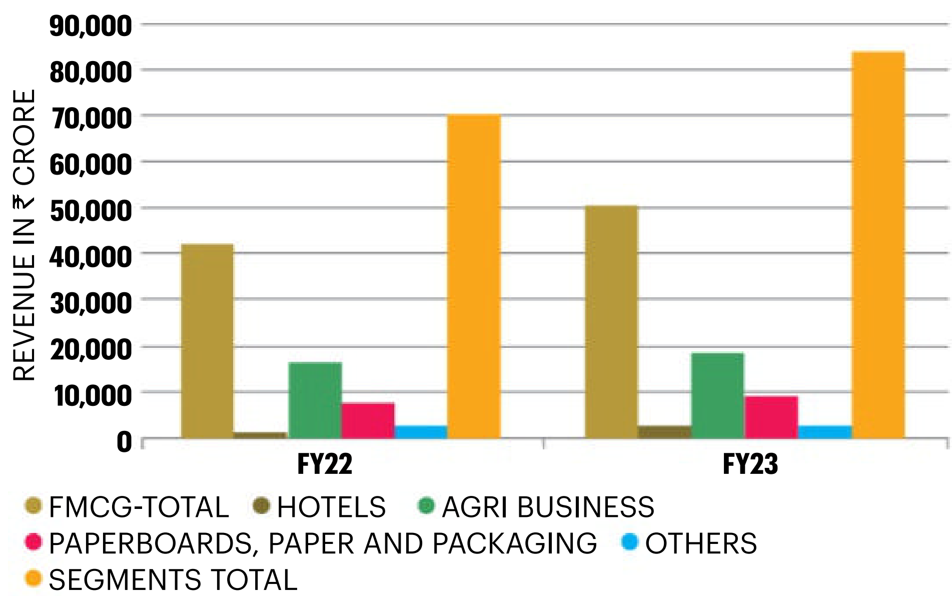
Puri admits to not being very aggressive until about five years ago when he took over as Chairman. In the FMCG business, which has seen a fair level of M&A activity, often at considerably large valuations, the biggest buyout ITC made was for ₹2,150 crore—

REVENUE ROSTER

▶ The share of other businesses, most notably FMCG, has taken off sharply



▶ High potential exists in paperboards and agri business at this point



Others Includes ITC Infotech **Source** ITC annual report for 2023

for Sunrise Foods, a Kolkata-based spices maker, in May 2020. "For us, the strategic fit is important with how much headroom there is for growth. We may do it inorganically but always with an eye on valuation," he says.

One example he picks is Nimyle, a floor cleaner brand, again through an acquisition. The rationale was the world tilting towards natural and neem-based products. "If you look at Sunrise, the category has a certain resistance to change, but we can bring in value because of our sourcing and product development synergies," points out Puri. Since the buyout, the market share has increased in West Bengal, and the brand now sells in Bihar, Jharkhand and the Northeast. The importance of being a good fit is again demonstrated in the acquisition of Yoga Bar (bought early last year), where the company saw an opportunity in "healthy, premium snacking." The two most important boxes to tick on the M&A story for ITC are a combination of the right fit and value accretion.

Centrum Broking's Pardeshi views the inorganic strategy from the past as cases of being able to turn around brands such as B Natural and Nimyle. "However, ITC's recent investments in the fast-growing D2C space, such as Mylo, Yoga Bar and Mother Sparsh, indicate a balanced growth strategy. That means entering futuristic high-growth categories that bring in millennials."

The one business that has gone almost unnoticed is ITC Infotech, largely because of its small contribution to the pie. Puri ran this at one point and is convinced of the potential. "We are in the upward quartile of the mid-tier and have started to invest more. With the disruption in tech coming from areas like digital, it is good for a small player since it is more tightly linked to business outcomes," he says. The pandemic came in the way of hiring good talent, and the growth strategy is clear in his mind. "We must be an inch wide and a mile deep instead of a mile wide and an inch deep." The business has done a few deals, though Puri emphasises that it will be around tuck-in acquisitions (the buyout of a smaller company) to strengthen capability. "We are a young company and size and scale should come from the depth of capability."

Over the next three to four years, each business's vision is to have industry-leading growth. "We must make appreciable progress towards leadership, where we are not leaders," he says. Just in case one is thinking about how long this growth engine will continue at this pace, Puri is blunt, saying the question is only about identifying the pockets of opportunity. "It is clear that the best is yet to come for ITC." That is some food for thought. BT

@TheSouravM, @krishnagopalan

CHAMPIONING INCLUSION: THE EMPOWERING JOURNEY OF L&T FINANCE HOLDINGS LTD.

By **MS. APURVA RATHOD,** Company Secretary and Chief Sustainability Officer, L&T Finance Holdings Ltd.

In today's corporate landscape, fostering inclusion isn't just a moral imperative; it's a strategic necessity. At L&T Finance Holdings Ltd. (LTFH), we believe in the transformative power of inclusion, both within our organization and in the communities we serve. Through our businesses like micro loans and impactful CSR initiatives like the Digital Sakhi project, we are committed to empowering women and promoting inclusion at every level.

Driving Change Within: Governance and Equal Opportunities

At LTFH, inclusion starts from within. Our commitment to diversity and providing equal opportunities is ingrained in the corporate DNA. Through robust governance practices and policy on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, we ensure transparency, accountability, and fairness in our operations. This commitment extends to our hiring practices, where meritocracy reigns supreme, offering equal opportunities for all individuals to thrive, regardless of gender or background.

In FY23, women's representation in our Group Executive Committee stood at 27%, a testament to our dedication to gender diversity and inclusion in leadership roles. We recognize that diverse perspectives drive innovation and growth, and we remain steadfast in our efforts to cultivate a culture of inclusivity at every level of our organization.

Extending Impact Beyond: The Digital Sakhi Project

While inclusion begins within our organization, its impact extends far beyond our walls. Our CSR flagship project, the Digital Sakhi, exemplifies our commitment to making a tangible difference in the lives of women in rural India. Centered around enhancing financial and digital literacy, this initiative aims to make rural women self-reliant by equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to navigate in their local surroundings. Since its inception in 2016-17, the Digital Sakhi project has sensitized over 40 lakh community members covering predominantly rural women, empowering them to take control of their financial futures. Through entrepreneurship training programs, around 14,000 women have gained the skills and confidence to become self-reliant entrepreneurs, driving economic growth and empowerment in their communities.

It is worth noting that every single rupee invested in this initiative has resulted in generating Rs. 123 as social return on investment, highlighting the profound impact of our efforts (Source: CRISIL SROI study 2024).

A Future of Inclusion: Ambitious Roadmap Ahead

As we look to the future, LTFH is committed to building on its successes and pushing the boundaries of inclusion even further. Our ambition roadmap FY28 includes initiatives aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion by way of implementing inclusive policies and practices across all facets of our operations as well as extending the outreach of our Digital Sakhi project manifold.

#InspireInclusion: International Women's Day 2024

I extend heartfelt congratulations to every woman on this International Women's Day 2024. Let us embrace the theme of #InspireInclusion, celebrating our diverse strengths and collective achievements, while working together to create a world where Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is embedded in every walk of our lives.

YOUNG GUN

After a baptism by fire, 34-year-old Abhyuday Jindal, MD of Jindal Stainless, has proved his mettle by helping the company overcome its supply chain worries

By **Nidhi Singal**

PHOTO BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

▶ **ENGINEERING PROFICIENCY IS** essential in the steel industry. It's no wonder, then, that the Jindal family places a premium on an engineering degree. But 34-year-old Abhyuday Jindal, the MD of Jindal Stainless Limited (JSL), deviated from that script, opting out of engineering when he was 17.

He did initially plan to pursue mechanical engineering at Boston University, but just before joining college, Jindal took time to understand the intricacies of stainless steel at the company's plant, participating in the induction of new hires, who were mostly engineers, for a year as an associate manager in 2010. That stint led

Mid-sized Companies

ABHYUDAY JINDAL

MANAGING DIRECTOR, JINDAL STAINLESS LIMITED (JSL)

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	35,697
	9MFY24	29,108.5
Profit before tax	**FY23**	2,890.6
	9MFY24	2,837.6
Profit after tax	**FY23**	2,083.8
	9MFY24	2,192.8
	FY23 RoE (%)	22.13
	Market Cap	52,868.6

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

Jindal to question the value he would bring to the company, which boasted of stellar engineering talent. After discussions with his father and advisors, Jindal decided to study economics and business instead. "Being an engineer adds tremendous value to the business, but there is so much more—other than technical aspects—that, if I were an engineer, I could never learn," he says.

That quest for a deeper understanding of business led to a one-and-a-half-year stint as a consultant at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) after his degree, before he joined JSL as its Vice Chairman in November 2015. It was at BCG that tremendous learning occurred, and Jindal is still trying to embed some of those insights into his company. "I was part of different industries and a different discipline—in the cement industry, the focus was on sales and marketing; in wind energy, on project execution; and then in auto components, on vendor management." But as he was preparing for an MBA course, he was called back home. JSL had hit its lowest market capitalisation level, so he joined the company. "It was a real tough time when I entered... it was baptism by fire."

To identify where the problem was, Jindal started by interacting with people on the ground—the suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders. He realised the company's biggest concern was delivery. The initial loose-ended commitment of six to eight weeks posed challenges, with orders being fulfilled in as little as four weeks or taking as long as 16 weeks. He zeroed in on the pain point: the supply chain. Jindal dedicated two years to streamlining it. Transitioning from a 'Made to

FUTURE PROOFING
Abhyuday Jindal, MD, Jindal Stainless

Fresh Look

❶ **Abhyuday Jindal has fixed supply chain delays by transitioning to a dual approach of 'Made to Order' for month-on-month repeat orders and 'Anticipation of Stock' for specific orders**

❷ **He effected a strategic shift to not have more than 15-20% dependence on any industry**

❸ **Secured raw material supply through collaboration with New Yaking Pte Ltd's smelter facility in Indonesia**

❹ **Has made efforts to combat counterfeit products with the Jindal Saathi seal initiative to assure quality**

Order' model—where the firm only makes the product once the order comes in—he introduced a dual approach. The firm would continue to follow the 'Made to Order' approach for month-on-month repeat orders, but for specific orders, it would move to an 'Anticipation of Stock' approach, where the firm would have some buffer inventory.

That done, Jindal analysed years of company data, applying the insights from BCG, and realised that another issue was the heavy dependence on specific industries. That triggered the next change, which was to not have more than 15-20% dependence on any industry or geography. This strategic shift shielded JSL from market fluctuations. For instance, at the peak of the lockdown in 2020 because of Covid-19, when the auto industry faced a downturn, sales fell 60%. The company redirected volumes to other segments, preventing a dip. Similarly, facing a 15% export duty in 2022, impacting 25–30% of exports to the US and Europe, Jindal says the firm prioritised long-term contracts, absorbing losses on unscheduled exports, and rerouting the volume to the domestic market.

It had to shore up the raw material supply, considering the high volatility, particularly in nickel. The rising price of nickel posed a significant challenge for JSL. To address this, in March 2023, JSL entered a partnership with New Yaking Pte Ltd, investing $157 million over two years for a 49% equity stake in a nickel pig iron smelter facility in Indonesia.

Around this time, Jindal turned his attention to the opportunities opened up by technological change. JSL became the first firm in India's metals sector to implement automated logistics systems. The entire truck ordering process is now fully automated, and efforts are underway to automate supply chain and procurement processes. "There are many firsts that we are working on that will not only become a showcase for Indian companies, but even global companies, because we are now at a size where we are no longer [just] a domestic player."

But perhaps the biggest challenge he had to tackle was that of counterfeit products. In the stainless steel sector, where there is a substantial unorganised segment, smaller players falsely label their products, tarnishing the reputation of both Jindal Stainless and the metal itself. Direct product branding was impractical for JSL, a B2B company. To distinguish its stainless steel in the decorative pipes and tubes segment, the company introduced co-branding with "Jindal Saathi". Under this initiative, exclusive partners, bound by MoUs, added their logos alongside the JSL seal, providing a quality guarantee. "Relate this to Intel Inside," he says. Intel was not making the software or the hardware. But the marketing was that you buy Compaq or IBM machines, and they have Intel inside. "So that is our concept: that you can buy from any pipe and tube [vendor], and if [the] JSL co-branding is there, we can guarantee it is the right product, the right material, and it will have the same warranty or features."

Despite having achieved all this, Jindal remains restless. Though the company has a 50% share of the domestic stainless steel market, JSL is looking to expand its footprint. "Until now, JSL was in flat products, but now it is getting into long products with the recent acquisition of Rathi Steel. It has invested another ₹150 crore in capex, and production has started. The numbers will start flowing from Rathi Steel as well. Long products are used in infrastructure, and the usage is also evolving," says Tushar Chaudhari, Research Analyst at brokerage Prabhudas Lilladher.

JSL has also diversified into other areas, like defence and aerospace, and is now looking to expand even in terms of geography in India.

Jindal, winner in the Mid-sized Companies category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking, says his success is rooted in his guiding philosophy: "keeping your ear to the ground" and "keeping things simple".

Now that's a formula for success. **BT**

@nidhisingal

Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

मोदी की गारंटी
विष्णु का सुशासन

हमने बनाया है
हम ही संवारेंगे

2 MONTHS OF RAPID DECISIONS

For Farmers

- Decision to immediately release the outstanding paddy bonus amount of Rs 3716 crore to 13 lakh farmers.
- Decision to procure 21 quintals of paddy per acre from farmers.
- Provision of Rs 10,000 crore under 'Krishak Unnati Yojana' (Farmers' Prosperity Scheme).

For Rural Residents

- Provision of Rs 4,500 crore for free tap connections to 50 lakh rural families.

For the Poor

- Decision to provide free ration to 69.92 lakh poor families for five years.
- Provision of Rs 8369 crore for construction of 18 lakh houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.
- Decision to provide annual assistance of Rs 10,000 to landless agricultural labourers under 'Dindayal Upadhyay Krishi Majdur Kalyan Yojana'.

For Women

- Decision to provide financial assistance of Rs 12,000 annually at the rate of Rs 1000 per month under 'Mahtari Vandan Yojana'.

For Youth

- Decision to conduct a CBI investigation into PSC exam scam.
- Decision to implement 'Chhattisgarh Udyam Kranti Yojana' to promote youth self-employment.
- Decision to give relaxation of 5 years in the prescribed age limit for youth in various government recruitments including Police Department.

For All Residents of Chhattisgarh

- Decision to implement the 'Ram Lalla Darshan Yojana' for Ayodhya Yatra.

For Tribals

- Decision to increase the remuneration to tendu leaf collectors from Rs 4,000 per standard bag to Rs 5,500 per standard bag.

For Rapid Development of Chhattisgarh

- Provision of Rs 300 crore for construction of Katghora to Dongargarh rail line.

For General Families

- Decision to provide electricity at half price up to 400 units per month.

For Corruption Prevention

- Decision to establish the 'Atal Monitoring Portal' to monitor the implementation of government schemes.
- Decision to implement online permit system for transparent coal transportation.

For the Preservation and Promotion of Chhattisgarhi Culture

- Decision to restore the glory of Rajim, the city of historical and cultural significance in Chhattisgarh, through the Rajim Kumbh (Kalp) festival.

SIMPLE, FEARLESS, DECISIVE LEADERSHIP

Shri Vishnu Deo Sai
Chief Minister
Chhattisgarh

सबका साथ, सबका विकास, सबका विश्वास और सबका प्रयास

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THE MAN WITH THE IRON FIST

The pandemic led to an existential crisis for Ramkrishna Forgings and its MD, Naresh Jalan. But Jalan's quick thinking and adaptability brought the company around

By **Ashish Rukhaiyar**

▶ **FIVE YEARS AGO** Ramkrishna Forgings Limited (RKFL) found itself navigating a challenging business landscape. Things got worse when the pandemic struck, compelling the founders and the leadership team to reassess their strategies. What precisely led to this downturn? The company's financials paint a vivid picture of the existential crisis. From a robust bottom line of ₹120.11 crore in FY19, RKFL witnessed a stark decline to ₹9.70 crore in FY20, followed by a modest recovery to ₹20.67 crore in FY21.

"The transition of Ramkrishna Forgings started four-five years ago. There are two RKFLs actually—one pre-pandemic and the other one post-pandemic. RKFL had a different kind of working style post the pandem-

Emerging Companies

NARESH JALAN

MANAGING DIRECTOR, RAMKRISHNA FORGINGS LTD

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	3,192.9
	9MFY24	2,931.6
Profit before tax	**FY23**	374.4
	9MFY24	330.8
Profit after tax	**FY23**	248.1
	9MFY24	247.6
	FY23 RoE (%)	21.01
	Market Cap	13,584.2

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

THE IRON MAN Naresh Jalan, Managing Director, Ramkrishna Forgings Ltd ic," says Naresh Jalan, 47, Managing Director of RKFL, who has emerged as the winner in the Emerging Companies category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking.

"We went through one of the toughest times of our careers. The pandemic brought to light that a company cannot grow with debt and that is one thing we changed in the post-pandemic era. We decided that the firm has to grow but will grow with free cash flow and only through what we earn rather than growing with debt," he adds.

This assumes significance as the company had historically grown on the basis of debt. But as soon as the company pivoted to a completely new strategy, the financials started to look up. In FY22, the profits jumped to ₹198.03 crore, with the last fiscal— FY23—registering a net profit of ₹248.11 crore.

"If you see the history of the company, while it was debt heavy before the pandemic, now, as we speak, we are almost on the verge of being debt free. Our debt to Ebitda is less than 0.5 right now," says Jalan.

But it was not all about bringing down the debt. The company created an ecosystem where it transitioned from an owner-driven entity to a leadership-driven firm, while putting in place a proper structure of professionals running the company.

"It is not a top-down approach but a bottom-up approach. We have a five-year vision plan which we strictly follow and which is basically the foundation of the company in the post-pandemic era," says Jalan.

The post-pandemic era also saw the company creating new verticals and expanding its reach to new geographies. "Earlier, we were only prevalent in North America or India. Now we have a presence across the globe, except China. We increased our outreach to the customers in Europe, Southeast Asia, North America, South America and Turkey. Today, 40% of our businesses are exports and we are growing at a rapid pace of almost 20-25% in terms of our export business," says Jalan.

Furthermore, the company also took a strategic decision of getting into non-auto segments like railways, tractors and oil & gas, among other sectors.

"These are the sectors where we were not prevalent pre-pandemic. Post-pandemic, almost 20% of our business comes from the non-auto sector," he says.

Interestingly, castings and forgings is not exactly viewed as a new-age sector and is known to rely heavily on old methods and technologies but RKFL boasts of artificial intelligence (AI) adoption in a big way.

The company uses automation and AI in various verticals, including production, quality checks, documentation and even in the overall accounting standards.

"From having fully loaded paperwork in the system, we are trying to get into a system wherein we work on a paperless method and work more towards becoming an automated set-up with 24X7 operating standards," says Jalan.

Incidentally, the company is also using AI to concentrate heavily on Industry 4.0, which, according to Jalan, is the "future for any engineering company". Going ahead, he is looking at almost 15-20% volume growth year-on-year.

"That is the vision we are working with. To almost more than double in the next five years' time," says Jalan.

Incidentally, the stock market has taken note of the positives and, if the stock price movement is anything to go by, the company is indeed a darling of the investors.

Changing Tides

❶ **As MD of RKFL, Jalan was instrumental in driving the company's focus on reducing debt and increasing cash flow**

❷ **Under Jalan, RKFL has transitioned from an owner-driven firm to a leadership-driven company**

❸ **Jalan has been responsible for putting in place a robust five-year vision plan**

❹ **Under him, RKFL has expanded to cover newer geographies**

Shares of RKFL have gained around 170% in the last one year, outperforming the benchmark Sensex—which rose about 18%—by a huge margin and analysts are quite bullish.

"Considering RKFL's robust growth plans via the organic as well as the inorganic route and continuous focus on high margins with an aim to outperform the underlying industry's growth, we remain positive for the company," stated a recent report by the brokerage firm Sharekhan by BNP. "The management foresees a huge opportunity to grow in the non-auto segment, including railways," it added.

"We have been able to get one of the best pedigrees of investors in RKFL and I think that is what puts RKFL in a sweet spot," says Jalan. BT

@ashishrukhaiyar

PHOTO BY **DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY**

IN CONVERSATION WITH SUMIT GUPTA AND NEERAJ KHANDELWAL, CO-FOUNDERS, COINDCX

Starting from a rental flat in 2018 and investing their savings, Sumit and Neeraj have built a crypto exchange that is being trusted by 1.4 crore Indian investors. Sumit and Neeraj believe 2024 will be a watershed year for crypto, institutional endorsement will be a key driver propelling the industry forward - this long-awaited assurance is anticipated to push the next level of adoption in India.

Q With the compliance landscape in conversation, how has CoinDCX managed to keep up, given that the space you're in is still relatively new?

Neeraj: It is about time every entrepreneur and builder accepts that the industry demands rigorous compliance measures. Instead of shying away from it, even if it is complex, the only way you can ***best serve your customers is by taking the harder road of compliance.*** Therefore, from our early days of CoinDCX, ***we put together a very strong compliance team and*** established a robust KYC system. ***Building a compliant product was tough, but our team anticipated and adapted.*** For instance, when the government mandated FIU registration in 2023, we were the first VDA exchange to comply.

Similarly, when TDS and taxation were declared for Virtual Digital Assets in 2022, we paid the highest amount of TDS in industry, around 67 percent, and were the first to simplify crypto tax reporting for our customers.

The VDA industry is still evolving, and as a responsible exchange, our vision is to build a future where it thrives responsibly and sustainably.

Q Despite challenges like market conditions for crypto for the last two years, regulatory space in India, what has motivated you to stay strong? What drove your determination to continue 'building in India'?

Neeraj: Sumit and I often reflect on the journey of building CoinDCX, from a startup to achieving unicorn status. The path has never been easy. When we were about to launch in 2018, the RBI ordered banks to stop trading with crypto companies. This led to investors backing out, leaving us with limited resources to sustain our business for only three months. What kept us going is our belief in the future of Web3, and we decided to continue on our journey of making crypto accessible to the masses. The last two years have been equally challenging, but we continued to build products in the Web3 space. Our self-custodial wallet, Okto, that we built during this phase, helps non-native Web3 users access the Web3 and DeFi ecosystem through their mobile phones. While Web3 is still at a nascent stage, we believe it has tremendous opportunities for growth – not just in terms of volume and investments, but also overall innovation and its impact on industries and societies.

Our conviction is that great tech products can be built from India for global users, and the outpouring of trust and love from the community has been humbling.

Sumit: What motivated me is the growing adoption of VDA among the Indians, their hunger for innovative products and belief in web3. At the same time, we have noticed a significant shift in perception around VDA, especially among policymakers. From being skeptical, policymakers have now begun to acknowledge the industry. Moving away from outright rejection, they are now showing interest in learning more about the technology and its potential applications. Measures such as FIU regulations indicate a positive step forward in this regard.

I often share within my team that we're not merely running a company; we're actively shaping an entire industry. As founding members of the Bharat Web3 Association (BWA), we recognize the significance of our role in laying the groundwork for a responsible Web3 future in India.

At CoinDCX, our mission has always been to create an inclusive ecosystem where individuals and businesses can fully participate in the crypto space. Moving forward, our focus remains unchanged - we're determined to support India's emergence as a global hub for Web3 innovation.

Q Do you foresee the crypto market taking a positive turn anytime soon?

Sumit: Certainly, history offers insight into the cyclical nature of the crypto market. Over time, we've observed fluctuations between periods of heightened activity and what's commonly referred to as "crypto winters." Presently, there are indications that we might be on the cusp of a significant shift, potentially heralding the onset of a bullish market phase.

This potential upswing holds considerable importance within the context of crypto history. Notably, there are three major catalysts aligning, each with the potential to fuel a bullish trajectory within a relatively short span. Firstly, the introduction of Bitcoin ETFs has garnered significant attention. I***nstitutional endorsement will be a key driver propelling the crypto industry forward in 2024 -*** this long-awaited assurance is anticipated to push the next level of adoption.

Secondly, the impending Bitcoin halving event holds historical significance, typically resulting in exponential price surges attributed to reduced supply and heightened demand. Lastly, the submission of a spot Ethereum ETF application to the US Securities and Exchange Commission by Franklin Templeton, an institution often associated with traditional finance, is noteworthy.

Q How have you seen the preferences and behaviors of crypto investors change over the past 4-5 years?

Sumit: There's been a significant rise in crypto adoption, with a growing number of investors showing interest in virtual digital assets. ***One key change is the maturation of these investors - the average age of investors has now increased to around 30 years old, indicating a more serious and committed approach to crypto investment.***

Another noticeable trend is the increasing interest in structured investment products such as systematic investment plans (SIPs) that offer structured accumulation of assets, providing avenues for sustained wealth growth within the crypto asset class.

Moreover, the overall narrative surrounding crypto in India is changing rapidly. What was once met with skepticism is now sparking curiosity among investors. This shift can be attributed to the tech-savvy nature of the younger generation and the availability of user-friendly investment platforms, which are making it easier for people to start their investment journey in crypto.

On the global level, institutional investments have increased multifold adding new capital to the industry, and this trend is bound to add further impetus to the retail investors.

Q What prompted you to look at a larger landscape? What opportunities exist in decentralized finance (DeFi) space?

Neeraj: We want to continue building Web3 products and solutions enabling any individual with a smartphone to take part in the Web3 economy and gain value from it. We solved the access problem for crypto assets via CoinDCX App. The key for the next big growth story lies in DeFi. DeFi has seen a 100x growth over the past two years and expected to see explosive growth in the next 2-3 years. However, to make it more accessible to non-VDA natives, there is huge scope for development in the DeFi space. Last year we launched our DeFi App Okto for the global users. We wanted to solve the access challenge for users for DeFi investment opportunities and make it almost as easy as any internet App they are already engaged with.

We have taken a step forward and are now supporting customer facing companies to onboard Web3 through the Okto Web3 Software Development Kit.

Our vision is to touch upon every segment of society and build a better, more secure, and decentralized internet.

Sumit: Looking ahead, CoinDCX aims to solidify its position as a global leader in Web3 Finance. Our commitment to 'Fi' - finance, innovation, and inclusivity - serves as our guiding principle. We strive for excellence across the entire Web3 spectrum, bridging the realms of centralized exchange and DeFi. Through strategic initiatives and groundbreaking advancements, we aspire to become the gateway that propels the mass adoption of Web3 technologies.

Importantly, we acknowledge the extraordinary potential of India's tech talent to lead innovation and shape the future of Web3 on a global scale. By fostering a supportive ecosystem, removing barriers, and empowering the next generation of innovators, we aim to leverage India's abundant talent pool to drive forward innovation and propel the Web3 industry into the future.

FASHION ROOTS

Chairman K.P. Ramasamy's calibrated yarn-to-garment vertical integration of KPR Mill has made it one of India's largest knitwear garment manufacturers, which exports to top brands such as H&M, M&S, and Primark

By **Vidya S.**

▶ **CHAIRMAN K.P. RAMASAMY** stitched up KPR Mill, much like piecing together a T-shirt—one step at a time. First, the front and back pieces were sewn together with its yarn and fabric businesses; the sleeve attachment came next with the garment business; the addition of fabric processing, printing, and embroidery capacities reinforced it like the side seams and neckline; and the sugar and ethanol business to fulfil power requirements served as the hem for a good finish.

"We didn't bring in everything suddenly. We went step by step," says Ramasamy, the patriarch of one of India's largest vertically integrated knitwear garment manufacturers, which exports to top global fashion brands like Marks & Spencer, H&M, and Primark. The profitable family-driven business generates more than ₹6,000 crore in revenues annually. Founded four decades ago by Ramasamy and his brothers, it had evolved into a yarn-and-fabric maker by 2010, catering to both domestic and international markets, with a small garment export business churning out 50 million pieces. Given the low profit margins on yarn and fabric, it made sense to broaden the scope of garment exports.

Initially, KPR Mill outsourced washing, dyeing, printing and embroidery due to a lack of crucial fabric processing capabilities in-house. But 5% of the consignment would get rejected by buyers due to damages. "When we tried it in-house, the rejects fell to 1% and we saved money," explains Ramasamy. This led them to focus on integrating spinning, knitting, processing and garmenting during 2010-15. KPR Mill now has 15 factories to spin cotton into yarn, knit yarn into fabric, process the fabric, and produce 150 million garments for export annually. It ships more than 140 million pieces, mostly to Europe, North America, Australia and the rest of Asia. Now, garment exports account for 40% of its revenues, or about ₹2,400 crore, up from ₹230 crore in FY10.

Noting an impressive 25% CAGR in their garments exports business in a 10-year span, Sandeep Raina, Executive Vice President-Research at wealth management firm Nuvama Professional Clients Group, says KPR Mill's vertical integration provides it advantages such as higher profits and swifter shipping. "In the fashion business, if you miss a deadline, the product becomes redundant." He says it has moved into high-yield products, bolstered with more capacity and capital. The firm added a greenfield factory in March 2022 to produce 42 million pieces and a ₹100-crore viscose yarn spinning mill in 2023.

Glocal CEO

K.P. RAMASAMY

CHAIRMAN, KPR MILL

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	6,208.1
	9MFY24	4,197.8
Profit before tax	**FY23**	1,084.2
	9MFY24	762.5
Profit after tax	**FY23**	814.1
	9MFY24	591.7
	FY23 RoE (%)	23.62
	Market Cap	25,501

● Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
● M-cap as of February 23, 2024
● **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

Shirt Tales

❶ A school dropout himself, K.P. Ramasamy's empathetic leadership in providing free education to KPR Mill's factory workers, predominantly women, has created a loyal and skilled workforce—a big plus in the labour-intensive textiles sector

❷ The company's strategic expansion to higher-margin yielding garment exports a decade ago, under his guidance, has aided higher revenue and profits

❸ The firm's vertically integrated yarn-to-garments set-up gives it an edge over peers in profit margins and delivery timelines

❹ It has leveraged off-seasons of the cyclical textile business for capacity expansion, while growing revenue and profits

❺ The company boasts of a strong financial record, showing stability and resilience

ROLE MODEL K.P. Ramasamy, Chairman, KPR Mill

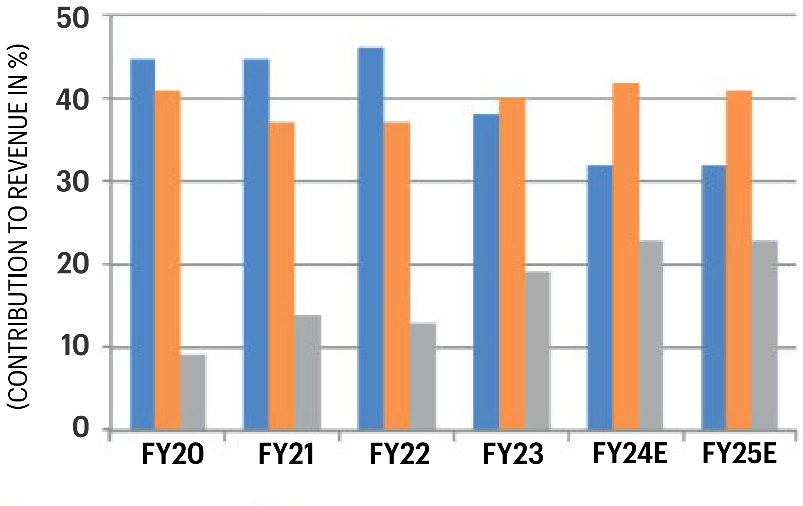
Nothing about Ramasamy reveals that he is one of India's 100 richest people, with a staggering net worth of ₹19,000 crore; not his no-frills office; not the plain white shirt he is mostly seen in. Under him—a farmer's son who was forced to drop out of high school—the company has become adept at turning challenges into opportunities.

He pioneered free education up to Class 12 for factory workers, mainly women dropouts. Over 27,000 women workers have successfully completed their studies, with some even obtaining MBAs. Many have now taken up positions in various industries, such as nursing and IT, while others are advancing in their careers at KPR Mill. In an industry grappling with skilled-labour shortages, Ramasamy, fondly known as "Appa" (or father) to his vast workforce, has earned immense goodwill.

A cyclical textile-and-garment business doesn't always adhere to capacity expansion plans. If you start building a new factory when the demand is good, chances are that the scenario will have reversed when you finish it. "The right time to start a project is during the dull phase—that's our plan," Ramasamy quips. The rationale is that when the project is completed, demand may have returned, allowing the market to readily ab-

THE REVENUE SPREAD

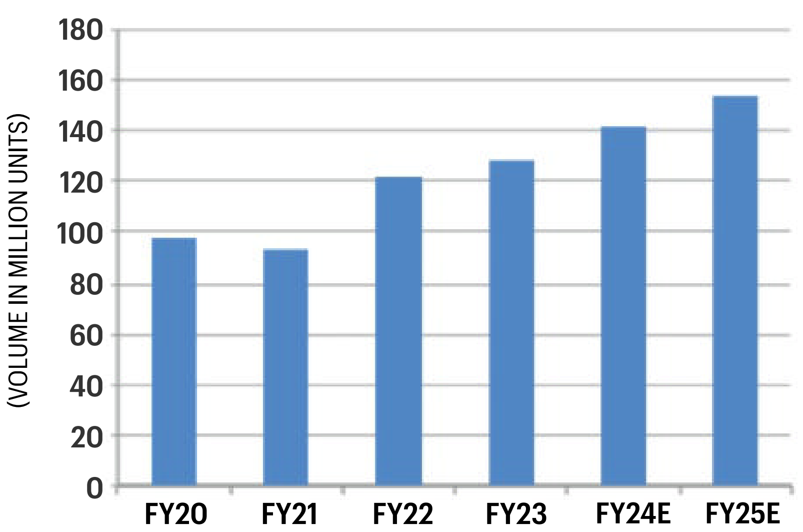
In FY23, the contribution of yarn and fabric to revenue declined as the firm focussed on garment exports



E ESTIMATES
SOURCE NUVAMA PROFESSIONAL CLIENTS GROUP

KNITTING PRETTY

Volumes in the garment segment are expected to see a CAGR of 10% over FY23-25



E ESTIMATES
SOURCE NUVAMA PROFESSIONAL CLIENTS GROUP

sorb the extra production—a sound logic that requires impeccable execution.

And KPR Mill has a war-footing strategy in place for it, too, to build operational factories within six months, a much quicker timeline than the usual 1-1.5 years. Step 1: Order machinery once the board approves the project. "Machinery can take even a year to reach us. We voluntarily pay a 10% advance to get it on a certain date," he says. Step 2: If the norm for factory construction is to get quotations from four contractors before assigning them to one, get quotations from 10 and assign them to four. Lapsing into Tamil, he says: "When there's a sudden downpour in the village, everybody in the household drops whatever they are doing to rush outside and bundle up all the grains left to dry. If it is a core task, our people will be fully on the job."

For steps 3 and 4, ensure sufficient orders from buyers and trained labourers to execute them. One without the other can prove costly, he warns. If the new factory requires 1,000 labourers, hire and deploy 500 on training in existing factories two months before D-Day. "So, order-ready, trained people-ready, machinery has arrived on time. If we do a *pooja* on the target date, the factory can be commissioned by starting production on Day One itself," he beams. Then, it is just a question of ramping up production. "Once commissioned, the road is clear; we just have to drive straight."

The most crucial aspect for this plan to work to the hilt is finance. Ramasamy's youngest brother and Managing Director P. Nataraj says the company has never embarked on a project relying entirely on bank loans, neither do they have the intention of doing so in the future. "In such a situation, we prefer postponing the project until we can create surplus funds from existing businesses. We are always very conscious of this." Nataraj, a chartered accountant by training, says poor financial planning for big projects is how even large companies find themselves drowning in hefty loan repayments and interest.

But over the past 18 months, the global textile and garments industry has experienced a slowdown, especially with the Russia-Ukraine war denting exports to Europe, which accounts for 60% of the company's garment exports. Even KPR Mill, known to leverage downturns, is focussed on adding sewing machines in factories with space to spare instead of greenfield expansions. "This year, we started adding capacity to boost production by another 30 million pieces, which is as good as a large factory. Less investment, same increase in production," Ramasamy adds.

Ramasamy says the vision is to continue growing year after year. It's quite possible, says Nuvama's Raina, especially as the proposed India-UK Free Trade Agreement could potentially unlock a $1-billion export opportunity for India. "The firm has guided an incremental 10-15% revenue growth if the deal goes through, apart from the 10-12% at which they have been growing," says Raina.

As the business has welcomed the second generation into the fold, Ramasamy's prayer is for continued teamwork in the 30,000-employee-strong company. "That is what got us here. I hope the next generation also takes this from us." BT

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1-2 March, 2024 - Ujjain

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

Dr. Mohan Yadav
Chief Minister

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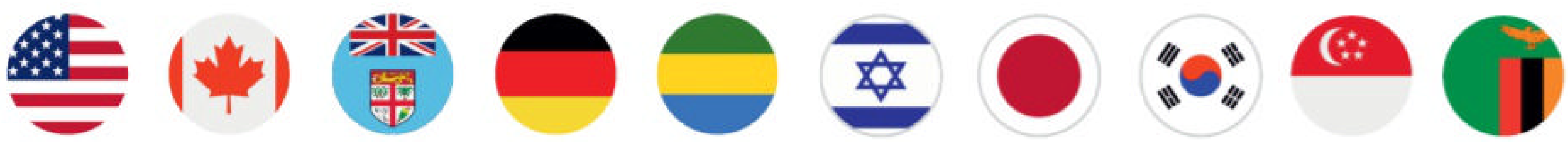
CONCLAVE HIGHLIGHTS

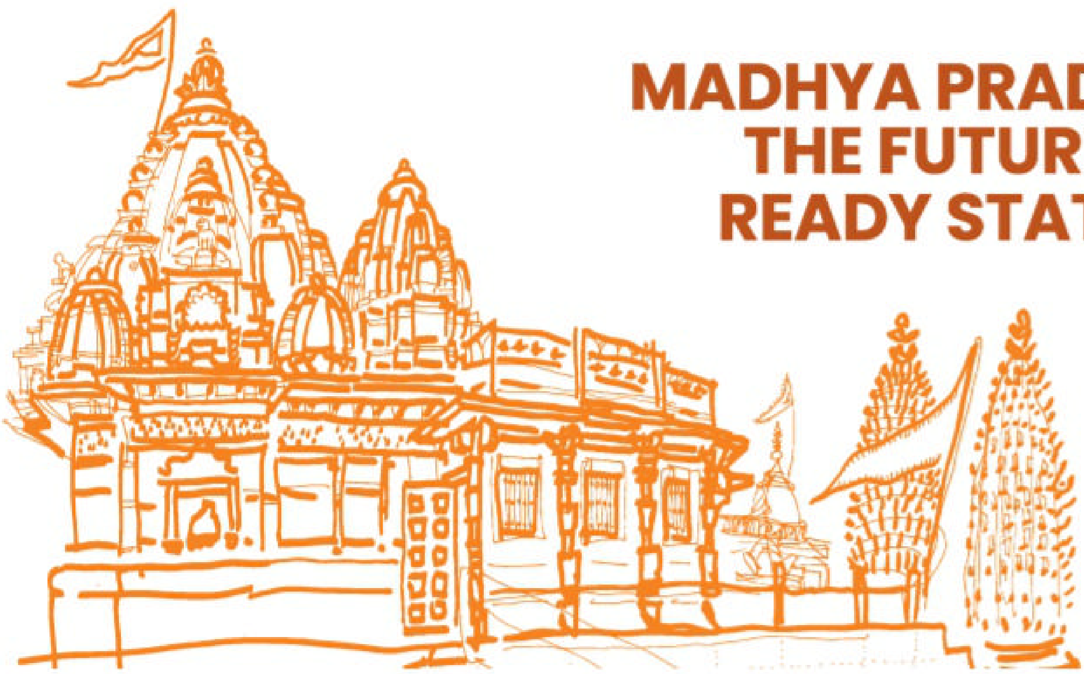
- BUYER & SELLER MEET
- EXHIBITION
- 5 THEMATIC SESSIONS

Foreign Delegates:	Industry Participants:	Thematic Sessions:	Buyers and Sellers:	B2B Meetings:
30+ from 10 Countries	650+ Prominent Industrialists	5 Sessions with 25 Industry Leaders	3000+	1000+

FOREIGN DELEGATES



USA, Canada, Fiji, Germany, Gabon, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Zambia



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ROOM WITH A VIEW

Patanjali G. Keswani's big bet on India's burgeoning middle class with his Lemon Tree Hotels has weathered the pandemic storm. And the brand has retained its zest as it looks to tap into the insatiable demand for leisure

By **Prerna Lidhoo**

LEADING FROM THE FRONT
Patanjali G. Keswani, Chairman & MD, Lemon Tree Hotels

Growth Path

❶ In the early 1990s, Keswani identified a gap between the luxury and the unorganised guest house market

❷ Like freshly-minted lemons, he embodies the essence of a modern-day maverick

❸ Today, Lemon Tree is a key player in the hospitality industry and a leader in the mid-market segment

▶ **IN THE EARLY** 1990s in a newly liberalised India, there were two very distinct sets of clients that hotel owners catered to: one, the polished, upscale customer who would put up at luxury properties like the Taj hotels; and two, the rest, who would be left to the mercy of often unorganised and inconsistent guest houses and budget hotels. That was until Patanjali G. Keswani (popularly called Patu Keswani) thought of a middle path.

What changed in the 1990s is that a larger set of consumers—India's burgeoning middle class—started looking for better accommodation. "They were willing to spend and make a trade-off for better quality," explains Keswani, Chairman & MD of Lemon Tree Hotels (LTH). "It was like an epiphany," he recalls, adding that looking at the hotel stats then, he discovered that there were only 25,000 branded rooms in India, of which 20,000 were at 5-star properties. "It was a very inverted pyramid of demand. So, clearly there was a white space, but the question was how do you create a brand in the mid-market space?"

Keswani decided to do something that was refreshingly different. LTH opened its first property in Gurugram (then called Gurgaon) in May 2004 with 49 rooms. Taking a cue from fresh lemons, the property mirrored the crisp and zesty essence of the citrus fruit in the sights, sounds and smells at every corner.

Keswani, an alumnus of IIT Delhi and IIM Calcutta, who worked with the Tata group for 17 years till he turned entrepreneur, had planned to build just one hotel, run it efficiently, and then take it easy and play golf and bridge. But fate had other plans.

"When we started, it [the hotel] was a pure mid-market product," he says, adding that it was like a 3-star property with "4-star service levels". But some customers who had upgraded from guest houses said it was too expensive, while some who had downgraded from 5-star properties said it was a step below what they were willing to trade off, he recalls. "So, we expanded both upwards and downwards," says Keswani, 65.

❹ Mid-scale hotels are receiving considerable investments, reshaping the hotel business

❺ Lemon Tree owns and operates 101 hotels across 64 destinations, including Dubai and Bhutan

Resilient CEO

PATANJALI G. KESWANI

CHAIRMAN & MD, LEMON TREE HOTELS

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	875
	9MFY24	738.1
Profit before tax	**FY23**	178.2
	9MFY24	126.8
Profit after tax	**FY23**	140.5
	9MFY24	97.7
	FY23 RoE (%)	16.68
	Market Cap	11,226.1

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

Today, LTH owns and operates 101 hotels across 64 destinations, including in Dubai and Bhutan and owns/leases/operates/franchises hotels across the upscale, upper-midscale, midscale, and economy segments. And among the Indian hotel chains, it is the third-largest in terms of the number of rooms. LTH has 9,707 rooms; IHCL—that operates the Taj hotels—tops the list with around 20,000 rooms, followed by ITC with around 12,000 rooms.

While LTH flourished, nothing could prepare the hospitality space for Covid-19. There were significant fluctuations over two years due to evolving travel restrictions and health risks. According to the Ministry of Tourism, the share of India's travel and tourism industry in the country's GDP declined from approximately 5.2% in FY20 to a mere 1.1% in FY21.

"For our sector, Covid-19 was like a nuclear bomb. Suddenly, your revenue dropped by 85%," says Keswani, adding that when one talks of resilience it's about an entrepreneur's ability to withstand shocks. "[But] there are some events where no matter what you say, you can never plan," says Keswani, the winner in the Resilient CEO category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year.

LTH has shown a remarkable recovery since those tough years. It posted consolidated profit after tax

OPERATING SEGMENTS

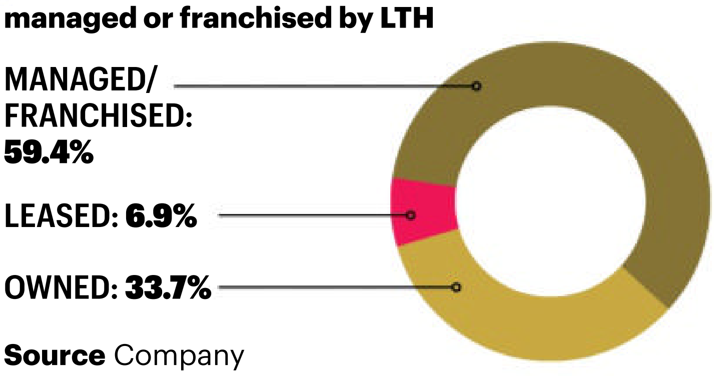
- **Lemon Tree Hotels (LTH) has the largest number of hotels (63) in the midscale segment**
- **LTH plans to focus on growing its upscale segment, which operates 3 hotels in the country**

Upscale Segment: Aurika (3 hotels)	**Upper Mid-scale Segment:** Lemon Tree Premier (19), Keys Prima (1)
Mid-scale Segment: Lemon Tree hotels (52), Keys Select (11)	**Economy Segment:** Red Fox (11), Keys Lite (4)

Source Company

BUSINESS MODELS

- **LTH has three kinds of branded hotel arrangements: owned, leased, and franchise agreements**
- **More than half of the hotels in its portfolio are managed or franchised by LTH**



Source Company

(PAT) of ₹140.54 crore in FY23, after posting a loss of ₹137.36 crore in FY22; gross sales have almost doubled to ₹874.99 crore in FY23 from ₹402.24 crore in FY22. And there are 50-plus hotels in the pipeline.

According to financial services firm IDBI Capital, there will be robust inventory addition through management contract/franchisee to drive sustainable margin improvement in the mid- to long-term at LTH. "We continue to like LTH amongst the mid-scale hotels segment given its scale of operations. With the renovation of existing hotels under LTH and Keys (another LTH brand), we expect ADR (average daily rate, or the average rental revenue earned for an occupied room per day) to get a substantial push in the mid-term," it said in a recent report.

Keswani says that in the short run, the highest growth will come from the luxury segment. "It's the tip of the bell curve. It's visible in the premiumisation trend," he says, adding that the hockey stick growth will come from the mid-market space, where LTH is a leader. "I think in the next five years, close to 40% of India will get urbanised. That's all these Tier II, III, IV towns. Naturally, there will be a growth in consuming class with demand coming from smaller towns and cities."

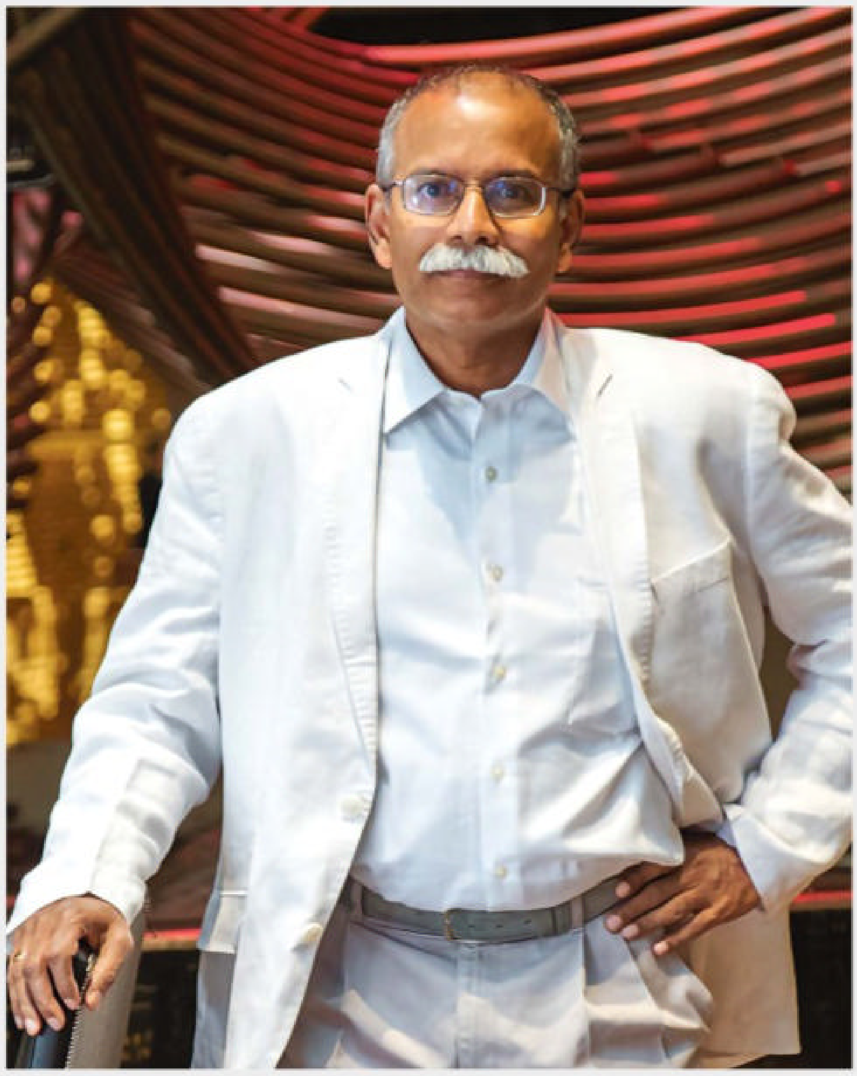
According to the HVS ANAROCK India Hospitality Industry Overview 2022 published last year, in 2022, mid-scale hotels continued to dominate the market, accounting for 48% of all signed properties. The hotel industry is seeing a significant structural shift, with substantial investments directed towards expanding the mid-scale segment to cater to the needs of the growing middle class, it says. "The next big opportunity [will be] with GenZ. They're aspirational, brand conscious, willing to live on credit more and more and moving into middle-income affluence," says Keswani, adding that as more young people move into the ₹15 lakh or higher income category, they will start consuming better.

Brokerage firm Motilal Oswal expects LTH's strong momentum to continue going forward, led by further improvement in occupancy and average room rate (ARR, a metric similar to ADR), on the back of a resilient demand scenario. "We expect mid-teen ARR growth in FY25 with the occupancy rate of over 70%," it said in a recent report, adding that it expects further increase in ARR within key brands such as 'Lemon Tree Premier' and 'Lemon Tree Hotels'. "Supply is growing at ~5% p.a., while demand is growing at a much faster pace on a pan India level," it added.

Experts say that domestic travel has emerged as the dominant force in the last few years, with Indians opting for road trips, staycations and workcations. The LTH boss says staycations, the rise of 'bleisure' (a combination of business and leisure) travel, the shift towards sustainable practices, and advancements in technology are upcoming industry trends that he's well positioned to cash in on.

Keswani, who can often be found dressed in sweatshirt and trousers—and sporting a ponytail—in the boardroom, says nothing keeps him awake at night except Netflix. But he warns of the biggest potential threat his industry faces. "What happens when Google, Facebook, Amazon, or Apple use their global platforms, to bundle deals together like flights, restaurants, and hotel bookings? That's the only thing that will disrupt my outreach to the customer and my brand." That is something to chew on. **BT**

@PLidhoo



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With a distinguished academic background that includes a Ph.D. from the University of Twente in the Netherlands, a Doctor of Engineering (Dr. Eng.) from the University of Tokyo, Japan, an MBA from Heriot-Watt University in the UK, and an M.Tech in metallurgical engineering from IIT, Kharagpur, India, Prof. Nair brings over 33 years of combined experience to his roles. His journey spans diverse domains, from oil & gas giants like Shell in Amsterdam to prestigious academic institutions in the Netherlands, Denmark, the US, Japan, China, and South Korea.

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Prof. Nair's impact extends far beyond academic circles. Having taught, consulted, and conducted executive workshops for prominent corporations such as Ericsson, Texas Capital Bank, Citi Bank, Hitachi, NEC, and many more, his influence is global. His tenure as a Clinical Professor and Academic Director at the University of Texas at Dallas, coupled with affiliations with leading institutions worldwide, underscores his commitment to fostering global collaborations and knowledge exchange.

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A BIG DEAL

The high-profile merger between IT majors L&T Infotech and Mindtree to create LTIMindtree has ensured that the merged entity gets a seat at the big table. It competes with the Big Boys of the Indian IT arena now

By **Ashish Rukhaiyar**

PHOTO BY **MANDAR DEODHAR**

▶ **THE MEGA MERGER BETWEEN** the erstwhile IT majors Mindtree and Larsen & Toubro Infotech (LTI) was announced in May 2022; its significance for the diversified multinational conglomerate L&T was visible from the fact that none other than then LTI Chairman A.M. Naik and Vice Chairman S.N. Subrahmanyan announced the merger, addressed the media, and took on the barrage of questions.

The two listed entities started operating as a single merged company—now the fifth-largest IT services firm in the country—from November 14, 2022. However, the seeds of the merger were sown much earlier. They had been working together on several deals even before the merger.

It was the pandemic that pushed the clock back. "If Covid-19 had not happened, then the merger of LTI and Mindtree would have happened earlier. The first criterion was that none of the companies should be leaning on each other," says CEO & MD Debashis Chatterjee.

Bigger and Better, Together

❶ Even before the formal merger, LTI and Mindtree worked together to bid for deals

❷ The consortium model helped execute the merger scheme in record time

❸ Also, it ensures minimal overlap in terms of clients, expertise, and capabilities

Best Deal

DEBASHIS CHATTERJEE

CEO & MD, LTIMINDTREE

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	33,183
	9MFY24	26,624.1
Profit before tax	**FY23**	5,791.5
	9MFY24	4,600.4
Profit after tax	**FY23**	4,410.3
	9MFY24	3,484
	FY23 RoE (%)	29.20
	Market Cap	1,64,200.4

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

“There is an acknowledgement among clients that LTIMindtree deserves a seat at the table. Our size is such that you cannot ignore us. All the metrics of the combined entity are looking much better”

DEBASHIS CHATTERJEE
CEO & MD, LTIMINDTREE

During the pandemic, both LTI and Mindtree were affected, with Mindtree experiencing a greater impact due to its reliance on the travel and hospitality sectors, which accounted for 17-18% of its revenue. This was a major factor behind the delay in announcing the merger.

“All credit goes to A.M. Naik and SNS [S.N. Subrahmanyan] for envisioning when the two companies should be brought together. And the vision was that the two companies can come together only when both are performing well in their own ways, rather than trying to time the market,” says Chatterjee, who was the CEO & MD of Mindtree when the merger was announced.

But as mentioned earlier, the two companies were not strangers to each other and had already been working together. “It was very clear that there were quite a few opportunities or deals where you as an individual entity may not get a seat at the table. I have been personally told that ‘you are too small for our size’. And I used to ask, what can I do? Can you bring your sister company also together, create a consortium and bid, they used to say,” says Chatterjee.

During 2019-2020, the two companies formed a consortium and bid, and won quite a few deals; they also put in place a ‘teaming agreement’ for select opportunities. However, the real benefit of the agreement was not securing specific bids but something far more significant. It facilitated the collaboration between the two companies to swiftly implement a merger strategy.

When two entities of a similar size merge, integration can be challenging due to potential cultural or behaviourial issues. “For these two companies, because of some of the arrangements we had, we kind of knew how to work with each other. We knew each other’s strengths and weaknesses,” says Chatterjee, pointing out that Naik and SNS always emphasised the “complementary capabilities” of the two companies in their discussions. This was also the second reason for the merger.

“LTI’s strengths were data, cloud, and enterprise apps. Mindtree’s was experience, data, and the cloud. So, there were a lot of complementary capabilities and synergies. That was the rationale. The benefit of the integration was that you could take those capabilities to the client. We had only 10-12 clients where there was an overlap,” explains Chatterjee.

“We knew that the two companies would come together at the right time. We knew that there were synergies in terms of capabilities. We also saw that there is an opportunity in terms of upselling and cross-selling. These three aspects are very critical to understanding how the whole thing happened,” he adds.

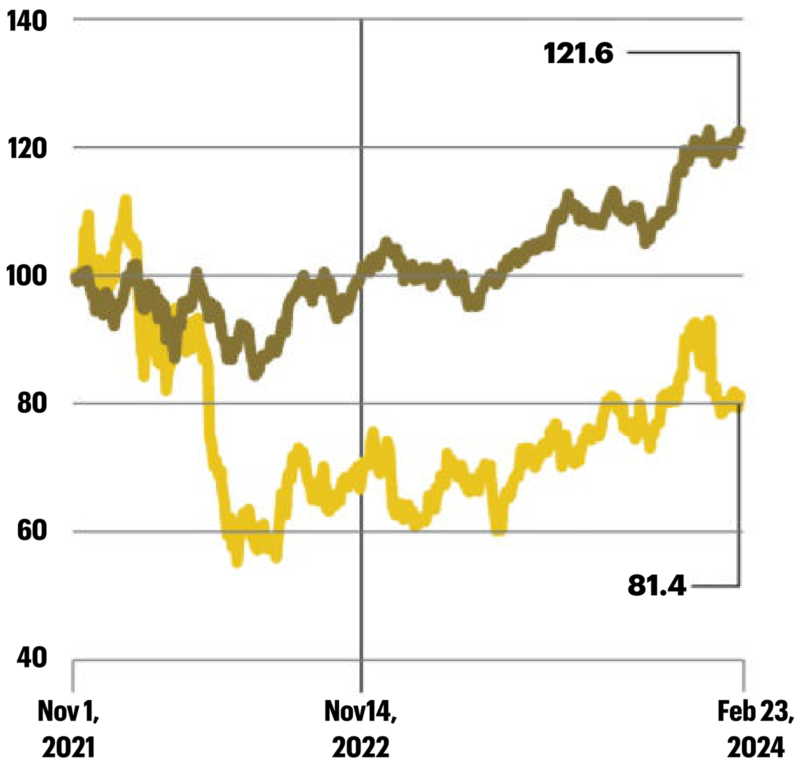
Synergies in terms of capabilities and upselling and cross-selling benefits are all fine, but cultural integration can at times be the most challenging aspect of a merger. Fortunately, the two companies successfully navigated this hurdle with a proper strategy in place. “When we decided to merge, it was decided by SNS that there should be a steering committee, but we

❹ The merger provides a very good opportunity in terms of upselling and cross-selling

❺ The combined entity has revenues in excess of $4 billion, with over 700 clients spread across 30 countries

TAKING STOCK

- **Shares of LTIMindtree have gained 14% in the past year, compared to benchmark index BSE Sensex's 23% rise**
- **Since trading as a single merged entity, LTIMindtree's shares are up 7%**



● LTIMindtree ● S&P BSE Sensex

Data has been indexed to 100
Source ACE Equity

COMPLEMENTARY VERTICALS AND INCREASED FIRM SIZE WOULD HELP IN GRABBING BIGGER DEALS... CROSS-SELLING AND UPSELLING AMONG CLIENTS, INCREASE IN GEOGRAPHIES WOULD ALSO HELP THE COMPANY TO DIVERSIFY CLIENTELE

REPORT BY BODHI CAPITAL

should do it in such a way that the two companies do not get distracted in any manner," says Chatterjee.

The steering committee consisted of a select group of people from both companies, with a few also coming from L&T. It was led by SNS himself and had multiple tracks established to oversee key verticals like human resources, finance, sales, and culture, among others.

"We had decided to do the merger in record time... every track was given six months," says Chatterjee. "We could not find any example of a merger that was completed in six to seven months. We took it up as a challenge, the reason being that if we could get the merger out of the way, then it would also help in having a unified go-to-market strategy," he says.

Incidentally, the cultural part was smoothly taken care of since there were a lot of commonalities between the two IT companies. "Almost 80% [of the] pillars were common... purpose, caring, learning, delivering results. We realised that culturally it was not much different, and we did a lot of cultural assimilations and workshops," says Chatterjee, who was heading the culture track. To be honest, six months was a bit of a stretch, but people really worked hard, he adds.

But the benefits were clearly visible. "Definitely, there is an acknowledgement among clients that LTIMindtree deserves a seat at the table. Our size is such that you cannot ignore us. Secondly, we are now very well positioned to compete with whoever it is, and we are winning too. All the metrics of the combined entity are looking much better," says Chatterjee.

Complementary verticals and increased firm size would help in grabbing bigger deals... Cross-selling and upselling among clients, increase in geographies would also help the company to diversify its clientele, says a report by investment fund Bodhi Capital.

Currently, the company boasts revenues in excess of $4 billion, serving more than 700 clients in 30 countries, with a team of over 82,000 employees. With the merger in place and the combined entity functioning smoothly, the next goal is to expand the company's size and reach.

"I want to see LTIMindtree become a $10-billion company. That is the vision that A.M. Naik and SNS have, and I think that is a fair vision. They want the services revenue to become a significant portion of the group's total revenue because services give a better margin. Do we have a vision to go up to $10 billion? The answer is yes," says Chatterjee. BT

@ashishrukhaiyar

CELEBRATIONS PROGRESS & PROSPERITY UTTAR PRADESH'S NEW IDENTITY

Investments worth lakhs of crores of rupees are pouring into Uttar Pradesh. As an MP from Uttar Pradesh, witnessing developments in my state fills me with immense joy. Today, work is commencing on thousands of projects. These upcoming factories and industries are poised to transform the landscape of UP. I extend heartfelt congratulations to all investors, particularly the youth of Uttar Pradesh.
In the last 7 years, culture of "red tape" has been replaced with the "red carpet" for investors. I have full faith in the power of UP and the hard work of the Double Engine Government.

-Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

*At GBC-4.0, Lucknow

UP
UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

Uttar Pradesh recently witnessed a significant milestone in its economic journey with the Ground Breaking Ceremony 4.0, marking a new era in infrastructure and Industrial development. Hosted by the state government, this event showcased a series of ambitious projects set to transform the landscape of Uttar Pradesh and propel it toward economic prosperity.

GBC 4.0 represents a harmonious collaboration between Prime Minister Narendra Modi's national vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's unwavering commitment to transforming Uttar Pradesh into a vibrant economic hub. PM Modi's presence sets the international stage, attracting global investors through his policies like 'Make in India' and 'Ease of Doing Business', while CM Yogi's governance reforms have created a fertile ground for these investments to blossom.

SECTOR WISE INVESTMENTS

Manufacturing	₹2 lakh cr
Renewable Energy	₹1 lakh cr
Waste Mgmt	₹25000 cr
Food Processing	₹60000 cr
Distilleries	₹10000 cr
Dairy	₹9000 cr
IT & Electronics	₹90000 cr
Education	₹25000 cr
Healthcare	₹10000 cr
Real Estate	₹50000 cr
Handloom & Textile	₹6000 cr
Pharma & Medical Devices	₹2000 cr

BIZ FRIENDLY UTTAR PRADESH

1,000+
Unique reforms implemented under BRAP

481
License services available

41
Depts integrated

96
lakh MSMEs highest in India

46,000+
Acres GIS-enabled land bank

200+
Services included for timely delivery of NOCs

250mn
population provides the largest consumer base in India

1st rank in Industrialization

2nd rank in Export Preparedness Index (Landlocked)

Achiever state in Ease of Doing Business & Logistic Ease Across Different States

MASTER BUILDER

In just eight years, Asish Mohapatra and his team have not only forged a flourishing category leader but also gave life to not one, but two unicorns. Now, this sector-aware operator is preparing to face the public markets

By **Binu Paul** • PHOTO BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

▶ **ON A VIBRANT** Mumbai night in early 2015, Asish Mohapatra and his companion Bhuvan Gupta were immersed in a conversation that crackled with energy. That would set the stage for something extraordinary. Amidst the lively banter, Mohapatra opened up about his dream of launching a B2B venture, extending an intriguing invitation to Gupta. Without a moment's hesitation, Gupta, then poised to become the Chief Technology Officer at the flourishing Snapdeal, nonchalantly shrugged and said: "Sure." Little did they fathom that that spontaneous exchange would chart the course of their future in unforeseen ways.

"I don't know if he agreed because he was tipsy. I'm not even sure if he heard the word B2B," muses Mohapatra, winner of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs award in the Unicorn category. However, beneath the laughter, a deeper bond of mutual trust anchored the connection between Mohapatra and Gupta. Mohapatra emphasises that he would have readily reciprocated had Gupta been the one extending the invitation. Thus, fortified by this unspoken pact, Mohapatra assembled a dream team comprising Ruchi Kalra (Mohapatra's wife), Vasant Sridhar, Gupta, and Nitin Jain. United by trust, they embarked on a collective mission to forge a path in B2B for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The decision involved significant personal risks as both Mohapatra and Kalra left their respective jobs—Mohapatra as an investor at Matrix Partners and Kalra as a Partner at McKinsey & Company. They relocated from Mumbai to Delhi, with their new-born baby in tow, to set up the business.

Why B2B? Mohapatra's thesis was simple. In his line of work as a non-tech VC focussing on healthcare, consumer goods and manufacturing, he saw an uptick in B2B pitches from late 2014 through 2015. He was quite familiar with most of the solutions being built and felt many of them did not understand the sector well. He also saw a lot of qualified people—people with good pedigree and work experience—going into that sector. Above all, it marked a crucial and necessary career expansion for him as he was advised to explore technology investments for career growth, and he decided to take on the challenge himself, acknowledging the learning curve it would entail.

Right out of the gate, the team laid down five principles as the foundation of the company. They aimed to "help underserved SMEs, extend beyond just lending, ensure meticulous collections, fuel growth through debt, and maintain profitability." And they stuck with it.

OfBusiness's primary aim when it began was to help underserved SMEs, extend beyond just lending, ensure meticulous collections, fuel growth through debt, and maintain profitability

UNICORN BUILDER Asish Mohapatra, Co-founder and CEO, OfBusiness

OfBusiness made three commitments to SMEs. Firstly, they pledged to always offer a better price for industrial goods than any other available option by sourcing materials directly from the origin, eliminating middlemen. This ensured a price advantage. Secondly, they guaranteed on-time delivery, building trust. Thirdly, they assured SMEs that all quality testing and QC reports would be provided with the delivery, ensuring product quality.

On these founding principles, OfBusiness kicked off with steel as the first category. They recognised the broken and opaque nature of the steel supply chain, facing problems like logistics, last-mile delivery along with pricing complexities. It then diversified into aluminium, copper, and zinc because the entrepreneurs saw that these sectors too grappled with similar challenges. Eventually, OfBusiness entered into polymers, petrochemicals, and chemicals.

The business quickly gained momentum, pulling in revenue from the get-go in February of 2016. Within just

SME Champion

❶ OfBusiness directly sources materials from the origin and delivers them to SMEs, eliminating middlemen

❷ It promises to provide better prices, quality and reliable input materials, and on-time delivery to SMEs

❸ Steel is its leading category, followed by non-ferrous metals like aluminium, copper, and zinc, along with petrochemicals, agriculture, chemicals, and polymers

A FUNDING SNAPSHOT

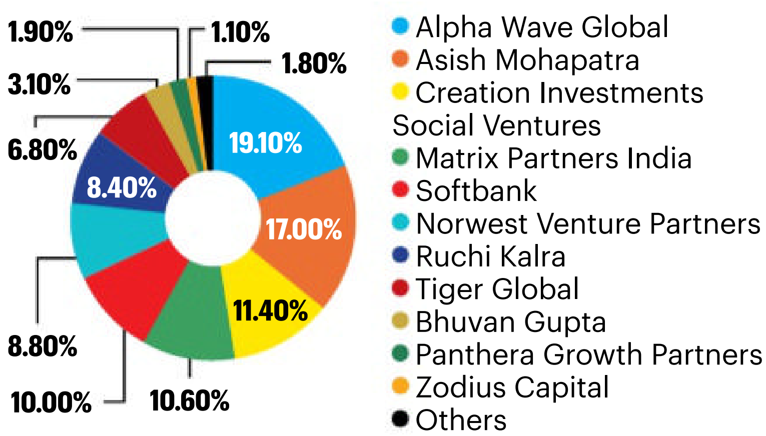
- **In 2021, the company secured a whopping $745.5 million in funding**
- **The company secured unicorn status in mid-2021**

YEAR	AMOUNT	YEAR	AMOUNT
2015	**4.3**	2019	**44.1**
2016	**1.1**	2021	**742.5**
2017	**10.2**	2022	**95.3**
2018	**25.9**	2023	**6.53**

Amount in $ million **Source** PrivateCircle Research

STAKEWORTHY

- **Alpha Wave Global holds the largest stake at 19.1%. It initially invested in its Series A in 2018**
- **Asish Mohapatra and wife Ruchi Kalra hold 27.5% stake**



Note Shareholding data as of January 17, 2024
Source PrivateCircle Research

two months, by April, it reached a monthly turnover of ₹10 crore. By the 36 month mark, OfBusiness was consistently hitting ₹100 crore in monthly revenue.

Currently, steel constitutes 35% of the business, followed by aluminium, copper, and zinc in the non-ferrous category at 16-17%, petrochemicals at 10%, agriculture at 15%, chemicals at 7-8%, and polymers also at 7-8%, with the rest made up of two-three smaller segments.

To make the operations seamless, the company also developed various in-house tech products, including BidAssist for tender sourcing, SMEAssist for digitising SME operations; Ved AI, which is a pricing engine; OxyV for invoice discounting; Oasys for commerce ERP (enterprise resource planning); Tracecost for construction project monitoring; and other tools for lead management and loan processing.

At the other end of the spectrum, building a robust supply chain also presented its own set of challenges.

"I remember sitting outside the office of the Steel Authority of India, during our early days, for close to about four months before they actually agreed to give us a chance. It was the same across suppliers. We were thrown out of a couple of companies, one being Sangam TMT, which we ended up buying later," Mohapatra says.

As the business gained momentum, it began providing credit through a marketplace model, collaborating with banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs). However, the team quickly realised that banks and NBFCs were hesitant and took time because they lacked trust in the company's underwriting, mainly due to its relatively small scale. "By the time they gave us a limit for credit, we would have lost the purchase order. So, we decided to do it on our own and that is how Oxyzo was born," he says.

Oxyzo, its lending arm, was launched in June 2018 and OfBusiness stopped third-party lending. Led by Kalra, Oxyzo is particularly pertinent for smaller SMEs seeking purchase financing. In May 2022, Oxyzo became a unicorn when it raised its first round of external funding. OfBusiness has close to 75% stake in Oxyzo.

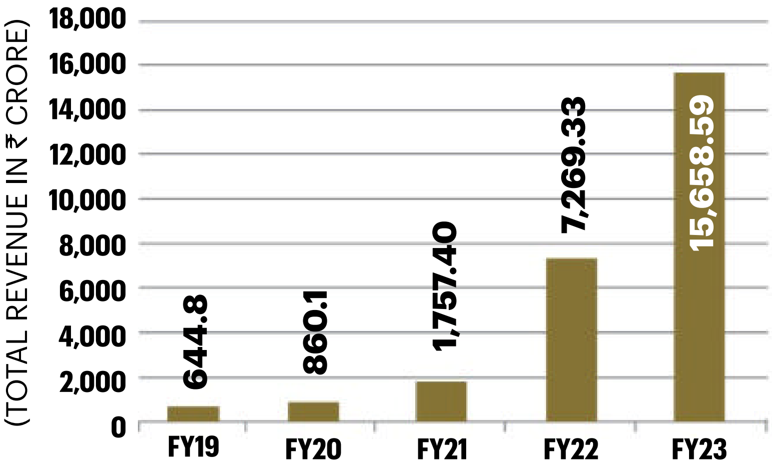
OfBusiness, which first raised $4.3 million from Mohapatra's former employer Matrix Partners, subsequently drew the interest of major global private investors such as SoftBank, Tiger Global, and Alpha Wave Global. The company was valued at $5 billion in its last round in 2021.

The aggregation business for raw material procurement accounts for 72% of its revenue today, while 16% comes from processing, and 12% from manufacturing.

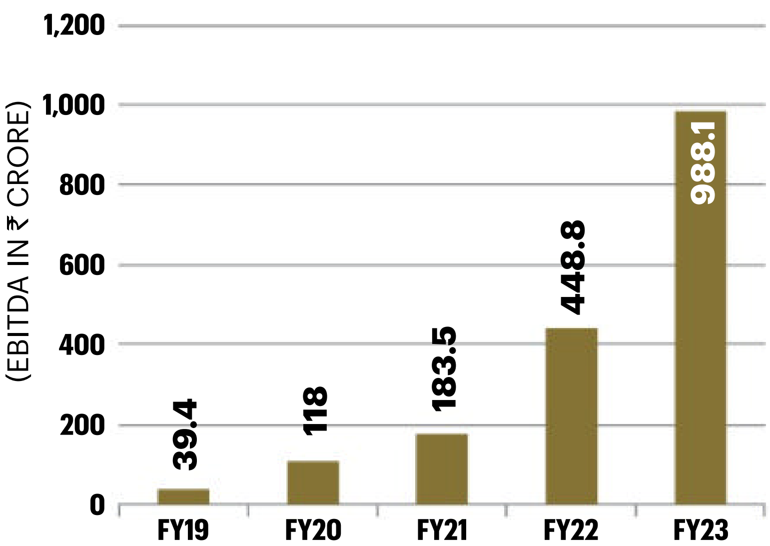
STRONG SIGNALS

- OfBusiness surged past the ₹15,000-crore revenue mark in FY23, sustaining robust growth
- In FY23, the company recorded a 2.3x growth in profits, reaching ₹463 crore

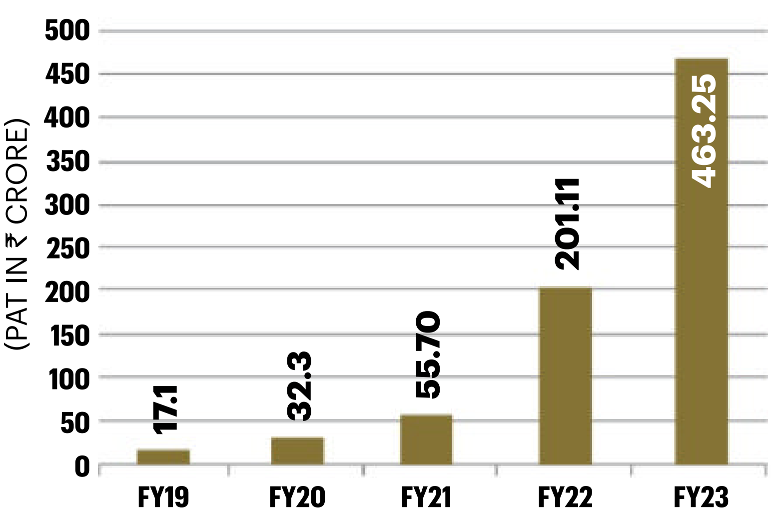
ROCKETING REVENUE



EBITDA EFFICIENCY



CONSISTENT PROFITS



Source Tracxn

Talking about the reasons behind OfBusiness's profitability, Mohapatra says it was because they knew how to spend less. "We broke even in FY18. The first full year of operating profit was in FY19. We are very frugal, we didn't have much of an operating expense, we never did loss-making transactions, we did sales with no marketing, never sold things at a discount," he explains.

Mohapatra emphasises that while the market opportunity is massive, the primary focus should be on ensuring that growth does not compromise quality or profitability, a temptation many start-ups fall into.

"Even at our current scale, we can easily compound at 40-50% CAGR for the next five years. We are at close to ₹20,000 crore (annual revenue) now. At our scale, the challenge is to keep generating more profits, the profitability growth has to be faster than revenue growth, we should not be taking wrong capital allocation decisions, and we need to make sure business is very clean, meaning there should not be any concentration risks," he says.

No wonder, therefore, that industry watchers are happy. Sarthak Misra, Investment Director at SoftBank Investment Advisers, praises Mohapatra's disciplined cost control, which he says is deeply rooted in an early understanding of B2B's thin-margin nature. This, according to Misra, will help the company not only to stay committed towards profitability, but will also help it scale.

"Mohapatra understood from day one that a B2B marketplace is a thin margin business. The founders set the example right from day one that you need to make profit on every transaction and collections should be a priority focus for everyone. Mohapatra heads collections even today. Everybody from the youngest employee in the company to the founders, have focussed on this from day one, and that has allowed them to achieve scale profitably," Misra says.

As for the future, Mohapatra sees a huge market opportunity in what they are doing and plans to stick to the current categories for the next three to four years at least. Moreover, after eight years in business, the company is now getting ready for its debut on the public markets, expected in the next 15-18 months.

For Mohapatra, steering the ship as a category leader isn't just a role—it's a commitment. He rolls up his sleeves, dives into the challenges, and works relentlessly to ensure the venture generates value for everyone in the ecosystem, from suppliers and SMEs to his investors. BT

@binu_t_paul


AIRPORT

Transforming Transportation

Uttar Pradesh's Infrastructure Revolution

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visionary leadership has propelled Uttar Pradesh into a new era of development, particularly in enhancing transportation infrastructure. Under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's decisive governance, the state has witnessed remarkable progress in highways, expressways and road networks. These initiatives have not only reduced travel times but also significantly improved connectivity between cities and towns, fostering economic growth and enhancing the quality of life for the state's residents. The efforts of the double-engine government have truly transformed Uttar Pradesh, marking a significant milestone in its journey towards prosperity.

What UP offers

55% of India's expressway network

- ***6 expressway operational, 7 under construction***
- ***Country's largest rail network***
- ***Eastern and Western dedicated freight corridors intersecting at Dadri***
- ***Country's first Inland Waterways connecting the eastern port of Haldia***
- ***Highest number of airports with 21 airports 10 operational & 11 under construction***
- ***Country's first rapid rail Namo Bharat operational (Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut)***

GAME CHANGER

Vellayan Subbiah, the fourth-generation Murugappa Group scion, has successfully turned around debt-ridden CG Power, and is now helping future-proof TII by focussing on a new set of businesses

By **Vidya S.**

FORESIGHT Vellayan Subbiah, Executive Vice Chairman, Tube Investments of India

▶ **A FLOOR DESK** and chairs welcome us as we enter Vellayan Subbiah's 'strictly shoes-off' and minimalist office in Chennai, which requires sitting cross-legged on the ground. Slight and athletic, he is at ease in this arrangement—no wonder the 54-year-old Executive Vice Chairman of southern conglomerate Murugappa Group's Tube Investments of India (TII) rode shotgun on a 50-hour truck ride from Delhi to Mumbai in 2016. As Managing Director of the group company Cholamandalam Investment & Finance Company (CIFC), it was important for him to gain a deeper understanding of truck companies, who were major customers. It was also a ride during which he supposedly kept up his yoga practice in a moving truck.

A few years after he joined the engineering and component maker TII as its MD-designate in 2017, the management recognised the need to shift away from relying heavily on the cyclical auto industry to achieve sustainable growth. TII, best known as the parent of BSA Cycles, specialises in manufacturing precision steel tubes and strips, automotive and industrial chains, car door frames, and bicycles. Back then, automobiles accounted for over 70% of its revenues. The business had to be derisked. "It was basically that if auto is not growing, how do you make up through growth in other sectors?" explains Vellayan, the fourth-generation Murugappa Group scion.

Inspired by leading auto parts manufacturers globally and domestically, such as American diversified conglomerates Danaher Corporation and ITW, Motherson Sumi, and Sundram Fasteners (from the erstwhile TVS Group where Vellayan has worked), a three-engine growth plan was drawn up—TI-1 or core business; TI-2 or frontier businesses; and TI-3 for inorganic growth through acquisitions. Danaher, a firm he has tracked since 1995 and one that safeguarded itself from cyclical loops to grow through acquisitions, offered a solid playbook. In the past, Danaher would acquire firms that were not considered top performers and then work to improve their performance.

To its credit, TII too has acquired and turned around a debt-ridden and fraud-hit company—CG Power and Industrial Solutions. TII first noticed the troubles of the motor and generator maker, formerly owned by Gautam Thapar-led Avantha Group, when it defaulted on

Patient Play

❶ In 2020, TII acquired debt-ridden and fraud-hit CG Power and Industrial Solutions

❷ CG Power turned debt-free in March 2022 under Chairman Vellayan Subbiah

❸ The acquisition has boosted TII's consolidated financials and driven multi-fold returns for shareholders payments to another TII subsidiary, Shanthi Gears. By March 2019, CG Power had amassed over ₹2,000 crore in debt. Its share price nosedived to ₹5 on December 11, 2019, from ₹225 in September 2014. In November 2020, TII acquired a 57% stake in CG Power for ₹800 crore and set a five-year target to turn it debt-free and generate an annual revenue of ₹5,000 crore. Under Vellayan's chairmanship, it accomplished this by March 2022 . (It turned net debt-free by FY22).

"Apart from the timely decision of derisking the business, the acquisition and turnaround of CG Power has been a major turning point," says Saji John, Research Analyst at Geojit Financial Services. He says TII's profit has doubled on a consolidated basis, and CG Power's transition from loss to profit has also won them investor confidence. Currently, CG Power's shares hover around ₹400, and its market cap has grown to ₹66,000 crore.

Vellayan attributes the successful turnaround to the emphasis on four key metrics: profit, revenue growth, free cash flow, and return on invested capital. But the IIT Madras alumnus admits the decision to acquire the company "wasn't so scientific or so well thought through." Instinctively, it felt like a very good company. "When that is the case, you will get over the challenges. That is the confidence with which we went into it."

But acquisitions are opportunistic, and TII needed a growth engine, especially as growth in certain core business areas, such as cycles, is depleting. "In situations where CG-like acquisitions are too expensive, how can we use a VC approach, which is being very careful about capital but trying to get into a potentially larger space?"

With its three engines, the company has cut its revenue reliance on the auto sector to 30-35% as a parts supplier. But, a big part of its TI-2 engine is its EV bet, which is expected to bring growth, as India targets transitioning to electric mobility by 2030; and also turn the component maker into an OEM.

Through its subsidiary, TI Clean Mobility Private Ltd (TICMPL), it has rolled out passenger three-wheeler Montra in the south, and e-trucks. Three e-tractor models are in the works. TII has invested ₹750 crore in TICMPL, raised ₹1,250 crore from investors such as Multiple Alternate Asset Management, and is raising ₹1,000 crore from PE players. Analysts say they are keenly watching how the firm scales up its electric three-wheeler business that earned it hefty valuation multiples.

But Vellayan says he's not worried about the next quarter or the next year's performance. It is a long-term game. "Our focus is on being one of the leading players when the market shifts. If the market takes three years to shift, we want to be patient... If it shifts more next year, we are ready." It's with the same idea that TII has forayed into manufacturing active pharma ingredients, medical consumables, and mobile phone camera lenses to leverage the China+1 opportunity.

"The thing with family businesses is that we are patient," says Vellayan. He is happy to invest even five to seven years to sort out the electronics business. The way he sees it, the core business of engineering, metal formed and industrial products will grow at low double-digits over the next few years through product range expansion and exports. Analyst John agrees that TII's expanding core business to new geographies has helped scale.

For the next several years, the group is betting on a new set of businesses to propel growth. "What we are trying to build in TI is a company that's strong for the next 100 years," says Vellayan. He says there are lessons to be learnt from nature, where nothing is rapid. "You need to be patient to allow something to bloom." Agility and patience—the business mantra of a true yogi. **BT**

@SaysVidya

Auto & Auto Ancillaries

VELLAYAN SUBBIAH

EXECUTIVE VICE CHAIRMAN,
TUBE INVESTMENTS OF INDIA

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	14,430.95
	9MFY24	11,989.9
Profit before tax	**FY23**	1,581
	9MFY24	1,284.3
Profit after tax	**FY23**	1,158.4
	9MFY24	912.8
	FY23 RoE (%)	33.1
	Market Cap	69,918.7

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

❹ Now, Vellayan is focussed on identifying future growth areas for TII

❺ He stands out for his financial discipline and patience to nurture businesses for long-term growth

Inclusive Education

Empowering Minds, Building Futures

In Uttar Pradesh, education is not just about imparting knowledge; it's about empowering minds and building futures. The state's commitment to inclusive education is evident in its various initiatives.

- Enrollment of more than 1.92 crore students in the School Chalo campaign
- Infrastructure enhancements in 1.40 lakh+ primary/upper primary schools under Operation Kayakalp
- A sum of Rs. 1,200 per student is being directly transferred to the bank accounts of parents through DBT for uniforms, school bags, socks, shoes etc.
- Establishment of state universities in Azamgarh, Aligarh and Saharanpur
- Construction of the Uttar Pradesh State Institute of Forensic Science in Lucknow
- Establishment of 15 incubation centers under the startup policy
- Dr. Rajendra Prasad National Law University established in Prayagraj
- Construction of Major Dhyan Chand Sports University underway in Meerut
- Decision to establish Mahatma Buddha University of Agriculture and Technology in Kushinagar
- Decision to establish state universities in Vindhyachal, Devipatan and Moradabad divisions
- Construction of 280 new Government Inter Colleges/High Schools and 65 girls' hostels
- Construction of 41 New Inter Colleges, 215 Government High Schools and 77 girls hostels completed
- Expansion of government ITIs from 260 to 305, with seat capacity increased from 1.25 lakh to 1.72 lakh
- 51 Government Polytechnics under construction

A FORCE FOR TRANSFORMATION

From laying the foundation of transparency through ICICI Lombard's listing to positioning it as a digital leader, Bhargav Dasgupta has spearheaded many changes

By **Teena Jain Kaushal**

▶ **IN SEPTEMBER 2023,** Bhargav Dasgupta stepped down from his role as CEO and MD at ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company after 14 long years. During that tenure, he achieved significant milestones that laid the foundation for increased transparency and accountability in the industry. Under his leadership, ICICI Lombard became the first general insurance company to be listed on the bourses in 2017.

"We are a listed company, very focussed on transparency and disclosure. The challenge was that most of our competitors were unlisted, and they didn't have the same demands on them in terms of disclosure and transparency. I strongly believe that companies should list after 10 years because the discipline of listing is good for the industry," says Dasgupta.

For the insurance veteran, the listing was just one of the many highlights. His easy-going demeanour helped in the seamless merger of Bharti AXA General Insurance with ICICI Lombard, a feat accomplished swiftly after receiving final approval from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) in September 2021. After the merger, ICICI Lombard quickly rose to become the second-largest general insurer in terms of gross direct premium underwritten. By December 2023, it had captured an impressive 8.76% of the market, coming in second behind the state-owned The New India Assurance Co., which held 13.33% market share.

Dasgupta believes in hard work, and this is reflected in the numbers. Under his leadership, the gross premium of ICICI Lombard surged to more than ₹21,000 crore in FY23 from ₹3,457 crore in FY09, and profit after tax (PAT) grew 78 times during the same period—from ₹22 crore to ₹1,729 crore, a remarkable CAGR of 36.5%. Over the past three years, the company's premium earned (net) and net profit have grown at a CAGR of 16% and 13%, respectively. This performance has led to Dasgupta being crowned the winner in the Brokers, Mutual Funds & Insurance category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year.

The 57-year-old management graduate from IIM Bangalore took charge of the insurer in 2009, but his association with the group dates back to 1992, when he joined what was then ICICI as a Senior General Manager. He held different positions within the group, including serving as Executive Director in ICICI Prudential Life Insurance. During his long tenure at ICICI Lombard, Dasgupta achieved remarkable success before stepping down on September 21, 2023, to explore an international career opportunity. At present, he is the Vice President (Market Solutions) of the Asian Development Bank in Manila.

Brokers, MFs & Insurance

BHARGAV DASGUPTA

FORMER CEO AND MD, ICICI LOMBARD GENERAL INSURANCE COMPANY

Gross premium written	**FY23**	21,771.8
	9MFY24	19,331
Profit before tax	**FY23**	2,112.5
	9MFY24	1,857.4
Profit after tax	**FY23**	1,729.1
	9MFY24	1,399.1
	FY23 RoE (%)	17.73
	Market Cap	80,694.8

● Data is on a standalone basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023

● M-cap as of February 23, 2024

● **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

Empowering UTTAR PRADESH

A Vision for Prosperity

The resolve of a developed Uttar Pradesh can only be realized by ensuring full opportunities for women at every level, harnessing the energy of the youth to accelerate progress, providing comprehensive support to the farmers who are the backbone of the nation's food security and addressing the needs and aspirations of the poor.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already mentioned these four segments in his speeches earlier. With the empowerment and welfare of these four segments, the dream of a 'developed India' by 2047 can be realized. Echoing this vision, dynamic Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has prioritized the development of four key groups: the poor, women, youth and food providers (annadatas), through a range of development schemes and adequate budget allocations.

Agent of Change

1. Bhargav Dasgupta led ICICI Lombard to listing in 2017, setting industry standards for transparency
2. He spearheaded a seamless merger with Bharti AXA, propelling ICICI Lombard to become the second-largest general insurer
3. With a CAGR of 36.5%, ICICI Lombard's PAT grew 78 times under his leadership
4. He shifted ICICI Lombard's focus from wholesale to retail business to drive growth

DIGITAL LEADER Bhargav Dasgupta, former CEO and MD, ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company

Dasgupta has accomplished much more than just growing the business through acquisitions. He led a major change at ICICI Lombard, shifting the company's focus from wholesale to the retail business. "Our focus was on doing what was right while balancing growth and profitability. We focussed on building the retail health lines and were more disciplined in the motor segment," says Dasgupta.

To boost growth in the retail health segment, he devised a plan centred around recruiting agency managers who then hired agents to drive business. When it came to claims, the loss ratio in the health segment (including travel and personal accident) for ICICI Lombard increased to 80% in 9MFY24 from 77% in FY23. Despite the rise in claims in the health segment, the combined ratio stayed within the target range at 103.7%.

ICICI Lombard dominates the motor insurance business, with a market share of 12% as of December 2023, which is also the primary component of its product mix at 37%. Considering Own Damage pricing is far more aggressive in motor insurance, Dasgupta says he took a cautious approach to writing businesses in that segment.

Digital was another focus area for Dasgupta. He championed technological innovation for ICICI Lombard's competitiveness and expansion. "We were the first company to go completely in the cloud. It gave us the ability to think about how to be agile, nimble, and future-ready. So, investing in technology and going into new lines of business such as retail health while staying disciplined helped us grow," says Dasgupta.

He also separated ICICI Lombard's digital division to compete like a start-up. ICICI Lombard's "IL Take-Care" app has achieved 8.5 million downloads as of December 2023 from 4.6 million in March 2023, which is an indication of its growing digital prowess. He also led efforts to expedite claims processing, improve service delivery, and foster a culture of responsiveness and empathy in the organisation, knowing that customer happiness is key to long-term success. Thanks to these measures, ICICI Lombard's complaints as a percentage of policies issued dropped from 0.56% to a mere 0.01% during his tenure.

Throughout his career, Dasgupta has exemplified the qualities of a visionary leader, strategic thinker, and transformational change agent. He was one of the leaders who initiated dialogue with the regulator for dismantling the third-party motor insurance pool due to its rising losses. Talking about his vision for the company, Dasgupta quips, "I don't want to give my vision, as I don't want to cast a shadow on Sanjiv Mantri's [the new CEO] thought process, and it's unfair to him. So, yeah, I just think that the organisation continues to do well. That's all I can say."

As he continues to chart new paths and explore new horizons, Dasgupta's legacy will continue to steer the company ahead. BT

@teena_kaushal

TRANSFORMING HEALTHCARE

FREE MEDICINES & IMPROVED MEDICAL FACILITIES

The landscape of healthcare in Uttar Pradesh has undergone significant enhancements, marked by a commitment to provide free medicines and improved medical facilities to its residents. This transformative journey is characterized by several key initiatives aimed at bolstering healthcare infrastructure and accessibility across the state.

- AIIMS operational in Gorakhpur and Raebareli
- Commitment to establish one medical college per district
- Expansion of medical education with 65 operational and 22 under construction medical colleges
- Implementation of comprehensive medical insurance, covering up to Rs. 5 lakh per family for 9 crore beneficiaries through Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) and Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Yojana
- Facility of free dialysis across all 75 districts
- The number of MBBS seats has surged from 1840 to 3828 in government medical institutions and from 2550 to 5250 in private institutions. This brings the total available seats to 9078, marking a substantial increase in opportunities for aspiring medical students
- Substantial increase in PG seats across government medical colleges from 741 to 1543 and in private medical colleges from 480 to 1775 a total of 3318 seats are available
- 21,889 health and wellness centers operational
- Establishment of prestigious medical universities such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee Medical University in Lucknow and Mahayogi Guru Gorakhnath AYUSH University in Gorakhpur
- Installation of Health ATMs in all Community Health Centers (CHCs) and Primary Health Centers (PHCs)
- NAAC A+ grade awarded to King George Medical University, Lucknow
- Integrated 50 bed AYUSH hospitals established in 11 districts
- Establishment of 1,600 health wellness centers under the Ayushman Bharat program
- 225 Yoga Wellness Centers offering training sessions
- Uttar Pradesh's strides in healthcare exemplify a comprehensive approach towards addressing the diverse healthcare needs of its populace, laying a robust foundation for a healthier and more prosperous future

CEMENTING GROWTH

Under K.C. Jhanwar, UltraTech Cement is making all the right moves to increase capacity, moving into newer markets with a sharp focus on sustainability

By **Krishna Gopalan**

EYES ON THE PRIZE K.C. Jhanwar, Managing Director, UltraTech Cement

▶ **ASK K.C. JHANWAR** what UltraTech Cement has been doing over the past three years and pat comes the reply: "Our philosophy is to work on a long-term vision and plan, which is value-accretive to all stakeholders." The company's Managing Director explains that this includes all spheres of the business from operational excellence to new product development, a high focus on green products and brand building. "None of this can be achieved without having high empowerment and agility across the organisation," says Jhanwar, a chartered accountant by training.

Cement is an intensely competitive business and UltraTech is the largest player—it has an installed capacity of 140 million tonnes per annum (mtpa); the Adani Group, through various entities, is the second largest at around 75 mtpa. "We have been on a significant growth trajectory for several years and expect this growth phase to continue. Our Chairman (Kumar Mangalam Birla) has announced the ambition of achieving a capacity of 200 mtpa and we want to convert that vision into reality," says the MD of UltraTech Cement, which is a part of the Aditya Birla Group.

To get to a capacity of 200 mtpa, the company will need to focus on key areas like supply chain management and, as Jhanwar puts it, specifically on logistics operations and cost optimisation, and ensure improved response time for consumers. "We are also committed to further build on brand UltraTech and strengthen our equity across all our stakeholders," says Jhanwar, a veteran of the Aditya Birla Group.

Excluding China, UltraTech today is the third-largest cement company in the world in terms of sales, and Jhanwar is hopeful that the company will move to the second position soon. In the commodity business, apart from just scale and size, building the brand is critical, he points out.

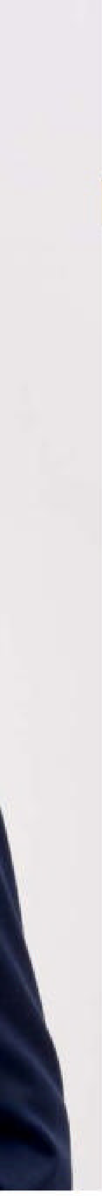
"That can be done by adopting the shift from product sales to becoming a solutions provider in the con-

Building Capacity

❶ With an installed capacity of 140 mtpa, UltraTech is the largest cement player in India

❷ The company's aim is to hit an installed capacity of 200 mtpa

❸ It has been involved in projects such as the new Parliament building and the Statue of Unity



struction journey, be it for individual home builders or for institutional customers."

UltraTech has been involved in several big-ticket projects in the country. These include the new Parliament building in New Delhi, the Statue of Unity in Gujarat, and the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link, apart from metro rail projects in many cities. Jhanwar views this as partnering the country in nation building. "We are very optimistic about the cement sector in India since it has direct linkages with the country's infrastructure requirements. That in turn is aided by fast-paced urbanisation coupled with the increasing aspirations of a younger generation," he says.

Not surprisingly, there is a big opportunity in India's ambition to be the third-largest economy globally by 2030. "It will provide opportunities for growth across sectors and there is a lot of headroom in cement. For us, the high focus on the domestic market will continue, apart from exploring strategic growth opportunities in the overseas markets," says Jhanwar, the winner in the Cement category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year.

Taking the M&A route has been a key part of UltraTech's strategy. Late last year, it announced the acquisition of the cement business of Kesoram Industries through a share-swap agreement—UltraTech will issue one share for every 52 shares of Kesoram—and bring to the fold capacity of 10.75 mtpa across Karnataka and Telangana. There was also the buyout of Burnpur Cement's cement grinding assets in Jharkhand (with a capacity of 0.54 mtpa), giving UltraTech access to the state's market.

A report put out by Elara Capital right after these deals said UltraTech's long-term prospects looked good with these and its previously announced expansion and would enable the company to achieve its target capacity of 200 mtpa. "Further, capacity augmentation would strengthen UltraTech Cement's place in India, likely making it the biggest beneficiary of demand prospects," it stated.

The one point that does not miss Jhanwar's attention is sustainability—he calls it a foundational principle. "It is a key criterion for all our business and operational decisions, and we are fully committed to achieving our net-zero goal by 2050," he says. It is a point that finds favour with Jigar Shah, Head of Sustainability Research at Maybank Investment Banking Group. "By joining the EP100 and RE100 initiatives, UltraTech has made the right moves when it comes to recycling of water, looking for alternative raw materials and greater use of the sea route. Also, the decision to take the M&A route is a positive since it does not increase emission levels for the company," he explains. EP100 and RE100 are global corporate initiatives for energy efficiency and renewable energy, respectively.

In the context of cement, emissions are always an important issue and that is where the role of sustainability gets larger. "Limestone emits carbon and during the process of transportation too. The large-scale use of fossil fuels is a reality in the cement business," points out Shah. "In the case of UltraTech, the focus on waste heat recovery (capturing and transferring the waste heat with a gas or liquid, which is back in the system as a source of extra energy) and moving towards wind and solar are important from a long-term strategy point of view."

With Jhanwar at the helm, UltraTech Cement seems set on a sustainable growth path. **BT**

@krishnagopalan

Cement

K.C. JHANWAR

MD, ULTRATECH CEMENT

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	63,240
	9MFY24	50,489.2
Profit before tax	**FY23**	7,416.3
	9MFY24	6,298.8
Profit after tax	**FY23**	5,073.4
	9MFY24	4,746.9
	FY22 RoE (%)	9.70
	Market Cap	2,88,852.2

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Data Source** BSE, ACE Equity

❹ Its future growth will come from the infra story and fast-paced urbanisation

❺ Last year, it expanded its installed capacity via two acquisitions

Four Pillars of Development

'Good governance' remains the core objective of the Uttar Pradesh government. Embracing the mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas', CM Yogi Adityanath committed to the comprehensive upliftment of all segments of society, with a special focus on the poor, farmers, women and the youth, without any discrimination. Initiatives such as Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra have played a pivotal role in ensuring the direct benefits of government schemes to every needy and deprived person. Today, even the common citizen is experiencing 'Ease of Living'. Through efficient and effective policies, approximately 6 crore people in Uttar Pradesh have been lifted out of multidimensional poverty. Visionary Prime Minister has set an ambitious goal to elevate the country's economy to $5 Trillion. In alignment with this vision, the Yogi government is diligently working towards strategically growing the State's economy to a size of $1 Trillion. Significant measures have been undertaken by the State government across all facets of the economy, encompassing financial and social infrastructure. As a result of robust law and order, ease of doing business, investment-friendly policies and a commitment to good governance, Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a dream destination for investment in the country.

Empowering Farmers

Transformative Policies & Support for Agricultural Prosperity

- The government stands as a genuine supporter of farmers. In line with this commitment, during the crushing season of 2023-24, the price of early maturing sugarcane varieties has been raised from the previous year's Rs. 350 per quintal to Rs. 370 per quintal
- Record-breaking sugarcane price payments of more than Rs. 2.34 Lakh Crore
- Ensuring 18 to 20 Hours of Power Supply in Rural Areas
- Empowering farmers with an additional irrigation potential of more than 23 lakh hectares by completing 36 projects including Ban Sagar, Arjun Sahayak and Saryu canal
- Implementation of Nand Baba Milk Mission with an investment of Rs. 1,000 Crore
- To promote organic and natural farming, across 1.86 lakh hectares
- Under PM KUSUM Yojana, 51,774 solar pumps have been installed
- With the aim of increasing the income of small and marginal farmers, 3,421 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have been formed in the year 2023-24
- Establishment of 125 Mandis (Markets)
- Establishment of Agritech Startups/Incubation Centers

- Facilitation of digital trade worth Rs. 3,468 Crore through the National Agriculture Market (e-NAM)
- The food grains production witnessed a growth rate of 5.1% and production of more than 625 lakh metric tonnes of food grains and 21.57 lakh metric tonnes of oilseeds
- A total of 4,18,483 Kisan Credit Cards (Animal Husbandry component) have been issued to all farmers engaged in animal husbandry
- New green field dairy plants have been established in the districts of Varanasi, Moradabad, Gorakhpur, Kannauj, Bareilly, Lucknow and Ayodhya, and are under construction in Kanpur and Meerut
- During the Kharif season of 2023-24, around 50.18 lakh metric tonnes of paddy were procured from 7.50 lakh farmers under the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme. An amount of about Rs. 10,856 crore has been directly deposited into the bank accounts of these farmers
- The year 2023 was declared the International Year of Millets, the State government procured over 3.55 lakh metric tonnes of millets from 66,879 farmers in 40 major millet-producing districts.

Empowering the Poor

Uttar Pradesh's Initiatives for Economic Inclusion

- 6 Crore people moved out of Multidimensional Poverty
- Under the Pradhan Mantri Svanidhi Yojana, loans worth about Rs. 2,317 crore have been distributed to a maximum of 17.34 lakh street vendors across the country
- 164.80 crore mandays created under MGNREGA Scheme
- Under the 'One Nation One Ration Card Scheme', 44,359 ration card holders from other States have availed of food grains from Uttar Pradesh, while 38,78,442 card holders from Uttar Pradesh have received food grains from other States so far
- Every month, more than 3.60 crore Antyodaya and eligible household cardholders in Uttar Pradesh receive free food grains. This initiative alignswith the Government of India's decision to provide free food grains for a period of 5 years starting from January 01, 2024, ensuring continued support for those in need
- Under the 'SVAMITVA Yojana', the drone survey to prepare rural residential records (Gharauni) has been completed in 90,866 villages, resulting in the preparation of 75,72,876 rural residential records.Out of this, Rs. 56,33,606 has been distributed to the land owners
- Under Amrut Yojana, a tap water supply connection was provided to about 10 lakh houses and a sewerage connection to 8 lakh houses.

The resolve of a developed Uttar Pradesh can be fulfilled only after giving full opportunity to women at every level, with the support of the youth to speed up the pace, with all possible help to the 'farmers' who are the food providers of the country and fulfilling the needs and aspirations of the poor

Empowering Women

Uttar Pradesh's Commitment to Safety and Equality

- Free education for girls up to Graduation
- Government jobs to more than 1.50 lakh women
- Under the Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana, 17.82 lakh girls have benefited thus far
- 2 cylinder refills are being provided free of cost to the beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana. So far, free LPG cylinders have been distributed to more than 1.75 Crore beneficiaries
- Construction of 2.62 crore toilets (Izzat Ghar) under the Swachh Bharat Mission, 10 crore people benefitted
- More than 54.44 lakh mothers benefited under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana
- Appointment of 58,000 women as BC Sakhi
- Monthly pension of Rs. 1,000 to more than 98.28 lakh destitute women, elderly and differently-abled persons
- Under Mukhyamantri Samuhik Vivah Yojana, 3.25 laks couples married, with the grant amount, increased from Rs. 35,000 to Rs. 51,000
- More than 2 lakh women benefitted from Pradhan Mantri SVANidhi Scheme
- To ensure the safety of women and senior citizens, the Safe City Project involves the installation and integration of CCTV cameras at crucial locations. This initiative also includes the identification and illumination of dark spots, pinpointing hotspots, setting up pink booths, and implementing panic buttons in buses/taxis
- 03 women PAC battalions are established in Lucknow, Gorakhpur and Badaun districts. Action is being taken to establish 5 more PAC battalions in the Balrampur, Jalaun, Mirzapur, Shamli and Bijnor districts
- Cybercrime cells have been set up in all the police stations. At present cyber crime police stations are operational in all 75 districts. All police stations have been equipped with CCTV cameras
- Establishment of Shakti Mobile and 10,417 women police beat in all 1584 police stations

Empowering Youth

Creating Opportunities & Fostering Innovation

- More then 6 Lakh government jobs given to youth
- Teaching training for four New Age courses - Data Science and Machine Learning, Internet of Things, Cyber Security, and Drone Technology - has commenced from the 2022-23 academic session
- Under 'Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarojgar Yojana,' from the year 2017-18 till now, approximately 1.80 lakh jobs have been generated
- Under the 'One District, One Product Financing Scheme', so far more than 1.92 lakh jobs have been created
- Nearly 4.08 lakh employment opportunities were created by providing toolkits to the beneficiaries under One District One Product Skill Development & Toolkit Distribution Scheme and Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana
- There is a provision for financial assistance of up to a maximum of Rs. 5 lakh for micro-entrepreneurs in the 'Mukhyamantri Sukshma Udyami Durghatna Bima Yojana launched in the year 2023
- Arrangements have been made to provide appointments on gazetted posts to medal-winning players of the State in international sports competitions
- Under the Swami Vivekanand Yuva Sashaktikaran Yojana, Uttar Pradesh has distributed over 25 lakh smartphones and tablets to students enrolled in higher educational institutions across the state, enhancing access to digital resources and fostering educational empowerment
- With the financial participation of Tata Technology Limited, the process of upgrading about 150 government industrial training institutes and constructing modern workshops within them is currently underway.
- The number of government ITIs has increased from 260 to 305, and the number of available seats has expanded from 1.25 lakh to 1.72 lakh.
- The 'Mukhyamantri Handloom and Powerloom Udyog Vikas Yojana' has been initiated to promote self-employment opportunities.
- At present, 75 government polytechnics are under construction

Uttar Pradesh's unwavering commitment to empowering its citizens across various sectors is evident through transformative policies and support initiatives. The state's focus on agricultural prosperity, financial inclusion, and women's empowerment has paved the way for significant advancements. From providing financial assistance to farmers and ensuring fair prices for their produce to creating employment opportunities for the youth and promoting innovation, Uttar Pradesh is forging a path towards inclusive growth. As the state continues to progress, it stands as a beacon of hope and opportunity, setting new standards for development and empowerment in the country.

Green Dreams

Adani Green Energy, under Vneet S. Jaain's leadership, is making clean energy affordable through a mix of scale, localisation and digitisation to help meet India's energy goals

By **Anand Adhikari**

▶ **VNEET S. JAAIN** has an interesting take on the word "impossible". To the Managing Director of Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL), the word simply means "I'm possible". To the 53-year-old, the refusal to take calculated risks in favour of a safe path translates to succumbing to failure by default. This mindset inspires his daily routine at work, and it has guided him to a successful career over the past two decades.

For instance, after almost one and a half decades with the Delhi-based Jindal Steel & Power Ltd (JSPL), Jaain chose to face fresh challenges, both geographically and professionally, by joining the Adani Group in Ahmedabad in the mid-2000s. "I was in my comfort zone. I was working very closely with the late O.P. Jindal and his sons. I was actually enjoying more authority because of my association with the family," explains Jaain. At JSPL, he was exposed to all departments—mining, steel making, rolling mills, power, etc. But he wanted to face new challenges.

Living by his mantra, Jaain packed his bags and left for Ahmedabad when the opportunity arose with the Adani Group. The Jindal Group was well known those days, while the Adani Group was emerging as a new player in the trading, agribusiness, and ports sectors. Not many professionals would have taken the risk of leaving a stable job in a metropolis to shift base to the sleepy city of Ahmedabad to join an emerging player.

In Ahmedabad, Jaain started his innings in the newly set up thermal power vertical. "I was the fourth or fifth employee of the energy vertical," recalls Jaain, who joined as Vice President in 2006. He was quickly elevated to the post of CEO at Adani Power Ltd; this was followed by a stint as CEO of Adani Transmission Ltd (now called Adani Energy Solutions Ltd). Later, he took over as CEO of Adani Infra (India) Ltd, before moving to AGEL in 2015 as a Non-executive Director.

Under Jaain's leadership, AGEL has grown to become one of the largest renewable energy firms in India, with a current wind and solar project portfolio of 20.80 GW. AGEL's operating portfolio is 8.47 GW, the largest in India. The firm has also sewed up long-term power purchase agreements with central and state governments, as well as with government-backed enterprises. Jaain, the winner in the Clean Energy category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year, says his contribution is minimal, as the Adani ecosystem contributed to the success of the green energy business. "I am executing my leader Gautam Adani's vision," he says modestly.

Clean Energy
VNEET S. JAAIN*
MD, ADANI GREEN ENERGY

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	7,776
	9MFY24	6,693
Profit before tax	**FY23**	1,367
	9MFY24	1,035
Profit after tax	**FY23**	973
	9MFY24	950
	FY23 RoE (%)	27.52
	Market Cap	3,04,688.7

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024; *CEO till May 2023
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

MR. CLEAN Vneet S. Jaain, MD, Adani Green Energy

Jaain has led many first-of-its-kind projects in the country, driven by his deep technical understanding and sector focus. The Adani Group has completed a number of significant energy projects under his leadership, including the biggest solar plant in the world at a single site, at Kamuthi, in Tamil Nadu. The facility covers 2,500 acres, or about 950 Olympic-sized football fields. The 650-MW facility was completed in a record eight months, with 8,500 people toiling day and night. "It gave us a big boost and confidence in the group. We can execute large-scale projects while managing all the contingencies and challenges," says Jaain. The Kamuthi plant was completed in 2016.

In 2022, AGEL commissioned a 390-MW wind-solar hybrid power plant in Rajasthan, the first such plant in India. In March 2023, AGEL's fourth wind-solar hybrid power plant with a capacity of 700 MW became fully operational in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer. With this, AGEL's operating wind-solar hybrid portfolio reached 2,140 MW, the largest wind-solar hybrid cluster in the world.

"At present, we have the most ambitious renewable projects, not only for Adani Group but also for India and the world," says Jaain, a mechanical engineer by training.

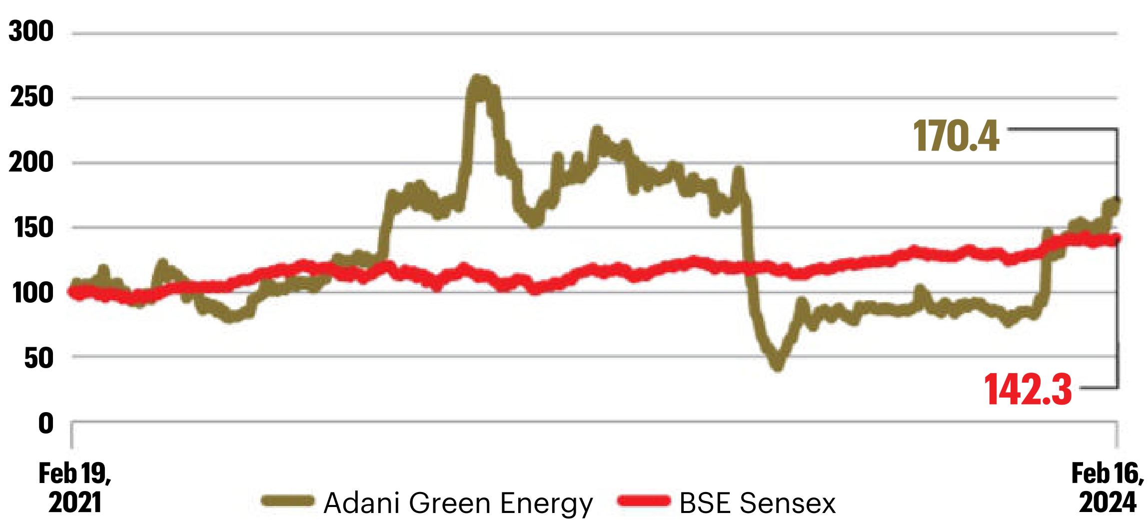
The company also has plans to develop 30 GW of renewable energy capacity at Khavda in Gujarat, which will be operational over the next five years. Khavda, located in the Kutch district of Gujarat, is a promising location for wind and solar energy projects. When completed, the Khavda renewable energy park will be the largest such installation in the world. "We have already operationalised 551 MW of solar capacity in Khavda by supplying power to the national grid," adds Jaain.

While initially appointed as MD & CEO in July 2020 for a period of five years, Jaain relinquished the CEO's role at AGEL in May 2023, with Amit Singh stepping in as the new CEO. Under the leadership of these two, AGEL is aiming to deliver 45 GW of power by 2030. The company is focussed on delivering affordable power. "We have developed the in-house capabilities to execute large-scale projects, which brings economies of scale," says Jaain.

The company is also supporting the indigenous supply chain for equipment used in renewable energy (RE). AGEL is leveraging group synergy in RE equipment manufacturing to accelerate the clean energy transition. For example, Adani Wind, the wind manufacturing division of Adani New Industries Limited (ANIL), has an integrated manufacturing ecosystem for wind turbine generators (WTG) with a manufacturing capacity of 1.5 GW, which produces India's largest onshore WTG of 5.2 MW. Adani Wind is focussed on de-

Rising Again

- The Adani Green Energy stock outperformed the broader market index in the past three years
- The stock enjoys a higher multiple because of the new sector and huge capacity expansion plans



Data has been indexed to 100
Source ACE Equity

veloping technologically advanced next-generation turbines with the objective of making India the global manufacturing hub for renewable equipment.

"They are supplying 100% of the turbines to AGEL. This gives us a cost advantage," says Jaain. Adani Wind is focussed on developing technologically advanced next-generation turbines with the objective of making India the global manufacturing hub for renewable equipment.

Then there's Adani Solar, which is creating a manufacturing line to produce silicon ingots exclusively for solar wafers, cells, and modules. The group is also developing storage solutions for seamless connectivity with the electricity grid. It plans to invest ₹24,500 crore in three pump storage projects in Tamil Nadu, with a combined capacity of 4.9 GW. It has also lined up investments of more than ₹5,000 crore in pump storage projects in Telangana with a capacity of 1.35 GW. The localisation strategy with backward integration to manufacture equipment for renewable energy is helping put a check on costs, which will result in affordable power, say experts.

AGEL has continued to invest in innovative technologies to optimise energy generation while minimising generating costs. Its newly operationalised solar-wind hybrid portfolio of 2,140 MW deploys cutting-edge bifacial solar photovoltaic modules and horizontal single-axis tracking (HSAT) technology to extract maximum energy from the sun. "Machine learning and artificial intelligence techniques are also helping to reduce costs. Predictive maintenance inputs are provided via a cloud-based analytics platform that allows for the remote administration of all locations from a single place, reducing downtime," Jaain explains. There is also centralised surveillance, which allows the company to monitor the functioning of a solar plant from anywhere. More particularly, the Energy Network Operation Center (ENOC), the first of its kind in the world, enables understanding of which modules are running below ideal levels, thereby allowing for informed remedial action. This responsiveness has resulted in higher uptime, increased energy throughput and more profitability.

With equity and debt capital raised, the company has put in place the capital management framework for achieving the targeted 45-GW capacity by 2030. The company recently issued equity share warrants to the promoters for a total investment of ₹9,350 crore. In January, it announced that it had completed the funding of a $750-million Holdco bond, which was due in September 2024. This redemption will result in deleveraging AGEL by way of equity proceeds. Ventura Securities, in its latest report, says that AGEL's debt profile is still relatively healthy compared to other renewable energy companies in India. "The company's interest coverage ratio is currently at 2.7 times. Additionally, Adani Green's debt is mostly long-term, which means that it has a relatively stable repayment schedule," it said in its January report.

For a man who believes that anything can be achieved, Jaain has ample support from Adani Group Founder and Chairman Gautam Adani, who is equally ambitious and has grand plans for India. That's what makes AGEL the Indian solution for clean energy on a global scale. BT

@anandadhikari

Steaming Ahead

❶ Vneet S. Jaain worked on building Adani's 8.4-GW renewable energy portfolio, which is the biggest in India

❷ The company is set to deliver 45 GW of power by 2030

❸ Localisation strategy, local supply chain created

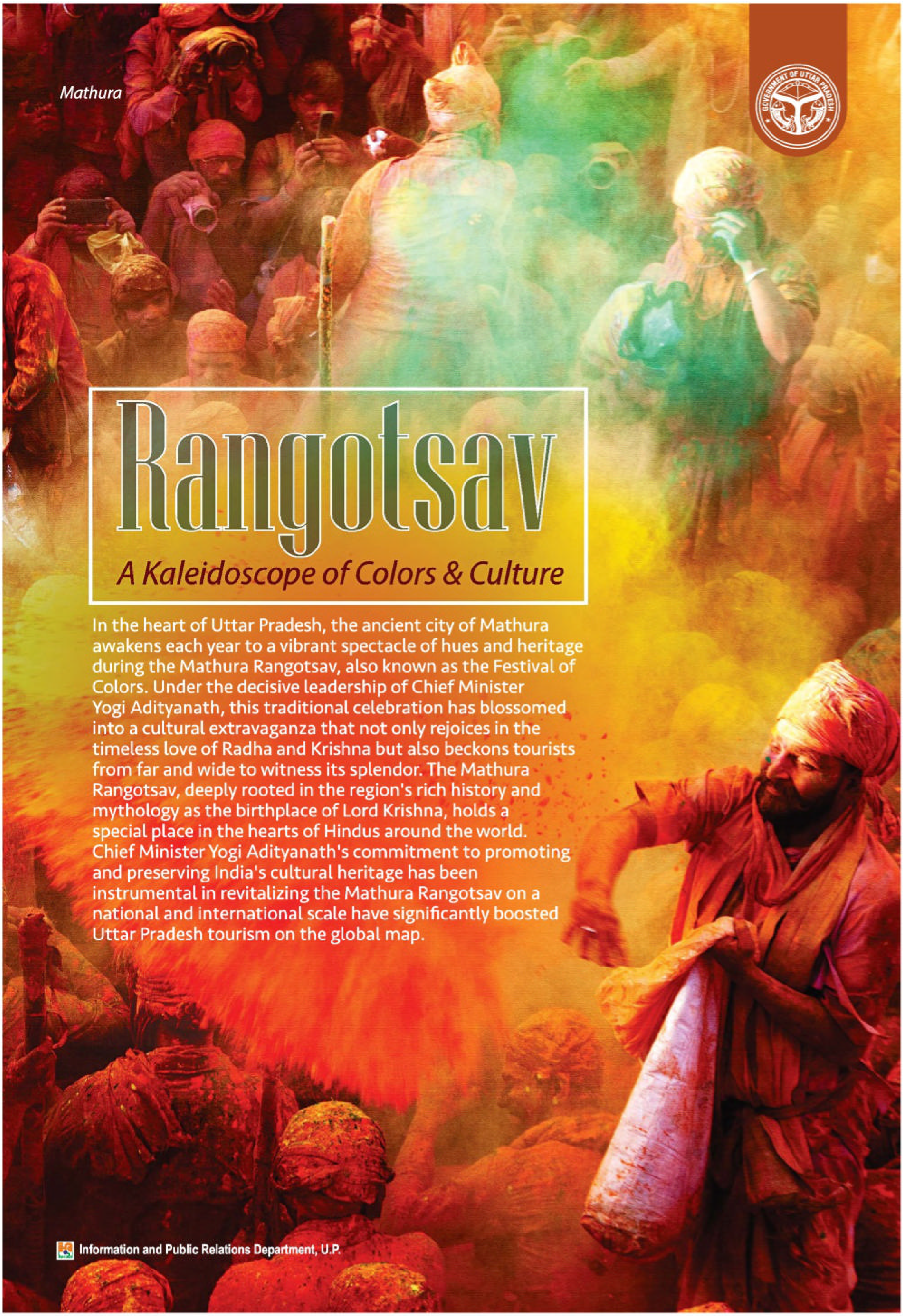
❹ The company is using AI, ML and other technologies to maximise energy generation and minimise the cost of generation

❺ Completed the funding of a $750-million Holdco bond

The Big Plan

Adani Green's renewable energy capacity

- Operational: **8.47 GW**
- Under execution: **12.36 GW**
- Locked in growth: **20.84 GW**
- Target: **45 GW** (by 2030)



Rangotsav

A Kaleidoscope of Colors & Culture

In the heart of Uttar Pradesh, the ancient city of Mathura awakens each year to a vibrant spectacle of hues and heritage during the Mathura Rangotsav, also known as the Festival of Colors. Under the decisive leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, this traditional celebration has blossomed into a cultural extravaganza that not only rejoices in the timeless love of Radha and Krishna but also beckons tourists from far and wide to witness its splendor. The Mathura Rangotsav, deeply rooted in the region's rich history and mythology as the birthplace of Lord Krishna, holds a special place in the hearts of Hindus around the world. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's commitment to promoting and preserving India's cultural heritage has been instrumental in revitalizing the Mathura Rangotsav on a national and international scale have significantly boosted Uttar Pradesh tourism on the global map.

SMART STRATEGY Sunil Vachani, Executive Chairman, Dixon Technologies (India) Ltd

SUM OF THE PARTS

Dixon Technologies is reaping the benefits of some smart decisions it made a decade ago. Founder Sunil Vachani is now focussed on consolidating the gains

By **Arnab Dutta** • PHOTO BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

▶ **IT ALL STARTED WITH AN IDEA.** For a young Sunil Vachani, the proposition was simple: to set up a company that would specialise in manufacturing electronic components and products on behalf of other firms. And with this idea, he approached his father for funds. But this was the early 1990s, and India then was a different place. Then, electronics manufacturing was confined mainly to television and refrigerators. Moreover, most leading players preferred to keep their production in-house. What we know today as electronics manufacturing services (EMS), was virtually unheard of back in the day. Vachani, however, was confident about its future. Freshly back from London with a graduate degree, the young entrepreneur's journey took flight in December 1993 when his father finally agreed to back his plan. "He trusted me and said, 'I am going to give you four things.' He gave me a small capital to start the venture; chose the name Dixon [for the venture]; sent one of his trusted protégées, Atul Lall, and [gave me] his blessings. That's how the journey began," says Vachani, who is the winner in the Consumer Goods & Durables category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year. Atul Lall is now the CEO of Dixon.

Consumer Goods & Durables

SUNIL VACHANI

EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN,
DIXON TECHNOLOGIES (INDIA) LTD

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	12,192
	9MFY24	13,032.9
Profit before tax	**FY23**	344.8
	9MFY24	364.3
Profit after tax	**FY23**	255.1
	9MFY24	277.6
	FY23 RoE (%)	22.63
	Market Cap	41,073.5

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

And Vachani's journey has been nothing short of remarkable. From a single rented factory in Noida, only 30-odd employees, one modest product for one customer—assembling CRT TV sets for Goldstar (now LG Electronics)—Dixon Technologies has come a long way. Today, it is a leader across multiple sectors, servicing leading global and Indian brands, and proudly stands among the top players in the global EMS arena. Dixon today has 23 factories spread across Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh, and employs close to 25,000 professionals. And, from a few lakh rupees as turnover in the first year, it has surged to ₹12,192 crore in FY23. Now Vachani expects it to grow to ₹18,000 crore by end-FY24.

Incidentally, none of the company's customers has left since their first association with Dixon over its three decade-long journey. What has impressed industry watchers is the kind of growth that Dixon has registered over the past five years. From ₹2,984 crore in FY19, its sales have grown at a CAGR of 42.2% till FY23, defying the economic slowdown that the pandemic had wrought.

During the first nine months of FY24, Dixon's top line has surged by another 49%, from ₹9,125 crore in April-December FY23 to ₹13,033 crore in the current fiscal.

How did Dixon pull this off? Experts say the reason could also be geopolitical. Global electronics players are increasingly looking for an alternative to China. Hence, Indian EMS firms have grown in importance. In the post-pandemic era, with the China +1 strategy on the rise, Dixon has benefitted from its unique positioning, securing major global players operating in India as clients. Dixon has also benefitted from the government's policy moves, where it is looking to scale up local manufacturing in order to establish the country as a major electronics exports hub. A key intervention in this regard is the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme and it has helped in import substitution by bringing down the extent of imports in key sectors like mobile handsets, thereby helping Dixon's growth. The company is a major beneficiary of the multi-sectoral scheme across sectors.

Bright Sparks

❶ Started in 1993 in one rented factory in Noida, Dixon now has 23 facilities, 25,000 employees and is a supplier to all leading consumer durables and handset brands

❷ Dixon Technologies has grown by leaps and bounds in the last five years with a top line CAGR of 42%

❸ With a capacity of 70 million units a year, Dixon is the leading EMS in the mobile handsets industry in India

❹ Dixon diversified a decade ago and this was crucial in propelling its growth. It has also benefitted from the government's PLI scheme

❺ Experts anticipate a robust future as the local EMS industry is estimated to grow at 32% CAGR till FY26

But not all factors are external. As Vachani says, the seeds for the present success were sown around a decade ago. "The decisions that we took 10 years ago are now giving us great results. We decided to de-risk the business model and diversify across multiple categories," he tells *Business Today*. Since then, the company has diversified into nine key categories: televisions, mobile handsets, LED lighting, telecom equipment, security & surveillance systems, washing machines, wearable items like smartwatches, refrigerators, and IT hardware. In fact, Dixon was one of the few Indian companies that got approval under the first PLI scheme for manufacturing of mobile handsets in October 2020. Earlier it used to manufacture some 70,000-80,000 handsets a year; the capacity has now jumped to 70 million units a year. To put it in perspective, Dixon's handset manufacturing capacity is about 27% of India's market size of 260 million handsets a year. As a result, while a decade ago it used to get 95% of its sales from one category—LED TVs—today the share has come down to 20% as other categories like mobile handsets have grown substantially.

Industry watchers believe Dixon's growth story has only started. According to Hitesh Taunk, Senior Research Analyst at ICICI Securities, the Indian EMS industry is likely to grow at a CAGR of 32% to ₹4.5 lakh crore by FY26, where Dixon currently has a market share of 3-4%, leaving ample "opportunity to expand and grow". Taunk points out that Dixon's future revenue growth hinges on several key strategies: expanding its customer base, maximising wallet share in the mobile segment, and diversifying into new segments. Sectors like electronics, IT products, telecom products, LED lights, and components for refrigerators and ACs—many of which Dixon is already active in—would drive the future revenue growth of the company.

After guiding Dixon for three decades, Vachani now wants to place the company among the global elite in the EMS space. "Business is akin to yoga. Once you discover your focus and balance, everything aligns," he reflects, revealing his guiding philosophy. In fact, it is this unwavering focus and commitment towards his work and customers that has kept him away from the temptation of launching a consumer brand, a path many EMS players tend to pursue. But Vachani is not like the rest. As he says, competing with his own customers is a red line he would never cross.

Most importantly, Vachani, having set his eyes firmly on the global stage, is sure of one thing: his late father would have been very proud. BT

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CELEBRATIONS PROGRESS & PROSPERITY UTTAR PRADESH'S NEW IDENTITY

UP signifies 'Unlimited Potential. The State neither lacks 'manpower' nor 'willpower. The state has assimilated respected the Prime Minister's instructions on value addition and framed its policies. Transformation with speed is the new identity of UP. This land is blessed by sages and saints and has received the divine blessings of rivers like Ganga, Yamuna and Sarayu. It is a land of virtue as well as 'enterprise and entrepreneurship. Uttar Pradesh is the blessed land of 'Prakriti' (nature), 'Parmatma' (God) and 'Pratibha' (talent). The 'New Uttar Pradesh', as the growth engine of the country, is transitioning from being'Uttam Pradesh' to becoming an 'Udyam Pradesh,' in order to evolve into a 'Viksit Pradesh' in alignment with the resolve of a Viksit Bharat. Now people have started saying that Surakshit Nivesh Matlab Uttar Pradesh (safe investment means Uttar Pradesh).

-Yogi Adityanath
Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

*At GBC-4.0, Lucknow

THE MAN WITH A GREEN VISION

As the MD of Torrent Power, Jinal Mehta is overseeing a massive transition to green energy. His unwavering determination can make the company one to watch out for

By **Krishna Gopalan**

▶ **THE WINDS OF CHANGE** are blowing all over Torrent Power, which is headquartered in Ahmedabad and is considered one of India's foremost power utility companies. Spearheading this transformation is 40-year-old Jinal Mehta, the company's soft-spoken Managing Director and the recipient of this year's *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs award in the Energy category. And it would be a truism to say that within the rigorous landscape of the power industry, Torrent's ambitious vision mirrors Mehta's own unwavering determination to succeed.

"The foundation of our strategy is that we are one of the few integrated energy companies. We think a play across the value chain would help in meeting the needs of the energy transition," outlines Mehta. The eventual

Energy
JINAL MEHTA
MANAGING DIRECTOR, TORRENT POWER

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	25,694.1
	9MFY24	20,654.6
Profit before tax	**FY23**	3,041.4
	9MFY24	1,965.3
Profit after tax	**FY23**	2,164.7
	9MFY24	1,448
	FY23 RoE (%)	20.66
	Market Cap	54,249.6

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

PHOTO BY **NANDAN DAVE**

GREEN PASTURES Jinal Mehta, Managing Director, Torrent Power

Synnova Gears and Transmissions Pvt Ltd - Blending Innovation with Sustainability to Push India Towards a Greener Path

Suresh Vekaria
Chairman and Managing Director
Synnova Gears and Transmissions Pvt Ltd

In the pursuit of sustainability, genuine empathy emerges as the driving force. Visionary leaders acknowledge the environmental impact of their carbon footprint and commit to pioneering sustainable solutions. Among these trailblazers stands Suresh Vekaria, a seasoned figure in India's Auto, Agri, and off-highway sectors. His company specializes in manufacturing Gears, Shafts, and Other Transmission items, primarily supplying to OEMs. Spanning across 22,000 sq. yards (Unit-1) and 76,321 sq. yards (Unit-2) In Rajkot (Gujarat), the company boasts state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities and cutting-edge technical expertise, offering quality products and cost-effective solutions that align with global standards and customer requirements. As the leader of Synnova, Suresh Vekaria spearheads a movement towards innovative practices deeply rooted in sustainability.

Synnova's mission is clear: to harness collective talent and forge a future where innovation and sustainability walk hand in hand. As India steers towards a greener path, Synnova emerges as a beacon of responsible enterprise, illuminating a way forward towards a more environmentally conscious tomorrow.

Forging Ahead on the Green Frontier: Suresh Vekaria's Vision for Synnova

As the Chairman and Managing Director at Synnova, Suresh Vekaria shoulders the responsibility of steering the company towards a future defined by cleaner energy and sustainability. His vision is bold, aiming to propel India towards embracing eco-friendly practices at an accelerated pace.

Despite the daunting scale of the task, with India's vastness and dense industrial landscape, Vekaria's resolve remains unwavering. Through Synnova Gears, he champions a relentless pursuit of excellence, anchored in quantifiable value and the cultivation of a sustainable ecosystem.

A shining testament to Synnova Gears' commitment to sustainability is the establishment of a 2.6 MW windmill in Jamnagar. Vekaria emphasizes that change begins at home, and this initiative marks a significant stride towards a more environmentally conscious future for India. By curbing greenhouse emissions, the windmill exemplifies Vekaria's ethos of pursuing what is right, in the right manner, thereby transforming vision into tangible reality.

Elevating Human Flourishing Through Sustainable Practices

At Synnova, the commitment to altruism extends beyond environmental concerns; it encompasses the holistic well-being of people. Recognizing that sustainability and growth are interconnected facets encompassing both the environment and humanity, Synnova embraces a comprehensive approach.

Responding to the recommendations of the CSR and Sustainability Committee, Synnova has embraced a CSR policy to align its activities with the overarching goal of sustainability. Under the stewardship of Suresh Vekaria, Synnova Gears allocated substantial amount towards educational initiatives. These efforts have been pivotal in nurturing the potential of underprivileged children, laying a foundation for India's future.

These initiatives mark a transformative juncture for Synnova Gears, propelling the company into new realms of possibility. By prioritizing values and investing in human capital, Synnova emerges not only as a frontrunner in India's corporate landscape but also as a catalyst for financial growth, underscoring the intrinsic link between sustainability and prosperity.

Recognition Beyond the Bottom Line

Synnova's achievements extend far beyond mere financial gains, as evidenced by its receipt of prestigious accolades. Among them, Synnova was honoured as the MSME of the Year in Automotive & OEM for the Year 2022-2023 by ET MSME, a testament to its excellence in the industry.

A Vision Transcending Profits

Under the leadership of Suresh Vekaria, Synnova Gears has embarked on a trajectory driven by values and sustainable energy practices. The organization's commitment to altruism is matched only by its dedication to sustainability. What remains intriguing is the potential impact of this transformation on India's industrial landscape. With a burgeoning emphasis on empathy and sustainability, Synnova's evolution may well herald a paradigm shift towards operational excellence, shaping the future of India's industries in profound ways.

plan is clear—to have clean energy round the clock. Mehta envisions that it will lead, eventually, to a move to green hydrogen. "That's really where the future is."

Mehta characterises the current phase at Torrent Power as Torrent Power 2.0, contrasting it with the earlier phase marked by the energy transition and gas-based projects. He emphasises, "The transition to renewables will drive the majority of our growth. This, coupled with distribution and B2C, is pivotal for creating future value." The company's financial performance reflects this optimism. Torrent's total income has grown at a CAGR of 24% over the past three years, with profit after tax (PAT) growing at 22%. As a result, its stock price has also surged, jumping by over 136% in the two years to February 21, outperforming the BSE Sensex, which rose 26%.

The company operates across five key areas: generation, transmission, distribution, renewable energy, and power cables, forming an integrated energy portfolio. In power distribution, it serves 12 centres, including Ahmedabad, Surat, Dahej, Kalwa, and Agra, with a capacity of 4,700 MW, catering to up to 4 million customers.

Regarding renewables, the government has set a 500-GW target for the country by 2030. Torrent Power's participation in the recently concluded Vibrant Gujarat summit signifies its commitment. It inked four MoUs worth ₹47,350 crore in renewable energy, green hydrogen, and electricity distribution, aligning with this vision. As for green hydrogen, industry watchers are already bullish about its potential. According to Deven Choksey, CMD of wealth management and investment advisory firm DRChoksey FinServ, green hydrogen has the potential to be disruptive. He feels it must be understood from both the production and consumption perspectives. "It can cost substantially lesser than the prevailing price and that will have a ripple effect across usage opportunities. A business model of today can look dramatically different once that takes place," he says.

At Torrent Power, there are many projects at various stages of discussion and implementation, with the possibility of injecting green hydrogen with gas being a very interesting one. Torrent's existing gas distribution network will come in handy and Mehta says this is something that is already taking place in the West and can disrupt the status quo here. To elaborate, Torrent's gas distribution business, which is through a different company, Torrent Gas, operates in 35 cities and does not overlap with the power operation. The 47 cities put together, he says, can grow to 100 cities over the next decade. "There is no other group with a big presence in both gas and power. Though that is at a group level, synergies will be shared," he says.

Torrent is clear about its future strategy and has already identified avenues for growth. During the Q4FY23 earnings call, the company stated that it wants to focus more on distribution along with the renewables segment. And to this effect, the company is actively scouting for inorganic acquisitions along with greenfield projects. But power distribution is a tricky business and achieving growth, especially through the inorganic route, has been an uphill battle.

"The real test in distribution lies in transforming operations to generate tangible value," explains Mehta. However, each market presents its own unique set of hurdles. Consider Daman, the first instance of privatisation in a Union Territory, where the high load density due to industrialisation signalled immense growth potential for both demand and infrastructure. "Despite paying a premium compared to other bidders, the investments made in network quality have yielded significant returns over the past two years," explains Mehta.

For Mehta, the focus ultimately is on customer experience through reliability and reducing AT&C (aggregate technical & commercial) losses (in Gujarat it is less than 4% and comparable to global standards. Similarly, in Bhiwandi, AT&C losses plummeted from 65% to 9%). As for reliance on coal or gas, Mehta is clear that from a direction point of view, it will reduce significantly.

Mehta's green vision promises interesting times for both his company and the country. BT

@krishnagopalan

Power Play

❶ **Under Mehta, Torrent is undergoing a transition. It intends to focus more on renewables and green hydrogen is something the company is excited about**

❷ **Torrent Power does not plan to grow significantly in coal or gas**

❸ **Torrent Power's distribution business operates in 12 cities**

❹ **Torrent recently inked MoUs worth ₹47,350 crore, with most of it in renewables**

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Dr. P. Shyama Raju
Chancellor,
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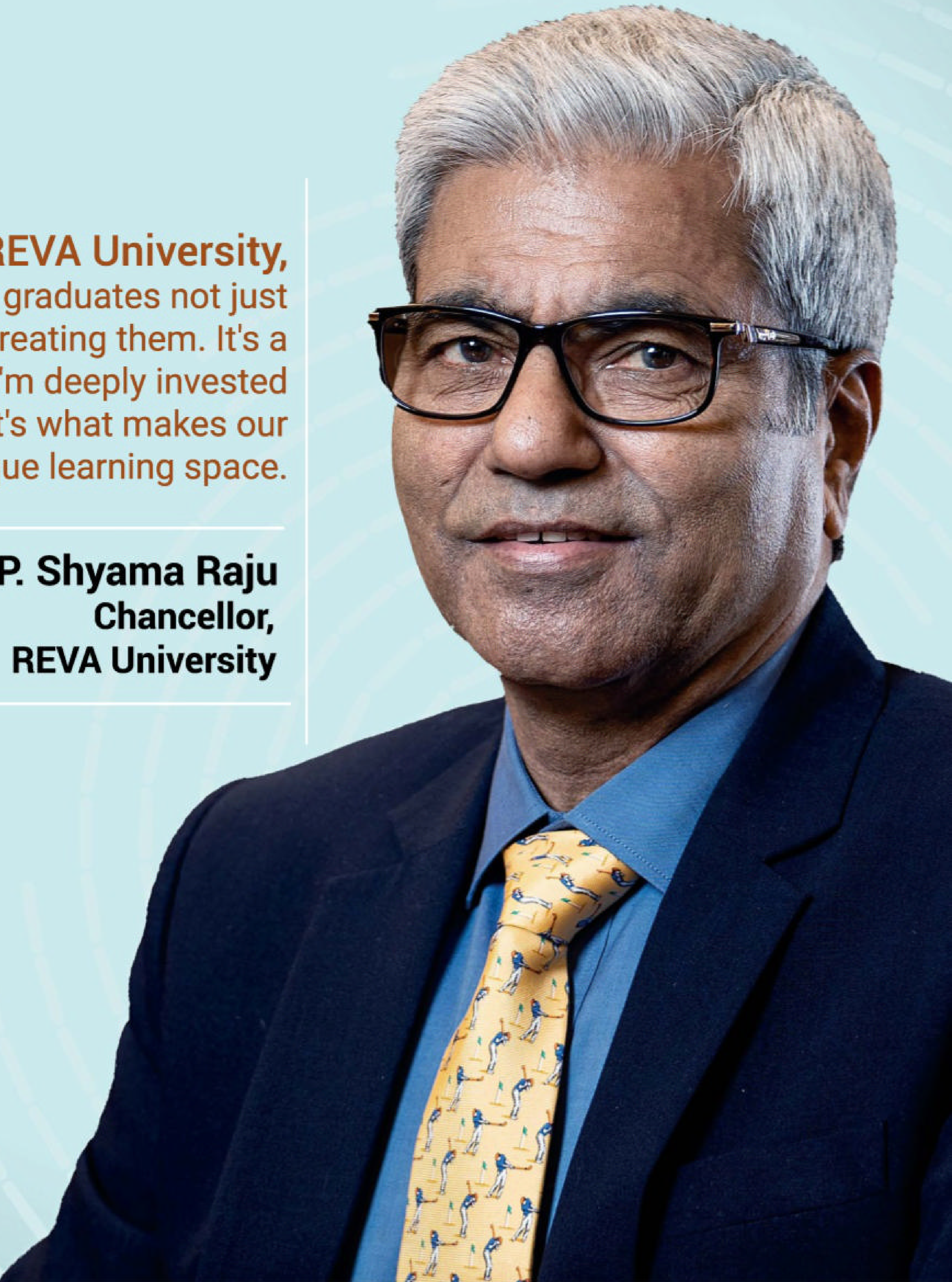

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DESTINY'S CHILD

From youthful freedom to success as a top executive, Varun Jaipuria has ensured the family-run Varun Beverages is in able, strong hands

By **Arnab Dutta** • PHOTO BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

▶ **IN 2009, WHEN** Varun Jaipuria returned to India, fresh from completing his studies in the UK, the idea of diving into his family's business seemed distant. Instead, he longed to savour a year of youthful freedom and exploration. But destiny wanted him to walk a different path.

Hailing from a traditional Marwari family, Jaipuria was tasked with overseeing the family's bottling business in Sri Lanka. Fast forward 15 years, and as the Executive Vice Chairman of Varun Beverages (VBL) now, he has plenty to celebrate. Steering a family business to unparalleled success is no easy feat, yet Jaipuria has achieved what many second- and third-generation businessmen still strive for. At the age of 36, he is one of the youngest recipients of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs award. He has won in the FMCG category.

Unlike many modern entrepreneurs who flourish in the limelight, Jaipuria prefers to operate away from media attention. However, when it comes to discussing the intricacies of his business in person, he sheds his reserved demeanour.

Consider this: in an age when health-conscious consumers are increasingly eschewing sugary aerated beverages, Jaipuria's VBL, responsible for bottling and distributing nearly the entirety of PepsiCo India's beverage portfolio, has experienced remarkable growth. Between 2021 and 2023, the company's top line surged at a 35% CAGR, soaring from ₹8,958 crore to ₹16,321 crore. Under Jaipuria's direct leadership as CEO of its India and South Asia operations, revenues nearly doubled in two years, from ₹6,596 crore in 2021 to ₹12,633 crore in 2023. Furthermore, despite widespread concerns about inflation, VBL has also managed to improve its margins: from 7.42% in 2019, its standalone net profit margin has jumped to 14.05% in 2023.

Since Jaipuria assumed leadership of the domestic territory, which contributes approximately 80% to VBL's top line, its market capitalisation has surged fourfold to ₹1.97 lakh crore (as of February 23, 2024). This remarkable growth stems from a pivotal shift in the company's operations, which is the re-franchising initiative spearheaded by PepsiCo India in 2019. This move effectively doubled VBL's addressable territory in India. Previously serving roughly half of the Indian market, VBL acquired a significant portion of PepsiCo India's territories, expanding its coverage to over 92%.

But all this was before the pandemic. With the outbreak of Covid-19, disruptions jolted VBL's daily operations. And that is when another chapter unfolded.

FMCG

VARUN JAIPURIA

EXECUTIVE VICE CHAIRMAN, VARUN BEVERAGES LTD

Revenue from operations	**CY23**	16,321.1
	CY22	13,390.6
Profit before tax	**CY23**	2,739.4
	CY22	2,023.6
Profit after tax	**CY23**	2,101.8
	CY22	1,550.1
	CY22 RoE (%)	33.77
	Market Cap	1,96,812.5

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; Varun Beverages follows a January-December financial year
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

YOUNG AND BOLD
Varun Jaipuria, Executive Vice Chairman, Varun Beverages Ltd

Amidst the pandemic, VBL embarked on a significant capex cycle, prioritising infrastructure expansion for last-mile delivery and retail storage. This, coupled with agile execution of business and product strategies, propelled sales to record highs in 2022, notes Jaipuria.

Jaipuria shares the credit of VBL's success with his father, Ravi Jaipuria, the Promoter and Chairman of VBL. "He has tremendous risk-taking abilities. So, when everyone else was cutting down on spending, my father went on a capex spree during 2020 and 2021. And being a large bottling partner, in comparison to the fragmented model followed by our competitors, we could execute the plans much faster," Jaipuria tells *Business Today*. Since its acquisition of the additional PepsiCo India territories, the company has added nearly 13 new plants in India, taking the number to 33.

Interestingly, while Coca-Cola has been traditionally leading the local market with its product and pricing strategy, VBL took the lead by tweaking its strategy. It introduced 1.5 litre and 400 ml packs at competitive prices, thereby helping it turn the tables.

"We thought, why don't we come up with a new strategy and become the leader. So, the change in pack pricing also gave us a lot of traction," he says.

Jaipuria also recognised the untapped opportunities in rural areas, particularly with the enhanced road and electricity connectivity. The upgraded road network facilitated increased access to remote regions at reduced costs, while the improved electricity supply in rural areas across northern India enabled the company to deploy its freezers in retail outlets previously hindered by unreliable power supply. After all, stocking chilled cola bottles in local stores remains one of the most effective methods of attracting consumers.

According to Emkay Global Financial Services, multiple factors will sustain VBL's business through FY24 and likely into FY25. Over recent years, VBL has invested ₹3,000 crore in capacity expansion, aiming to further enhance sales. This investment is projected to increase production capacity by over 45% from its peak in 2022. "The beverage category is outperforming other FMCG categories on under-penetration and improved road and electricity infra. VBL has identified these tailwinds and has invested close to ₹3,000 crore for capacity expansion. Further, it is benefitting from new products at affordable price points," says Devanshu Bansal, Research Analyst at Emkay Global Financial Services. They estimate that by calendar year 2025, VBL's revenue could nearly double to touch ₹23,570 crore, while its profit after tax (PAT) could reach ₹3,350 crore.

Experts suggest that India's per capita consumption of colas remains among the lowest, indicating potential for a broader portfolio, including juices, value-added dairy, packaged water, and energy drinks. Despite expanding retail reach in recent years, VBL has only accessed about 3.5 million of the country's 12 million FMCG outlets. As India's per capita income rises, this gap presents an opportunity to increase consumption of branded packaged drinks over the next decade.

For Jaipuria, the dream run has just begun. BT

@arndutt

Young Energy

❶ VBL is responsible for bottling and distributing nearly the whole of PepsiCo India's beverage portfolio

❷ Under Jaipuria, VBL's market capitalisation has surged fourfold to ₹1.97 lakh crore (from January 1, 2022, to February 23, 2024)

❸ Jaipuria saw new opportunities in India's hinterlands

❹ Since 2019, VBL has added 13 new plants, taking the total number to 33. Three more are in the pipeline

Jaipuria recognised the untapped opportunities in rural areas, particularly with the enhanced road and electricity connectivity. It facilitated VBL's access to remote rural regions at reduced costs

An IMPACT Presentation

HEALTHCARE Maestros

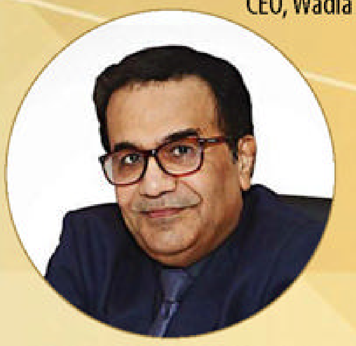
Orchestrating Excellence in Leading Hospitals

DR.MINNIE BODHANWALA
CEO, Wadia Hospital

SHRI MANSUKH MANDAVIYA
Minister of Health, GOI

DR. ALOK SHARMA
Director, NeuroGen Brain and Spine Institute

DR. UPASANA ARORA
CEO, Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital



DR. BHUPENDRA AVASTHI
Managing Director, Surya Hospital

ORCHESTRATING EXCELLENCE IN LEADING HOSPITALS DELVES INTO THE INTRICATE WORLD OF HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP, EXPLORING THE PIVOTAL ROLES AND INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES OF THOSE AT THE HELM OF THE WORLD'S PREMIER MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS. THIS COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE ILLUMINATES THE MULTIFACETED APPROACH REQUIRED TO NAVIGATE THE COMPLEXITIES OF MODERN HEALTHCARE DELIVERY, EMPHASIZING THE BLEND OF CLINICAL EXPERTISE, VISIONARY LEADERSHIP, AND OPERATIONAL ACUMEN NECESSARY FOR EXCELLENCE. THROUGH INTERVIEWS, CASE STUDIES, AND ANALYSIS, IT OFFERS A DEEP DIVE INTO THE M.

DR. SUJIT CHATTERJEE
CEO, Dr L H Hiranandani Hospital

DR. DEEPAK NAMJOSHI
Founder, Criticare Asia Multispeciality Hospitals

HUZAIFA SHEHABI
CEO, Saifee Hospital

DR. SHASHI BALIYAN
Md & Founder, Clearmedi Healthcare

DR. RANJAN PAI
MD, Manipal Group of Hospitals

CDR. NAVNEET BALI
CEO, Clearmedi Healthcare

DR. NARESH TREHAN
Chairman, Medanta Hopsital

DR. TARANG GIANCHANDANI
Group CEO, H N Reliance Foundation Hospital

DR. ALOK SHARMA , NeuroGen Brain and Spine Institute

Making Bharat a Global Leader in Regenerative Medicine for Disabilities

Bharat's Historic Role in Healing and Health

Bharat has historically shown humankind the way forward in the field of healing and medicine. Sushruta is referred to as the "Father of Surgery" in ancient India. His descriptions of surgical techniques laid the foundation for surgery. Charaka was an ancient Indian physician who is referred to as the "Father of Indian Medicine." His work laid the foundation for Ayurveda and influenced medical practices. Yoga has been a guiding light to health over the millennia. However, for the past two centuries, the field of medicine has largely been dominated by technical advances from the West. But this is fast changing with the new Renaissance in Indian medicine, especially in the advanced field of Regenerative Medicine.

Dr Alok Sharma presenting the honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji with the copy of his book "Stem cell therapy for neurological disorders"

Prime Minister's Vision & Leadership in the Health Field

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat' embodies a resolute commitment to propel India towards unprecedented heights of prosperity and excellence. The government has done a lot of work to enhance healthcare, financial inclusion, gender parity, and sanitation with programs such as Ayushman Bharat, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana. The Honourable Prime Minister has led the way in promoting and popularizing Yoga across the world.

Shri Narendra Modiji has always had a special commitment to the 'Divyang' of the country. He shifted the nomenclature of the disabled from 'Viklang' to 'Divyang' thereby bringing about a shift in the attitude to disabilities which affects 2.68 crore people. He brought out the landmark "Rights of Persons with Disability Act 2016". He has also been committed to the field of stem cells, having initiated the creation of a stem cell therapy center at the Surat Civil Hospital in 2011. He visited Nobel Prize winner for stem cell research Professor Yamanaka in Kyoto, Japan, in August 2014, and made a passionate speech about his Kyoto visit and the importance of stem cells in the Parliament in 2015.

Dr. Alok Sharma Pioneering Work in Cell/Stem Cells

Dr. Alok Sharma, a distinguished Neurosurgeon from Mumbai, embodies the visionary principles championed by the Hon'ble Prime Minister through his groundbreaking Cellular Therapy initiatives. The visionary ideals of our esteemed Prime Minister, encapsulated in 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', 'Make in India', and 'Skill India', find real-life manifestation through the groundbreaking efforts of Dr. Alok Sharma. Through his work in cell/stem cell therapy Dr Sharma has made India a Global leader in the field of cell/stem cell therapy for neurological disabilities. He has treated more than 13,000 patients with neurological disorders from over 102 different countries from all six continents. He has published 172 scientific papers and 24 books. He created medical history by publishing the world's first scientific paper on the role of cell therapy in Autism.

Paradigm shift in the worldwide thinking in the treatment of Autism and Cerebral Palsy

The most significant impact of his work has been in the management of Autism which as per USA CDC figures, affects one out of 36 children. All these years it was believed that there was no treatment available for Autism and Cerebral Palsy. His extensive clinical work and pioneering scientific publications have shown the world that these conditions can be treated with cellular therapy resulting in improvements in their mental and physical conditions, eventually enabling them to live independent lives. Our country has now become a global leader and hub for Autism treatment with Cell therapy.

Saving lives in fatal conditions like Muscular Dystrophy

Our Hon'ble Prime Minister has shown

awareness and understanding of the suffering of Muscular Dystrophy patients as evidenced by his talk in Mann ki baat in April 2023. He has also written a message in a book on Muscular Dystrophy authored by Dr Sharma. Muscular Dystrophy is a condition with a high mortality rate and Dr. Sharma through his research and clinical work has been able to save hundreds of lives. All this data is documented in several international scientific papers.

Limb saving work in spinal injury, head injury and stroke

Dr Sharma's cell therapy has become a new hope to adults who have developed paralysis following spinal injury, head injury and stroke. Hundreds of wheelchair bound and bed ridden patients are now able to walk after having taken treatment at NeuroGen. This has been specifically beneficial to our country's brave army men injured due to bullets and falls.

Work Done during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Inspired by the leadership of our hon'ble Prime Minister during the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire country, including the medical community and pharmaceutical industry, came together to battle the deadly virus and save as many lives as possible. As part of this effort, NeuroGen served as a dedicated COVID hospital and treated over 900 patients with excellent clinical outcomes. Simultaneously, Dr. Sharma also conducted pioneering research in the form of clinical trials on two novel treatment options for COVID – stem cell therapy and ozone therapy. The result of this research has been published in four scientific papers and three books.

Work Being Done in Anti-Aging

From 2019 onwards, Dr. Sharma diversified into the futuristic field of Anti-Aging. Through scientifically validated, non-invasive treatment methodologies, he has demonstrated that the process of aging can be slowed down and even reversed, thereby increasing longevity and improving the quality of life. This work is likely to have far reaching implications for our society at large. His visionary efforts have culminated in the establishment of one of the nation's first dedicated Anti-Aging hospitals.

About Dr Alok Sharma, NeuroGen Brain and Spine institute & KLS Wellness

Dr. Alok Sharma is a Neurosurgeon with special expertise in the field of regenerative medicine for neurological disabilities. He is the Director of NeuroGen BSI and KLS Institute of Anti-Aging in Navi Mumbai and Retired Professor & Head of the Department of Neurosurgery at the LTMG Hospital & Medical College Mumbai. He serves as the President of the 'Society for Regenerative Sciences (India)' and Vice President of the 'International Association of Neurorestoratology.'

Dr Sharma operates from two hospital facilities, NeuroGen Brain and Spine institute - an 11-floor building in Seawoods and KLS Wellness - a 4-floor building in Sanpada, both in Navi Mumbai.

As a part of NeuroGen's CSR activity, orphan children, children from tribal/rural areas and all members of the armed forces injured in the line of duty are given free of cost treatment.

Awards received

Dr Sharma has received the following awards: Nelson Mandela Leadership award, Oxford, UK (2023), Sino Phil Asia International Peace Award in Manila, Philippines (2023), Newton Universal Legendary Award from the Socio-Economic Development Foundation Boston, USA (2022), Bharat Gaurav Award at the House of Commons of the British Parliament in London, UK (2019), European Award for best practices from the European Society for Quality Research at Brussels (2018), Best Institute of stem cells and research center in India, (2018), Rose of Paracelsus Award by European Medical Association Oxford UK, (2016)

"Vocal for Local & Local for Global"

In alignment with our Honourable Prime Minister's strategy of "Vocal for local and Local for Global", Dr Sharma has been invited by various foreign countries to start offering his services there. Official permission has been received from the Government of the Bahamas to offer stem cell therapy in their country and a joint venture centre will become operational by 2024. Similar invitations have been extended from Cambodia and UAE. A joint venture neurorehabilitation centre has been functional in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, since 2023. Within the country they have expansion plans in New Delhi, Kolkata and Vijayawada.

Developing a Digital Future

A prototype Robotic child companion has already been developed which using AI will offer therapies to children. A digital platform offering app-based neurorehabilitation services is also being put together. Both the above will enable children with special needs to get rehabilitation from the comfort of their homes.

All the above endeavours will be transformative to children with Autism and other neurological conditions. These will reverse their disabilities making them independent and productive citizens of the country.

Dr Alok Sharma receiving the Sushruta award from Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya

Hiranandani Hospital: Committed to our aim of creating a better life for the communities

Dr. Sujit Chatterjee, CEO, Hiranandani Hospital

'If we aim for perfection, we will meet excellence somewhere in that journey!' I firmly believe in this. Got to aim high! Orchestrating excellence in such a complex environment as healthcare is easier said than done. There are hugely different issues in this space, it encompasses myriad dimensions. Allow me to dilate further on the subject in the following paragraphs.

The last mile is always the delivery of healthcare but to achieve that one has to start with the brick and mortar. I do not mean that literally, but as a metaphor for a well-designed hospital building. More horizontal than vertical. This may be a wishful as it may not be possible in metros but we are discussing orchestrating excellence.

The milieu interior must adhere to the best in class in the healthcare as there will need to be adequate fresh air intake and air circulation as this will be an important facet in prevention of infection. Daylight harvesting again important for the patient to see more natural light as opposed to LED lights. The trade off here will be with the air conditioning but there are recent advances that would help in reducing energy utilization. We are on the road to perfection.

Medical equipment is a very important and should be sourced from vendors of standing and marked to the service that the healthcare organization is providing, secondary, tertiary or quaternary case. In our case w e source it from the leading vendors in the world as it is required for the clientele we service and the kind of care one gives. Technology plays a huge role in all of this and the most suitable needs to be employed.

Now the most important facet in all of this is human innovation. This is what healthcare is about. People have to be involved and that starts from the entrance, the meet and greet, efficient processes that get the admission process in a short span of time, courtesy and oodles of empathy. This itself helps in the journey to fostering the culture of excellence overall. Then again there is the discharge, which would entail resolution of issues with prepaid care (read Insurance) and so on. This too is an important piece in the puzzle.

Professionally following the thematic analysis, there are four defining attributes in the journey to excellence in healthcare: It needs to be (1) Effective, (2) Safe, (3) Culture of wanting excellence holistically, and (4) Desired outcomes. All of the preceding requires a highly motivated team with a missionary zeal to ensure that the therapy provided meets the standards. This has to be a trickledown effect to all from the Consultant to the ward support staff who uphold the service culture.

Healthcare quality spans multiple disciplines. The role of the nurse can never be underplayed. In nursing, quality began with Florence Nightingale. She was amongst the first to earn credit for developing a theoretical approach to quality improvement. There needs to be a culture of compassion fostered within the organization which will have to be the true north of nursing. If this is found lacking then the sophistication of medical equipment coupled with technically skilled professionals will certainly deliver safe, effective and desired outcomes in healthcare but the patient may still find the experience wanting.

While the points have been enumerated on the essentials, but to ride on the road to perfection it is important to comprehend, that, to unfurl the flag of excellence the staff contribution on that journey must be well recognised and publically. This is a motivation for the individual and a compass for others also to want to travel the route to be recognised for the service that is being rendered. I cannot but emphasise on the importance of such iniotiatives to help the organisation in morale building.

To orchestrate excellence in healthcare the aforementioned ingredients are mandatory, It is also obvious that there is a huge complexity in the overall journey to excellence and hence it is necessary to punch above excellence category to perfection it is only in that will we ever hit upon excellence.

Dr. L H Hiranandani Hospital has from inauguration focussed on setting up these processes to ensure that we start on the road for perfection in healthcare. As has been mentioned, it is not a simple task to foster a culture wherein all are focussed on ensuring patient delight or in other words orchestrating excellence in the best hospitals in the country. It is a journey that has to be constantly nurtured and a lot is dependent on human interaction and we are dealing with our tribe of humans!!

Dr. Minnie Bodhanwala

Pioneering figures in contemporary India reshaping the healthcare landscape

Dr. Minnie Bodhanwala is the CEO of Nowrosjee Wadia Maternity Hospital & Bai Jerbai Wadia Hospital for Children, Parel, Mumbai. She has received more than 100 Awards in her career for various fields she has ventured in.

Dr. Minnie has played an instrumental role in bringing a positive transformation at Wadia Hospitals and shown compassion towards the underprivileged Women and Children of our Nation. With her dedication, excellence, innovation and sustainable vision Wadia Hospitals being charitable semi-government organizations are providing quality, safe and affordable healthcare at par with top corporate hospitals to the underprivileged Women and Children of our nation.

Dr. Minnie possesses strong domain knowledge in implementation and execution of business strategies, ensuring high-quality standards in service delivery, identifying control enhancement modules; escalating significant issues identified and proposing resolutions. She is highly experienced in successfully managing diverse groups of people as well as handling union committees. A visionary and ethical enterprise originator, she nurtures and executes new ideas, engages in multiple projects, recreates branding for organisations, business verticals and is confident in taking the organisation to the next level.

Dr. Minnie Bodhanwala is presently managing the two hospitals with 925 beds, with the staff capacity of almost 1800 including medical, paramedical and administrative manpower. Dr Minnie is also the advisor to the Chairman of Wadia Group for CSR activities, advisor to Impact India foundation, advisor to the Modern Education society, which operates 7 colleges in Mumbai and Pune, Advisor for Britannia Nutrition foundation & Sir Ness Wadia Foundation. Holding Directorship at Bombay Dyeing Mfg & Co. Ltd, National Peroxide Ltd and the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation, Ltd.

Dr. Minnie has played an instrumental role in bringing a positive transformation at Wadia Hospitals and shown compassion towards the underprivileged women and children of our nation. It is only because of her dedication, excellence, innovation and sustainable vision that Wadia Hospitals being a charitable semi government organisation are providing quality, safe and affordable healthcare at par with top corporate hospitals to the underprivileged women and children.

Dr. Minnie Bodhanwala played an inspiring role in the relief and rehabilitation programs during the Covid-19 situation. The various initiatives included setting up a 20-bedded isolation ward at the Children's hospital with all the supporting critical care equipment's, providing hot meals and grocery hampers to families. The landscape of beneficiaries included underprivileged families, those stranded in public places, those with shelter but without livelihood and the poorest of the poor, who had their aid cut off because of the bigger crisis. Combined with the hot meals, the total meals equivalent were 60 lakh.

With her help the state have been able to achieve high standards of healthcare in our region and cater to the underprivileged people from all over the country and abroad. Due to her efforts our region proudly hosts one of the largest NICU in the world with 155 beds, the Paediatric hospital caters to more than 30 Paediatric services. Dr. Minnie has established centers of excellence at BJWHC in Paediatric Cardiology, Complex Paediatric Surgeries, Neurology and Neurosurgery, Nephrology, Hemat-Oncology and Bone Marrow Transplant, thus providing comprehensive treatment to all children under one roof. Also she has looked minutely into the health needs of the community by catering to people with rare health conditions, which are often ignored by other health players as these health conditions do not earn much revenue for them or these patients are extremely poor and cannot afford expensive treatments. With her efforts Wadia Hospitals have a dedicated nodal center for Clubfoot treatment in Maharashtra, a dedicated clinic for Cancer, Malnutrition, HIV, TB, Epilepsy, Occupational therapy etc. Recently the Hospital has also started with a clinic for children suffering with MDVI, which is one of a kind initiative in this region. She has also set up IVF center for the poor patients who cannot afford expensive treatment. The hospital caters to more than 3,00,000 patients every year.

Over the years she has arranged several medical & malnutrition camps in the rural areas and education programmes for the underprivileged of our nation for empowering them. Dr. Minnie has played a key role in establishing a strong foundation for community projects in dental health for Impact India foundation by UNDP, UNICEF and WHO for their "Hospital-on-Wheels" project.

Dr. Minnie is also a Principal Assessor with National Accreditation Board for Hospital & Healthcare Providers (NABH), Internal Auditor Joint Commission International (JCI), Internationally recognized auditor for ISO 9001 & 14001 and additionally she has a Master Black Belt in Six Sigma. She has also participated and completed the 2021 session of Strategy for Health Care Delivery with Harvard Business School and achieved a Certificate for Sustainable Business Strategy from Harvard Business School Online.

She has also achieved recognition certificate for Global Women on Boards by Lead Women, Paris 2023 and Women on Boards program by Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston 2022.

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- Featured in India Forbes March 2019 as a "Globally Recognized Indian Business Leaders"
- Ranked 2nd Position among 25 legends of Healthcare Industry in India by Medicare Insight Magazine.
- Recipient of over 100 awards, accreditations and achievement from National and International organisations.
- Rated amongst the top 25 Living legends of Healthcare in the country.
- Recognised Six Sigma Master Black Belt Expert to undertake Brown Field and Green Field Projects with expertise in revenue generation and crisis management.

UPASANA ARORA: A CEO WITH A SOFT HEART

DR. UPASANA ARORA CEO, Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital

In the dynamic landscape of healthcare, leadership serves as the cornerstone for steering organizations towards success. There are certain distinctive traits that set apart the best CEOs in the healthcare industry. Upasana has many of these qualities, to name a few, Visionary Leadership, Strategic Acumen, Patient-Centric Focus and Strong Communication Skills which has brought her to the mantle of Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital, Kaushambi and she is spreading her wings and taking it across the seas.

We take a brief insight on her road to success which has not been a bed of roses but she had endured challenges and overcome them at every step of her life. She started her career as a Director in 2000, which was then a 100-bed facility and she wanted to bring in technological updation in the facilities and uplift it to meet the growing demand of patients and be futuristic. This was a challenge for her, particularly considering her position as the youngest member and a woman in the family. She established her role and the family also supported her and she expanded her scope from HR and undertook tasks such as computerizing the hospital and working on quality accreditation thus demonstrating that women excel not only in HR but also in overall management.

As Director of the hospital, she has been contributing to the organisation from 2000 and provided leadership to her team to make it the First NABH Accredited Hospital in Ghaziabad in 2010. She also got her laboratories accredited by NABL in 2011. She had always believed in continuing education and hence has been continuously updating herself to the latest in the field of healthcare. She did a CII Assessor course in 2011 and then a Certificate in Lean management course in association with Cardiff University, U.K. in 2012. Subsequently she did a Lean deployment across challenging work processes in her organisation. It had a significant impact on improving the supply chain management of medicines for patients in her pharmacy.

She did her NABH Assessor course in 2012 and management courses from IIM Ahmedabad from 2013-2015 and also a Fellowship in Health Technology Assessment from WHO-Anglia Ruskin University. She became the First Indian to be working in India to be awarded the prestigious Fellowship of ISQua (International Society for Quality and Accreditation) in 2015. She did her Quality Leadership programme from Harvard University and subsequently did a practical learning implementation of Six Sigma in 2016 in NHS hospitals in U.K which impacted her thinking of streamlining processes.

She has always been a technological updated person and hence has been constantly upgrading her diagnostics, rehabilitative and therapeutic departments with the latest advancements, along with qualified manpower and infrastructure meeting patient expectations, which keeps her abreast with all her peers. She has focused on quality of patient services and had kept the patient expectations as her first priority which led to the growth of the hospital. She started with a tertiary care hospital in 2006 and expanded the specialities in coherence to patient needs and transformed to a quaternary care hospital in 2017. In addition to all the general specialities, the hospital offers a varied range of Superspeciality services i.e. Cardiology & CTVS, Endocrinology, Gastroenterology, Joint Replacement, Nephrology, Neurology, Oncology, Pulmonology, Urology, Neurosurgery, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. The centre has a state of the art Cardiac Cath Lab along with CT Angiography for Interventional Cardiology, Radiology and Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgeries. With a world class seamless operation theatre complex with HEPA filters and laminar flow maintaining international standards of engineering, operational safety and infection control the hospital has also embarked with Robotic Assisted Surgery with the Da Vinci Robotic Surgery. The hospital is now providing Robotic assisted surgeries in the field of Gynaecology, General

Surgery, Urology and Oncosurgery soon. The hospital recently started Yashoda Cosmetic Boutique providing state of the art Cosmetic facilities to the people at an affordable price. In quaternary care the hospital is already offering kidney transplant services and has applied for Liver Transplant license.

She is continuously seeking improvement in quality of services and hence many Quality Improvement programs are running in the organisation which have received recognition at National level like Early initiation of Breastfeeding in delivering mothers which received the DL SHAH Gold Quality award in 2020 and Gold Level Recognition at the Fourth CII National Safety Practice Competition 2021 – "Excellence in Workplace Safety" held on 22nd April 2021.

The vision for Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital to be a place where patients are happy to seek medical care and consider it their second home, when they are unwell has been successful as we see today that first and second generation of those patients and their extended families are seeking treatment at the hospital. Yashoda has become a household name in Ghaziabad and Delhi NCR with a continuous flow of patients making it one of the leading hospitals in the region.

Upasana's has always looked at providing quality healthcare to those who are often left at the end of the line, as well as to work selflessly for the betterment of society. She has covered people belonging to lower socio—economic strata by having 40% of beds for them. She is also serving to the people of middle class by having 35% of beds as Private and Semi-private beds and 25% beds of Deluxe category catering to the upper middle class and affluent class. She had empanelled her hospital under Ayushman Bharat Scheme and has empanelment's with more than 200 corporate and over 50 insurance companies. Hence her hospital is offering seamless services to all sections of the society.

Her emphasis on making healthcare accessible and improve the well-being of remote communities in India is reflected in her continuous contribution to provide sustainable healthcare to the people in high-altitude areas of Uttarakhand by donating ambulances and medical equipment to the Swami Vivekanand Health Mission Society. Swami Vivekanand Health Mission Society is holding regular camps in association with Yashoda Super Specialty Hospital, Kaushambi by mobilizing health teams having specialist & super specialists, along with medications ensuring that people in remote regions have access to quality medical services.

She is focusing on Mental Health, Anaemia and Tuberculosis among the society at large. She is working on the ambitious goal of TB elimination in her district by adopting all the patients of Tuberculosis in Ghaziabad district (approx. 5100) by providing them medicines, dietary supplements, treatment and counseling as part of the Prime Minister's initiative, "Nikshya Mein Potion ka Nishchay." Her team has been involved in approaching various associations including Industrial associations for holding regular camps for identifying Tuberculosis patients as a lot of Industrial workers are prone to be infected by Tuberculosis. Due to her active participation in taking care of Tuberculosis patients, UNION has also designated Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital, Kaushambi as their STEP CENTRE and is also been acknowledged as TB DR centre under National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme

She has played a crucial role in implementing the Ayushman Bharat program, India's largest social insurance initiative, aimed at providing accessible healthcare to all. Her first step was creating awareness in the leadership of the various hospitals in her region by holding an interactive session with them along with the representatives of the Ayushman Bharat program, so that a proper communication channel is created among the stakeholders for exchange of ideas, followed by an implementation program in which her hospital took the first initiative to empanel super specialty services like Cardiology, Kidney transplant etc for which Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital was acknowledged by the Ayushman India team of Uttar Pradesh.

She has embraced excellence and is expanding the hospital network. The hospital is running Consultant OPD's in various Corporate organisations like Jubilant and Navratna PSU's like SAIL and NTPC Ltd. She has set up two Medicentres, one in Karkardooma, East Delhi and another at Meerut U.P. She is close to commissioning 300 beds out of 1200 beds at Yashoda Medicity, Indirapuram this year for meeting demands for her patients in National Capital Region. She has already opened office at London of the overseas wing Yashoda Mediworld. Yashoda Mediworld seeks to revolutionize global healthcare with world-class medical services. Yashoda Mediworld will be dedicated to delivering exceptional healthcare solutions with a patient-centric approach with priority in comprehensive healthcare, cutting-edge technology, and internationally accredited facilities to ensure world-class treatment and personalized attention for the patients. The launch of Yashoda Mediworld in London positions her to make a significant impact on the global healthcare landscape using the arms of medical excellence, advanced infrastructure and seamless coordination, with which she aims to attract patients worldwide who seek high-quality healthcare services.

INDIA@76 IN THE GLOBAL HEALTH LANDSCAPE: POTENTIAL & PRUDENCE

India has made tremendous progress in embracing quality as a part of healthcare delivery. The various accreditations and quality initiatives have surely enhanced the prudence of healthcare towards patient care.

I believe the year of 2023 has been significant with India's strategic journey to the top, having performed the leadership roles in both Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and G20. With our voice in the global arena, we are now enabled to chart the course of health strategies and cultivate international collaborations. We now, have a platform to articulate and influence collective healthcare, emphasising a holistic approach that brings together modern practices with traditional medical wisdom, underlining India's approach of showcasing the importance of leveraging collaborations, fostering partnerships, and ensuring that global health responses are synergised and not siloed. This perspective is deeply rooted in India's broader vision hereon. For India, being multifaceted is not just about navigating crises now but shaping a more buoyant global future. I am confident that with these initiatives, as envisioned by India, we will aim to bolster global readiness and response to potential health crises. India, with enhanced private resources pooled in the healthcare system, has enormous potential to provide highest standards of health owing to availability of best technology and brilliant clinical expertise

Private sector contributes over 70% towards healthcare delivery and India currently spends, cumulatively 4.2% of its GDP on healthcare with 1.4% being contributed by the government. With India being sixth largest, having a GDP of $2.61 trillion and aspiring to become third largest economy with $10 trillion by 2030, healthy India is a necessity. The non-communicable burden needs to reduce, as it is contributing to around 5.87 million (60%) of the overall deaths in India.

At Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital, we are committed to ensure personalised and unique care. The prime differentiators will be to provide holistic care not only across the entire care continuum but also end to end within every speciality so that from primary to tertiary, quaternary to home care, all basic and high-end patient needs are catered to under one umbrella.

Dr. Tarang Gianchandani,
Group CEO - Healthcare Initiatives and Chief Executive Officer, Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital

What will drive innovation in India - Digital disruptions are the future

Let's address the elephant in the room: There is a shortage of healthcare professionals across India. Only 64 doctors are available per 1,00,000 people in comparison to the global average of 150 and technology is the answer to somewhat solve the issue at hand. AI currently is in its early stages but certainly promises a leading future with multi-fold benefits. To my mind, technology must aid time saving by automating daily clinical routine work in order to help medical professionals focus on delivering quality care with critical decision making. We, at Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital are equipped with remote patient monitoring systems to enable proactive interventions and care in chronic situations. Moreover, we are moving towards machine learning models, that will, in the coming years accelerate drug discovery and development leading to a more precise treatment. In India, Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare is projected to grow from $14.6 Billion in 2023 to $102.7 Billion by 2028. However, data security will need to play a role, because safeguarding patient details sets the centre of success, which is what we are working towards. Digital health solutions play a pivotal role in this transformation, promising to revolutionize healthcare delivery across the globe.

Also, Medical Tourism - India's medical tourism market is anticipated to burgeon to $9 billion by 2025. In conclusion, revolution in the sector requires sustained efforts and investments to ensure there are benefits which can be extended to intended beneficiaries with lasting improvements in health outcomes.

360 Bedded Hospital Providing Tertiary & Quaternary Care Services in the Heart of South Mumbai

The differentiator: Paradigm shift in patient care towards greater rationality

With the world becoming smaller, and patients being a lot more in the know of the diseases, what is going to be crucial is how healthcare institutions manage expectations of care givers and takers. Healthcare has always been service led but with patient expectations, increasing – it will be important to maintain a balance between illness, cultural background, attitudes, health beliefs and levels of understanding. As, we move into the future, paradigm shift will be important as the continuum of care for patients will evolve. So as medical professionals, we will have to make patient engagement with medical experts more meaningful and holistic.

Sir H. N.
Reliance
Foundation Hospital
RESPECT FOR LIFE

Policy makers are also now into prioritizing investments in digital infrastructure to enhance service delivery, reduce administrative burden, and improve patient outcomes. In India, the government's introduction of the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) and National Digital Health Blueprint (NDHB) have been instrumental in strengthening the accessibility and equity of health services, firmly placing patients at the centre of the care delivery system. It has leveraged the power of IT and other associated technologies to support the existing healthcare infrastructure and streamline health information.

This shall further help us to reach out to many more people in the country and also help to integrate healthcare across the nation. With this paradigm shift, India can emerge as the next healthcare AI capital of the world.

For any further queries, please call Toll Free No.: 1800 890 1111

TRENDSETTING LEADERS PLAYING A PIVOTAL ROLE IN ALTERING THE HEALTHCARE NARRATIVE IN NEW AGE INDIA

One of the vital responsibility of the CEO of any given healthcare institution would be to see to it that skills of the entire workforce remains relevant with the ever changing times, meeting all sorts of expectations not only of patients but their attendants also, this includes management of doctors and their approach towards their patients in accordance with the same idea.

The CEO plays a crucial role in overseeing the overall management, strategic direction, and day-to-day operations of the hospital. The responsibilities of a CEO in a tertiary care hospital are extensive and varied, encompassing both administrative and strategic responsibilities.

Develop and implement strategic plans to ensure the hospital's long-term success. This involves setting goals, defining objectives, and establishing policies to guide the organization.

Oversee the hospital's financial health, including budgeting, financial planning, and financial reporting. Ensure the hospital operates within budgetary constraints while maintaining high-quality patient care.

Maintain and enhance the quality of healthcare services provided by the hospital.

Stay abreast of advances in medical technology and healthcare management systems. Implement innovative technologies to improve patient care, streamline operations, and enhance overall efficiency.

Develop and implement plans for responding to emergencies and disasters, ensuring the hospital is prepared to handle crises effectively.

Blending technology with low cost healthcare delivery.

Overcome high attrition rates in the healthcare sector.

Adopting and incorporating various regulatory changes which are coming too fast and too often in the Indian healthcare center.

Maintaining a low profile and holding the entire team together with looking inward for development ranging from quality in-

novation and service providing to deliver better outcomes.

Optimizing resource allocation and implementing lean management principles.

The CEO of a tertiary care hospital navigates a complex and dynamic healthcare environment, balancing the delivery of high-quality patient care with the need for financial sustainability and strategic growth. Effective communication, decision-making, and a commitment to the hospital's mission are critical attributes for success in this role.

REDEFINING THE HEALTHCARE BLUEPRINT OF MODERN INDIA

Dr. Bhupendra S. Avasthi brings over three decades of expertise in neonatology and pediatrics. As the promoter and Managing Director of Surya Hospitals, he stands as a prominent figure in Neonatology and Pediatric Healthcare across the country. His significant contributions have propelled Surya Hospitals to become one of India's most rapidly expanding hospital chains.

Under Dr. Avasthi's leadership, Surya Hospitals has celebrated over 40 years of excellence, carving out a distinctive space in the Women and Children Care segment. Starting from a modest 16 beds, Dr. Avasthi's visionary guidance has expanded the hospital to over 750 beds across India. This impressive growth has not only positioned Surya as a leading hospital but also as a forefront academic institution in Neonatology and Pediatrics. The hospital has been pioneering in Premature Baby Care, Neonatology, and Pediatric Critical Care, showcasing its commitment to exceptional medical care in cities like Mumbai, Pune, and Jaipur. Driven by Dr. Avasthi's forward-thinking approach, Surya has established one of India's finest Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU), achieving outstanding clinical outcomes. Additionally, with its dedicated Human Milk Bank Facility, the hospital is on its way to becoming one of Asia's fastest-growing hospital chains.

Dr. Avasthi's remarkable educational foundation, holding degrees in MBBS, MD, and DNB in Pediatrics. His proficiency has established him as an esteemed faculty member in Neonatology and Pediatrics. As a pivotal founding member of the Pediatric Department and Research Centre at Lilavati Hospital, he dedicated 20 years as the Chief Pediatrician, significantly shaping the department's success. Beyond his roles in clinical leadership, Dr. Avasthi has made substantial contributions to the medical field with numerous research papers in Pediatrics and Neonatology, underscoring his authority in these domains. Furthermore, he is the visionary founder of the Surya Charitable Trust, playing a crucial role in advancing research in allergies and extending support to the underprivileged, thereby broadening his impact on healthcare and research.

Dr. Avasthi's expertise has attracted a wide and diverse clientele to Surya Hospitals, encompassing celebrities, sports figures, and other notable personalities. Among them are Diana Hayden, Jonty Rhodes, Karan Johar, Kajol Devgan, Hrithik Roshan, Sussanne Khan, Vikrant Massey, and many others, highlighting the trust and confidence they place in the hospital's services under his guidance.

DR. SHASHI BALIYAN, MD & Founder Clearmedi Healthcare

WITH ONE AIM: "EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE, EQUALLY"

The driving force, the fire in the soul and the zeal for greater good. ClearMedi Healthcare, the group fostering into leading healthcare chain being led by healthcare maestros Dr Shashi Baliyan and Commander Navneet Bali, is set to bring in the right balance in the Indian Healthcare.

ClearMedi Healthcare backed by Morgan Stanley is on the journey of expansion. Currently, operating 4 hospitals in cities of Mysore, Nanded and Gwalior along with 10 partner hospitals. The earlier model of ClearMedi which was focused on oncology is now moving to multispeciality care. They are known to be the pioneers of healthcare in providing care equality in deeper underserved sections of the society.

Across India, everyday they have approximately more than 600 patients on couch across all their LINAC sites. They have been operating into locations as far as 7 hrs inside the city of Hyderabad in Nanded at ClearMedi Monark Cancer center, 2hrs inside Baroda at Kailash Cancer Care Centre.

What we call as conductors of healthcare – Technology, primary care physicians and specialities, health insurances and hospital administrators. Focus of entire universe of healthcare is patient and their families. To run all the other conductors seamlessly is in the hands of how the leadership functions. The leadership has all the power to make or break or shape how the ecosystem comes up.

ClearMedi has healthcare maestros playing pivotal role in bringing and shaping up how Indian Healthcare is looked at. First LINAC in the city of Hisar was brought in by Dr Shahi Kant Baliyan, founder and MD, ClearMedi Healthcare in 2010. The wonderful initiatives like Village Adoption and participation in Government of India initiative, Vidyanaljali, for medical education for students from economically weaker sections of society has been successfully done by Commander Navneet Bali, CEO, ClearMedi Healthcare.

An organisation where patient comes first and foremost before everything else is setting up an example everyday to provide an equitable access to care. As more and more focus shifts towards preventive health checkups and early cancer screenings, ClearMedi has been providing health checkups at basic costs which expert consultation and regular follow-ups.

Bottomline of being the healthcare providers is to be empathetic towards patients and their families. The entire team of ClearMedi Healthcare brings top class clinicians backed by latest technology to bring world class care to those who require it. To access this truly comprehensive care we have a single number +91-7900900953, patients can also log in to our website www.clearmedi.in to book an appointment.

COMMANDER NAVNEET BALI
CEO, Clearmedi Healthcare

CRITICARE ASIA: A JOURNEY OF 25 YEARS, FOCUSED ON COMPASSION, INNOVATION & HEALING

In the thriving heart of Mumbai, the story of CritiCare Asia Multispecialty Hospitals began in 1999 when visionaries Dr. Deepak Namjoshi and Dr. Masuuma Namjoshi laid the foundation for what would evolve into a beacon of health and wellness. As the hospital approaches its Silver Jubilee Anniversary in October 2024, it reflects not only on its remarkable achievements but on 25 years of unwavering commitment encapsulated by the motto, "Your Health Our Concern.

Visionary Leadership, Exceptional Growth

Dr. Deepak Namjoshi and Dr. Masuuma Namjoshi's visionary leadership has propelled Criticare Asia to new heights. A stellar team of expert consultants, dedicated junior doctors, and compassionate nursing care, coupled with cutting-edge technology, has been the recipe for their success.

Excellence as Standard: NABH Accreditation and Beyond

Every Unit of Criticare Asia Hospital proudly boasts NABH accreditation, a testament to their commitment to international guidelines and protocols. It's not just a hospital; it's a promise of world-class healthcare.

Pinnacle of Expertise: Specialized Surgeries and Breakthroughs

From CABG to HIPEC, Neuro and Spine surgeries and groundbreaking Robotic Knee Replacements, complex angioplasties, Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation (TAVI), and intricate endoscopy procedures, Criticare Asia is at the forefront of specialized treatments. They've not just embraced innovation; they've defined it.

'Your Health Our Concern': More Than a Motto'

The heartbeat of Criticare Asia is encapsulated in their motto – 'Your Health Our Concern.' It's not just about treatment; it's about genuine concern for every patient.

A Quarter Century of Leading Healthcare

Over the past 25 years, CritiCare Asia has metamorphosed into a leading healthcare organization, establishing its presence across four locations in Mumbai. With a formidable team of over 600 specialized doctors and 1000 dedicated staff members. The commitment to patient well-being, a constant throughout its journey, is now deeply ingrained in its legacy.

Tertiary Care Excellence Through the Years

CritiCare Asia has been a trailblazer in delivering world-class healthcare over the past two and a half decades, serving as a prominent tertiary care facility. The Critical Care Unit, equipped with ICU, ICCU, PICU, and NICU, has provided exceptional patient care, earning trust and recognition from millions of patients worldwide. Isolation rooms, 24/7 ambulance and pharmacy services, and advanced monitoring facilities underscore the hospital's dedication to comprehensive care.

Branch Spotlight: CritiCare Asia Kurla at 25

As CritiCare Asia's Kurla branch celebrates its quarter-century milestone, it stands out for its distinctive facilities, including a Paediatric Super Speciality Department and Maternal Centre. Recognized as the first LEED approved hospital in Asia and second globally, this branch is a testament to the hospital's commitment to environmental consciousness. The Paediatric Department's focus on emergency treatments solidifies CritiCare Asia Kurla as one of the most advanced healthcare providers in both Eastern and Western Mumbai.

Key Specialties Driving CritiCare Asia Hospitals for a Quarter Century

CritiCare Asia Hospitals have been at the forefront of healthcare for 25 years, excelling in specialties such as Cardiology, Critical Care, Minimally Invasive Surgery, Orthopaedics, Nephrology & Kidney Transplant Centre, Neurology & Neurosurgery, Gastroenterology & G.I. Surgery, Paediatrics & Paediatric Surgery, Neonatology, ENT, Pulmonary, Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Ophthalmology, Dentistry, Dermatology, Cosmetic & Reconstructive Surgery, Endocrinology, Oncology, Pain Management, Bariatric Surgery, and Urology.

Awards and Recognitions over Two and a Half Decades

CritiCare Asia Multispecialty Hospital and Research Centre has consistently earned accolades, establishing itself as one of the top hospitals in Mumbai over the past 25 years. Notable awards include the Times Health Excellence Awards, the Award for India's Top 100 Small Medium Enterprises, and the prestigious Maharashtra Gaurav Award.

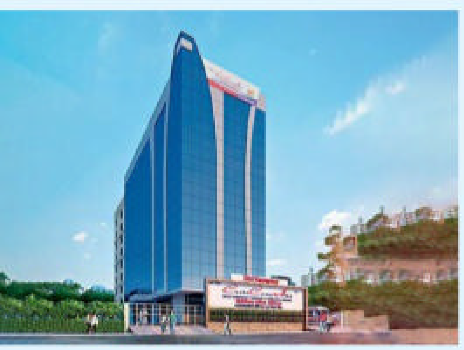
Continuing the Legacy for Generations to Come

As CritiCare Asia Hospitals celebrate 25 years in healthcare, the commitment to delivering ethical, high-tech, and high-quality healthcare remains stronger than ever. Beyond its state-of-the-art facilities, CritiCare Asia actively engages in community screening programs and health awareness initiatives, emphasizing its dedication to the well-being of both individual patients and the broader community.

Contact Details:

Website: www.criticareasiahospital.com

Tel: 02268100000



Criticare Asia Hospital, Kurla, Kirol Rd off Lal Bahadur Shastri Road, Ali Yavar Jung Kurla (West)

Criticare Asia Hospital, Plot No 516, Besides SBI Telli Galli, Andheri (East)

Criticare Asia Hospital, Plot No 1064, New Link Road, Near Toyota Malad (West)

Criticare Asia Hospital, Plot No. 38_39, Main Gulmohar road, JVPD Scheme, Juhu, Andheri (West)

GROWTH ARCHITECT

Under the deft guidance of Kushal N. Desai, APAR Industries seems well set on a profitable path thanks to its agility in doubling down on opportunities

By **Prerna Lidhoo**

▶ **IN THE HEART** of Mumbai's bustling cityscape, 57-year-old Kushal Narendra Desai's influence reverberates far beyond the confines of his office in APAR House, nestled in Chembur.

Dressed in a crisp business suit radiating quiet strength, Desai powers APAR Industries' empire, which is spread across 140 countries. His demeanour may be soft-spoken and his presence unassuming, but his impact on the nation's infrastructure is considerable. Through the manufacturing of cables, industrial lubricants, specialty oils, and conductors, his firm is perhaps the silent force behind the grand edifices and sprawling projects that define the landscape.

"When one looks at a fancy-looking building, people appreciate the external things like the glass and signage. Our products are all hidden, but we do the bricks, the steel, and the network without which the building can't stand," says Desai, Chairman & MD of APAR Industries, who is a third-generation businessman at the company founded in 1958 by his grandfather, Dharamsinh D. Desai.

Desai, who runs the company with his brother Chaitanya, who is the MD, likes to stay true to his company's name, which translates to 'limitless' in Sanskrit. "I firmly believe that we work on tomorrow's solutions today. That's what makes us limitless. There's always been a need to think out of the box," he says.

That thinking has helped it become the largest global manufacturer of aluminium and alloy conductors and the third-largest manufacturer of transformer oils. It has blockbuster projects like the INS Vikrant, India's first indigenous aircraft carrier, to its credit. It is also the largest supplier of cables for the flagship Vande Bharat trains and accounts for nearly 98% of the cables used in them.

Today, it caters to specialty sectors from the railways, naval ships, submarines, solar firms, windmills, telecom firms, etc., with a wide range of medium-voltage and low-voltage XLPE (or insulated), elastomeric (or rubber), specialty, and fibre-optic cables. It is the leader in India for specialty cables, with a 70% market share in the domestic wind energy sector. "We provide our customers solutions that tangibly solve their problems. As the market requirements advance, we have ensured that we have a product portfolio that is both relevant and leading the technology curve across our business verticals," he adds.

Experts point out that APAR's first and biggest business of conductors, which accounts for 47% of its revenues, is expected to grow by leaps and bounds. This is thanks to the growing demand for electricity, the focus on renewable energy, and the opportunity from the upgrade of the outdated power transmission infrastructure both in India and abroad.

In FY23, the company reported consolidated sales of ₹14,352 crore, against ₹9,316.57 crore in FY22, and a profit after tax (PAT) of ₹637.7 crore, compared with ₹256.73 crore in FY22. According to Prabhudas Lillad-

Infrastructure & Capital Goods

KUSHAL NARENDRA DESAI

CHAIRMAN & MD, APAR INDUSTRIES

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	14,352.2
	9MFY24	11,711.1
Profit before tax	**FY23**	854.6
	9MFY24	784.8
Profit after tax	**FY23**	637.7
	9MFY24	588.9
	FY23 RoE (%)	32.28
	Market Cap	25,277.9

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- Source: ACE Equity, BSE

THE BUILDER Kushal N. Desai, Chairman & MD, APAR Industries

Wired Up

❶ The company has become the largest global aluminium and alloy conductors manufacturer and the third-largest global manufacturer of transformer oils

❷ According to Prabhudas Lilladher, the company's focus on value-added products and strong traction in exports will drive profitability in the long run

❸ It caters to various specialty sectors with a wide range of medium-voltage and low-voltage cables

❹ It is the leading Indian exporter of wires and cables, and supplies to America, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe

her, the company's focus on value-added products and strong traction in exports will drive a strong top line and profitability in the long run. It pegs APAR's revenue growth at ₹21,858 crore from FY23 to FY26 and expects PAT to grow at a CAGR of 11% to ₹871.8 crore by FY26.

"Not just the next few years, we see the next two decades [as] great for the company, [especially] in electrical transmission, and distribution infrastructure growth is set to double by 2050. Of that, electricity as a [percentage] mix will grow from 20% to 40%. Hence, there will be 4x growth for all the building blocks," says Desai, winner in the infrastructure and capital goods category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year.

His vision is clear: to see the businesses grow at 15% for the next 10 years, and the cable business at 20-25%. "The company today is in a strong position to take on the opportunities that are present both locally and globally," he adds.

Exports, in fact, are a great opportunity that Desai recognised early on during Covid-19. "What has worked for us is that we've been the first or amongst the first to introduce new products in the Indian market across our three business verticals and one of our key business decisions has been to start focussing on export markets during Covid-19," he says.

APAR was able to develop an entire range of solar-, wind-, railways-, and defence cables when the demand for these products was still nascent. When the market expanded dramatically, it had the largest and best product offering, says Desai.

The contribution of exports has increased from 34% in FY16 to about 50% in FY23. "Increasing traction for conventional conductors from key geographies like the US and Europe has resulted in strong export growth in the last couple of years. We expect increasing spends in T&D (transmission and distribution) infrastructure in the domestic and export markets to continue to drive demand for conductors in the medium to long run," Prabhudas Lilladher said in a report. It added that the company's conductor business will be driven by demand for premium products from the domestic market and conventional as well as premium conductors from exports.

APAR is already a leading Indian exporter of wires and cables, supplying to countries across the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the SAARC region. "Going forward, we expect growth momentum in exports [to be] driven by increasing geographical presence, product approval, superior product quality, increasing acceptance for products, backed by strong demand from key geographies such as the US, Europe, etc., increasing traction in renewable energy, and the China+1 strategy," Prabhudas Lilladher added.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Desai now wants to take it up a notch. "There's a lot of positive pressure. The world is getting more competitive and more global; you need to be the best in your business. You can't be the jack of all trades, but you can be the master of a few," he says.

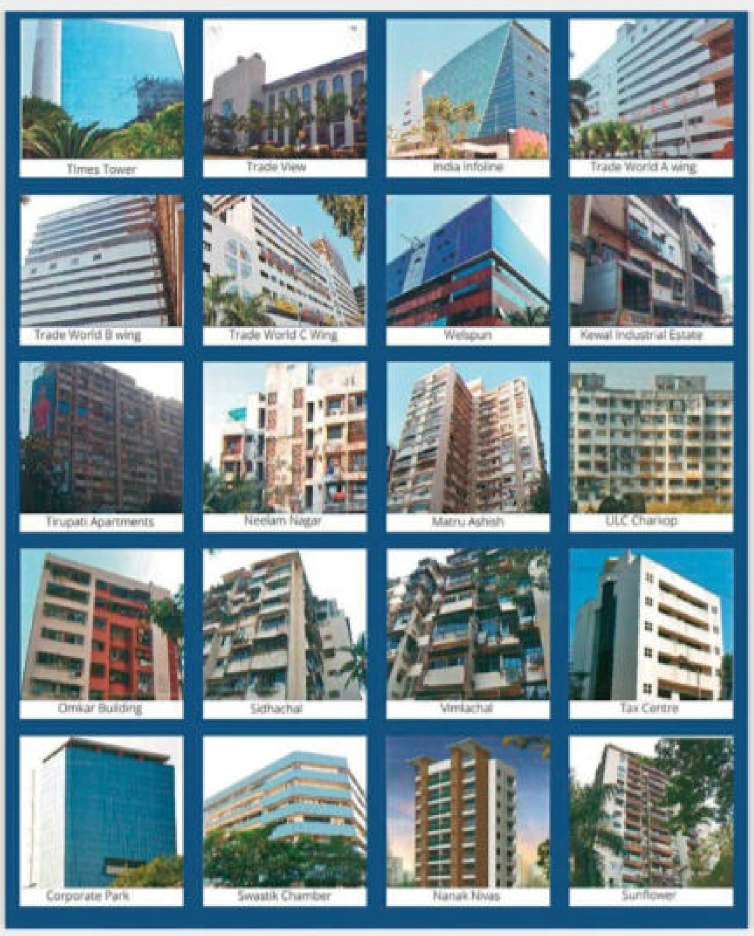
Considering the scale of opportunities, Desai seems to be in an enviable position. **BT**

@PLidhoo

PHOTO BY **MANDAR DEODHAR**

MAKING OF A VISIONARY:
Success Story of Business Tycoon, Mr Ramesh Gowani

MR RAMESH GOWANI
Founder and Director of Kamala Group & Kamala mills



There is no shortcut to hard work; the success story of business tycoon and visionary Mr Ramesh Gowani is perhaps the best instance of the age-old proverb. Born and brought up in the metropolis of Mumbai, Mr Ramesh Gowani is an out and out self-made man who has tasted the essence of success through relentless hard work, dedication and passion. His journey to success is not through a bed of roses rather he had to overcome numerous challenges and hurdles to attain the stature as one of the leading industrialists of the country.

Belonging to a Hindu Rajasthani lineage, Mr Gowani dreamt of making it big in real estate since childhood and realized his dream by being the craftsman and brain behind multiple iconic buildings across the country that includes residential complexes as well as commercial spaces. The Prithvi Apartment, Times Tower, India Infoline, Trade World with its three magnificent wings, the El Dorado are few specimens of his exemplary skill and brilliance in real estate. Owner of the Kamala Group, Mr Gowani believed in enriching the quality of lives through aesthetics and artistry. Thus, each of his creations testifies to the fact that he knows the art of creating spaces with the Midas touch with beauty and professional expertise. The La Papilo building in Mumbai, the debut project of Mr Gowani speaks about his sense of aesthetics in the most graphic way. Mr Ramesh Gowani is the mastermind behind housing the world class corporate companies, restaurants and establishing the renowned I.T Park in the Kamala Mills compound. Transforming the concept of business acumen, Mr Ramesh Gowani designed Kamala Mills compound as a one stop solution for every business necessity and luxury. Right from Reliance to PWC, KPMG, India Infoline, Siyarams, Times of India and many more corporate giants are operating in the financial capital of the country from the compound of Kamala Mills. The Victoria Mills, The AC Market of Tardeo and Tradestar Andheri are also part of this visionary's unique projects.

With a profound knowledge of the industry, Mr Ramesh Gowani has undertaken multifarious real estate projects that are hailed as masterpieces and that added to the radiance of the Mumbai skyline. Unanimously reputed as an innovator with a great creative instinct, Mr Ramesh Gowani has made it from the grass shoot level and the empire he has built is a result of his vision and extraordinary business skill. s

His vision has also touched the genre of renewable energy projects and Green Plant Energy Projects across India, with a view to contributing against the impending threat of global warming and embracing the principles of sustainability and organic mechanism.

Being counted as the leading industrialists of the country, Mr Ramesh Gowani stands as an innovator par excellence in the field of real estate and power projects.

THE TECH WIZARD

Tata Elxsi, led by CEO & MD Manoj Raghavan, has been delivering cutting-edge tech services to global OEMs, all the while maintaining a steady growth path

By **Binu Paul**

▶ **WITHIN THE TATA ELXSI** universe, each customer conversation revolves around the compelling concept of "design as a differentiator," crafting a business narrative that goes beyond the ordinary. With each passing shift in design, the company has been consistently reinventing itself, always staying ahead of the curve to embrace emerging trends long before they become mainstream.

"We have been building our industrial design business for almost 12-13 years; that's a strong differentiator when it comes to leading conversations with customers using design as a distinguishing factor. Increasingly, now we're talking of 'design digital' as a differentiator as the world moves more and more towards the digital side," Manoj Raghavan, CEO and Managing Director of Tata Elxsi, says.

IT & ITeS

MANOJ RAGHAVAN

CEO AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, TATA ELXSI

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	3,144.7
	9MFY24	2,646.2
Profit before tax	**FY23**	937.5
	9MFY24	786.3
Profit after tax	**FY23**	755.2
	9MFY24	595.3
	FY23 RoE (%)	40.97
	Market Cap	48,650.3

- Data is on a standalone basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

The Bengaluru-based design and technology services company has been at the forefront of leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities, spearheading projects in driverless cars, media and broadcast recommendation engines, and cutting-edge smart advertising long before the AI phenomenon became a buzzword.

"As technology evolves, we have also been evolving—both in the way we've structured ourselves and the way we focus on some of these new technology trends. We've always been ahead [of the curve] by 5-6 years. We've made investments in some of these technologies prior to their market release. It really helped us to have that differentiation with respect to our competition as well as to be more meaningful for our customers," he says.

The 52-year-old IIT Madras graduate is in his 27th year with the company. Many credit Tata Elxsi's robust and steady growth to its stable top management, which includes Raghavan. In the quarter ended December 31, 2023, the company reported ₹206.4 crore in net profit—an increase of 6% over the corresponding period in the previous year.

"They hardly had any churn at the top level. Their attrition level also generally is lower than industry standards. They have been able to attract a lot of talent because of the highly appealing quality of their work. Despite not offering any ESOPs, they are good paymasters. Their entire HR policy and the Tata name and the TCS association—all that create a positive and virtuous circle," says Dipan Mehta, Director of financial services holding company Elixir Capital.

Raghavan highlights the company's focus on fostering internal talents for leadership positions, along with a series of developmental activities designed to cultivate leadership skills among the staff, which he credits for the longevity of key talent. According to Raghavan, retaining key talent has helped the company build enduring relationships with clients. "We are in the engineering R&D space. The way we do our business is because of the core capabilities and skills that we bring to the

KEY DIFFERENTIATOR Manoj Raghavan, CEO and Managing Director, Tata Elxsi

High Tech

❶ Tata Elxsi's stable leadership drives consistent growth and fosters enduring online client relationships

❷ CEO & MD Manoj Raghavan keeps the company focussed on key verticals and uses GenAI and digital to enhance consumer value

❸ Tata Elxsi has always been at the right place at the right time, developing expertise in key sectors with rising tech spend

❹ It is now looking at certain adjacencies within its core industry verticals to avoid over-dependence on prime segments

PHOTO BY **HEMANT MISHRA**

table. Our customers primarily engage with either the engineering department or the R&D department. What really matters to them is—did the partner really bring in value additions in terms of technical capabilities and stability of engagement? If you have attrition at the top level, it can disrupt the bonds and relationships that have been built over many years," he explains. Also, the technical know-how gets disrupted over time, he says.

Raghavan's inclusive leadership style, characterised by attentiveness, mirrors the company's DNA, which is customer-focussed and employee-centric. "I talk less, and I hear more," he says.

Since the early 2010s, when the company decided to establish domain competencies and focus on three key industries—media and communications, transportation, and healthcare—growth has remained consistent. "The company will continue to focus on these key core sectors and leverage the powers of emerging technologies such as GenAI and digital to deliver even greater value to its customers," a pleased Raghavan says.

"They have been at the right place at the right time. They have good execution skills. The sectors in which they are present require solid domain knowledge and experience to provide cutting-edge technology services to global OEMs. These skill sets have been nurtured and cultivated by Tata Elxsi over several decades," says Elixir Capital's Mehta.

"Now we are seeing massive disruption taking place in all of these segments—auto, media and entertainment and healthcare—providing a lot of opportunities for Tata Elxsi to offer their specialised services. That's why they have seen good growth rates for the past several years," he adds.

However, Raghavan shows no signs of slowing down. Under his guidance, the company is now looking at certain adjacencies within its core industry verticals, such as commercial vehicles, farm and agricultural equipment space, and working on building its own products, solutions and intellectual property that can be licensed to customers.

"A great success for us is the connected car platform that we have developed and licensed to a number of customers. This achievement gives us a lot of confidence that we can not only build a world-class product but also establish effective business models around it. There are a few more products in the pipeline that we are looking to license to our customers. Incrementally, every year we will be launching new products to take on the market," says an upbeat Raghavan.

The company will continue to keep its gaze fixed on the three key industries, while also working on gradually introducing new products within these, he says. "Opportunities are plenty. Every few years a disruption happens in the industry; we love these disruptions as they give us an opportunity to reinvent ourselves. So, we will continue to be at the cutting edge of some of these innovations," he says. BT

@binu_t_paul

FROM CUSTOMER TO CONSUMER

Sailesh C. Mehta, CMD of Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals, has decided to give the businesses a fresh look and his move seems to be paying off

By **Krishna Gopalan**

▶ **ABOUT FIVE TO** six years ago, Sailesh C. Mehta, Chairman & Managing Director of Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd (DFPCL), sat down with his strategic team with a simple yet loaded question. "What should we do over the next decade with our businesses?" he asked. The reason, in Mehta's view, was simple. There was too much talk about price, but it was important to make the shift to value.

In a simple conference room at his Pune office, the 62-year-old, who is a winner in the Natural Resources (Chemicals and Metals & Mining) category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year, elaborates on the thought process. "I saw the invaluable knowledge we possessed in areas like fertilisers, industrial chemicals,

Natural Resources
SAILESH C. MEHTA
CMD, DEEPAK FERTILISERS AND PETROCHEMICALS CORPORATION

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	11,300.7
	9MFY24	6,589.8
Profit before tax	**FY23**	1,815.5
	9MFY24	375.6
Profit after tax	**FY23**	1,220.9
	9MFY24	237.6
	FY23 RoE (%)	27.28
	Market Cap	6,578.2

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

PHOTO BY **MILIND SHELTE**

BOOSTING YIELD Sailesh C. Mehta, Chairman and MD, Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals Corporation

and mining chemicals picked up over 40 years. It was very clear that we needed to build on it," says Mehta.

In many ways, it was time to take a hard look at the businesses and get them ready for the inevitable disruptions of the future. A more complacent manager might not have seen the need, given the leadership position the company enjoyed, but things had to be turned around to seize newer opportunities.

The businesses sit well with the India growth story. Mehta cites the case of power, where coal is needed, and you cannot do anything without mining chemicals. "There was an obvious tailwind, and the mid-income segment was growing. That meant a large demand for fruits and vegetables," he explains.

Finally, some mantras were drawn up: getting the size right (doubling fertiliser capacity and the belief that the play in ammonium nitrate could make it very large globally); and, strengthening the value chain (this was across businesses, and in the case of ammonia, the firm decided to produce it on its own as opposed to relying on the Middle East). The new greenfield ammonia plant has also helped the company lower the risk profile of all three businesses. All this meant the organisation would need to change. Mehta spent time on areas like teamwork and total quality management. That meant shifting the emphasis from a commodity player to one offering holistic solutions, or from the customer to the consumer.

Through the conversation, Mehta labours on the last point and how it has worked out well. The foray into investing in brands was one such initiative and came because commodity businesses were getting squeezed. "The solution was to move to the final consumer... plus value emerges from a brand," he says. Often, that means a higher price the consumer needs to pay. Take the case of sugarcane, where the insight was that a 1% increase in sucrose led to a ₹35-crore benefit to a sugar mill. "We then understood what nutrients could impact sucrose content. If people see value, they will not speak about the price, since the benefits are clearly understood," he says.

For technical ammonium nitrate (TAN)—a key ingredient in pharmaceuticals, mining, power, construction, and steel industries—the way to make that insight into reality was not just to supply it to an industrial explosives company but to enhance mine productivity. With time and success in core sectors—where DFPCL gets paid based on success—the move from product to mining solutions is now a reality.

Vinit Bolinjkar, Head (Research) at Ventura Securities, sees a big opportunity for the company in ammonia. "From a backward integration point of view, ammonia is well-placed, and moving ahead to complex derivatives leads to high margins," he explains. In the chemicals business, the products are completely fungible. "They can manufacture any product depending on demand, and it is easy to be opportunistic about this." The big clincher for him is TAN. "It can be used in many sectors, and in the long term, we will see it grow sharply. The company has a very sound understanding of this business segment." In FY24, the firm's performance was affected by a reduction in government subsidy on fertilisers.

DFPCL has a complex set of businesses, and often when Mehta travelled overseas, there were folks who wanted to enter into partnerships. But, he says, "It was important for investors to be clear about our businesses." In December 2022, a decision was taken to demerge the mining chemicals into Deepak Mining Services Pvt. Ltd, for which NCLT approvals have come through. According to him, this gives investors an option to choose businesses with greater ease.

The move from commodities to holistic services is "a massive cultural change". Push him on what the next three to five years will look like, and Mehta says the transformation will be complete. "The commodity to brand [shift] will be a big one, apart from each company in the group having a sharp focus on its business. We have a solid base with global manufacturing scale, and there is a joy in connecting with the end consumer," he says.

In keeping with his own brand, he signs off with a smile. BT

@krishnagopalan

Staying Agile

❶ Sailesh C. Mehta helped the company see adjacencies in the areas where it already dominated

❷ It is looking to double fertiliser capacity as it aims to become a global leader

❸ There has been a big shift in emphasis from being a commodity player to one offering holistic solutions

❹ This has meant pivoting from a customer to a consumer orientation

Catalyst of Change

Since founding Laurus Labs in 2005, CEO Satyanarayana Chava has overseen a series of transformations that has helped the firm become an integrated pharma company

By **Neetu Chandra Sharma**

▶ **LAURUS LABS,** once a leading manufacturer of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, is undergoing yet another transformation under Satyanarayana Chava, its Founder & CEO. Until 2011, ARVs—a group of medication used to manage and treat human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection—accounted for a substantial portion of the company's revenue. Then it made a strategic shift towards becoming an active pharmaceutical ingredient (API)-focussed company.

Subsequently, the company forayed into the formulations business in 2014, which helped it become an integrated pharma company by 2020. As a result of that shift, the ARV API contributes only 25% of revenues now, while the contract development and manufacturing organisation (CDMO) segment has seen significant growth.

The success of these shifts is evident in the numbers. Over the past five years, Laurus Labs, which was found-

Pharma & Healthcare

SATYANARAYANA CHAVA

FOUNDER & CEO, LAURUS LABS

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	6,040.6
	9MFY24	3,601.2
Profit before tax	**FY23**	1,108.9
	9MFY24	129.1
Profit after tax	**FY23**	796.6
	9MFY24	92.9
	FY23 RoE (%)	21.63
	Market Cap	21,493.9

● Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023

● M-cap as of February 23, 2024

● **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

PHOTO BY **KRISHNENDU HALDER**

LEADING FROM THE FRONT Satyanarayana Chava, Founder & CEO, Laurus Labs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COIMBATORE

ed in 2005, has seen a significant growth in revenues, rising from ₹2,292 crore in FY19 to ₹6,041 crore in FY23, an increase of 164% over the period. However, there has been a slight dip in revenues in the first nine months of FY24, settling at ₹3,601 crore.

Further, Laurus Labs's biotechnology business represents a strategic diversification into a high-growth sector with significant potential for development. The biotech business is relatively new, launched in 2021 through the acquisition of Richcore Life Sciences, a pioneer in microbial fermentation technology.

By leveraging its expertise in fermentation technology and focussing on sustainable and innovative products, Laurus Bio (what Richcore is called after acquisition) aims to capture a significant share of the growing biomanufacturing market—which is valued at $216.7 billion in 2023, according to business consulting firm Grand View Research, and is projected to grow to $420.7 billion by 2030, with a CAGR of 9.5%. Rising demand for sustainable solutions, bio-based products, and advances in biotechnology are driving this growth. India, which is emerging as a significant player in this space, also has a thriving biomanufacturing market estimated at $58 billion in 2023, per the national investment promotion agency Invest India, and is anticipated to double every two to three years, and could reach $300 billion by 2030.

"Our investment in [the] bio [space] in 2021 helped Laurus offer a combination of biology and chemistry for sustainable products. Laurus's recent investment in ImmunoACT, launching the country's first indigenously developed CAR-T [cell therapy] for cancer treatment, is another area of interest. These investments were augmented by licensing patents from IIT Kanpur on certain rare disease molecules," says Chava.

Chava, winner in the pharma & healthcare category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year, is now targeting investments in emerging areas such as precision fermentation, viral vector manufacturing, and cell and gene therapy, with the CDMO segment expected to lead near-term growth. Chava, who has a master's degree and a PhD in chemistry from Andhra University, an Executive MBA from the Indian School of Business, and a postgraduate diploma in quality management from the World Quality Council, brings over three decades of pharmaceutical experience.

Pharmaceutical analysts are upbeat about the company as the CDMO segment's project pipeline is expanding, and the animal health unit is expected to contribute gradually from Q4FY24. The biotech segment is witnessing momentum, with plans for capacity expansion.

Gross profitability has improved, with potential margin improvements as sales volumes increase, analysts say. Significant investments in capex have been made, with expectations for future demand. Commercialisation of CAR-T therapy has commenced, with profitability expected in Q4FY24. "Laurus Labs would incur a cumulative capex of ₹2,800 crore over FY22-24, across CDMO, non-ARV formulation, and non-ARV API segments. Further, it is undergoing a validation phase for products in the animal health segment, and capex for the crop science segment. It is [also] building a product pipeline in the non-ARV formulation segment," says Tushar Manudhane, Research Analyst at brokerage firm Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

The Big Shifts

❶ Until 2011, ARV drugs accounted for a substantial portion of Laurus's revenues

❷ It forayed into the formulation business in 2014, which helped it become an integrated pharma company

❸ ARV API contributes only 25% of revenues now

❹ It moved into the biotech space in 2021 through the acquisition of Richcore Life Sciences

But there has been a dip in revenue and profits in FY24. Speaking about this, he says, the anticipated increase in sales from CDMO and non-ARV segments has been delayed. The company experienced adverse effects on its performance, especially in the third quarter of FY24, adds Manudhane.

A report from research firm K.R. Choksey Research indicated that despite underperforming on profitability in Q3FY24, Laurus Labs could see improvement in its margins. "Regulatory compliance remains robust, with significant investments in R&D and capacity expansion in high-growth segments like CDMO and bio," said the research firm's report.

With the pieces falling into place, it's no wonder that the analysts are upbeat about Laurus Labs. BT

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COIMBATORE

THE NAVIGATOR

Pradeep Gaur, CMD of RVNL, believes that every adversity brings opportunity. He has steered the railway PSU into more sectors and geographies as it charts out a new course

By **Surabhi**

▶ **AS ONE OF** the oldest-serving employees of Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL), Pradeep Gaur, its current Chairman and Managing Director, has seen the rail PSU come into its own.

RVNL was incorporated in 2003 with the twin objectives of implementing projects related to creating and augmenting the capacity of rail infrastructure on a fast-track basis and raising extra budgetary resources for SPV (special purpose vehicle) projects. It began operations in 2005, and Gaur, a 1987 batch IRSE (Indian Railway Service of Engineers) officer, joined RVNL soon after.

Over the past 19 years, he has seen the company grow and has also played a significant role in its transformation in recent times after he became its chief in 2018. He also oversaw the company's listing in 2019, when the government sold 12.12% stake.

"I'm one of the longest-serving people in this organisation. I joined it from Indian Railways on deputation in 2005 and was later absorbed [into it]. So, I have been here almost since its inception," Gaur tells *BT*. Based on this long association, he confidently states that RVNL has evolved into a very capable project executing organisation with very high technical capabilities. "It has developed a lot of resiliency and can spring back from any pushback," says Gaur.

But it hasn't been easy going. When Gaur took charge as CMD about five and a half years ago, RVNL faced a number of challenges. Project execution was slow, and a large number of projects were languishing. So, Gaur's first task was to bring these to order and get them commissioned.

Then the Covid-19 pandemic struck, and RVNL's focus shifted to saving the lives of the workers at its various project sites and ensuring they got adequate support. But by far the biggest challenge it had to navigate was the decision of the Ministry of Railways to move from execution of projects on a nomination basis to competitive bidding, which meant that RVNL no longer had the advantage of getting projects straight off from the Railways. That being the case, it had to also foray into non-railway projects.

"At that time, it was a huge challenge to foray into a different business altogether that we were not used to and had to take projects on bidding. I will give full credit to the resilience of the organisation for being able to rise to the occasion because it was an extremely difficult proposition. RVNL consists 100% of officers and staff from the Railways, and they were not used to this," recalls Gaur.

The company took this up as a challenge, and Gaur believes that the change in orientation has opened up a whole new vista of opportunities in various sectors.

Over the past few years, RVNL has diversified into

PSU

PRADEEP GAUR

CHAIRMAN AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, RVNL

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	20,281.6
	9MFY24	15,175.2
Profit before tax	**FY23**	1,719.3
	9MFY24	1,429
Profit after tax	**FY23**	1,341.8
	9MFY24	1,096.1
	FY23 RoE (%)	20.81
	Market Cap	55,200.9

● Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023

● M-cap as of February 23, 2024

● **Source** BSE, ACE Equity

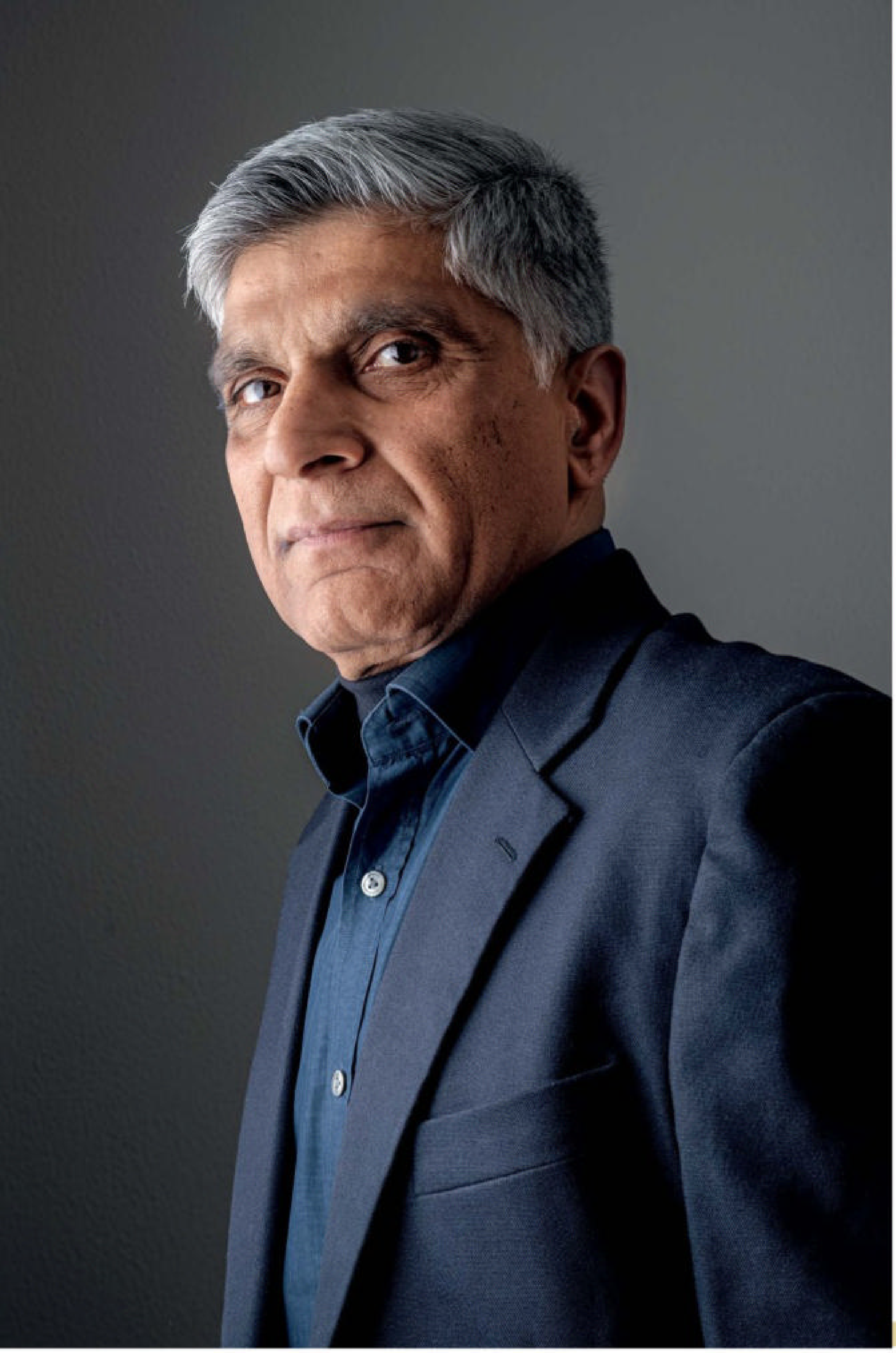

PHOTO BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

INSTITUTION BUILDER
Pradeep Gaur, Chairman and Managing Director, RVNL

Multiple Tracks

❶ Pradeep Gaur took charge as Chairman and Managing Director of RVNL from September 1, 2018

❷ Under Gaur, RVNL listed on the bourses in March 2019 and was granted Navratna status in 2023

❸ He has overseen key initiatives of the railway PSU, including its foray into other sectors such as ports and metro rail

❹ RVNL has also started undertaking international projects with the first such project in the Maldives

❺ It has ventured into manufacturing with Vande Bharat coaches

non-railway projects such as ports, national highways, metro rail, and irrigation. It has also moved to other geographies, such as the Maldives, where it is implementing a port project. The UTF (Uthuru Thila Falhu-Island) Harbour project in the Maldives is a strategic project placed by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), and RVNL was appointed as the implementing agency in December 2022.

Gaur says that not only is the MEA happy with the pace of work and progress, this project has also shattered the general perception that most Indian PSUs do not perform well abroad. RVNL is now also looking at other regions, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the government of Kyrgyzstan, and has ventured into the solar sector in Uzbekistan and the Middle East.

"As of now, we are into four or five sectors. We will see how the situation evolves. We will not like to spread too much. But we would like to focus on areas that are becoming our strength," he says.

Its order book stands at about ₹65,000 crore, of which around 50% is from the nomination, that is the typical railway projects, and 50% is from the market through bidding.

The challenge now with bidding for projects is to remain competitive and also think of the bottom line, says Gaur. "Getting orders is the easier part; the difficult part is executing them well with margins without compromising on the quality of the work, because that is most important," he adds.

With this in mind, the company, which was granted Navratna status—which is granted to public sector firms that have an excellent or very good MOU rating in three of the past five years, among other parameters—last year, is working on a number of initiatives. This includes rightsizing the organisation, which has about 440 employees right now; imbibing new technologies such as artificial intelligence in segments like finance, HR, bidding, and eventually project execution; exploring innovations and getting the latest technologies in its projects; as well as focussing on execution strategies. Gaur highlights that project execution is RVNL's core strength.

With an eye on the future, the company has also moved to manufacturing and has signed an agreement with Russian firms Metrowagonmash and Locomotive Electronic Systems for the manufacture and supply of 120 Vande Bharat sleeper train sets. Gaur says this is just the start of the manufacturing journey.

The company is also looking at getting into the data centre business, as it has a strong team of engineers with a background in electronics.

While RVNL reported a 6.2% decline in its net profit in the third quarter of FY24 at ₹358.6 crore, compared to ₹382.4 crore in the year-ago period, analysts remain upbeat about its prospects.

"RVNL was formed to carry out critical railway projects. By design, there was a nomination clause for railway orders, which helped RVNL in shoring up the order backlog. Its performance has been spectacular over the past 10 years, with a 26% CAGR in revenues and a 24% CAGR in profits," notes Rohit Natarajan, Vice President and Research Analyst at Antique Stock Broking.

However, the government's policy on railways has changed, and so have the priorities. "RVNL will also have to transform itself, and how it adapts will be critical for the company's future," says Natarajan. He adds that it will have to focus on new sectors, such as manufacturing and international projects, where it is already making headway.

"It has a ₹35,000-crore project in Kyrgyzstan and has also bid for the ₹83,000-crore Trans Kalahari Railway Project [in Africa]. It also has an order backlog [of ₹65,000 crore] for domestic projects. "With the possibility of a ₹14,400-crore railway contract manufacturing order, RVNL has the potential to transform its order book to ₹2 lakh crore by FY26, which will be a big task for the company," he says.

Vikas Gupta, smallcase Manager and CEO, Chief Investment Strategist, at investment advisory OmniScience Capital, also notes that RVNL has been growing at a steady pace, with profits increasing consistently. "It has a large order book of over ₹65,000 crore and is targeting an order book of ₹1 lakh crore for FY24. Given the large capex planned by the Railways and RVNL's diversification outside railways into other sectors and other countries, the order book is likely to get bigger," he says.

The Navratna status will give it significant financial freedom in terms of capex and the choice of investing in particular projects, he says, adding that this should help in the quick turnaround of new projects.

With nearly a year and a half left before his retirement, Gaur has much more left to do. It is thanks to this enterprising attitude that he's been adjudged the winner in the PSU category of *BT*-PwC India's Best CEO ranking this year. **BT**

@surabhi_prasad

Scale of operations

- **₹65,000 crore:** Order book
- **440:** Number of employees
- **16,000 km:** Commissioned railway infrastructure
- **₹1.5 lakh crore:** Project expenditure
- **38 Project** Implementation Units at 26 locations (as of FY23-end)

What next

- The firm is targeting an order book of ₹1 lakh crore by the end of FY24
- It will continue working in non-railway projects
- It is looking to include AI in operations such as finance, HR, bidding and project execution
- It will get into manufacturing of coaches and rolling stock
- It is eyeing setting up data centres at a later date


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Rising From The Ashes

Ravaged by the pandemic, Phoenix Mills was trying hard to survive. That's when MD Shishir Shrivastava's silent strategy proved successful

By **Arnab Dutta**

▶ **THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** severely impacted the real estate sector, with the sudden lockdown crippling consumption and causing a steep decline in demand. In this situation, resilient businesses survived solely through determination and grit. Shishir Shrivastava, Managing Director of The Phoenix Mills Ltd., exemplifies this. With nearly 25 years of experience, the 48-year-old Shrivastava, winner in the Real Estate category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking, reflects on those times and says that when the virus threatened livelihoods, he had no choice but to intensify efforts and quietly prepare for the challenges ahead.

What did he do? When most of his industry peers were scrambling in search of a survival strategy, Phoenix Mills, under his guidance, launched an upgradation drive for its retail assets. The company's top line comes mainly from mall rentals, and with cities coming to

Real Estate
SHISHIR SHRIVASTAVA
MANAGING DIRECTOR, THE PHOENIX MILLS LTD

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	2,638.3
	9MFY24	2,671.7
Profit before tax	**FY23**	1,671.4
	9MFY24	1,154.3
Profit after tax	**FY23**	1,472.5
	9MFY24	772.5
	FY23 RoE (%)	19.74
	Market Cap	51,899.4

- Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023
- M-cap as of February 23, 2024
- **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

FOREVER RESILIENT Shishir Shrivastava, Managing Director, The Phoenix Mills a halt, malls had turned into empty shells. But Shrivastava persevered. The company management saw the pandemic also as an opportunity, and it used it to change the brand- and category mix in its malls.

Furthermore, Shrivastava drew valuable insights from the 2008 global financial crisis, which proved instrumental. This was when the company was initially expanding beyond its base in Mumbai's Lower Parel neighbourhood. However, its assertive approach then had placed the company under considerable duress, with debt exceeding equity by a significant margin.

"The learnings stayed with us. So, almost all of the new projects that we launched since 2017 were financed by leveraging equity. That was one of the very important decisions that we took, to not grow our debt to higher levels for under-construction projects," Shrivastava tells *Business Today.* Along with massive cost cutting measures in place, while most other real estate developers were either staring at debt piling up or were selling some of their key assets to reduce debt, for Shrivastava the strategy came handy. "So during Covid-19, it was really helpful as we did not have that undue pressure of debt service on our head," he recalls. To fuel its operations, Phoenix Mills secured ₹4,873 crore in capital through equity and joint ventures from 2020 to 2022. With investments totalling close to ₹7,000 crore, including land acquisitions and capex, Shrivastava asserts that this strategic move positioned Phoenix as a leader, particularly as lockdown restrictions eased.

The numbers bear testimony. After taking a hit on its top line in FY21, the firm's operating revenue surged 38% year-on-year to ₹1,483 crore, while its net profit jumped 4.6 times to ₹268 crore. In FY23, Phoenix Mills recorded a 78% rise in its operating revenue to ₹2,638 crore and its profit after tax jumped by a whopping 449% to close the year at ₹1,472 crore. According to analysts at Geojit Financial Services, its earnings growth was "impressive", driven by rising consumption and successful project launches. "The company's strategic positioning in the retail and entertainment business has contributed to increased footfall and revenue. With a robust pipeline of upcoming projects, the company is well-positioned to sustain its growth trajectory," the market analysis firm notes. The revamping exercise yielded rich dividends. Rental income from retail categories like jewellery (up 164% between Q2FY20 and Q4FY23), food and beverages (64%), fashion and accessories (62%), multiplex (33%) and electronics (15%) boosted its performance as the segment contributed nearly 70% to Phoenix's top line.

Shrivastava aims to swiftly expand Phoenix's footprint in the office and hospitality sectors. With 30 million sq. ft. of retail assets in eight cities like Mumbai and Bengaluru, Phoenix will soon extend its reach to Kolkata, Surat, and Thane. Together with expansion in its existing locations, Phoenix will add another 2.5 million sq. ft. of retail assets. As the expansion progresses, Shrivastava remains proactive. He's actively seeking opportunities in cities such as Jaipur, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, and Coimbatore, identifying untapped potential for consumption in areas lacking quality retail centres.

Industry observers are also upbeat. According to Pritesh Sheth, research analyst at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, Phoenix's rental income will stay ahead of the consumption growth in the retail sector. "Aided by densification of existing malls, we expect Phoenix to report a 14% CAGR in rental income over FY24-FY26," he says. In the office space segment, the plans are even more aggressive. Shrivastava now aims to add 5.5 million sq. ft. of office space to Phoenix's portfolio and wants to venture into key markets like Bengaluru and Chennai, to take the total number to over 7 million sq. ft. by FY27. This, believes Shrivastava, will push the segment's contribution to the top line to 25%. There is also the company's ongoing luxury hotel project, under the Grand Hyatt brand in Bengaluru. When this is completed, it will take the group's hospitality assets count to three.

With wind underneath his wings, small wonder, therefore, that a quiet smile is ubiquitous on Shrivastava's face these days. BT

@arndutt

Mall Play

❶ **Under Shrivastava, Phoenix raised ₹4,873 crore during the pandemic and invested heavily in revamping its malls**

❷ **Phoenix's retail segment, which contributes 70% towards its top line, is expected to surge ahead of the consumption growth rate till FY26**

❸ **A major boost is expected in the office segment as Phoenix ventures into Bengaluru and Chennai**

PHOTO BY **MANDAR DEODHAR**

GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT

Bharat K. Sheth, Deputy Chairman & MD of Great Eastern Shipping, took the tough decisions early and that has helped the firm pounce on opportunities when they arise

By **Krishna Gopalan**

▶ **LIKE FOR MANY** executives across the world, the Lehman moment in 2008 was a big wake up call for Bharat K. Sheth. "We were always conservative as a company. Lehman taught us we were not conservative enough for Black Swan events and that was a huge learning," says the Deputy Chairman & Managing Director of The Great Eastern Shipping Co. Ltd.

It was time to get back to the basics, and that meant revisiting the risk model. From a fundamental point of view, it was about defining risk and how to prepare for the unexpected. "Shipping is a very capex-intensive business, and everything hinges on capital allocation. The question is: What is the leverage within which you are willing to play the game," explains Sheth.

A decision to cut back on debt was taken. Interestingly, the company was in very good shape (it had a triple A rating), and this was done proactively. There was a committed capex of $1.6 billion, but banks were understandably nervous, and funding could have become a challenge.

Reflecting on the period, Sheth, winner in the Transport & Logistics category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking this year, says: "Shipping being amongst the most volatile industries globally, few companies have been around for over 75 years." Great Eastern has learnt over the years that "having low leverage, high cash balances and a strict discipline on making acquisitions in low markets is the best mantra for long term survival." Today, it has a fleet of 42 ships—crude, product, gas, and dry bulk carriers. It also owns and operates one of India's largest and most modern fleets in the offshore oilfield exploration and production sector. It has four jack-up rigs and 19 offshore support vessels.

It conducted an exercise to identify risks afresh after Lehman. That phase turned out to be invaluable, and by 2016, the scenario had changed and Great Eastern was hungry. "Asset values had dropped considerably, and we had the capacity to invest. The phase between 2008 and 2016 was about being on the Titanic and not hitting the iceberg but changing direction," says Sheth. If Lehman was a big lesson in the unexpected, it meant being better prepared when the pandemic hit. In financial terms, that process of strengthening the balance sheet worked very well. The investments made in 2016 paid off, yielding a dollar return of close to 30% in seven years.

Transport & Logistics

BHARAT K. SHETH

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN AND MD,
THE GREAT EASTERN SHIPPING CO. LTD

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	5,690.5
	9MFY24	3,757.8
Profit before tax	**FY23**	2,553.5
	9MFY24	1,752.5
Profit after tax	**FY23**	2,575
	9MFY24	1,709.1
	FY23 RoE (%)	28.1
	Market Cap	13,647.8

● Data is on a consolidated basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023

● M-cap as of February 23, 2024

● **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

PHOTO BY **MANDAR DEODHAR**

STAYING CONSERVATIVE Bharat K. Sheth, Deputy Chairman & Managing Director, The Great Eastern Shipping Co. Ltd

Key Highlights

❶ A complete relook at the risk model has worked well for the company

❷ The Lehman crisis in 2008 reoriented the company's outlook and reducing debt was a priority

❸ By 2016, when asset values dropped, Great Eastern was in a good position to buy

❹ Great Eastern was established in 1948 and has a fleet size of 42 ships today

The approach to cash is also interesting. To survive a Black Swan event, there is cash that will never be touched, and that is the first bucket. The second is to extend the runway, and the third is "to take advantage of blood on the streets". To Sheth, the present moment is critical, and being debt-free is also about investing wisely and needing that big opportunity. "There are too many moving parts in our industry, and on a global scale, we are still at the mid-level. It is necessary for us to be at the table with the big boys, and with 85% of our revenue coming from outside India, we want to sail with them."

In the business it operates in, there is the option of taking the balance sheet risk or the operational risk. "With a balance sheet in control, I can take an operational risk. While I have the cash today, a sudden spike in oil prices could change everything," emphasises Sheth. The other business of Great Eastern is Greatship (India), a player in offshore oilfield services, which is today "almost net debt-free".

According to Vinit Bolinjkar, Head (Research) at Ventura Securities, Great Eastern understands the shipping cycle very well. "They get it well on asset flipping and manage to buy at low prices and sell at high prices. Now, with a turnaround in the oil industry, the rig business will do well," he says. He says the company is risk-averse when it comes to debt, and a long-term charter approach results in good cash flows. "They have a healthy mix, with the spot rates helping in the short term."

For Sheth, risks are a part of the business. "Look at what is going on in the Red Sea, and it is not easy to mitigate it," he says. The focus of Great Eastern has been on superior capital allocation. Be it buying bulk carriers, tankers or even buying back its own shares. "Along with the right capital allocation, keeping the balance sheet light also helps us take greater operational leverage and this has worked well for us over the last few years," says Sheth.

Clearly, there is merit in getting the basics right. **BT**

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POWER TRAIN

Rajni Hasija, who was CMD of IRCTC for a little over two years, spearheaded the PSU's turnaround post Covid and believes train tourism will remain a favourite

By **Surabhi**

▶ **WHEN RAJNI HASIJA** took additional charge as the Chairperson and Managing Director of the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) in February 2021, the public sector undertaking (PSU) was reeling from the body blow of the pandemic like other entities in the travel and tourism sector.

No stranger to the IRCTC, she had served two terms at the PSU in the capacity of Group General Manager, handling the IT business segment, and being overall in-charge of an entire zone. She also played a pioneering role in the inception and development of the internet ticketing site of the railways, *www.irctc.co.in*.

Travel

RAJNI HASIJA

FORMER CMD, IRCTC

Revenue from operations	**FY23**	3,541.5
	9MFY24	3,115.4
Profit before tax	**FY23**	1,354
	9MFY24	1,114
Profit after tax	**FY23**	1,005.9
	9MFY24	826.9
	FY23 RoE (%)	46.26
	Market Cap	77,172

● Data is on a standalone basis; all figures in ₹ crore except RoE; 9MFY24: April-December 2023

● M-cap as of February 23, 2024

● **Source** ACE Equity, BSE

But those stints did not prepare her for the unprecedented challenges facing IRCTC—which focusses on rail ticketing, catering, tourism, and bottled water product Rail Neer—in 2021. "When I signed my first balance sheet as CMD, the total revenue from operations had fallen to ₹783.05 crore in FY21 from ₹2,264.31 crore in FY20, due to the pandemic. But we took it as a challenge, and the IRCTC team worked upon it, and the next two balance sheets were very good and [showed] remarkable performance," recalls Hasija, who superannuated on May 31, 2023, after holding additional charge as CMD of the PSU for a little more than two years. She was also Director (Tourism and Marketing) at IRCTC for five years.

The recovery was remarkable. IRCTC posted an 88.5% jump in its revenue from operations to ₹3,541.47 crore in FY23, the highest ever, compared with ₹1,878.57 crore in FY22. Net profit also jumped 52.5% year-on-year to ₹1,005.88 crore. The key contributor to revenue in FY23 was the catering business with 41.69%, followed by e-ticketing at 33.83%, tourism at 15.98%, and Rail Neer at 8.5%. Return on equity in FY23 was a solid 46%.

Hasija, winner in the Travel category of the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking, highlights that by the end of FY23, all business segments had been restored to pre-Covid levels and were turning a profit.

For the uninitiated, the scale of operations of IRCTC is gigantic, despite having just 2,229 employees. As the only entity authorised to provide railway tickets online, catering services to railways, and packaged drinking water at railway stations and on trains in India, IRCTC served over 7.7 million passengers in FY23, with 6.12 million daily logins and an average of 1.18 million tickets booked daily. From the 891 pairs of trains it catered to pre-Covid, it now caters to 1,284 trains.

As many as 14.8 million meals were booked on its e-catering platform in FY23, and it was present in over 474 trains equipped with pantry cars and 713 trains under

PHOTO BY **HARDIK CHHABRA**

STABLE HAND Rajni Hasija, Former CMD, IRCTC

On the Right Track

❶ Rajni Hasija took additional charge as Chairperson and MD of IRCTC in February 2021 and superannuated on May 31, 2023

❷ She worked on a number of measures to shore up IRCTC's revenues when the pandemic brought railway ticketing, catering and tourism to a near halt

❸ Ensuring high quality services to win back the trust of passengers while ensuring profitability for investors was a key focus for her

❹ Under Hasija, IRCTC posted its highest ever revenue from operations at ₹3,541.47 crore in FY23

train side vending (TSV). Its 16 Rail Neer plants produced 357.7 million bottles last fiscal and produce an average of 1.2 million litres of Rail Neer bottles per day. In the tourism business, it operated 140 chartered trains, and 91,555 passengers used its tour packages last fiscal.

For Hasija, the first few months after joining were a challenge, as the pandemic was at its peak and train travel and tourism had come to a grinding halt during the lockdown. Hasija remembers spending much of that time ensuring that passengers were refunded for their train tickets and that community kitchens and Shramik trains to transport migrant labourers operated efficiently.

But as a listed entity, profitability and revenue continued to be key focus areas, and slowly, as train travel resumed and the tourism sector got back on the recovery path, reclaiming the trust of passengers and convincing them to come back was the main priority.

Since railway ticketing was yet to pick up and full-fledged catering in trains only resumed from November-December 2021, IRCTC took that time to get its staff trained in safety standards through Bureau Veritas (a French firm specialising in testing and inspection), technical service provider TUV-Nord, and the Ashok Institute of Hospitality and Tourism Management under the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC). "A strategic decision was also taken to go for horizontal rather than vertical growth," Hasija says, adding that several initiatives were taken to boost the catering and tourism businesses.

Bharat Gaurav trains, Tejas trains, an online travel agency certificate from the Ministry of Tourism, and a shift to a deluxe model of tourism from budget tourism helped the PSU in this journey even as it tightened its belt and cut expenditure.

Scale of operations

- **1.18 million** tickets booked daily
- **14.8 million** meals booked
- **357.7 million** Rail Neer bottles produced
- **91,555** passengers used its tour packages

Revenue contributors

- Catering: **41.69%**
- E-ticketing: **33.83%**
- Tourism: **15.98%**
- Rail Neer: **8.5%**

Vikas Gupta, smallcase Manager and CEO, Chief Investment Strategist, at investment advisory OmniScience Capital, notes that IRCTC's revenues had already nearly touched the pre-pandemic level of FY19 in FY22. And it had extraordinary growth over that in FY23. "In fact, FY22 had roughly the same level of revenues as FY19, that is, the pre-Covid year, and in FY23, the revenues were such that they had a CAGR of more than 17% from FY19 to FY23. Profits, too, have been growing at a good pace. FY24 again promises to be a 15% growth rate year, and this momentum is likely to be continued in the future, albeit at slightly lower growth rates, comparatively," he says.

Gupta notes that one of the factors underlying that revenue growth was that trains with a pantry car increased significantly from nearly 400 to nearly 500 and were further supported by train-side vending on nearly 700 trains. "Tejas, Maharaja, Teerth, Bharat Gaurav, and air ticketing were other factors driving growth. Customers have responded well to the IRCTC's theme packages, especially as pent-up demand comes back after the Covid hiatus," he says.

And Gupta expects this growth to continue. The launch of more than 400 high-speed Vande Bharat and a similar number of Amrit Bharat trains, as part of the 3,000 new trains to be launched in the near future, and numerous railway station upgrades promise to aid the growth of IRCTC in terms of ticketing, catering, and tourism for several years, he adds.

Jinesh Joshi, Research Analyst at brokerage firm Prabhudas Lilladher, says that post-Covid, the pick-up in tourism has benefitted all companies in the travel segment, including IRCTC. "The rail PSU also took several steps, such as launching 10 Bharat Gaurav trains, that helped boost its business further. The major driver of IRCTC's revenue remains the ticketing business, and we do not see much change in the non-suburban ticketing volumes or traffic," he says, adding that any upswing in its earnings per share from the current level may be challenging. "The key earnings lever for IRCTC is an increase in the convenience fee or retail price of Rail Neer. However, we believe the possibility of any revision in the near term is limited," he notes. Hasija agrees and says that ticketing through IRCTC has risen to 82% of the total tickets, and the rail PSU will now have to focus on resources other than the convenience fee, which was about a third of the total internet revenue.

Having spent 13 years at IRCTC in various capacities, Hasija is a firm believer in its bright future. "IRCTC's business model is resilient," she declares. According to her, catering will grow as more Vande Bharat trains come up and the dedicated freight corridor frees up more line capacity for trains. The demand for Rail Neer is also growing, and production capacity is being expanded.

Hasija's term at IRCTC was followed by the appointment of Seema Kumar as additional CMD at the railway PSU. Recently, in January, Sanjay Kumar Jain was appointed as the CMD. IRCTC seems keen now to expand its footprint in the payments space and recently incorporated a wholly-owned subsidiary, IRCTC Payments Ltd.

As it embarks on its next phase of growth, the foresight and determination Hasija instilled in the PSU will hold it in good stead. BT

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COIMBATORE

BY VIVEK PRASAD

FIVE MANTRAS FOR TODAY'S CEO

With India's progress, challenges have grown for the modern Indian CEO. These five action steps, therefore, are most crucial

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL intelligence (Gen AI) is rapidly transforming the business landscape. With every passing day, its influence in shaping business operations is proving to be more real than hype. Companies that do not recognise or leverage its transformative potential may find it hard to remain economically viable over the next decade or so. PwC's *27th Annual Global CEO Survey: India* perspective, accordingly, highlights the imperative for companies to reinvent—especially with Gen AI—not only to stay the course but also to increase revenue and profitability.

While CEOs in general have been upbeat about the Indian economy, numerous social challenges barricade India's road to economic prosperity. A well-defined strategy comprising the following five action steps can perhaps help businesses gain a competitive advantage while remaining viable in the long run.

BUILDING TRUST

Technological preparedness and the availability of skilled talent have positioned India as an attractive investment and manufacturing destination. India has risen to the fifth position as an investment destination for global CEOs, up from the ninth position it held in 2023, PwC's *27th Annual Global CEO Survey* has revealed. Moreover, the country has also improved its Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) ranking. Nonetheless, businesses continue to be pinched by the burden of compliance, governed as they are by over 1,500 Acts and nearly 70,000 compliances. But what if a company were to shift its perspective and view regulatory compliance as an opportunity and not a barrier? Regulatory compliance can help businesses build trust with their stakeholders and position themselves as ethical and responsible leaders. For instance, if businesses were to show that their business operations comply with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, that can reassure customers that their data is being handled responsibly.

CUSTOMER PREFERENCES

For Indian business leaders, changing customer preferences is the top reinvention driver. The survey shows that 61% of respondents said that customer preferences had led to changes in how their companies created, delivered and captured value in the last five years. It follows, therefore, that companies that focus on continued reinvention to meet the changing preferences of customers will stay ahead of the curve. Recent PwC research suggests that companies can fulfil customer needs by working across industry boundaries. Retail companies can leverage Gen AI, for instance, to enhance customer engagement and personalise product recommendations. Also, with more customers using their smartphones to research products

Companies that focus on continued reinvention to meet the changing preferences of customers will stay ahead of the curve

ILLUSTRATION BY **RAJ VERMA**

before buying them, it has become imperative for businesses to reach the customer at the pre-purchase stage, even before the choice to buy a particular product is made.

USING GEN AI

Gen AI is helping maximise productivity and efficiency across industries, serving as a co-pilot or intelligent assistant to the human workforce. Indian CEOs acknowledge the transformative potential of Gen AI and anticipate that it will deliver significant benefits. Around 71% of Indian CEOs expected Gen AI to increase employee efficiency over the next 12 months, while 70% believed it would improve their own performance. However, these findings underscore the societal responsibility that CEOs have for ensuring their organisations use AI responsibly. For one, companies need to be certain that the data sets used to train large language models (LLMs) are inclusive and diverse. Stringent tests need to be conducted on Gen AI systems to verify their reliability, safety and relevance before deployment. More importantly, there is a need to establish robust internal governance procedures and provide human oversight.

DECARBONISATION

At the COP28 summit in 2023, leaders yet again underscored the need to transition away from fossil fuels. Rapid decarbonisation of the energy system is a necessity, and 130 countries at the summit pledged to triple the world's installed renewable energy generation capacity. Half of the business leaders polled in our survey believed that regulatory complexities were holding back decarbonisation efforts. Simplifying regulatory processes can accelerate climate action by the private sector. Also, with major Indian firms committing to net-zero targets, it is imperative for businesses in a climate-conscious world to meet investor and customer expectations on sustainability.

CYBERSECURITY

With businesses increasingly embracing digital transformation, the risk of cyberattacks has grown. It is, therefore, not surprising that cybersecurity figures high among Indian CEOs' concerns around factors impacting the growth of their businesses. Cybersecurity fears have become more acute with the advent of emerging technologies, like Gen AI. A majority of Indian CEOs believe Gen AI would increase cybersecurity risk and, therefore, it's important for businesses to put the necessary checks and balances in place.

The increased pressure Indian business leaders expect over the next few years is a sign that continuous reinvention will be needed. Staying ahead then will require every business leader to challenge conventional wisdom, embrace change and leverage potential opportunities, although this will look different for different industries. **BT**

The author is Partner and Leader-Markets, PwC India. Views are personal

HOW WE DID IT

The methodology behind the *BT*-PwC India's Best CEOs ranking

By **Rahul Oberoi**

PHOTO BY **MILIND SHELTE**

(*From left*) Amit Tandon; Ramnath Krishnan; R.M. Vishakha; Uday Kotak; Sourav Majumdar, Editor, *Business Today;* Vivek Prasad, Partner and Leader-Markets, PwC India; Rajat Dhawan; and Siddharth Zarabi, Managing Editor, BTTV

▶ **THE 12TH EDITION** of the annual ranking of India's Best CEOs is here. Like last year, *BT* teamed up with consulting firm PwC to devise a methodology for the study, which takes into account both quantitative performance as well as qualitative aspects. We started with the quantitative exercise to shortlist the Top 3 performers in each segment. But before that, a series of checks and filters were applied to our universe of the BT500 ranking of India's most valuable companies. Only those with revenues of over ₹1,000 crore were considered, and data was sourced from ACE Equity. The study period was FY21, FY22 and FY23. Firms whose latest audited financial year results were not available were dropped, as were those that posted a net loss in any of these fiscals. Firms that were listed during the study period were not considered, and banks and NBFCs, too, were not considered.

A total of 301 companies made the cut, of which CEOs (or executive heads) who had been on the job for the full study period were considered; for PSUs, the period was a minimum of one fiscal. To arrive at the rankings, growth in total income, profit before interest and tax (PBIT) and total shareholder returns (TSR) were considered, with the results being considered on a consolidated priority basis. Firms were assigned a score on the average of year-on-year absolute change and three-year CAGR in total income and PBIT, along with the geometric CAGR of TSR—calculated using net price change plus dividends.

Firms were then split into four groups—Super Large (total income of ₹1 lakh crore-plus); Large (₹50,000-1 lakh crore); Mid-sized (₹10,000-50,000 crore); Emerging (₹1,000-10,000 crore)—and 12 sectors.

This year, we introduced seven new categories—PSU, Resilient CEO, Unicorn, Clean Energy, Travel, Best Deal, and Glocal CEO. PSUs and Clean Energy firms were shortlisted based on total income, PBIT and TSR; for Resilient CEO, firms that had four successive quarters of losses followed by six consecutive quarters of profits made the cut. And start-ups that had a funding round in FY23 or later were considered for Unicorn, with the firms being scored on time taken to become a unicorn and the latest valuations. Travel firms were shortlisted from the listed and unlisted universe based on total income and PBIT. For Best Deal, the top M&A deals since January 2022 were picked. For Glocal CEO, only those firms that had seen income from overseas rising for the past three years were considered; and among them only those that got 10-50% of business from abroad in the past three years were picked.

Then, the names of the Top 3 CEOs in each group were placed before a jury led by Uday Kotak, Founder and Director, Kotak Mahindra Bank. The other members were Rajat Dhawan, Senior Managing Partner, McKinsey & Company in India; Ramnath Krishnan, MD, ICRA; R.M. Vishakha, MD & CEO, IndiaFirst Life Insurance; and Amit Tandon, Founder & MD, Institutional Investor Advisory Services.

Besides awards for Lifetime Achievement and Business Icon of the Year, the jury also suggested adding a special award for Impact Leader of the Year. **BT**

@iamrahuloberoi

DR. SATYA VADLAMANI

THE PIONEER OF NANOSPHERE TECHNOLOGY IN INDIAN PHARMA INDUSTRY

DR. SATYA VADLAMANI
Chairperson and Managing Director.
Murli Krishna Pharma Private Ltd.(MKPPL)

Dr. Satya Vadlamani & Dr. Vijay K. Shastri established Murli Krishna Pharma Private Ltd.(MKPPL) in early 2004. This young and dynamic duo is pioneering NanoSphere Innovations in India, providing a range of effective solutions to optimize the delivery of pharmaceutical products.

Nanospheres are a polymeric matrix of spherical shape that ranges in size between 10 and 200 nm in diameter. The drug is dissolved, entrapped, encapsulated, or attached to the matrix of polymers that are biodegradable and biocompatible. Nanospheres have small particle size making them suitable to oral administration, locally and systemically. They can penetrate the tissue and cell gap to reach the target organs. Moreover, attachment of the ligand on the surface of a sphere facilitates site-specific targeting. Reduced toxicity makes them more preferable for drug delivery. When an engineer like Dr. Satya becomes an entrepreneur, it is but natural that she will bring in innovations that set new standards for the industry.

With a marketing degree to boot, Dr. Satya is guiding MKPPL to greater heights, as its Chairman and the Managing Director. Her vision to provide the best possible range of international quality products at competitive prices through integration, research, innovation, technology & development, has ensured that her firm has succeeded in establishing international standards of excellence, garnering global accolades.

Dr. Satya's unstinted focus on research and development has ensured that it has a significant number of patents, underscoring its prowess in intellectual property. The company's bet on aqueous-based technologies has further propelled its advancements. The transformational journey showcases its relentless pursuit of progress. Today, MKPPL's expertise extends to diverse therapeutic areas, including ophthalmology, corticosteroids, oncology, transdermal applications, and oral solid dosage products.

Dr. Satya Vadlamani is driven by a passion to make drugs more effective in healthcare. She is aggressively deploying Nanosphere technology in drug delivery. It has the potential to change the way medicines address our problems and cure us.

Dr. Satya emphasises that the organization's aim is to establish itself at the pinnacle of the field worldwide. She says, "Our plant is approved for manufacturing by the European Union & for GMP Compliance by the WHO. MKKPL is equipped to undertake formulation development projects on oral NDDS. Our R&D facility was recently approved by DSIRT". The company's strategy revolves around introducing a plethora of cutting-edge technologies to the market. She states, "We have a world-class oral solid dosage form manufacturing facility for Pellets, Micro-Pellets and Granules approved by regulatory authorities of developed countries. We want to carve out a niche in the field of Novel Drug Delivery System (NDDS) & would like to be known as one of the Leading Global Research Based Drug Delivery Companies, with an expertise in novel drug delivery systems, constantly striving towards building and strengthening upon our intellectual property".

Under Dr. Satya's leadership, MKPPL has risen to stake its claim as a notable player in the industry. She shares, "With a client base of 200+ with more than 64 leading international companies and a turnover exceeding US$ 6 Million, our performance speaks of our capabilities with a cumulative growth of over 60% from the last 3 Years".

The company plans to establish a scientific office in Dubai. There are plans to set up corporate offices in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany. These strategic moves reflect the company's global growth strategy, to metamorphose into a multifaceted global organisation.

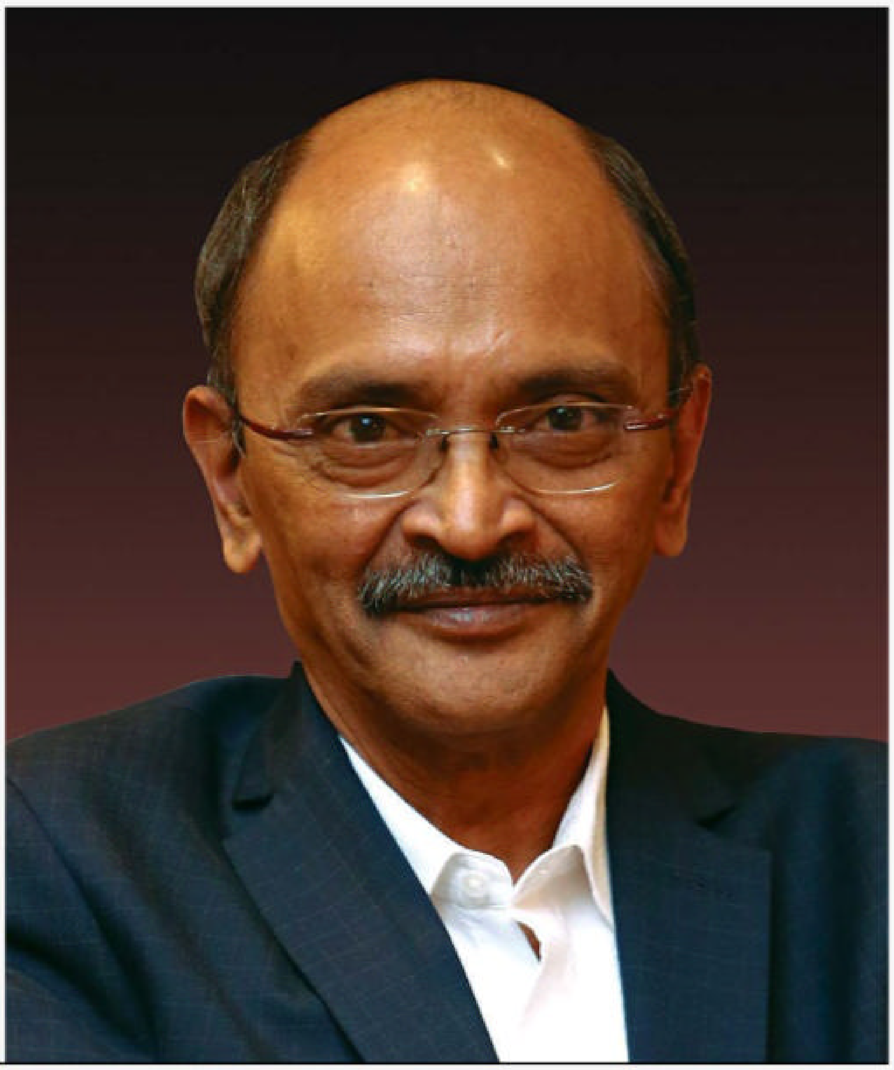
MKPPL has been a recipient of many honours including the prestigious Make in India Award in 2016, both in the biopharmaceutical and pharmaceutical categories. Presented by Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman, the then Minister of Industries, it underscores MKPPL's outstanding contribution to the pharmaceutical sector and commitment to the principles of the Make in India initiative. Dr. Satya personally has been honoured by the Times Group with the Times Exemplary Leader Award in 2023.

Looks like Dr. Satya's Nano initiative is a giant step for mankind's health!

VARADHAN

SUCCESS HAS A NEW MASCOT

All success stories have a common thread. That of passion and perseverance. In Varadhan, we have a person who never knew that failure was an option



Varadhan, Chairman, Mascot Systems Private Limited

Born in a simple, middle class family, Varadhan grew up surrounded by educators and academicians. As a result, the importance of education as a means to progress got ingrained into his psyche. Curiosity became his second nature and going beyond the syllabus, he grew up to be an avid student of the world around him.

After completing his school education at Kendriya Vidyalaya ASC Centre, Bangalore, Varadhan went on to graduate in Mechanical Engineering from MNNIT Prayagraj (then Allahabad) in 1983. Later in his career he burnished his credentials with a much needed Management degree from OUBS UK.

Varadhan started his professional sojourn with a brief stint in the mechanical maintenance in a Tyre MNC in the early 1980s. He discovered that mastering the marketing function would offer him the leeway to rise up to the top, faster. He chose to bolster his engineering knowledge with his marketing skills in a South based Engineering corporate he joined. Varadhan recalls, "I was "Employee of the Year" multiple times in this corporate and was instrumental in taking the organization to newer heights during my 20 year stint there."

As Varadhan worked his way to the top he was also studying the way organizations function and how the various departments worked in tandem. He says, "I believed in transforming the style of business. I wanted to create it as an organization that I could entirely call my own. This resulted in the birth of Mascot Systems Private Limited.

Mascot Systems is an Engineering firm which deals in products that address the serious environmental and safety Issues in the process delivering better ROI to the customers. It offers niche products required for the Reduction of harmful emissions in the process industry, such as DuPont™ Kalrez®, Fluoro elastomers such as Viton and other sealing elements for all the rotating and static equipments.

Varadhan also underlines his commitment to the cause. He says, "To ensure the health of all equipments and people working in close quarters to these equipments, Mascot Systems offers the best solutions for both Process Safety and Explosion safety as well and ensures better life of these equipments through German technology from **Rembe®- Safety is for life.**"

Mascot Systems, also offers consultancy solutions on Inventory Control and solutions on improved MTBR. They conduct Technical Seminars and audits so as to ensure knowledge is passed across for the betterment of the Plant functioning.

Varadhan says, "As a team @ Mascot Systems we develop newer designs, improvements and have the in-house R and D facilities to develop newer products for the process industry both in mechanical and Instrumentation departments."

Varadhan shared his simple mantra for success. He says-"Failure never deterred my thought process and always egged me to move ahead ensuring I don't repeat anything that led to my earlier failures."

As he finally confesses, "I always believed in one thing. Offer the best solutions to the Customer and business will automatically follow". This Mantra always kept the customer and Mascot Systems satisfied which always propelled the organization growth.

Varadhan's 4 Corner Stones

1. Environment Safety
2. Return of investments of the customer.
3. Profit after ensuring satisfaction of all stake holders
4. Employee Satisfaction

Varadhan couldn't have got it any better. With all bases covered, we say the sky is the limit for this Mascot.

DR. AMARJEET SINGH SALUJA

FORGING A SUSTAINABLE TOMORROW IN STEEL

Everyone desires to play a role in nation building. But it takes a visionary to decide on the way to contribute. Dr. Amarjeet Singh Saluja found his calling in steel. While the firm manufactures a range of iron and steel products, his Saluja Gold TMT bars are literally building a strong, resilient nation.

Chairman **Dr. Amarjeet Singh Saluja** is supported by a dedicated Board of Directors that comprises Taranjeet Singh Saluja, Satvinder Singh Saluja & Joraver Singh Saluja.

Not for nothing does Dr. Dr. Amarjeet Singh Saluja's company have a tagline that says – Mazbooti Sab kuch hai. Over the years, Saluja Steel and Power has evolved as a trusted source for Top-Quality, high-grade TMT bars that redefine strength and reliability in the construction industry. Their Saluja Gold TMT bars are renowned for their exceptional and unmatched strength, durability, and flexibility, making them the ideal choice for all construction needs.

Established in 1974, Saluja Steel and Power has a production capacity of 30000 metric tons of TMT bars every month. As a leading brand, it commands a healthy market share in Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Jammu & Kashmir and the North East. The 50 year company has consistently delivered products that have transcended generations. At its state-of-art facility, the firm's research unit conducts rigorous lab testing to ensure the highest standards, delivering long lasting durability to end users. Embracing both traditional and modern technologies, the company employs the best facilities in the manufacturing process. Its revamped rolling mill stands as a testimony to the company's adherence to continuous innovation.

Dr. Saluja says, "Commitment to excellence in TMT bars is a legacy that has been our hallmark since 1974. While we manufacture billets & sponge iron too, our focus on TMT bars has solidified over the past nine years, making us a trusted name in the steel industry". Thermo-mechanically treated (TMT) bars play a crucial role in construction ensuring the structural durability of buildings.

Based out of Jharkhand, Saluja Steel and Power stands out as a prominent player in the eastern market. Addressing the constant need for technological innovation, rigorous quality assurance standards and the imperative for environmental sustainability, it has adopted eco-friendly processes, ensuring compliance with global standards. With expansion at its core, the company has grown from a single rolling mill plant to two, effectively doubling production capacity in both the TMT sector and billet manufacturing. The market's expanding demands have prompted the company to effectively double their production capacity. Spreading out to Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland, their products have even reached Nepal at an institutional level. The company's plans to venture into Uttar Pradesh within the next four to five months, charting a dynamic growth trajectory for the coming years.

Saluja Steel and Power's high-quality Sponge Iron, produced through chemical reduction, serves as a scrap substitute, playing a pivotal role in electric arc furnaces and basic oxygen furnaces, with an annual capacity of 1,00,000 metric tons. But their identity remains TMT Bars. "Our flagship product, Saluja Gold TMT Rebars, is crafted through Thermo Mechanically Treated processes. It offers unparalleled strength with its robust outer layer and flexible core, ensuring exceptional bending, twisting and fatigue resistance. Available in various grades, these TMT rebars provide remarkable corrosion resistance, weld-ability and ease of handling, making them ideal for structures like buildings, bridges and homes", says Dr. Saluja with pride.

PADMAJA REDDY
EMPOWERING RURAL INDIA WITH MICRO FINANCE

Padmaja Reddy knows the magic that timely finance can do. A domain expert, she has seen how rural and small entrepreneurs miss out opportunities because they are up against the challenge of liquidity. She took over as the Promoter and Managing Director of Keertana Finserv in April 2022. Prior to that, she served as the Managing Director of Spandana Sphoorty Financial Limited, the second largest MFI in India.
She shared her thoughts answering questions that were posed to her.

PADMAJA REDDY
Promoter and Managing Director of Keertana Finserv

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START KEERTANA FINSERV?

I established a Micro Finance Institution, Spandana in 1998. It became the second-largest Micro Finance Institution by 2009. We were to go public when the Andhra Pradesh (AP) Government implemented an ordinance, bringing microfinance activities in the state to a standstill. The company's net worth plummeted to a negative 1,400Cr and we went into Corporate Debt Restructuring (CDR). With unwavering determination, perseverance, and passion, we successfully emerged from the CDR process, increasing our Assets under Management eightfold and eventually listing it in 2019.

The Business faced another setback due to the impact of COVID-19. Micro Finance, as a monoline product, proved highly susceptible, experiencing crises every three to four years.

While proud to be one of the pioneers in this emerging industry, there remained a sense of dissatisfaction due to the inability to build a more sustainable and stable business. This fuelled the birth of Keertana Finserv. Here, there is a continuous focus on scaling the business, institutionalizing systems and policies, establishing layers of leadership, and optimizing technology adoption.

TELL US ABOUT THE COMPANY AND ITS PRODUCTS AND SERVICES.

Keertana Finserv Private Limited is now a prominent Non-Banking Financial Institution (NBFI) in South India with an AUM of Rs. 1,200 Cr. It provides a diverse array of financial products such as Micro Enterprise Loans, Business Loans, Gold Loans, Loan Against Property and Housing Loans. Our distinctiveness lies in our dedicated focus on rural areas, particularly in interior and remote regions where financial services are sparse. Operating with a commitment to fairness and ethical conduct, Keertana ensures that its employees are not only skilled professionals but also trained to remain grounded, treating customers with utmost respect and dignity. This approach is pivotal in establishing strong and trustworthy relationships with our clientele.

WHAT WERE THE INITIAL CHALLENGES YOU FACED?

The initial challenges faced by Keertana revolved around the constant need for capital. Since we had just commenced operations in 2022, lacking a substantial vintage posed a unique challenge in gaining the attention of lenders. We navigated through this situation by positioning ourselves as an exceptional case. It is a testament to our commitment and excellent financial performance, Keertana has successfully attracted numerous lenders and funding is no longer a hindrance.

Attracting and on boarding the right talent for employment, remains an ongoing challenge. We are proactively addressing this challenge by providing ample growth opportunities and fostering an employee-friendly environment, ensuring a holistic approach to talent acquisition and retention.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS FOR KEERTANA FINSERV?

With a diverse product range offering loans ranging from INR 20,000 to INR 20,00,000, Keertana strategically manages the advantages and limitations of each product in its portfolio. Our ambitious plan is to double the branches within the next two years and grow the Assets by five times. This is Keertana's commitment to expanding its market reach and making its services more accessible to a wider audience.

WHAT IS YOUR LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY, AND HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT IT IS REFLECTED THROUGHOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

I am a firm believer in excellence, emphasizing that everything we undertake should be executed with exceptional quality. Ethics and high integrity are paramount values in my leadership approach. By embodying these principles and fostering a culture of excellence, I aim to create a work environment where leadership is synonymous with integrity and the relentless pursuit of excellence.

Spoken like a true leader, we say!

SILKY JAIN & THE ART OF EXCELLING IN MULTIPLE FIELDS

SILKY JAIN MARWAH
Executive Director, Tula's Group
Co Founder Netpuppys

It takes a combination of multiple factors for a person to succeed in life. But to excel in every field that one takes to, one needs a vision and an absolute passion to reconfigure oneself to reign supreme in the chosen field. Silky Jain has been consistently doing it.

Born in Dehradun, Silky Jain Marwah is an alumni of Brightlands School and the prestigious Symbiosis Institute of Pune, where she earned a Masters degree in Digital Marketing and Fashion Communication.

Joining the Tula Institute of Dehradun when she was just 22, Silky aided her father to transform the institution and steer it to greater heights. This catapulted her into the limelight, as the first woman in Uttarakhand to etch an indelible mark in the historically male-centric realm of education management.

Silky's leadership heralded a transformative era for the Tula Educational Institutions. Teaming up with her younger brother, she pioneered innovative marketing and growth strategies, propelling TIS to emerge as one of India's premier co-ed boarding schools in record time. Her trailblazing marketing initiatives complemented TIS's educational excellence, earning it the nationwide acclaim it truly deserves. Silky ushered in a culture of ambition, encouraging students to look beyond academic excellence and work towards nurturing their dreams and working to achieve it. She has effectively laid the foundation for a legacy of inspiration.

A lifelong learner, Silky believes in a relentless pursuit of knowledge and excellence. It is ethos that saw her enriching her leadership acumen, attending programs at prestigious institutions like Oxford and Harvard University.

Silky's accomplishments are a testament to her profound influence in the field of education. She is the recipient of the 'Women Eduleader' Title from Engineering Watch and the 'Education Evangelist' award from SkillTree. She has been honored with the illustrious 'Today's Woman Award' and the 'Academic Excellence Award 2020'.

Silky's ambition and her flair for marketing found expression in the form of "Netpuppys" a digital marketing firm that she co-founded with her husband. Her marketing brilliance and her flair for the digital world ensured that the best of clients' on boarded her agency, ensuring them a lionshare of the business and the puppy remained just in the name. Today, the firm is in the forefront of the Indian digital marketing scene.

To Silky, marketing is a religion. Her zeal for marketing shines through, rubbing of on the people who come across her. It is this intensity and passion for her trade that enables her to smash stereotypes and demonstrate that gender poses no obstacle to the talented. Rising far above a successful entrepreneur, she has emerged as a beacon of inspiration to young girls with dreams of entrepreneurship.

Silky's rise to the top is a symphony of determination and unwavering dedication. Her journey is a compelling narrative, replete with instances of resilience, innovation and triumphs, showcasing that obstacles are stepping stones to success.

Nurtured amidst the picturesque landscapes of Dehradun, Silky Jain Marwah is indeed a trailblazer, who is redefining conventional notions and setting new standards in the pursuit of educational and entrepreneurial excellence. A virtuoso in multitasking, she effortlessly balances the demanding roles of a devoted mother, dynamic entrepreneur and a dedicated educationist.

Silky's triumphant journey is a testament to her unflinching commitment to her goals as much as it is to the steadfast support that her father, brother and husband have been.

"The retail equity revolution is a **huge economic event**"

Motilal Oswal Financial Services Group Chairman and Co-founder Raamdeo Agrawal on how the markets have evolved and the way ahead for digital firms

PHOTOS BY **MANDAR DEODHAR**

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Raamdeo Agrawal, Group Chairman and Co-founder of Motilal Oswal Financial Services, is a veteran of the stock markets who has seen many a cycle in his long career. The author of an annual wealth report—which he has been passionately spearheading each year for nearly three decades—the 66-year-old believes that even though this is an election year, the political overhang on the markets has diminished. In an interaction with *Business Today*'s *Ashish Rukhaiyar,* Agrawal says that this is a fascinating time for investors to be in the stock markets because volatility has gone down as domestic investors, including retail, are providing huge support to the markets even as foreign investors have turned net sellers again in the current calendar year. Edited excerpts:

Q: How do you view the political overhang on the markets since we are in an election year? The state election results a few months ago did give an indication that the BJP is in a strong position...

A: The political overhang has diminished. While you cannot eliminate the uncertainty till the results are out, people have seen the trailer. The view one gets is that there is hardly any opposition.... [But] let's not forget that... political parties will put in their best efforts for the General Elections. If you do a region-specific analysis, the view one gets is that the [Narendra] Modi government is acceptable in the North belt. What one has to wait and watch is what happens in southern India. Can they [the BJP] get a few seats from the South through [their] allies? Whatever they get from there will be a clear bonus for them.

Q: But how is the stock market looking at it? We keep hearing views that the BJP coming back to power is already priced in.

A: It is already priced in. But if the current government does not come back to power, then there will be a huge fall. There wouldn't be any big gain if they come back to power. I would say around 80-90% of the expectation is already priced in. The probability of the BJP not coming back to power is very low. But even if the market falls, in a year's time it will bounce back. The momentum is there due to stable policies.

Q: How do you see volatility going ahead? Foreign investors have turned net sellers in the current calendar year till date, though domestic investors have become a strong counterforce...

A: The ongoing retail equity revolution is one of the biggest economic events, and I believe this is the second revolution of India after the end of the licencing regime. Just imagine, there [are] 100,000 new customers coming to the markets every day. Which other industry is witnessing such a phenomenon? This was last witnessed in the mobile phone segment years ago, but even there the ticket size in terms of spends was very small compared to the ticket size in the markets. You have people coming with a few hundreds or thousands for an SIP, and you even have people who have lakhs and crores to invest directly or through the PMS route. The only catch is that social media is making us very impatient. We want to earn very quickly. But that is also the biggest opportunity for people like us. Because we have patience of 10-15 years. The biggest differentiator between now and may be 20 years ago is the patience among the customers.

Q: Would it be right to say that the retail equity revolution has made the Indian markets more resilient?

A: There is continuous buying by the domestic investors [and] because of that there is not much volatility in the Indian markets. People have more confidence

now... markets will fall or rise in a single-digit range... Interestingly, there has been no change in the overall returns... The value of the market has gone up for the investor due to low volatility. Also, one needs to understand that there are three broad categories of participants in the markets—FPIs, DIIs, and promoters. Around 50% [of the universe of listed companies is held by] promoters and 20% are FPIs with the balance 30% with DIIs and retail. Now, retail and DIIs are buying, with FPIs alternating between being net buyers or sellers. But who will sell in such a scenario? It will either be corporates from the unlisted space, or follow-on offers from the listed space, or blocks from promoters or private equity. Because of this, the market is expanding rapidly. This ongoing equity boom is causing money to move from the secondary market to the primary market. There are so many public issues happening, then there are QIPs (qualified institutional placements) or blocks (selling through block/bulk deals).

"The biggest differentiator between now and may be 20 years ago is the patience among the customers (as earlier, they could wait 10-15 years for returns to accrue)"

Q: And you believe this would continue for some time?
A: It is like a party is on and it will continue for 5-10 years. If you look at the additions in terms of new demat accounts, there are around 3 million new accounts being opened every month. My guess is that around 25-30 million demat accounts will be opened this year as well. So, the next four to five years might see 250-300 million new investors... Till the time new investors keep coming in such numbers, you don't have to worry about the... market. There will be no major correction unless there is some Covid-19-type event. Corporate earnings are growing, retail inflows continue and FPIs are not selling in huge quantum. Based on all these parameters, it is a fantastic time to be in the markets.

Q: New investors are coming to the markets but the equity penetration in terms of geography seems limited...
A: Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan are like old blue-chip states from where investors have historically come in big numbers. But now we are seeing huge traction even in cities where there was hardly any penetration in terms of equity investors. There was no equity investment culture in many cities earlier, but now there is such a vibrant investment culture there.

Q: You have been coming out with your annual wealth creation study for nearly three decades. What are the changes you have seen over the years and what keeps you going?
A: There has to be dedication and passion. The processes are the same, but the markets have become much more digital and transparent. Information flow is massive. The landscape has entirely changed as far as the market size is concerned. And not just the market, even the size of the economy is changing and that would obviously impact the market. But we also mature over a period of time and every study takes me higher as it is a learning for me as well as we go deeper. We look at five-year data and then identify a theme. The market is silently changing. Earlier, if you bought a low P/E stock, you would get good returns. But recent studies [have shown that] some of the stocks with the lowest P/E have given the lowest returns. The market is becoming more intelligent. It is not just looking at P/E, but also at growth-adjusted P/E. This trend started

after 2015. In our latest edition, we also used ChatGPT for the first time ever.

Q: What were some of the key learnings of the latest study? PSUs, along with mid-caps and small-caps, have found prominent mention... you have said that mid-caps and small-caps can deliver hockey stick returns...

A: One of the learnings is that after two decades of sustained decline, PSU stocks are making a comeback. In 2004, 50% of all wealth created came from PSUs, but then it fell to near-zero, and it has again come back to 10-12%. It is a reversal of trend. The government is giving big orders in sectors like infrastructure, defence, and railways. There is 'Make in India' as well. As far as mid-cap and small-cap stocks are concerned, if someone is looking at 10-12x returns over the next 10 years, then he or she should not be buying large-caps, but [buy] mid-caps.

Q: You have also mentioned that management change is a key move prevalent among those that deliver hockey stick returns...

A: If a company is not doing well, then there should be management change. When there is a new management, there is new energy, new ideas, new thinking and new execution and it can create wealth. But one needs to keep in mind that managing a management transition successfully is not an easy thing to do.

Q: You have also introduced the concept of economic profit in the latest edition, and said that it is much more important than simple net profit. Can you elaborate a bit on this concept? And is this common globally?

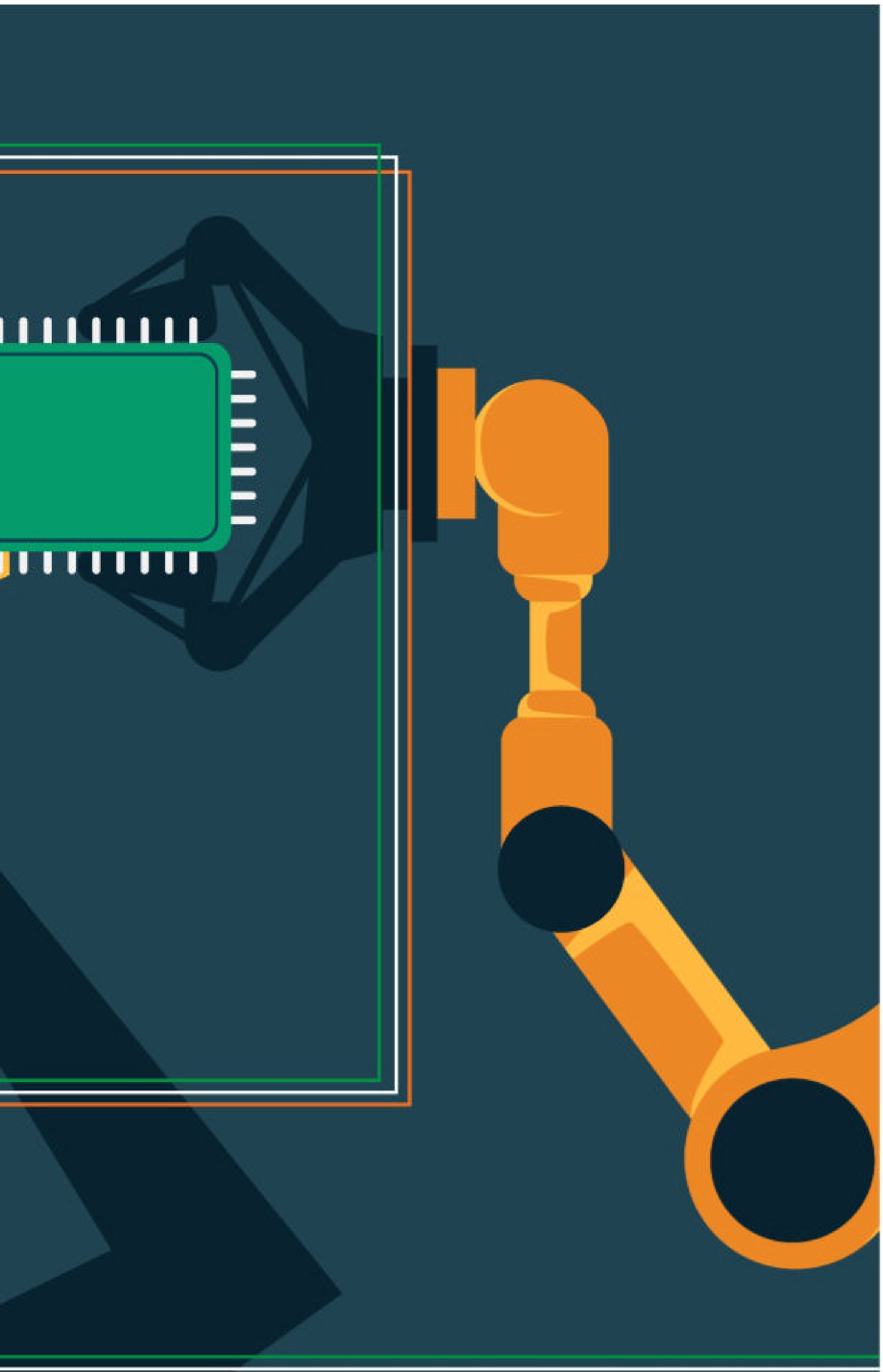
A: It is a new concept that we have introduced in the latest study. In between, there was this concept EVA—Economic Value Added—that became popular but then faded away. While conventionally earnings imply accounting profit, we believe that economic profit captures the true profitability of a company and is a far superior metric. Accounting profit does not factor in the net worth, or the equity used to generate that profit. Simply put, economic profit is accounting profit less equity charge, with equity charge being net worth multiplied by cost of equity. Our study also showed that portfolios comprising only economic profit companies have a high probability of outperforming the market. It is not that it is globally unheard of, but it still not very common. But the market knows this and is smartly pricing it.

Q: Around two to three years ago, your annual wealth study focussed on digital companies. How do you see that trend, and is there a difference in the way one looks at digital companies and the traditional ones?

A: It is a fact that no other sector has expanded like the digital sector. But it is also a fact that they are yet to achieve profit and then will come real economic profit. For digital companies, there is a huge fixed cost on the operating side because they do not have any physical structure. There is an upfront cost associated with customer acquisition. You may have millions of customers, but those customers are acquired through digital channels. That is a cost. And, hence, we are ready to look at those upfront losses. That is a fundamental shift (in the way one should look at digital companies) with a faith that in the next two to three years, they will make tons of money; and once they start making money, they will be comparable with the biggest and the best companies. BT

@ashishrukhaiyar

CHIPPING IN



THE DECISION OF INDIAN GROUPS LIKE TATA, CG POWER, AND HCL TO ENTER THE CHIP ECOSYSTEM COULD CREATE A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT AND MAKE THE COUNTRY'S LONG-CHERISHED DREAM OF BECOMING A SEMICONDUCTOR HUB A REALITY

BY **NIDHI SINGAL**

ILLUSTRATION BY **RAJ VERMA**

YOU COULD CALL it the Corona effect. Or say it is the right place and time. On January 18 this year, it was not surprising when the HCL Group said it was partnering with Taiwan's Foxconn to set up a facility to test and package semiconductors designed by third parties.

HCL Group isn't the only Indian conglomerate trying to get into OSATs. The salt to software Tata group and CG Power, which is into design and manufacturing of products related to power generation, received government approval to set up testing and packaging plants in the country on February 29. The Union Cabinet also approved India's first chip fab proposal, that of the Tata group in collaboration with Powerchip Taiwan, which will come up in Gujarat's Dholera at an estimated investment of ₹27,000 crore. Besides, the Hiranandani Group, which made its billions in real estate, is also in the game. All of them spied an opportunity and are trying to make the most of it.

That opportunity has come because the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 disrupted supply chains of everything, from the potato chips that fed a locked-in population to the silicon chips or semiconductors that go into smartphones, laptops, game consoles and even cars and buses.

For the Tata group—which already operates in various sectors that heavily rely on semiconductors, such as automobiles and electronics—stepping into the semiconductor ecosystem promises cost benefits and greater control over products. In the case of power electronics player CG Power—which serves end markets like automotive, industrial, and transport and logistics—this will help extend its value chain by vertically integrating the most important and strategic component of power electronics, semiconductor chipsets. And it is timely because all three of its end markets are poised to grow exponentially in India over the next decade.

The HCL Group, too, is heavily invested in semiconductors: HCLTech provides end-to-end engineering services spanning the entire IC manufacturing process. In grabbing Foxconn for an OSAT or outsourced semiconductor assembly and testing plant, HCL is also getting closer to its manufacturing roots in a manner.

Roshni Nadar Malhotra, Chairperson of HCLTech, told *Business Today*, "The genesis of HCL [in 1976] was in manufacturing and creating India's first indigenous 8-bit processor-based PC. We shipped the same day as Apple, but India was a closed economy, and no one ever covered us. And so, there's been a rich legacy that we've had in engineering services and creating for engineering."

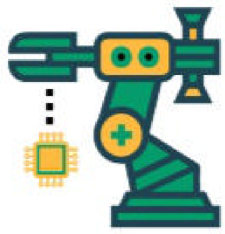
Nadar Malhotra, who runs the business founded by her father Shiv Nadar, says HCL has the manufacturing DNA and understands this ecosystem. HCLTech, the world's eighth-largest IT services firm, works with all the top semiconductor players and OSATs in equipment automation, data management and process control.

RIGHT TIME

In December 2021, the Indian government announced a ₹76,000-crore incentive package for the semiconductor industry. In the February 2024 Interim Budget, the government allocated ₹6,903 crore for the scheme. Today, with every big economy scrambling to "reshore" the fabs, OSATs are the biggest opportunity unfolding in India's information technology landscape.

Indian IT services companies have been working with global chip ecosystem players at the backend and now see this as a great opportunity to scale vertically. While HCL Group declined to share more details on the backend work, Harshul Asnani, President-Technology and

THE OSAT STORY



Indian firms like Tata group and CG Power are setting up chip testing and packaging units in the country

The HCL and Hiranandani groups also have plans to set up OSATs considering the surge in chip production

OSAT units require lower investment, less land, and less power than fabrication units, and can become operational in a year and a half

OSAT units also play a crucial role in semiconductor manufacturing as they package and test the silicon chips

By setting up OSAT units, Indian firms can reduce import dependence, and cater to the growing domestic and global demand for chips

In the long run, they could look at advanced packaging and gradually develop their own product

$69.19 BILLION

OSAT market pegged to reach this figure by 2029, growing at a CAGR of 8.1% from 2019

SOURCE MORDOR INTELLIGENCE

"India is a very close alternative to China for an OSAT hub, but an [Indian] OSAT ecosystem... requires strategic planning... [Else]... the Indian player may face trouble commercially"

DANISH FARUQUI
CEO, FAB ECONOMICS

Media Business, Americas, Tech Mahindra, explains his company's role in the ecosystem. "We have been providing design services to several leading semiconductor companies globally for over a decade," he says. This includes end-to-end design services in pre-silicon and post-silicon validation, embedded software, systems design, automated test engineering, and new-age solutions in IoT for various industry verticals. Tech Mahindra also provides turnkey system-on-chip (SoC) design services for new-generation silicon and derivative products in digital and analog domains.

BUT WHY OSATS?

OSATs are one of the key parts of the semiconductor supply chain. They are just like pure-play foundries but assemble, package, and test the wafers fabricated by any foundry (like TSMC) or integrated device manufacturer (IDM, like Intel). Setting up an OSAT is simpler and cheaper than a fab, and an OSAT can be up and running in a year and a half.

With chips becoming an integral part of everyday life and even being tested in the human brain, the semiconductor industry is expected to reach $1 trillion by 2030. Given the growing demand for chips, many fabs are coming up worldwide.

Ajai Chowdhry, a co-founder of HCL, points out that only some of the fabs coming up will have ATMP (assembly, testing, marking and packaging) plants sitting next to them. "So they will ship the wafer out to OSATs, who will do the packaging. Given that most of the packaging market is in Asia, that is where India can benefit," says Chowdhry, the founder of Electronics Products Innovation Consortium. He is also on the advisory committee of the India Semiconductor Mission.

Sanjay Gupta, Chairperson of the India Electronics & Semiconductor Association (IESA), says, "Indian IT companies have expertise in software development, system integration, chip design, verification, and validation, which are essential for the semiconductor industry."

Indian companies also have established partnerships and collaborations with global semiconductor players, such as Intel, Samsung, IBM, and TSMC, to provide them with various services and solutions, which is why they can leverage their existing capabilities and relationships to enter the OSAT and fab segments, he says.

RIGHT PLACE

Amongst the leading chip players, so far, only Micron Technology, a US-based memory chip maker, has announced plans to set up an ATMP plant in India. Indian companies building OSATs can bring multiple new opportunities against just one

THE OSAT LANDSCAPE

The Top 10 OSAT vendors by headquarter location are distributed across Taiwan, China and the US

TAIWAN

OSAT ASE, PTI, KYEC, CHIPBOND, CHIPMOS, SIGURD

CHINA

JCET, TFME, HUATIAN

THE US

AMKOR

SOURCE FAB ECONOMICS

DRAGON'S DOMINANCE

- 98% of global OSAT capacity is located in the Asia region
- Within Asia, it is concentrated mostly in China, with a 47.39% share. Both Taiwan and US-based OSATs have multiple sites in China
- China has three OSAT players in next-generation advanced packaging, 11 players in the commercial or current age advanced packaging, and five players in the legacy playing spaces

SOURCE FAB ECONOMICS, GLOBAL SEMICONDUCTOR POLICY COUNCIL

ATMP unit by Micron. The planned HCL-Foxconn OSAT facility in India is worth a third of Micron's planned investment in the ATMP in Gujarat, but the HCL-Foxconn project will have a much bigger market.

Micron ATMP's output is restricted to Micron products as it is an IDM, not a foundry or OSAT, says Danish Faruqui, CEO of Fab Economics, a US-based boutique advisory for semiconductor fab/ATMP/OSAT greenfield projects. "Micron's ATMP will add only to supply chain resiliency for Micron and its customers. But the HCL-Foxconn OSAT will provide assembly, packaging, and testing to a whole array of customers like a foundry model, thus enhancing supply chain resiliency for multiple players in India and globally," says Faruqui.

Also, while Micron ATMP's output is restricted primarily to memory die type assembly, packaging and testing, HCL-Foxconn's OSAT will offer fungibility for assembly, packaging and testing of logic, memory, analog sensors, and discreet die types. So India will offer the full portfolio diversity to design, manufacture, package and test products for all end markets.

OSATs from Indian players will be large assembly, packaging and testing units that could provide service to potential fabs in India needing OSAT services. For the design start-ups sprouting with government support, these OSATs can help complete India's manufacturing-assembly-packaging-test value chain domestically. In short, India will sit on a trusted value chain.

CHINA'S SUPREMACY

Fab Economics says 98% of the world's OSAT capacity is physically located in Asia and concentrated in China, whether the companies owning them are headquartered in Taiwan or the US. "It is important to understand the China OSAT play to inform strategy and plan-

IT SUPPORT

The three main areas of service being provided by IT companies in the semiconductor ecosystem

PRE-SILICON DESIGN

- FRONT END: SoC design, prototyping and validation
- BACKEND: Physical design, verification, synthesis and timing analysis
- ANALOG & MIXED SIGNAL: Circuit design and layout

POST-SILICON VALIDATION AND EMBEDDED DEVELOPMENT

- Post-silicon functional validation, automated test engineering, characterisation and certification
- Embedded hardware and software
- OSAT development

AFTERMARKET SUPPORT

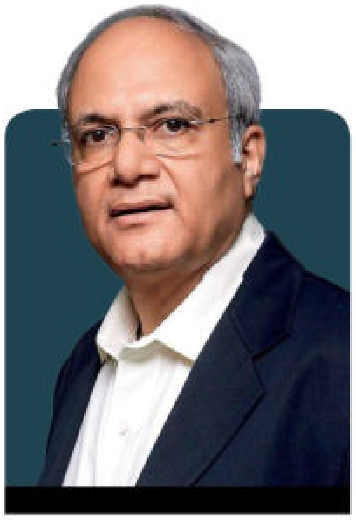
- System re-engineering and obsolescence management
- Value engineering and sustenance engineering

SOURCE TECH MAHINDRA

INDIA'S INCENTIVES

- It is around 35% of project cost globally
- In India, between the centre and states, it is around 70% of the project cost (50% by the centre, and an additional 20% by the states)

SOURCE *BT* RESEARCH



"Globally, there are many fabs coming up which will not have ATMPs sitting next to them. So, there is an opportunity in packaging... Given that most of the packaging market is in Asia, that is where India can benefit"

AJAI CHOWDHRY
FOUNDER, ELECTRONICS PRODUCTS INNOVATION CONSORTIUM; CO-FOUNDER, HCL

ning around OSATs," says Faruqui. He says China understands the strategic importance of OSATs.

China has three OSAT players in the next-generation advanced packaging, 11 in the commercial or current age advanced packaging and five in the legacy playing architectures—a portfolio unmatched in any geography. Fab Economics says China-based OSAT facilities took in annual revenue of $14.68 billion in 2023, which could grow four times by the decade's end.

US-China tensions have been going up in the past few years. The US has imposed targeted sanctions on advanced technology across equipment and fabrication services to be exported to Chinese players, including restricting TSMC wafer supply used for leading-edge products.

However, according to the Global Business Policy Council R&A, advanced packaging is still untouched. Instead, Taiwan-based OSATs with manufacturing sites in China, such as King Yuan Electronics and ASE Group, have aggressively ramped up their capacity support for China-based clients, including HiSilicon, Oppo, and Unisoc.

Faruqui notes that China has been developing OSAT capacity aggressively for the past two years as it knows that the end value chain would not be a permanent free pass.

"India is a very close alternative to China for an OSAT hub, but an India-based OSAT ecosystem build-up requires strategic planning informed with China OSAT portfolio," says Faruqui, adding, "Otherwise, OSAT being a cost-sensitive play, the Indian player may face trouble commercially."

NOT JUST CHINA

Indian firms will again have to get a technology-grade licence. The IESA's Gupta says the production-grade technology for OSAT can be obtained from various sources and the international players that own the IP and have set up plants in China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore. For instance, CG Power has signed a JV with Renesas Electronics and Stars Microelectronics. "This relationship covers both access to technology through Stars Microelectronics and offtake of output by Renesas Electronics, which are two most important ingredients for commercial success of an OSAT project," says Satya Gupta, President of VLSI Society.

But semiconductor analyst Arun Mampazhy warns of the danger of expanding in plain-vanilla packaging and too many companies setting up facilities, which could lead to idle capacity. To avoid this pitfall, the newcomers could graduate to advanced packaging.

Advanced packaging architectures lie behind all semiconductor leadership products that are the true moat of competitive advantage of end devices. This kind of packaging architecture is behind Nvidia's H100 GPUs powering Gen AI/ChatGPT. The same goes for AMD MI 300 AI Accelerators, Apple M series Ultra, A17, Intel's Meteor Lake and Amazon's Inferno.

Prithvideep Singh, General Manager at CDIL Semiconductors, a Mohali-headquartered firm that began making chips in 1964 but now works on a "fabless" model, says these OSATs can look at developing products five years down the line. "It might take five years, but step

Q&A

“WE UNDERSTAND THE ECOSYSTEM”

HCLTech Chairperson Roshni Nadar Malhotra discusses in detail HCL’s newest partnership with Foxconn on semiconductor design and manufacturing

BY **RAHUL KANWAL & SIDDHARTH ZARABI**

PHOTO BY **MANDAR DEODHAR**

THE RECENT announcement of a partnership between the Taiwanese semiconductor major Foxconn and the HCL Group for setting up an assembly and testing facility has been met with a lot of enthusiasm. Talking to *Business Today* during the World Economic Forum event at Davos in Switzerland recently, HCL Technologies Chairperson Roshni Nadar Malhotra speaks about that partnership, the world of semiconductor designing, chip manufacturing, and what makes HCL the most suitable company to enhance India’s semiconductor dreams. Edited excerpts:

HCL Group has announced a major partnership with Foxconn for chip packaging and testing. What is this about?

Let me rewind a little bit. The genesis of HCL, starting from 1976, was in manufacturing and [it] was in creating India’s first indigenous 8-bit processor-based PC. We shipped the same day as Apple, but we were a closed economy and no one ever covered us. And so there’s been a rich legacy. HCL Group, as it exists today, obviously has HCL Technologies as our flagship company at the forefront in the IT services sector. A subset of that is we do a lot of work in semiconductor design. So it’s not that we’re coming at it blindly. We have a certain DNA, we understand the ecosystem. So, for HCL Group now, I have to clarify, it seemed like a very strategic thing to do, which is to go into the OSAT [outsourced semiconductor assembly and testing] space.

Does it also seem like going back to the vision of Shiv Nadar, the founding

father of HCL?

At the moment, we've just signed a joint partnership and I think the announcement came because the Hon Hai Group is a listed entity and they had to inform the Taiwanese stock exchanges. But we see them as a great strategic partner as well. And, of course, a lot of people know them much more for their manufacturing prowess, but a big part of the universe of their manufacturing is the work that they do in semiconductor design.

Do you see this whole ecosystem—different aspects of design to actual production and manufacturing—coming along in India? Because we've seen that the government's been trying really hard, but the process seems to be moving much slower than we would ideally want...

Maybe, but I don't know how many of the announcements in collaborations that have been made, had a technology partner on the other side. So I think maybe that helps scale much faster because... we are going to be in the area of hi- tech assembly and testing. We already understand the services ecosystem. And also, there are many states in India, it's no longer isolated to just one or two states, where there is a push on manufacturing. So, wherever there's going to be manufacturing, especially electronics manufacturing... you're going to need chip design and you're going to need assembly and testing, which is closer.

Do you think, in the global context, is this some kind of parachute or cushion for global supply chains?

I think it's not fair to always look at India as a China+1 strategy. I think today we are as large a—if not larger—consuming market as China. And in the universe of IT services, we're the largest provider of services. All the push that India's having, not just in semiconductor and design, but also in manufacturing, is to be a marketplace for the rest of the world and not necessarily a substitute for any other.

"Wherever there's going to be manufacturing, especially electronics manufacturing, you're going to need chip design"

@rahulkanwal, @szarabi

one is to learn the product, technology, and process. Then you can always use capacity and build your brand," says Singh.

INDIA, AN OSAT NATION?

India is by far the best place for subsidising ATMP/OSAT units. If one combines the Indian government's semiconductor incentive scheme with incentives offered by various states, the subsidy could go up to 70% for the major cost structures involved in OSAT/ATMP site economics.

But incentives and government support alone cannot make India an OSAT nation. Indian players getting into OSATs must ensure successful execution while keeping track of the competition. Over the past decade, there has been growth and acceptance of speciality foundries that have innovated with architecture and materials on the legacy nodes. Still, there has been no radical player in the value chain's backend or packaging portion—India can leverage this strategic value opportunity.

THE WAY AHEAD

With the government doing its bit to get the best private names in the business, 2024 could be a breakout year for the sector in India. "The year 2024 will be a breakout year for this sector with large OSAT projects already approved and more under evaluation," says Gupta of the VLSI Society.

However, the government has made production-grade technology mandatory for approving any project. According to information in the public domain, many projects are being discussed, including those of Tower Semiconductor (fab), Silicon Power (compound semiconductor fab), and SICSEM (compound semiconductor fab).

"A significant chunk of ₹4,203 crore has been earmarked for incentives for ATMP, ₹1,500 crore for fabs, ₹900 crore support for the Mohali-based semiconductor laboratory, and ₹200 crore for the design-linked incentive scheme," says Gupta of IESA.

The players expect the government evaluation of other projects to be completed by the end of this year. BT

@nidhisingal

NOMA PHOTOS BY **DITTE ISAGER**

Culinary Adventures

Copenhagen, Denmark's capital city, is the undisputed gourmet capital of the world

BY **RAAJ SANGHVI**

It may be a gloomy winter city with little international connectivity in a cold country where agriculture is a challenge. But Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, is the undisputed gourmet capital of the world.

Much of this is down to just one restaurant: René Redzepi's Noma. With three Michelin stars, Noma is the most influential restaurant of our era and has been rated the 'World's Best Restaurant' by The World's 50 Best Restaurants a record five times. Its influence radiates globally, with alumni and former interns finding fame in their home countries (including Indian chefs like Prateek Sadhu, Gresham Fernandes and Garima Arora).

The success of Noma has played a pivotal role in propelling Copenhagen to emerge as an adult playground for global gourmets who can afford to jet in solely for the pleasure of exceptional dining. If you're contemplating a gastronomic adventure in Copenhagen, here are three restaurants that should be on top of your list.

A selection of the Game and Forest spread of Noma 2.0 (*left*), that is headed by Chef René Redzepi

NOMA 2.0

Nestled on the periphery of central Copenhagen, amidst gardens and beside a lake, Noma 2.0 offers guests a panoramic view of the natural wonders surrounding the restaurant. Having savoured Redzepi's creations thrice in the past year, it's almost unjust to encapsulate the essence of Noma in a single definition. Unlike most top restaurants, it has no signature dishes and no permanent menu. Instead, it presents three unique menus annually: Vegetables, Game and Forest, and Seafood. No dish is ever repeated, so each time you go, it's like eating at a different restaurant. Yet, the unmistakable style of Redzepi persists throughout.

In the summer, the spotlight is solely on vegetables: Employing techniques like fermentation and dehydration, the menu boasts intriguing elements like a 'Scoby' (a cellulose mat housing the mother of kombucha bacteria). As autumn unfolds, attention shifts to seafood and flavours of the ocean. Recent dishes include 'Sea Snail Kebab' and 'Deep Fried Cod Tongue'. The Game and Forest menu is by far the most unconventional and star dishes include 'Wild Boar Belly' and 'Grilled Reindeer Heart'.

Noma's culinary ethos revolves around allowing ingredients to shine; Redzepi has established a sprawling R&D lab (led by Indian chef Dhriti Arora) and test kitchen on the premises. A seat at Noma costs 3,950 Danish kroner (DKK, or around ₹48,000). Reservations open three months in advance for each season and sell out within seconds. Noma, in its current form, will close permanently at the end of 2024.

ALCHEMIST

Conceived of by Denmark's culinary provocateur Rasmus Munk, Alchemist is an immersive culinary escapade that challenges the traditional

1

ALCHEMIST PHOTOS BY **SØREN GAMMEMARK**

4

GERANIUM PHOTOS BY **CLAES BECH-POULSEN**

1 **The interiors of Geranium, located within Copenhagen's National Football Stadium**

2 **Chef Rasmus Kofoed, co-owner of Geranium that offers a classic fine-dining experience**

3 **Chef Rasmus Munk has changed the definition of a restaurant with his Alchemist**

4 **The experience at Alchemist extends to seven or eight hours, including at the 'Dome', where the visuals are synchronised with the food**

concept of a restaurant. Located in Copenhagen's industrial district, the experience stretches across seven to eight hours. Since its opening in 2019, it has climbed the culinary pyramid and now boasts two Michelin stars and ranks at No. 5 on the world's 50 best list. Legend has it that Munk once discussed his dream restaurant with a satisfied customer, painting an image of a technology-driven epicurean haven that would redefine global gastronomy. The patron turned out to be a Danish financial tycoon willing to fund the audacious venture.

The experience unfolds across multiple distinct spaces, treating diners to almost 50 bite-sized offerings playfully labelled 'impressions'. The odyssey commences in the 'Bar', where guests are served snacks that include an 'Edible Butterfly'. The next stop is the 'Dome', an expansive planetarium reminiscent of an IMAX theatre that projects a series of visuals synchronised with the food. The adventure culminates in the 'Freedom room', which houses a giant ball pit typically found at children's parties, where a surprise awaits.

While the interactive elements undoubtedly distinguish Alchemist, it's the impeccable culinary artistry, flawless service, and delectable dishes—such as the 'omelette infused with sound waves' or the 'Butter-poached lobster claw'—that ensure guests return. The cost of a seat is 4,900 DKK (around ₹60,000). Reservations open three months in advance and sell out within minutes.

GERANIUM

Perched within Copenhagen's National Football Stadium, Geranium stands as a beacon of classic gourmet cuisine. Helmed by co-owners, Chef Rasmus Kofoed and Søren Ledet, it became the first Danish restaurant to win three Michelin stars in 2016 and in 2022 it ranked No. 1 on the world's 50 best list.

The restaurant's ambiance mirrors its culinary ethos: modern and minimalistic with an open kitchen. Kofoed, a towering yet soft-spoken Dane, intertwines Nordic ingredients with classic French techniques, resulting in a 20-course tasting menu characterised by clean, robust flavours and artfully presented dishes such as 'Grilled Lobster with Lobster Oil' and 'Bread Pancake with Buttermilk and Truffle'.

In a move towards sustainability, the restaurant adopted a meat-free stance in 2021, marking a significant shift in its culinary narrative. While Geranium boasts an extensive wine cellar, I opted for the avant-garde juice pairing, featuring a concoction made using green apples, sea buckthorn and gooseberry. A seat costs 3,950 DKK (around ₹48,000) and reservations open three months in advance. For the discerning diner seeking a quintessential fine-dining experience, look no further than Geranium. BT

@RaajSanghvi

Tech Today

FOCUS BETTER, WORK BETTER

CEOs have a lot on their minds. Here are a few gadgets that can help enhance their productivity and optimise their focus

BY **NIDHI SINGAL**

ONEPLUS OPEN

₹1,39,999

This sleek and light foldable can be a lifesaver when you have to make decisions on the go

Mobile Manager

There are times when a CEO may need to take quick decisions on the go. While a top flagship mobile phone can substitute a laptop, there are times when a bigger screen is needed. That's when you need a foldable like the OnePlus Open. Its 6.31-inch cover screen is ideal for typing and browsing, while the 7.82-inch unfolded display is perfect for Excel sheets and presentations. It automatically resizes apps to make optimal use of the larger screen, enabling efficient work on emails, documents, and collaboration on platforms like WhatsApp. The triple-camera set-up is top notch, and the phone is powered by the robust Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Gen 2 processor. It comes with a 4,805 mAh battery that lasts more than a day. Although it does not support wireless charging, the 67W adapter supports quick charge. But the phone misses out on IPX8 certification.

Available on: *oneplus.in*

CAPABLE COMPANION

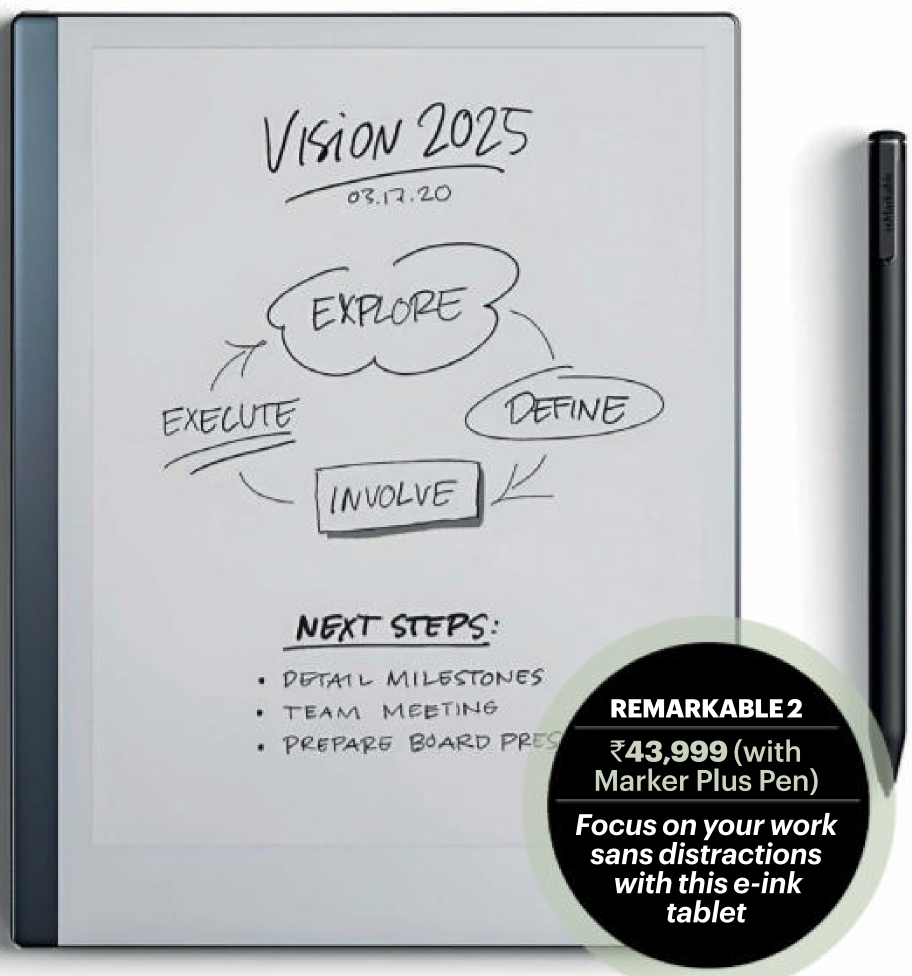
A CEO needs to be on top of things every day, and so needs a laptop that is dependable, powerful, and secure. Like the new HP Spectre x360 16, which features a 16-inch 2.8K OLED touch display and comes with a stylus. Powered by the Intel Core Ultra 7 processor, it can handle diverse tasks effortlessly. But what sets this apart is its AI smarts that focus on privacy and wellness. For instance, the walk away lock feature automatically turns off the screen when you move away from the laptop and activates it when you're back. It also dims the display when you look away and blurs it when someone comes up behind. As for its wellness features, the laptop prompts you to take breaks if you have been staring at the screen for long and alerts you if you're sitting too close to it. Additionally, the 9MP webcam, enhanced with advanced AI light processing, ensures a superior video call experience by positioning you perfectly in the frame.

HP SPECTRE X360 16

₹1,79,999

This capable laptop comes with AI-powered privacy and wellness smarts

Available on: *hp.com/in*



REMARKABLE 2

₹43,999 (with Marker Plus Pen)

Focus on your work sans distractions with this e-ink tablet

Power of the Pen

Many CEOs favour putting pen to paper when capturing ideas, engaging in brainstorming sessions, or jotting down notes. This tactile method enhances their focus and minimises distractions, they say. For them, the reMarkable 2 e-ink tablet with the Marker Plus Pen is a good fit. It replicates the tactile feel of paper and pen, plus it can convert handwritten notes to typed text with a single touch; and you can email the notes instantly. What's more, all documents can be saved online and synced to the cloud for easy access on other devices. You also have the option of using an onscreen keyboard or an external keyboard cover. While the tablet excels at tasks such as taking handwritten notes, annotating PDFs, and collaborative work (with a paid subscription), it intentionally leaves out a browser, an email client, and other distracting apps.

Available on: *amazon.in*


A solitary monk in Ladakh. Photo clicked by Amit Jaju


Reflecting the serene beauty of the mountains in Ladakh. Clicked by Jaju

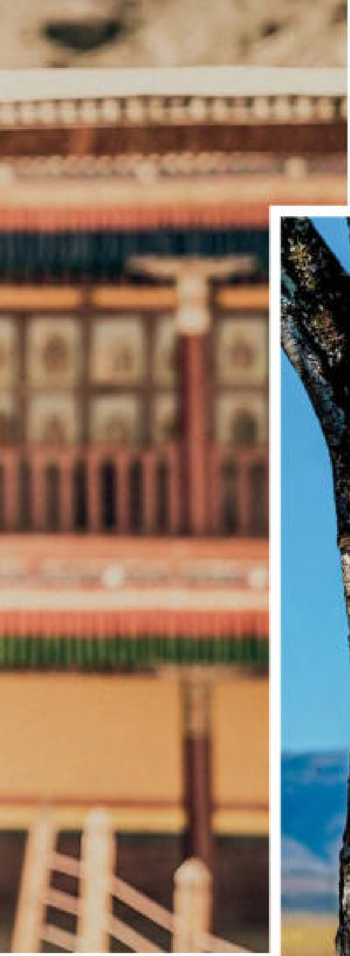
A Multifaceted Life

For Amit Jaju, Senior Managing Director at Ankura Consulting (India), life is a rich blend of melody and adventure

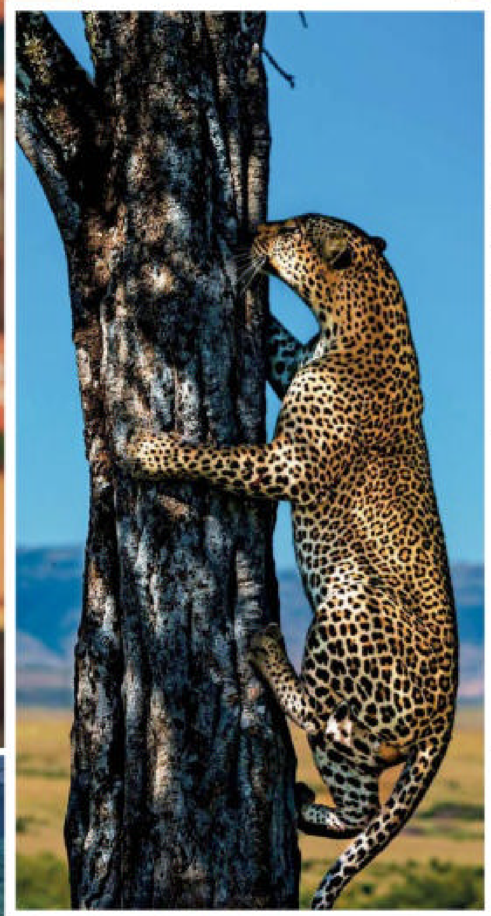
BY **NIDHI SINGAL**

T**HE WORLD MIGHT** seem drab or dark for someone whose profession revolves around data analysis, cybersecurity and forensic technology. But Amit Jaju isn't one of them. Known to be a leader and tech guru in India's corporate world, Jaju's life outside the boardroom is an eclectic blend of melody and adventure. He is a trained singer and says he has 'wanderlust at heart.' In fact, for Jaju—who is Senior Managing Director at the US-headquartered global expert services and advisory firm Ankura Consulting (India)—life is a rich tapestry of diverse pursuits. And because he juggles between business and art, Jaju, in many ways, best exemplifies Benjamin Franklin's famous dictum: 'If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins.'

Jaju's passion for music began early and he trained himself in Hindustani Classical through at-home classes. He also has explored several studios around Andheri West, Mumbai, where he has had the opportunity to record. "The recording studio knows me as well as the corner office, and each song I record is a testament to my dedication to this craft," he muses. He recently recorded renditions of



Jaju exploring the rugged terrain of Ladakh



The stealthy grace of a wild leopard. Photo clicked by Jaju

Jaju (*fifth from right*) with his biker friends pose for a group photo Ladakh

Khamoshiyan, *Phir Kabhi*, and *Humdard*, all originally sung by Arijit Singh. For him, these sessions were a remarkable experience in understanding the intricacies of studio recording.

But if you think that music is just a hobby, you wouldn't be more wrong. Jaju treats music as both therapy and spiritual calling. "The process, especially listening to my own recordings, offers an instant mood boost and a deep sense of personal satisfaction," he says.

He also believes that one's passions should never be contained in a box. It is not surprising, therefore, that when he is not consumed by corporate affairs, he finds reprieve in wildlife and street photography, apart from music. In fact, it is photography that has pulled Jaju away from his corner office and into the dense forests of Bandhavgarh or Masai Mara, or even into the vast and melancholic cityscapes of New York and Tokyo.

"My lens captures fleeting moments, framing the untamed beauty of nature and the candid spontaneity of urban life," he says.

He ventured into photography in 2011, sparked by a birthday gift from his wife: a Canon 60D camera with an 18-135mm kit lens. "My first encounter with a tiger in Bandhavgarh's dense forests was a turning point. Since then, I've been captivated by the tranquillity of nature," he adds.

But how often can someone with a busy corporate life escape into the uncharted realms of their passions? For Jaju, no matter how busy the schedule, he still aims for at least two wildlife trips annually. His approach is to travel during off-peak seasons and usually he chooses lesser-known destinations. His next adventure is a March expedition to Tanzania to observe silverback gorillas.

Coming from a tech background, Jaju is conscious of the fact that photography is a combination of both art and science. He has now undertaken numerous online courses, notably from award-winning photographer John Greengo. Jaju's wife is an artist, and in her he has found an able companion who understands how important art can be to one's life.

Jaju's photography arsenal now includes a Sony A9 mirrorless camera, complemented by a versatile mix of Sony and Sigma lenses. His primary lens for wildlife is the Sigma 150-600mm, and a Sony 70-200mm lens for varied shots. Additionally, he uses a Sony A6300 mirrorless camera and a Light L16. For more creative endeavours, he has a selection of prime lenses for portrait and street photography, a DJI Drone, a 360-degree action camera, along with an assortment of filters and polarisers. He has even mastered post-production skills, and this has not only allowed him to refine his photos but has also made them more vibrant.

"Juggling my professional responsibilities with my passion for photography and music has taught me valuable time management skills. It has also provided a creative outlet that complements my work-life balance," says Jaju as he signs off. BT

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BEST ADVICE

SINDHU GANGADHARAN | SVP AND MD, SAP LABS INDIA; HEAD, SAP USER ENABLEMENT

SAP Labs India is the local arm of the German software major SAP

PHOTO BY **SELVAPRAKASH LAKSHMANAN**

"Don't be afraid to want more for yourself"

What was the problem you were grappling with?
I moved to Germany early in my career to work at the SAP headquarters in Waldorf. Germany is like a second home to me, as both my daughters—Alisha and Rhea—were born there, and we spent considerable time there together as a family. I was offered a career-defining leadership role at the SAP headquarters while on maternity leave. As a new mother, I had apprehensions about taking on this new role that required more time at work.

Whom did you approach for advice and why?
Acknowledging my uncertainty, the leadership at SAP reassured me that they believed in me and would help me navigate the path. During this pivotal moment, my husband, Brian, played a crucial role. He switched from a full-time to a part-time work contract. This allowed me to pursue the leadership role.

What was the advice you received?
I was asked to evaluate my abilities without self-doubt. I remember being told, "If you're ready for this role, we will handle the rest. You can get your kid to the workplace." So, there were times when Alisha and Rhea accompanied me to work meetings. Also, when you see your managers/leaders reiterating their confidence in you, it propels you to greater heights.

How effective was it in resolving the problem?
I accepted that crucial role and, from there, took on many more leadership roles to lead the same lab where I started my career as a young developer. Life comes full circle, and I am glad for all the opportunities that have paved my journey. There is nothing wrong with being ambitious. Don't be afraid to want more for yourself than you ever thought you could achieve, because, in life, you don't get what you deserve; you get what you negotiate for. BT

—TEAM *BT*

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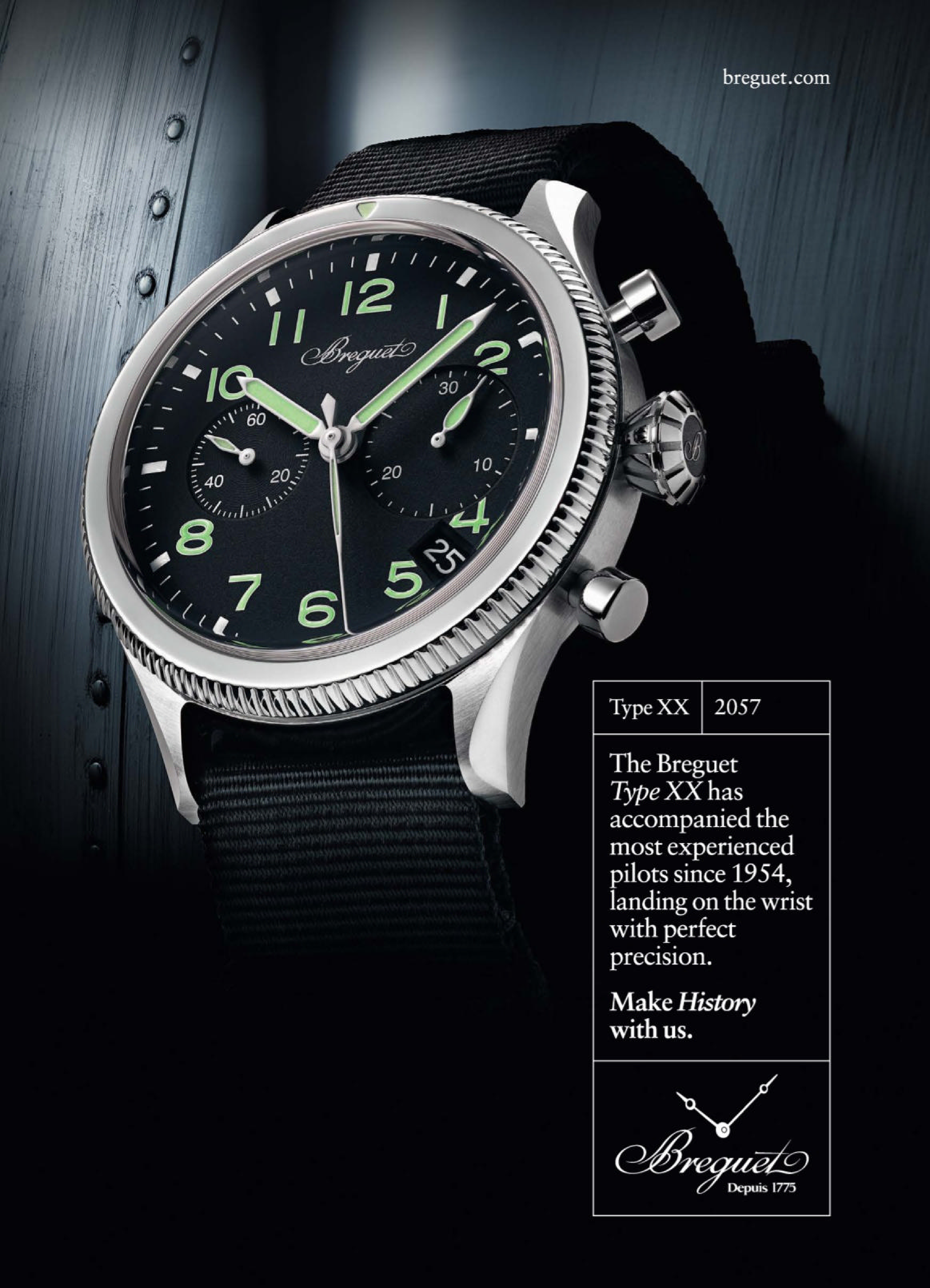
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