

OUTLOOK BUSINESS

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THINK BEYOND. STAY AHEAD.

+

COURSE CORRECTION

How large caps will be flavour of the year

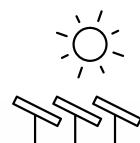
WHAT NEXT?

Mid- and small-cap stocks are zooming through the roof. But the joyride might not last long



David-Goliath Tale of Q-commerce > PG.54

Deepfake Push to Porn Industry > PG.66



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NARRATIVE MANAGEMENT



2024 is a crucial year for the world as more than 50 countries—close to half the global population—elect their next governments, which will have consequences for many years to come. Apart from elections in Taiwan, Bangladesh and Russia, the world is keenly waiting to see the fate of America as it unfolds later in November, not to mention the Indian Lok Sabha elections this month, where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi are all set to secure a third term.

While the outcome is a foregone conclusion for many, it does not take away from the significance of elections in India. The fifth-largest economy is growing faster than any of its major rivals. India is currently America's biggest ally as the latter tries to assert itself against China and Russia, all underscoring the subcontinent's significance in a multipolar world order. After the successful hosting of G20 last year, India is now the toast of the free world; it is capitalist, it is a democracy and everyone wants a slice of its huge market.

But that is just a veneer.

The great Indian growth story is limited to a small section of the population, which explains why, despite being the fifth-largest economy of the world, its per capita income places it at 159 among nations. So, India continues to be a nation of the poor and inequality rises while the affluent are getting richer.

Also, a closer examination of the GDP figures reveals that the current growth trajectory is heavily reliant on government expenditure, which has failed to stimulate private investments or large-scale demand. This dependency raises concerns regarding the sustainability of the growth cycle, as the government

seeks to control its fiscal deficit in the next financial year. We know how unchecked optimism can lead to disaster.

Modi's plan to alter this is on the back of manufacturing; the upcoming EV push is part of this; build equity by pioneering connectivity through both digital and physical infrastructure. With his third mandate in the offing, expectation is that the prime minister will stick to this primer. But the political and economic divisions could ruin India. The ruling party's calculated crackdown on opposition, its heavy-handed decimation of dissent, its penchant for dismantling institutions along with its deep suspicion of what it terms as woke, western and elite, all point to a much deeper malaise.

But with a third mandate, only Modi can rescue India from hate and divisive politics that has engulfed the country. While the ruling party's populist pitch for development often veers into authoritarianism and the vilification of minorities continues, here's hoping that Modi's legacy of prosperity will be one where the bounty of growth will be so large that the BJP will shun its divisive politics and share it with all in pursuit of a multi-cultural society. History has shown us time and again that this is the stuff of delirium. But can Modi's India set a new narrative?

Suchetana Ray

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COURSE CORRECTION

If last year was about small- and mid-cap companies, this year will be dominated by large caps, feels Sunil Koul, executive director for Asia Pacific portfolio strategy, global macro research at financial services company Goldman Sachs



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RACING AHEAD OF THE GIANTS

New age start-ups such as Blinkit, Zepto and Instamart have surged ahead of behemoths like Amazon, Reliance and others in the quick-commerce segment. The giants aspire to catch up with these newcomers, but they will need to adapt and innovate their strategies to keep pace



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Thanks to its ability to generate convincing images and videos of people, deepfake technology is being used to create pornographic content, often featuring celebrities and women. Loopholes in existing regulations make it tough to nail the guilty



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THE BUSINESS OF PLANTING TREES

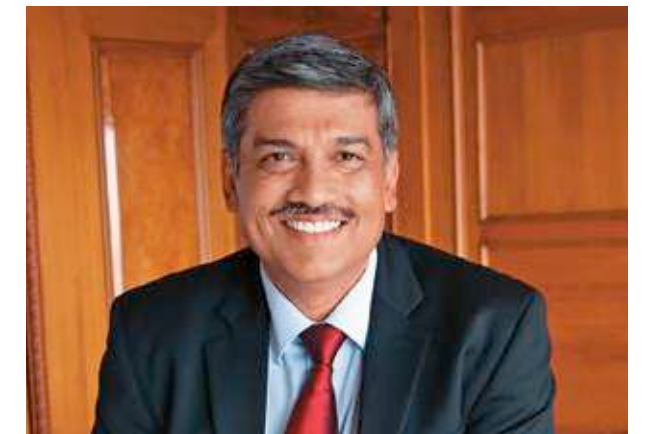
Planting trees has become a trend among people and institutions looking to either give back to the planet, improve ESG compliance or simply gather carbon credits. Irrespective of the trigger, the trend is emerging as a business opportunity



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THE JOY OF ADJUSTMENTS

Partha DeSarkar, executive director and CEO of Hinduja Global Solutions, is always ready to make adjustments on almost every front. He is also a student for life, never wanting to stop learning



OUTLOOK BUSINESS

THINK BEYOND. STAY AHEAD.

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Optimising Investment Outcomes: Overcoming Behavioural Biases and Emotional Decision-Making

Investor behaviour significantly shapes investment decisions and outcomes. The 'behaviour gap' is a critical aspect that highlights the difference between what investors could earn and what they actually do earn from their investments. This gap mainly results from behavioural biases, emotional decision-making, and cognitive errors, which deeply influence investor actions.

Behavioural Biases and the Behaviour Gap

Key behavioural biases such as fear, greed, and herd mentality significantly impact investor behaviour, contributing to the behaviour gap. For instance, fear, driven by market volatility may lead investors to hastily sell off their investments to prevent losses, often causing them to miss out on potential gains when the market recovers. On the other hand, greed might compel investors to pursue high-risk investments during bullish market conditions without adequately considering the risks or diversifying their portfolios. These emotional responses often lead to impulsive decision-making, further widening the behaviour gap.

The implications of the behaviour gap on investment outcomes are profound as it directly influences investors' financial success and wealth creation over time. Emotional decision-making and cognitive biases often result in suboptimal investment outcomes, like the common tendency among investors is to buy high and sell low in their attempt to time the market, thus failing to leverage long-term investment opportunities. By addressing the behaviour gap, investors can enhance their portfolio performance and achieve long-term financial objectives.

Emotional Decision-Making and Cognitive Biases

The detrimental effects of emotional decision-making and cognitive biases on investors' financial success are



Sashi Sekhar Saha
Niwesh Wealth
Associates LLP

significant and can lead to lasting repercussions for their investment portfolios. Such behaviour often hinders the investors' journey towards achieving financial goals and erodes confidence in the investment process, leading to increased anxiety, stress, and uncertainty. This situation may prompt investors to make more impulsive decisions or stray from their long-term investment strategies, exacerbating the behaviour gap and fostering a cycle of underperformance.

To mitigate these effects, investors must develop self-awareness regarding their behavioural tendencies, adopt strategies to manage emotional responses and adhere to a disciplined, rational decision-making approach. Bridging the behaviour gap is essential for optimising investment outcomes, achieving financial security, and realising long-term financial goals.

Recency bias is another factor which further aggravates the behaviour gap in investing. This cognitive bias leads investors to overemphasise recent events while neglecting long-term trends or historical data. Such bias can skew investors' risk and reward perceptions, resulting in suboptimal decision-making and worsening the

behaviour gap. Recognising and counteracting recency bias is crucial for investors aiming to bridge the behaviour gap and fulfil their long-term financial aspirations.

Solutions for Navigating Behavioural Challenges

Investors can adopt various strategies to improve decision-making and bolster investment outcomes. It is paramount to maintain a long-term perspective and focus on the bigger picture rather than reacting to short-term market fluctuations. Investors should align their decisions with their long-term financial goals, rely on fundamentals, and stay true to their investment strategy to avoid hasty, emotion-driven choices.

Moreover, attempting to time the market is often counterproductive. Market timing is challenging to execute successfully and consistently. Instead, investors should consider disciplined investing approaches, such as rupee-cost averaging or systematic investment plans (SIPs), which involve regular investments irrespective of market conditions. This strategy helps evade market timing pitfalls and capitalises on compounding over time.

Simplicity in investment strategies is also key to navigating the financial markets successfully. Complexity and overcomplication can lead to confusion and indecision. Investors should focus on constructing a diversified, straightforward portfolio of low-cost, high-quality investments aligned with their risk tolerance and objectives. Such a diversified portfolio can mitigate risk and enhance overall portfolio resilience.

In summary, investor behaviour plays a crucial role in shaping investment decisions and outcomes. Addressing behavioral challenges can significantly improve decision-making and investment results. Embracing a long-term perspective, avoiding market timing, and simplifying investment strategies are vital for navigating financial market complexities and achieving long-term financial goals.

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COVER STORY

DELIRIUM IN THE MARKETS

» Ayaan Kartik and Devanshu Singla

Market regulator SEBI says there is “froth” in the mid-and small-cap stocks; banker Uday Kotak says there is no bubble. Caught in this cross-current are traders in small towns who are betting heavily in risky derivatives. What is next for the turbocharged Indian markets and what of the retail investors rallying behind it?

Mahesh Kumar, a 32-year-old resident of Gaya, Bihar, earns Rs 25,000 a month as a salesman at a mobile phone showroom in Delhi. Inspired by YouTube videos by financial influencers, he invested all his savings in the stock market without any insights of his own. He recently bought a bike for over Rs 1 lakh with his earnings from the market.

▶ Twenty-year-old Krishn Vohra from Yamunanagar in Haryana decided to drop out of college and get into full-time stock trading instead of a formal job. According to him, it is better-paying.

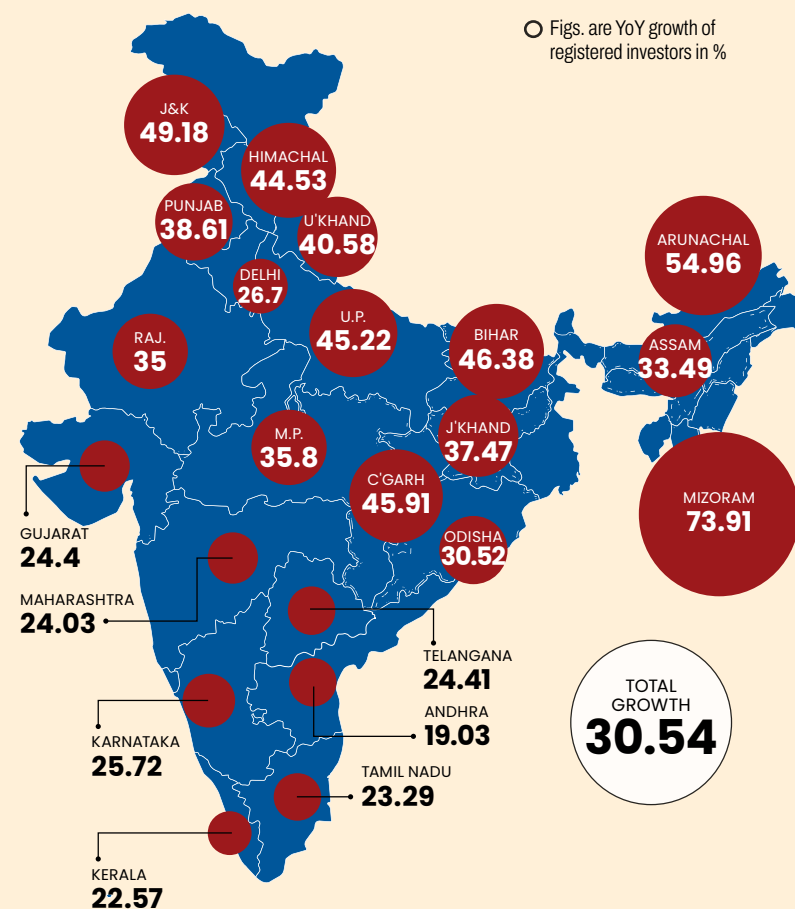
▶ Mohammad Afzal from Lohardaga in Jharkhand earns Rs 15,000 as a cab driver in Delhi. Having seen YouTube videos on trading, he is convinced he can make more money from the stock market. He is further encouraged by the profit he had earned once.

For Kumar, Vohra and Afzal, who hail from smaller towns where people are perceived to be frugal and cautious with their money, the plunge into an uncharted territory like the stock market, with little or no understanding of its workings, defies logic.

Jobs are scarce, retail inflation, especially food, is high, opportunities for growth are minimal and skill sets limited. In such a reality, the only way Kumar & Co. can jump on the *Viksit Bharat* bandwagon is to take risky bets with their money.

MARKET MANIA ACROSS THE COUNTRY

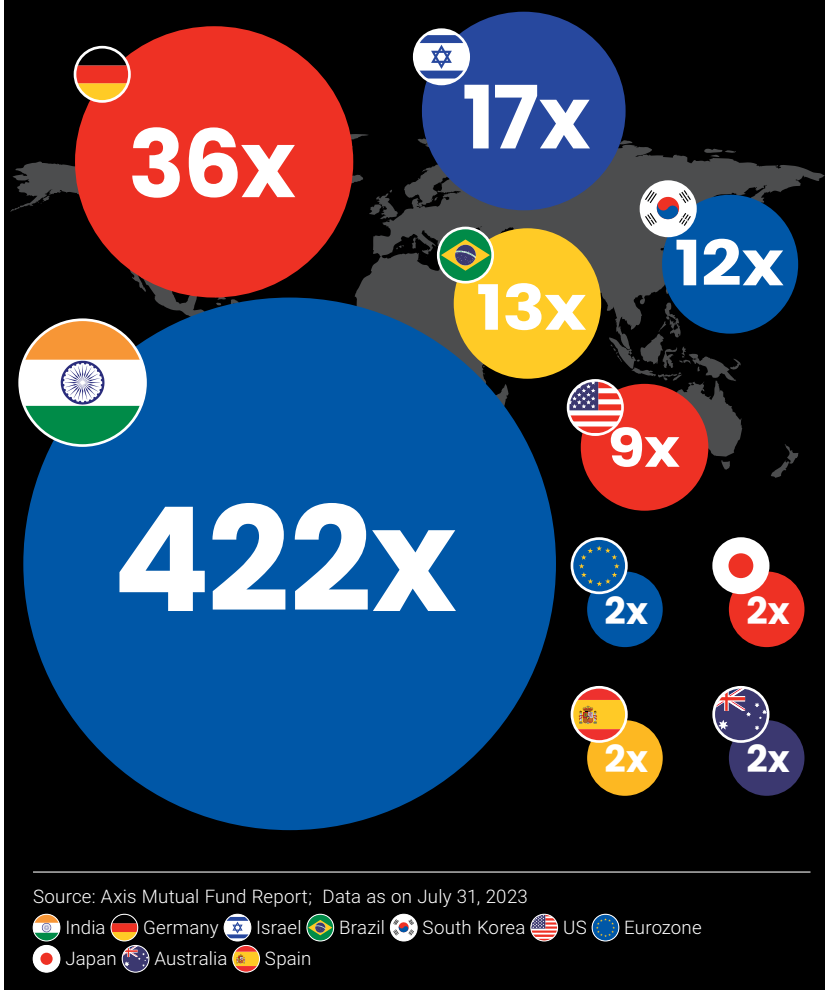
Indian markets are seeing new additions from all parts of the country. North-eastern states, Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh are among those which are seeing rapid rise in people interested in stock markets



Map not to scale; Data as on March 21, 2024; Source: BSE

RED FLAG IN TRADING ZONE

The derivatives-to-cash volumes ratio in India is significantly higher than in major countries. A higher ratio indicates higher volatility and can affect the overall market stability



Anil K. Sood, professor and co-founder at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Complex Choices, Hyderabad, says that in an environment where income growth is low, the pressure to build wealth through riskier investment leads a lot of people, especially youngsters, to venture into stock markets. “When there is so much positive narrative about the economy and the current growth rate is high, the propensity of people to believe in the invincibility of stock markets is high. They feel that the best way to supplement their income, which has seen sluggish growth, is not through their jobs but trading in the stock markets,” he says.

This mad rush to get rich quickly has baffled many. It led to Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch to issue a warning. Last month she said there is “froth” in the mid- and small-cap space and the bull run was “not supported by fundamentals at all”. She went on to call the run an “irrational rally”. The bull run in the mid- and small-cap stocks has been fuelled by the burgeoning numbers of retail investors.

The Rise of Smaller Players

Retail investors emerged as a strong buying force after the pandemic when all segments of the markets posted good returns. But this story is not concentrated in a few urban centres of the country. Brokerage firms report that a large part of new investor addition is happening from Tier II and III cities.

Brokerage firm Angel One reported that 60% of gross client additions happened from Tier III towns in 2022–23. Its data for the period between the first quarters of 2021–22 and 2023–24 shows that most new client additions were recorded from these towns in all the quarters. In its earnings call for the October–December 2023 quarter, the company informed shareholders that 80–85% of customer acquisitions were hap-

pening from Tier III and beyond.

At an industry event in 2022, trading app Upstox’s co-founder Shrini Viswanath said that contrary to the 2010–11 phase where 90% of the customers came from the top seven cities of the country, over 80% of new customers on the app came from Tier II and III cities in 2022.

BSE’s registered investors database also shows that poorer states like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand are recording higher year-on-year growth in investors joining the market than Delhi, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

“The V-shaped recovery of the market after the fall during the Covid-19

pandemic indicated to investors that good money can be made,” says Aditya Kondawar, partner and vice president at wealth management firm Complete Circle.

However, the euphoria of retail investors has sprung up worrying signs across the country’s capital markets. Kumar is lucky that he has not suffered any losses yet, but his lack of any knowledge of the markets leaves him at the mercy of those who advise him.

Afzal’s only trading wisdom is that one must buy shares when they are cheap—a guiding principle that even made him consider buying shares of the beleaguered Paytm when its price

fell after the Reserve Bank of India’s action against it. His 19-year-old brother quit his job at a small shop in Daryaganj in Delhi to do full-time trading in the stock market.

A major factor that lures many of these investors to trading is the easily available advice from finfluencers—financial influencers—who make stock-trading seem like child’s play.

Kondawar says that a lot of suggestions floating on the internet may have contributed to the behaviour of investors. “The internet is filled with content on the stock market where someone is promising exceptionally high returns in a short period of time. How can one ask an investor to bet their savings on a stock in a 30-second reel,” he asks.

The Finfluencer Phenomenon

While new age finfluencers are thriving, trusted legacy players like Motilal Oswal Financial Services, Edelweiss Mutual Fund and SBI Securities lag far behind with followers in the range of 13,000–2.5 lakh. To put this in perspective, the Instagram page of one of the most followed finfluencers has 24 lakh followers, while another has 17 lakh.

A large share of investors thronged to online platforms like YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, X and Telegram. A survey report of National Centre for Financial Education showed that only 27% of the respondents in India were financially literate in 2019.

While the number of unregistered finfluencers swelled, that of registered investment advisers has barely changed. SEBI data shows that India has 1,300 registered intermediaries acting as investment advisers. This number stood at around 1,299 in March 2023, according to some reports, showing that not many have been added to the regulatory ambit. In October last year, SEBI said that 35% of investment advisers were still not registered with the regulator.

The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) had said in 2023 that online content creators could only offer investment advice after being registered with SEBI. But that does not seem to have deterred the so-called experts.

Taking cognisance of the impact of finfluencers on the stock market, in August 2023, SEBI released a consultation paper, proposing to ban partnerships between SEBI-

registered entities and unregistered finfluencers, among other measures. It also banned several finfluencers.

The Market Mirage

The benchmark Sensex fell to 27,590 in April 2020 from 41,170 in February. However, in November that year, it was able to cross the pre-pandemic level. During the post-Covid surge, while Sensex delivered returns of over 163%, Nifty provided investors with returns of more than 171%. On March 6 this year, Sensex achieved a historic milestone, reaching 74,000 for the first time. Simultaneously, Nifty 50 kicked off 2024 with the third-fastest 1,000-point surge in its history, crossing 22,000 in January.

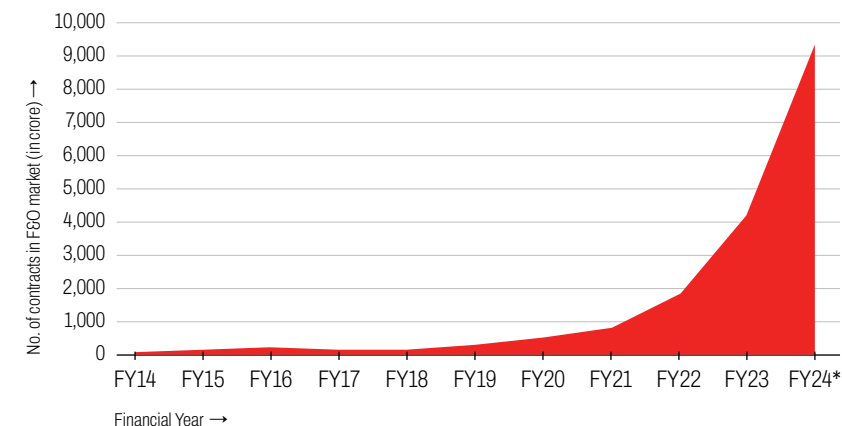
When the markets revived after the 2020 crash, the number of retail investors entering the stock market saw a steep rise. According to Goldman Sachs data, between 2012–13 and 2019–20, the number of demat accounts in the country grew from two crore to 4.1 crore at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10%. This rate jumped to nearly 41% between 2019–20 and 2022–23 when the number of accounts increased from 4.1 crore to 11.4 crore.

An analysis of market segments also reveals a pattern of heightened enthusiasm among retail investors. In the initial public offering (IPO) market, between 2018 and 2020, only six out of 274 IPOs saw retail subscriptions exceed 50 times. However, between 2021 and 2023, out of 510 IPOs, 131 recorded oversubscriptions by more than 50 times. According to Neeraj Chadawar, Head of Fundamental and Quantitative Research at Axis Securities, this increase is because of buoyancy in secondary markets. He says, “The rally in the secondary market has led to increased liquidity among investors, which is then redirected towards IPOs.”

Concerns over company valuations extend beyond the IPO market. The influx of liquidity into small-cap stocks by retail investors has driven

LOVE FOR SPECULATIVE TRADING

Sharp rise in future and option contracts shows that investors are chasing high returns in short time through dangerous speculative trading



*Data till March 20, 2024; Source: NSE

up company valuations significantly, posing concerns for seasoned investors. The small-cap segment saw strong returns, thanks to their considerable interest. While Sensex gained 18%, the small-cap index surged by nearly 48% in just one year, reflecting retail investors' increased allocation to this segment.

According to data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI), as of December 2019, large-cap fund portfolios totalled 95 lakh, while small-cap funds accounted for 50 lakh folios. However, the latest release for December 2023 reveals a notable shift: small-cap fund folios surged to 1.69 crore, surpassing large-cap funds, now at 1.32 crore.

An analysis by *Outlook Business* of 512 small-cap companies shows that the average price-to-earnings (P/E) ratio surged from 28.8x to 48.7x

between December 2019 and 2023. Industry experts view trading above the 40x ratio as a red flag. To contextualise, benchmark Sensex trades at a P/E ratio of 25x. A similar trend is observed in mid-cap stocks, as per an analysis by Kotak Institutional Equities. The average P/E ratio in their consumption universe soared from 36.7x to 47x between the financial years 2019 and 2024 (estimated).

The Risk Factor

Data compiled by Marcellus Investment Managers shows that retail ownership of free-floating stocks—shares available to the public for trading—posted good gains compared to domestic mutual funds and foreign institutional investors (FIIs). Between the December 2020 and 2021 quarters, the retail investors' ownership of free-floating stocks jumped from

17.9% to 19.6%. In the same period, the share in ownership of such stocks by FIIs reduced from 43.3% to 39.9% while mutual funds' share went up marginally from 14.7% to 15%.

The momentum in the markets is a fairytale for many retail investors. The pace in additions of new investors suggests that just like Kumar, millions across the country want to make the most of this euphoria at the bourses. But seasoned investors fear that many new investors joining the markets are not considering that markets follow cycles, and the current bull run will not last forever.

The pursuit of high returns has not only led investors to chase stocks without fundamental explanation but also engage in speculative trading through futures and options (F&O). There are two forms of derivatives trading which traders use to speculate on the prices of a stock. Generally, they are used by experienced traders to hedge risk on the stocks they own. However, it is now being used by lakhs of retail investors as a mode of speculative trading despite not having adequate knowledge or experience. SEBI's analysis of a sample consisting of the top 10 brokerage firms' data revealed a worrying trend in retail investors' participation. Between 2018–19 and 2021–22, the number of retail investors in equity F&O increased by over 536% to 45.2 lakh in 2022 from 7.1 lakh in 2019.

Due to this, the country's derivatives market volume has reached a dangerously high level compared to its cash market, where the actual purchase and sale of stocks or bonds happens.

An Axis Mutual Fund report showed that as of July 31, 2023, the derivatives-to-cash volume ratio stood at 422x in India. Globally, this ratio stood at 36x for Germany, 12x for South Korea and 9x for the US. A high ratio can lead to higher volatility and affect overall market stability.

Siddhartha Bhaiya, managing director and chief investment officer

at Aequitas Investment Consultancy, a SEBI-registered portfolio manager, says it is a horror story of how delirious and inexperienced traders are engaging in risky derivative trading. "With weekly expiries, F&O have become like gambling for many traders. What was supposed to be a hedging instrument has now become a purely speculative tool for many new investors, which is dangerous," he says.

SEBI showed in its analysis that 89% of individual traders in the equity segment made losses in the equity F&O market in 2021–22. This gambling-like problem for retail investors in pursuit of high returns through any investment instruments necessary has not only become a headache for the market regulator but also sprung up a problem for law enforcement agencies of the country.

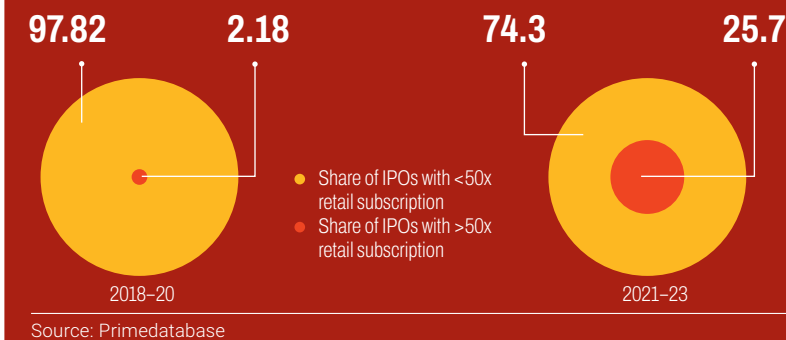
Field Day for Fraudsters

The National Crime Records Bureau's 2022 report hints at a rising propensity of people to fall for fake promises of fraudsters. Economic offences in the country rose by 11% in 2022 over the previous year, with forgery, cheating and fraud accounting for a maximum number of such cases. Across the country, cases of stock market-related fraud are being reported where individual investors are targeted through online messaging platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp. In February 2024, Mumbai Police arrested two people in connection with a pan-India fraud where investors were made to download a fake trading app and then duped of Rs 28 crore in total. Individual traders from Delhi, Maharashtra, Odisha and Gujarat were defrauded in the case. As per the details of the case, the arrested persons were part of a gang which had duped over 100 investors from across the country.

According to Anoj Menon, senior partner at Desai and Diwanji, a law firm, many retail investors fall for fraudulent investment advertisements as they chase high returns in a highly inflationary environment.

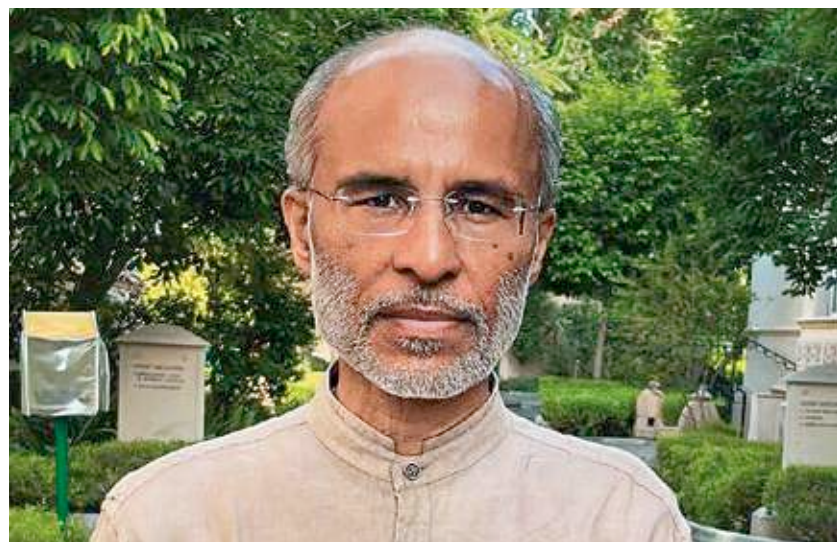
RUSHING AFTER IPOs

The share of retail investors in IPO subscription saw a significant rise when the markets began to revive after the March 2020 crash



GROWING BUBBLE

In the past five years, the average price-to-earnings (P/E) ratio of 512 small-cap companies rose above 40x, indicating overvaluation of stocks in relation to their earnings



When there is so much positive narrative about the economy...the propensity of people to believe in the invincibility of stock markets is high. They feel that the best way to supplement their income, which has seen sluggish growth, is not through their jobs but trading in the stock markets

ANIL K. SOOD

PROFESSOR AND CO-FOUNDER AT THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN COMPLEX CHOICES

"The fraudsters take the money from investors and show them high profits through screenshots or a fake app. However, the problem occurs when these investors try to redeem the fund and realise that they have been defrauded," he says.

Stock market-related frauds have been reported in Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Pune among other cities in the past few months. This has prompted law enforcement agencies to issue advisories about online trading scams.

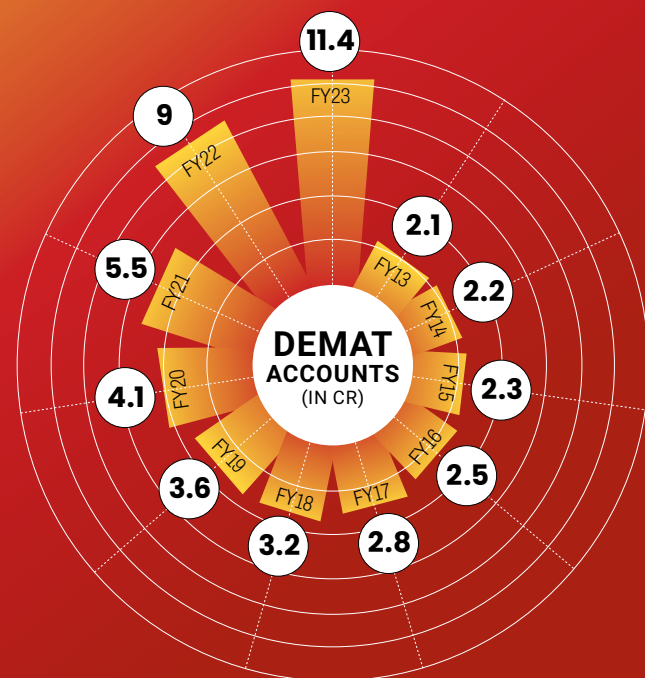
"While financial crimes were prevalent earlier as well, the increase in participation from retail investors has widened the base these fraudsters can target. In such a scenario, the

regulator must work harder to protect the interests of investors," says Tomu Francis, partner at Khaitan and Co., a corporate law firm. Francis feels that the problem of risky investment behaviour is compounded by the fact that financial advice is available easily to gullible retail investors over the internet and other means from unregistered investment advisers and bad actors. "Moreover, the sophistication of products and frauds have increased in the past few years due to the rapid rise of retail investors," he adds.

The dangerous rise of speculative trading, the increase in fraudsters taking advantage of retail investors and the formation of valuation bubbles have put the spotlight on SEBI.

LURE OF THE MARKETS

The number of demat accounts saw a steep rise between FY13 and FY23, indicating high interest of retail investors in the markets



Source: Goldman Sachs report

SEBI's Red Flag

The response to Puri's warning became visible immediately. Sensex pulled back from its March 6 high to the 72,000 range in the following week. Nifty too fell below 22,000 by March 19.

While the markets have seen several such falls in the past few years, the recent developments are an indication that retail exuberance may have gone too far, which the regulator is now trying to correct.

Aequitas' Bhaiya agrees that the valuation situation in the Indian markets is worrying. "What started as a healthy trend of retail investors pumping in money in beaten-down segments during the Covid-19 pandemic has now become a big valuation problem. Markets immediately need a moderation to control this," he says.

Kotak Mutual Fund imposed restrictions on inflows into small-cap funds. It was probably the first institutional investor in September 2023 to raise an alarm about the behaviour

of retail investors. It said in a note, "We see the limited point in trying to find fundamental reasons behind the steep increase in stock prices of several mid-cap and small-cap stocks. There is no meaningful change in the fundamentals of most companies; in fact, they have worsened in many cases. The primary driver of the rally appears to be irrational exuberance among investors."

On the other hand, Uday Kotak, founder and non-executive director of Kotak Mahindra Bank, part of the same group as Kotak Institutional Equities, disagreed that the markets were in a serious bubble phase. At a SEBI conference on March 13, shortly after Buch's observation, he said, "I believe at this stage, we are nowhere near that risk and there are enough checks and balances in our system today to compare ourselves in serious bubble territory."

In May 2023, SEBI directed trading platforms to display investment risks, especially in the F&O segment.

The Reserve Bank of India also voiced concerns over excessive liquidity in cash and derivatives markets, potentially influenced by speculative trading. Regulators are worried that borrowed funds may be driving speculative investments, blurring the line between investing and gambling.

Realising that previous measures were not sufficient to curb risky investor behaviour, SEBI urged AMFI in February 2024 to manage inflows into small- and mid-cap schemes to protect investor interests. This move sparked market instability, with the Sensex falling over 800 points on February 28. Following SEBI's directive, Kotak Mutual Fund and ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund placed restrictions on lumpsum investments in small- and mid-cap schemes. Some other fund houses followed suit.

When the Music Stops

Vijay Kedia, a veteran stock market investor with a portfolio worth over Rs 1,500 crore, raises caution that most new investors are putting their money into the market based on speculation. "A small proportion of investors are investing after proper research and analysis while the remaining are just shooting arrows in the dark, treating investing in markets as gambling and a way to make quick money."

According to Kedia, many of the new investors lack proper knowledge of the market fundamentals. "As most of them have entered the market during a bull run, they feel that nothing can go wrong. They do not take into account the possibility of a bear market. Many such investors will suffer severe losses whenever the market cycle shifts in future," he warns.

The concerns over valuations are rising at a rapid pace. Global investment firm Bernstein reportedly told its clients in a note in the first week of March that it is struggling to offer new investment ideas. As per the firm, the small- and mid-cap space

is in a bubble, and it will enjoy the returns till the music stops.

Realising that valuations are at elevated levels, promoters of companies are offloading their stake to make the most of the situation. An analysis by ICICI Securities of the top 1,000 stocks over the calendar year 2023 showed that promoters of these companies constituted 40% of overall selling flows.

US-based promoters of Whirlpool were in the news recently when they decided to sell a 24% stake in its Indian subsidiary. In an interview with CNBC, Whirlpool Corporation chief executive officer Marc Bitzer said that the company was positive on India, but it wanted to make the most of the high valuations. At the time of the stake sale, Whirlpool was trading at a P/E of over 50 at the bourses.

The bubble in the small- and

mid-cap segment is a problem from the broader market perspective as well because the trading volume of Nifty 100 as percentage of Nifty 500 has reduced significantly, an analysis by investment platform FundsIndia showed. This suggests that the stability of broader markets depends on the performance of lower-value stocks. From close to 70% in January 2019, the trading volume of Nifty 100 as percentage of Nifty 500 fell to 47% at the end of February 2024. Talking about valuations, the FundsIndia analysis noted that the valuations in the small-cap space are so high that even after a 25% correction, small cap would remain expensive.

The numbers suggest that a correction in the space is inevitable. SEBI has moved in to protect the broader markets, but analysts say that many retail investors are set to learn their lessons the hard way.

Bhaiya says that the consequences of a fall this time around could be severe for many across the country as the retail investors' base has never been so high and geographically diverse. "I do not know whether the new investors who have joined the markets understand the risks that are associated with trading. But the shifting of the cycle to bearish is inevitable," he says.


SEBI's data reveals a significant increase in young investors in the age group of 20-30 participating in the speculative derivatives market. In 2018-19, this age group accounted for only 11% of the total base, but

by 2021-22, it surged to 36%. Axis MF analysis further highlights that the average age of investors trading through discount brokers is 29 years, similar to the average age of 31 for fantasy sports participants.

SEBI's recent concerns focus on market safety, with potential soft measures such as advising caution among market participants. Unfortunately, actions against influencers and risk advisories have not curtailed the momentum of retail investors. Despite SEBI highlighting that most of the individual traders made losses in the derivatives segment, markets are set to close the current year with a record volume of contracts in the F&O market. National Stock Exchange data shows that the number of F&O contracts traded in the current financial year till March 8 stood at 8,889 crore, a 112% rise from the volume recorded in 2022-23.

The inflows through mutual funds continue to hit record highs and so do the benchmark indices. It appears there is a feeling of invincibility among the retail investors. Seasoned investors are convinced this will not end well for many.

Gaurav Manihar, business head of franchisee-broking and distribution at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, notes that many young investors from smaller cities are driven by the desire for rapid wealth accumulation, often making uninformed decisions. "As people become more financially literate, they will begin to tread cautiously, taking calculated risks wherever they venture. But for now, the risks they are embracing are far from calculated," he adds.

This explains Kumar's blind faith in the market's ability to toil while he slumbers, unaware of the potential losses. As regulators tiptoe delicately between regulation and the euphoric bull run on the Indian stock market, the looming consequences of market frenzy may soon weigh heavily upon ordinary Indians. 



With weekly expiries, F&O have become like gambling for many traders. What was supposed to be a hedging instrument has now become a purely speculative tool for many new investors, which is dangerous

SIDDHARTHA BHAIYA
MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CEO,
AEQUITAS INVESTMENT CONSULTANCY

WINNING THE GAME OF BULLS AND BEARS



Illustration: Shutterstock

While retail investors rushed to make hay as small- and mid-cap stocks shone at the bourses, institutional investors stayed away, guided by traditional wisdom that warned them against the exuberance in the stock market. The mid-March crash, dominated by the smaller segments, proved their point

» Harshita Dudeja

On March 13, just a week before the markets crashed, both Sensex and Nifty recorded new highs—while the former crossed the mark of 74,000 for the first time, the latter touched the milestone of 22,500. In the bull run, powered largely by smaller segment stocks, there emerged several multibaggers, or stocks that give more than 100% returns to investors. However, while retail investors made a beeline for them, institutional investors stayed away. They stood vindicated when the markets crashed as the “froth” around overvalued stocks in the smaller segments, as Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch called it, started settling and investors lost their early gains.

In the preceding months, small-cap, mid-cap, micro-cap and small and medium enterprises segments emerged as the biggest gainers. *Outlook Business* conducted an analysis of 3,638 BSE-listed companies for the period between third quarter of 2022–23 and third quarter of 2023–24, of which 637, including 590 from the small- and micro-cap space, emerged as multibaggers. When Sensex was up by 11,399 points—more than 18% jump—around 66% of multiplier stocks failed to garner the confidence of foreign and domestic institutional investors. Of the 637 multibaggers, 423 saw institutional investors either reducing or maintaining their stakes unchanged during the above-mentioned period.

The majority of the top 50 multibaggers, by returns, during this period have a market cap of less than Rs 500 crore. Almost all of them have institutional stakes of less than 1%, including over 50% with no institutional stake at all. Arpit Jain, joint managing director of Arihant Capital, a financial services firm, explains, “Their smaller market cap and lower trading volumes sometimes do not match up to what the big players are looking for.”

Investor Behaviour

According to analysts, institutional investors look for a larger size of investments with higher float. The higher the float, the higher is the liquidity level of a company’s shares in the market. This leads to lesser impact on stock prices during bulk trading activities and thus limits volatility. Restricted free float, on the other hand, can pose a challenge.

During the third quarter of 2022–23 to third quarter of 2023–24 period, the multibagger segment, which largely comprised small- and micro-cap stocks, had an institutional holding of 0.04%, while non-institutional holding was around 41%.

“Institutional investors often engage in substantial transactions, and small- or micro-cap stocks with a restricted free float may not provide the liquidity they require,” explains

Stocks going circuit to circuit day after day does not enthruse institutional investors. Retail investors, on the other hand, have fewer compulsions and are ready to take the risk of lower liquidity in case of a reversal in stock prices with the aim of earning big money

DEEPAK JASANI
HEAD, RETAIL RESEARCH, HDFC SECURITIES



ratio may signal that the stock is overvalued. Institutional investors who are often value-conscious may be cautious about investing in a stock with a P/E ratio that appears excessively high,” Goel adds.

Deepak Jasani, head of retail research, HDFC Securities, points out that institutional investors typically steer clear of high-risk investments. “Stocks going circuit to circuit day after day does not enthruse institutional investors. Retail investors, on the other hand, have fewer compulsions and are ready to take the risk of lower liquidity in case of a reversal in stock prices with the aim of earning big money. They can act fast once they spot a stock while institutions will want to carry out minimum due diligence before investing in such companies,” says Jasani.

Amit Goel, co-founder and chief global strategist at Pace360.

Other than liquidity, there are also concerns around valuation. The average price-to-earnings (P/E) ratio of the multibagger set surged by nearly 75%, climbing from 32.38% in third quarter 2023–24 to 56.64% in third quarter 2022–23. “A heightened P/E

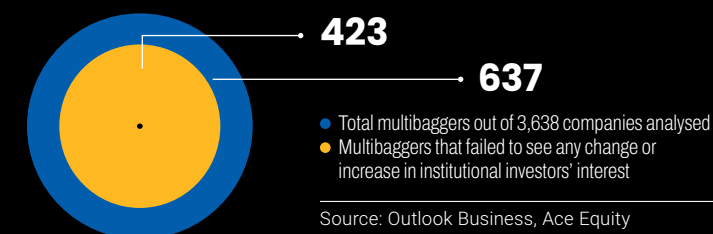
The Last Laugh

When the markets saw a major correction following SEBI’s concerns, around 54% of the 637 multibaggers analysed by *Outlook Business* fell from the December 2023 level. Many companies saw erosion of share price value in the range of 40% to 60%.

Goel highlights that while retail investors often chase quick wins, institutional investors focus on long-term growth driven by solid fundamentals. They have the resources and patience to ride out market highs and lows. The mid-March crash in the markets has yet again proved the wisdom in their strategy for the bull-and-bear game at Dalal Street. **OB**

THE MULTIBAGGERS

Institutional investors stayed away from most of the multibaggers that emerged from among 3,638 BSE-listed companies between Q3FY23 and Q3FY24



Perambalur For Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar: Bringing Academia and Governance Together With PM Modi

Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar the Member of Parliament is all set to contest in 2024 elections. Here is the fascinating exploration of his extraordinary life, unparalleled generosity and his commitment to his constituency, country and society at large. His dedication to the humanity ignites hope, fosters progress, leaving an indelible mark on the fabric of Indian democracy and society.

Indian politics are like an intricate tapestry. It is that formidable landscape, dotted with seasoned politicians, shaped by entrenched dynasties, and often tricky to navigate easily. We all know leaving that indelible mark in serving the public is no mean task. Still, the life journey of Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar serves as an inspiration to everyone hoping to safeguard Indian democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the following few pages, you will be reading about Dr. T.R. Paarivendhar, the Member of Parliament representing from Perambalur Lok Sabha constituency in Tamil Nadu. The life journey of Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar seamlessly intertwines the realms of academia and governance, weaving a story that transcends the ordinary.

"My formative years are from the



Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar the Member of Parliament With Hon'ble PM Narendra Modi

verdant fields of Thandavarayapuram Village near Salem, imbued with the essence of rustic simplicity. The quest for knowledge drove me to get equipped with a degree in B.Sc Mathematics and the prestigious MIE accreditation from the Indian

Institute of Engineering Technology in Chennai. I should say that education is the only way to embark on a quest for knowledge that would shape the contours of a remarkable career for anyone," he says.

With his aspirations extending far



The true satisfaction of being an academican is witnessing young people finding a foothold in great careers and building their lives. Interacting with students, especially from the rural areas of Tamil Nadu, made me realize the need to bring change in the system for the betterment of farmers, women, children, youth, minorities, and other underprivileged sections of society. With that vision to work for the oppressed, I charted a course into Indian politicians with my political party, Indhiya Jananayaga Katchi (IJK)," explains Dr. Paarivendhar.



beyond academia, Dr. Paarivendhar ventured into uncharted territory, founding the illustrious SRM Group. This educational conglomerate would emerge as a harbinger of excellence in higher learning. Today, SRM Institute of Science and Technology is revered for its academic rigor and innovative pedagogy, transforming countless lives and redefining the nation's educational landscape.

He further explains that transcending the traditional barrier between academia and governance took work. However, it is his aim to eradicate corruption and anti-social activities that kept him going. "I founded IJK in 2014, but I could step into the temple of Indian Democracy, the Indian Parliament, only in 2019. I still remember taking the oath as the MP representing the Perambalur constituency. At that moment, I realized that my life would henceforth be dedicated to the service of the public," says Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar.

In no time, Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar became a pivotal figure in

The job of an MP involves regular interactions with the public of your constituency to be aware of the ground realities. Every endeavour, every initiative, is a step towards enriching the lives of our people and uplifting our communities. It's not merely about infrastructure or policies; it's about making a tangible difference in the lives of every individual," says Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar, who posed a total of 268 questions, took part in 39 debates, and introduced 2 personal bills since May 2019.

driving regional development and progress. "As a first-time Parliamentarian, I faced multiple challenges, but as always, I stayed committed to the welfare of my constituency and advocating the interests of my constituents. As an academican, my primary objective has always been empowering the youth with education and ensuring 1200 students benefit through various courses including engineering, B.Sc Agriculture / Horticulture, MBA, Law, Health Sciences, Hotel Management, and

Art & Science through the Free Higher Education Scheme through my educational institutions to the tune of Rs. 118 crores."

Even as Dr. T.R. Paarivendhar continued his efforts to uplift the living conditions of Perambalur citizens, the most unexpected challenge came in the form of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Free medical camps were arranged overnight for the economically backward and facilitated the return of Perambalur, Trichy citizens stranded in other



states, including Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Kashi, at his own expense. He donated Rs. 1 crore to the Tamil Nadu government to meet medical costs and donated 100 tons of rice and other food items worth several lakh rupees from his fund during the pandemic.

“Two state-of-the-art ambulances and oxygen concentrators worth Rs 50 lakhs were contributed from my funds to the districts of Trichy and Perambalur under Perambalur Parliamentary Constituency.

Undeterred by challenges, Dr. Paarivendhar spearheaded several infrastructure projects, including the long-awaited Ariyalur-Perambalur-Thuraiyur-Namakal new railway line project. He ensured progress on critical transportation initiatives through persistent advocacy, benefiting commuters and farmers alike.

Developing infrastructure facilities in the Perambalur



constituency has always been at the top of his agenda; his efforts and regular meetings with the Union Minister for Highways and Shipping, Shri Nitin Gadkari, revived the stalled Siruvachur flyover project. The construction of a new flyover near Siruganur was completed, and the subways on the Chidambaram-Chennai National Highway at Lalgudi in the Perambalur constituency are in progress. Subways were constructed in Kallakudi, Kilperunkavoor, and Mulappukudi,



and a bridge was built on the Chennai-Trichy highway.

Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar says, “It is always about asking the right questions to get the right response from the concerned ministers and authorities. In the last 5 years, I closely watched the working style of our honorable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi. Every time he steps into Parliament, he bends and touches the floor with respect, and his commitment to our country and Tamil Nadu’s people is unparalleled. We joined the BJP in this election

to bring more projects to the Perambalur constituency.”

Beyond governance, Dr. Paarivendhar’s contributions extend to fostering harmony and spirituality in the region. His generous donations towards temple renovations, annadhanam assistance, and support for various religious institutions reflect his deep-rooted commitment to preserving cultural heritage and promoting communal harmony.

His love for the Tamil language is unparalleled. On behalf of IJK party, he organized a state conference on protecting the Tamil language, which was attended by scores of people and politicians. Speaking at the meeting,

Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar gave 18 times more than the amount allotted to the people of Perambalur from his personal funds and his immense generosity brought smiles to scores of people in

TESTIMONIALS



Warm regards,
Sivaranjini

I am studying third-year Chemistry at SRM. I have always faced financial struggles coming from a farming family. Dr. T.R. Paarivendhar’s generosity provided a lifeline, offering free college education. His support, like divine intervention, granted me the chance to pursue higher studies when it seemed impossible. Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar’s initiative not only enabled my education but also symbolized hope for those, like me, once hindered by financial limitations.

I am S. Madana from Panchapatti village, Kulithalai block. Despite excelling in school, my dream of studying medicine seemed distant due to financial constraints. Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar’s offer of free college education was a divine blessing, allowing me to pursue BSc Public Health. His generosity transformed my life, fulfilling my aspirations and bringing joy to my family. Forever grateful to Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar.



Eternally indebted to Dr. T. R Paarivendhar Sir, S. Madhina



Warm regards,
S. Satish
Kumar

I’m S. Satish Kumar from Kudugur village, Karur district. As a third-year Agriculture student at SRM, accessing higher education felt impossible. Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar’s free education initiative shattered barriers, making education accessible. His support extends beyond academics, enriching my talents. His benevolence transformed my family’s circumstances, for which I’m profoundly grateful. Thanks to Vallal Paarivendhar, education is no longer a privilege but a reality for the underprivileged like me.

his constituency - BJP state president K Annamalai.

Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar’s tenure as a parliamentarian embodies a vision of inclusive growth, compassionate governance, and unwavering dedication to the welfare of the people. His tireless efforts have not only transformed infrastructure and policies but have also touched the lives of millions, inspiring a legacy of progress and prosperity for generations to come.

In the captivating saga of his life, Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar emerges as a beacon of hope—a visionary whose

indomitable spirit and unwavering commitment to excellence continue to inspire generations. As we embark on a journey to unravel the multifaceted persona of this enigmatic figure, we are beckoned into a realm where the boundaries between academia and politics blur, giving rise to a narrative that is as intriguing as it is inspiring.

Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar is contesting in 2024 Lok Sabha elections from Perambalur and is hoping to rededicate his life for the welfare of people from his constituency.

► COLUMN

GREED OVER FUNDAMENTALS: THE INVESTOR'S FOLLY



**JITENDRA
GOHIL**

In her address at the fifth SEBI-NISM research conference on March 12, 2024, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) chief Madhabi Puri Buch expressed her concerns about the valuation froth in the mid- and small-cap space. The next day the Nifty Mid-cap and Nifty Small-cap indices dropped 4.4% and 5.3%, respectively. But who cares? The correction is a buying opportunity.

The number of demat accounts has surged from approximately four crore in March 2020 to nearly 15 crore as of today. And this is accelerating, with a monthly record addition of about 46.8 lakh demat accounts in January 2024 alone. This is just the tip of the iceberg. With about 65% of the 1.4 crore population below 35 years of age, India is a nation of thriving youth believing in instant gratification.

Canary in a Coal Mine

First-time investors with no prior experience in investing are finding it easy to open trading accounts with discount brokers that offer quick onboarding. The growth of these discount brokers has been unprecedented, with more than 60% of NSE's active client base already captured by them. This is a welcome development for the country that is hooked to investing in gold and fixed deposits and now moving into financial assets. Rapid financialisation is great for India's future and the growth of the

industry; however, the problem comes when the short-termism, excessive leverage and "gamification" of investing takes centre stage.

Retail investors generally favour small-cap stocks where the risk is maximum. Looking at the past three years of staggering returns, retail investors are increasing their small-cap holdings. The overall ownership of NSE Small-cap 100 Index by the retail investors has jumped to 15.4% currently, versus 12.5% in March 2019, while the ownership of NSE 100 remained largely stable around 8% during the same period.

According to ICRA data, the margin trading funding book for the stockbroking industry reached Rs 54,537 crore in mid-January 2024, a staggering eight times higher than the pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, the Futures Industry Association reports that option contracts traded on Indian bourses reached a staggering 8,530 crore in 2023, reflecting a 52.4% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) since 2013. This dwarfs the US market, where 1,120 crore contracts were traded in 2023, with a CAGR of 10.7% over the same period.

What is even more alarming is that this unprecedented surge in equity investment is happening alongside a decline in household financial savings. Net financial household savings in India dipped to a mere 5.1% of the GDP in 2022-23, the lowest level in the past 50 years. On the one hand, consumption is faltering and formal job growth is largely stagnant. On the other, unsecured personal loan growth has skyrocketed, with the end use of these loans often unclear. Personal loans grew a staggering 141% in the two years ending December 2023, far outpacing the overall system loan growth.

This lopsided growth in risky personal loans has nudged the RBI to tighten regulations on personal loans and credit card loans by raising capital requirements. Wherever required, the RBI also barred some banking products issued by certain entities. While technology is helping to improve financial asset penetration in India and ease access to capital, regulators have also stepped up the mon-

itoring of market activity. Recently, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) unearthed a scam where bank accounts of fictitious companies were used to manipulate the prices of certain small-cap companies.

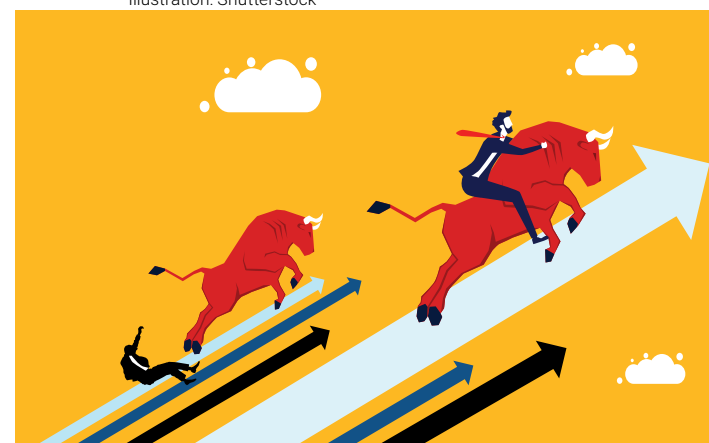
Optimism in India

India's real GDP growth is projected to reach a remarkable 8% in the current fiscal year, exceeding the RBI's initial optimistic forecast of 6.5%. This unparalleled resilience, demonstrably outperforming even the most bullish forecasts, is evident in the all-time low volatility of the rupee against the dollar over the past year. This comes despite the record low difference of around 100 basis points between the repo rate and the Fed rate. The resilience of the rupee is lowering the risk perception of Indian assets for foreign investors, allowing the market to comfortably accept a forward price-to-earnings ratio exceeding 20x for the Nifty Index, compared to pre-pandemic times when even 18x seemed stretched.

The market is forward-looking. What if the headwinds it faced this year turn into tailwinds! The Federal Reserve will most probably cut rates in mid-2024, nudging the RBI to ease domestic liquidity in the second half of the year. The El Niño weather condition that impacted the agriculture sector seems to be dissipating, as per meteorologists. Industry capacity utilisation has come to a level of close to 75%, where pick-up in private capex looks inevitable. The real estate sector, the second largest employer in India, is showing signs of recovery and, this time around, it looks like a longer cycle.

This, coupled with continued government focus on infrastructure and tourism, has the potential to create much-needed jobs and boost overall economic activity. The rock-solid political stability and visibility on policies are rare in India. The reform momentum is not only bearing fruits, but it may also see further acceleration with continuity of the government at the Centre. This is

Illustration: Shutterstock



**ON THE ONE HAND,
CONSUMPTION IS FALTERING
AND FORMAL JOB GROWTH
IS LARGELY STAGNANT. ON
THE OTHER, UNSECURED
PERSONAL LOAN GROWTH
HAS SKYROCKETED**

how the narratives are built and bubbles are formed, ignoring risks, and the market succumbs to the herd mentality bias.

Repeatedly, these unprecedented times have shown astonishing returns for equity investors, ignoring all the emerging risks. The post-liberalisation era in the early '90s, the dotcom bubble and the pre-crisis period [2007-08] are some of the examples where the returns were staggeringly high. However, these periods were often followed by multi-year consolidation with negative returns. When greed takes over, fundamentals are forgotten.

Call for Caution

These are indeed unprecedented times. The Fed's assertion that inflation was "transitory" has been proven wrong, and most experts have abandoned their forecasts of a US recession. China, previously touted to surpass the US as the economic superpower, is grappling with record-low valuations and significant wealth destruction. Meanwhile, the Russian GDP, despite crippling sanctions from the West, seems to have overtaken Germany's in terms of purchasing power parity. European countries like France, Germany and the UK are teetering on the brink of a cost-of-living crisis, yet their stock markets are flirting with all-time highs.

A highly speculative crypto asset like Bitcoin has surged over 70% year-to-date, creating 1,500 new wallet millionaires daily, according to Kaiko Research. Prime Minister Narendra Modi got behind PSU stocks in August 2023 parliamentary speech, where he advocated investing in PSU stocks with his comment "*Daav laga dijiye* [place a bet]". Since then, PSU stocks have been on a tear. While this is truly an India moment, and there is no doubt in my mind, past experiences suggest excessive leverage and speculative activities in India and abroad can ruin the party anytime. So, keep your canary with you. **OB**

The author is the chief investment strategist at Kotak Alternate Asset Managers

► COLUMN

MARKETS, RETAIL INVESTORS TANGO TO NEW HIGHS



**SANDEEP
RAINA**

As more investors enter the markets, the palette of investing style becomes more colourful. Each investor brings in their own biases, impulsive actions and assumptions to the markets. Sometimes this triggers unexpected outcomes especially when we look at those outcomes in the context of historical precedents.

In recent years, the markets have defied a historical precedent—that retail investors, generally, are late entrants to the markets when certain rallies are at their peaks. Over the past few years, the markets have defied this precedent as retail investors continue to make their presence felt in a pronounced manner. Actually, there has been a rise in retail investors to such an extent they have become a formidable force in the markets.

And, importantly, this resilience is expected to last much longer. This is because there are certain fundamental changes which support longer and sustained participation of retail investors. It is important to understand how household savings are increasingly being invested in financial assets. This can be understood by considering two key variables: savings and investment rate.

According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, as of 2021–22, savings rate as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) stood at 30.2%. Interestingly, the investment rate was 31.4%. This shows that increasingly people have realised the importance of investing. Besides this, according to the RBI, the share of household savings

in financial assets stands at 56%. The share of household savings in physical assets stood at 44%. Financial assets include cash, stocks, bonds, mutual funds and bank deposits. This higher proportion of household savings in financial assets shows the increasing preference among retail investors to invest in the markets.

Let us understand the triggers which have enabled increasing investments of retail investors:

• Digital Infrastructure

Investments in technology have empowered individual investors to not only transact in securities but also seek information. In the past decade, two major developments have smoothed the journey of retail investors in the markets. One is the emergence of trading platforms to buy and sell stocks. And the second has been the emergence of payment mechanisms to fund broking accounts. These facilities have become accessible to retail investors through their smartphones.

Today, it is easy to open a trading account. Unified payment interfaces (UPIs) have also made it easy to fund a broking account. Also, most trading apps in mobile phones are well-equipped to offer much-needed information to investors to make an informed decision. Even a small investor from a remote town can invest in the Indian stock markets.

• Going Direct

As a result of such favourable trends, millennials and Gen Z have found investing in the markets through smartphones convenient and profitable. The tech-savvy lot of investors have opened a record number of demat accounts. Three months in a row more than 40 lakh demat accounts have been opened. In February this year, 43 lakh new accounts were opened, taking the total demat account count close to 15 crore. Unique investor count has crossed 9 crore for the first time, according to data shared by the National Stock Exchange of India (NSE).

There is the lure of multi-fold returns of mid-sized and small-sized companies, which brings investors to the markets. As a result, traded volumes in the Indian stock

markets have been on the rise. A large chunk of this is contributed by India's retail investors—both small as well as high net worth individuals.

• Mutual Funds Sahi Hai

Mutual funds (MF) are catching up in a big way with retail investors. The Indian MF industry crossed Rs 50 lakh crore in asset under management (AUM) in December 2023. Investing in MFs through the systematic investment plan (SIP) route has been the preferred mode. Inflows through the SIP mode stood at Rs 19,186 crore in February 2024 compared to Rs 7,528 crore, three years ago. The number of SIP accounts opened stood at 8.2 crore in February 2024.

MFs are also preferred by investors due to tight regulation, low cost and performance record of money managers among other benefits. Low-ticket size is another key hook for many investors in MFs.

• Investment Products

Along with traditional MF schemes, investors have realised the advantages of investing through passive mode. Exchange-traded funds (ETF) and index funds tracking indices including stocks, bonds and commodities such as gold and silver are gaining acceptance in India. These passive funds managed assets worth Rs 8,830 crore in February 2024 compared to Rs 3,040 crore three years ago. Though a large chunk of this is an outcome of sustained investments by Employees' Provident Fund Organisation, the role of retail investors in expanding the AUM cannot be undermined.

More than traditional passive funds that track market-cap-based indices such as the Nifty 50 index or the S&P BSE Sensex, factor-based index funds are catching up with retail investors. These index funds and ETF offer baskets of stocks selected based on factors such as value, quality, momentum and alpha. MF houses have also added to their available products such funds to tap into retail investors varying investment needs.

In addition to MFs, individual investors have options

ACCORDING TO THE RBI, THE SAVINGS RATE AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP STOOD AT 30.2%. THE INVESTMENT RATE WAS 31.4%...PEOPLE HAVE REALISED THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING



Illustration: Shutterstock

such as portfolio management services, alternate investment funds to route their money into stocks. Service providers in these domains have also launched differentiated products targeting specific needs.

• Resilience

As more investors started investing in stocks directly or indirectly, they emerged as a formidable force in the Indian equity markets. Foreign portfolio investors sold shares worth Rs 12.1 lakh crore in 2022. It was a year when capital flowed from emerging markets to the US as interest rates were hiked in the US and the dollar gained against all global currencies. Despite such huge selling, the Nifty 50 index gained 4.32%. This established the fact that domestic money has emerged as a force that more than offset selling pressure by foreign investors. Similar selling in the past had negatively impacted the Indian markets and major indices had fallen.

Now, let us understand how the stage is set for further participation from retail investors in the markets.

Retail investors have been investing in mid- and small-cap stocks either directly or through MFs. This has led to bigger moves in the small- and mid-cap stocks compared to large-cap stocks. Globally, economic growth is slowing down and there are a few economies such as India that are recording growth. Inflation is falling. Interest rates are also about to fall this year. These developments make domestic investors' participation vital in any market. It not only reduces volatility but also gives an opportunity to create a sustainable wealth pool to domestic investors.

Improving awareness about investing, increasing disposable income and the need to provide for long-term goals such as retirement, health-care expenditure and children's education should encourage more retail investors to invest in equities. **DB**

The author is executive vice president (research), Nuvama Professional Clients Group

‘Markets Can See More Price Correction in the Coming Quarters’



Sunil Koul, executive director (Asia Pacific portfolio strategy, global macro research) at Goldman Sachs, in an exclusive interview with **Ayaan Kartik** and **Neeraj Thakur**, talks about the valuation situation in India and how foreign investors are looking at increasing their bets in the equity markets

► **There have been concerns about the valuations in the Indian markets. What do you think about the premium at which Indian markets are trading compared to others in the Asian region?**

The valuations of Indian markets look high compared to the rest of the region. However, with MSCI India trading at 22 times forward PE right now, we think Indian equities are ‘richly’ valued, but not ‘overvalued’.

We think 20 times is probably a fair value for Indian equities based on the macroeconomic environment. However, relative valuations of Indian markets are not at the peak currently. Indian markets are trading at a 65% premium to the rest of Asia, way below the peak of 100% which we have observed about 18 months back.

What helps India is the consistent earnings delivery, which offsets the higher valuations. If one entered 2023 with the assumption that Indian markets were overvalued, they would have missed the ~20% rally. Profits last year grew by 20%, suggesting that the gain in large caps was entirely driven by underlying earnings growth. This consistency in earnings delivery is why we are positive about the India story.

► **Since Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has flagged concerns about small- and mid-cap segments, broader markets have seen corrections. How do you see the concerns over froth in these segments?**

Strong domestic inflows drove a lot of these stocks higher. Both valuations and positioning for some of these companies got crowded. So, the correction we saw is quite healthy because it took out some excesses in the markets.

One of the core views we had coming into the year was that markets would rotate from small and mid caps to large caps. This seems to have already happened in the past five weeks.

Looking at how much these segments ran up in aggregate, we sense that the markets can see more price or time correction in the coming quarters.

► **Markets have seen a sharp rise in the number of retail investors. What has been the effect of this retail story on Indian equity markets?**

We have been seeing strong SIP [systematic investment plan] flows for a while now. If you look at inflow from domestic institutional investors, they have been higher than FII [foreign institutional investor] numbers for three years in a row. It has been a few years already where the strong domestic flows are more than offsetting the weakness in the foreign flows.

We think some of it is secular because of this broader theme about the financialisation of household savings. In general, the Indian household is still under-invested. Households have around 6–7% ownership as a percentage of their balance sheets in equity markets, which is lower than the 15% average we have for the rest of the region. I

AN FII TYPICALLY TENDS TO BE FOCUSED ON LARGE CAPS. FOR RETAIL [INVESTORS], THEIR FLOWS ARE GOING INTO THE MID- AND SMALL-CAP SPACE. BOTH ARE RAISING EXPOSURE IN THE INDIAN MARKETS ON THE BACK OF STRONG FUNDAMENTALS

think there is still room to grow.

This is offsetting weakness from foreign flows. It is also causing much lower volatility. During global risk-off moves, markets do not move much because retail investors buy on the dips.

► **Is there any difference in how foreign and retail investors read the Indian markets? Not everybody is aware of every fundamental parameter used to gauge stocks?**

An FII typically tends to be focused on large caps. One of the reasons why we feel markets will rotate towards large caps is that foreign inflows will improve.

For retail [investors], their flows are going into the mid- and small-cap space. There is a huge divergence here. However, both are raising exposure in the Indian markets on the back of strong fundamentals. Foreign investors have a constraint in terms of liquidity in the small-cap space. A lot of companies in Make in India and energy transition themes are in the mid-cap space so FIIs are exposed to those themes and stocks.

In addition to retail investors directly investing in the stock markets, a lot of money is finding its way through mutual funds via the SIP route. So, there is a part of retail money being invested on the back of strong fundamentals.

► **Individual investors have been dealing in the futures**

and options market which is speculative in nature. How big a threat is this?

It is not a systemic concern for two reasons. One, we do not think a lot of the trading in these segments is happening on the margins. Two, the overall delta exposure in the system is not high because the bulk of activity is in the contracts that are expiring the same day. In this scenario, the chances of systemic risk from this segment to the broader markets are less.

► **What themes do you expect will dominate in 2024?**

Last year was one of mid and small caps in India. This year will be about large caps. If you look at it from a factor lens, what has been working for India is ‘size’ factor—i.e. mid and small caps—but also the momentum and value factors.

We also think that investors will shift focus towards more quality pockets of the market. Hence, high-quality companies with strong balance sheets, cash flows and higher ROEs [return on equities] will start to do much better. There will be churning in the market. What is also encouraging is that over the past month or so, we have also seen foreign flows coming back in.

The reality of the Indian markets is that if you look at foreign ownership or foreign positioning in India, it is still relatively conservative, towards the lower end of its historical range over the past decade. There is strong room to grow. **OB**

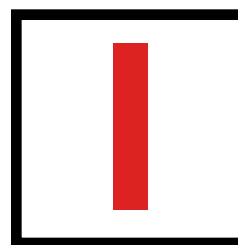
HOUSE OF CARDS

At 8.4%, India's GDP surpassed the expectations of analysts of almost all dispositions. But are GDP numbers hiding a bleaker story? It is not just the missing private money, there are more devils in the story

» Parth Singh



Photo: Shutterstock



India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate for the December quarter of the fiscal year 2023-24 has astounded observers, reaching 8.4%, a figure that even the Reserve Bank of India was not expecting. Currently when eurozone economies are stagnant and China, the second-biggest economy, faces headwinds, India's growth is perhaps the only bright spot in a world racked by geopolitical tensions.

"Robust 8.4% GDP growth in the third quarter of 2023-24 shows the strength of Indian economy and its potential. Our efforts will continue to bring fast economic growth which shall help 140 crore Indians lead a better life and create a *Viksit Bharat*," Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on X (formerly Twitter).

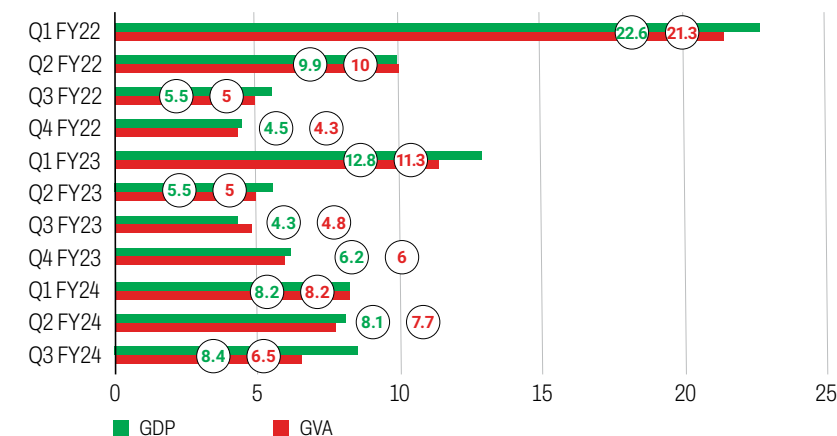
There has been considerable debate regarding the reliability of GDP data in recent quarters, with critics suggesting potential inflation through methodological jugglery. The latest data sets have received similar criticism, with some pointing to the disparity between gross value added (GVA) and GDP.

While GDP is a measure of the total value of goods and services produced within a region's borders, GVA is the value producers add to the goods and services they buy, and thus provides an insight into the raw economic output within the country. Mathematically, GVA is calculated by adding subsidies to the GDP and subtracting indirect taxes (GST).

In the December quarter of

WIDENING GAP

Usually, there is not much difference between GDP and GVA figures. However, in the December quarter of 2023-24, the disparity between India's GDP and GVA figures reached a 10-year high



Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

2023-24, the disparity between India's GDP and GVA figures reached a 10-year high. During the recent quarter, while India recorded a GDP growth rate of 8.4%, its GVA grew by only 6.5%—reflecting a significant divergence of 190 basis points.

"The wide gap [between GVA and GDP numbers] follows from a surge in growth of net indirect taxes to a six-quarter high of 32% in this quarter, which is unlikely to be sustainable," says Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ratings agency, ICRA.

In the December quarter, the Centre's subsidy burden decreased to less than half from the same period a year ago, leading to a 190-basis point difference between GDP and GVA. However, placing excessive emphasis on this gap is fussing over inconsequential.

Even with a 6.5% growth, India remains ahead of competing economies. But the devil lies in the detail.

Missing Private Sector

The remarkable GDP numbers for the December quarter were fuelled by the manufacturing, construction

and utility sectors. Manufacturing grew 11.6% year-on-year this quarter, while construction and utility were up 9.5% and 9% respectively.

In emerging markets, witnessing these sectors firing on all cylinders should be cause for celebration. But that is not the case with India. You guessed it right, the spoilsport yet again is the missing private sector. While you have heard this story before, we are adding a few new layers of data for you. And the picture is definitely more worrying than just the absence of big-ticket private investment.

A look at the Index for Industrial Production (IIP) gives a hint as to what ails the Indian economy. The growth in IIP fell to 3.8% in January from 4.2% recorded in December. The January 2024 data on manufacturing, which covers 23 components, shows that 12 segments have still not managed to cross their pre-pandemic levels recorded in January 2020.

The manufacturing segments which are doing well include basic metals and transport equipment, driven by government capital expen-

diture (capex). But manufacturing of consumer-facing goods like computers and furniture is yet to see a revival, the IIP data reveals.

Data from credit rating agency CareEdge Ratings shows the government had a 63.1% share in projects under implementation and a 52.4% share in projects completed in the first half of 2023–24. The government’s contribution to India’s growth story is visible on stocks that are dependent upon government capex.

State-owned units in various sectors like capital goods, railways and energy have ruled the bourses in the past one year. Bharat Heavy Electricals (BHEL) has delivered 229% returns in the past one year. Rail Vikas Nigam, the construction arm of the railways ministry, has seen its stock price jump by 277% in the past one year. Indian Railways Finance Corporation’s (IRFC) shares jumped over 398% during the same period. A similar story played out in the energy sector where power generator NTPC

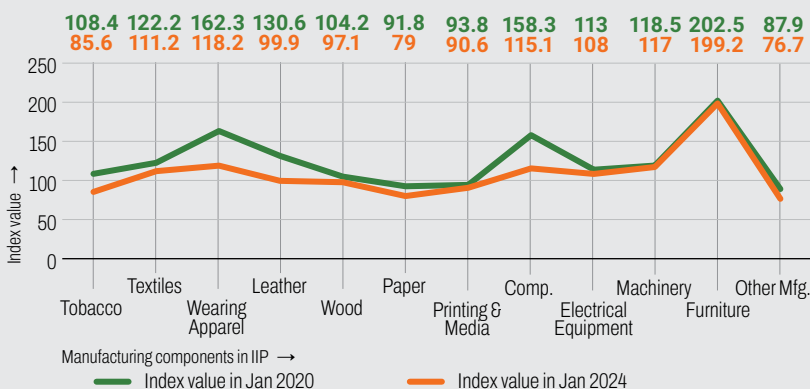


The sustainability of investment growth in the medium term hinges significantly on the strength of consumption growth

RAJANI SINHA
CHIEF ECONOMIST, CAREEDGE

STILL PLAYING CATCH UP

The growth in IIP fell to 3.8% in January from 4.2% recorded in December. Several sectors are still to regain their pre-pandemic levels



Source: MoSPI

and Coal India have seen their shares gain over 92% and 104% respectively.

The Union government has made a big capex push in the past few years. Allocation in investment rose from Rs 3.4 lakh crore in 2019–20 to Rs 11.1 lakh crore in 2024–25, a surge of 226%. On the other hand, private investment went up to only Rs 8.5 lakh crore in 2023–24 from Rs 5.5 lakh crore in 2019–20.

“This substantial increase [in capex] in recent years is central to the government’s efforts to enhance growth potential and job creation, crowd in private investments and provide a cushion against global headwinds,” said Nirmala Sitharaman, Union finance minister while presenting the Budget in 2023. The follow-up question to the finance minister is why has this substantial capex push from the government for the past decade failed to invigorate private investment.

This question is baffling economists as well.

Tepid Demand

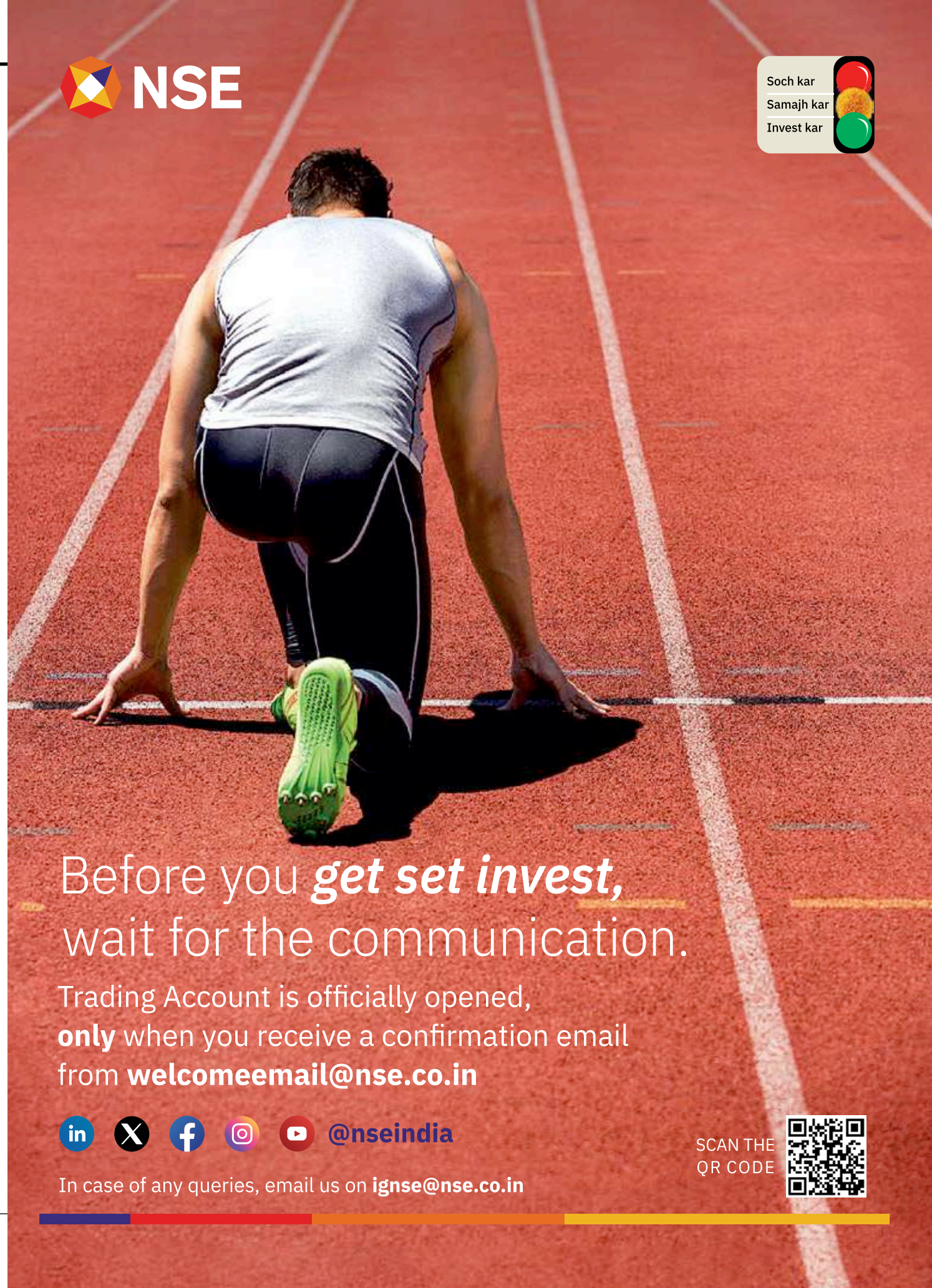
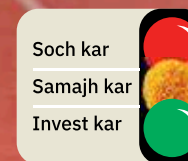
Dharmakirti Joshi, chief economist at credit rating agency CRISIL, believes although conditions for private sector investments have become conducive in recent years, a broad-based recovery still not happening after 10 years of massive capex push is a cause for worry.

“The pick-up in private sector investments is buoyant in sectors such as steel and cement which are linked to government’s infrastructure spending and housing sector pick up. Industrial policies like the PLI [production-linked incentive] are also bringing in some investments, in sectors like pharma and electronics. We expect investments in other new age segments like advanced carbon composite batteries, electric vehicles, semiconductors to pick up soon. Private investment is very gradually getting broad-based,” he says.

For now, it is the government that is driving India’s growth. But to sustain the momentum, it is imperative that the private sector steps in. But New Delhi has news! The Centre says private sector investment has begun.

“Now, that the private investments are happening at scale, the lower borrowings by the central government will facilitate larger availability of credit for the private sector,” said Sitharaman in her Budget speech.

“Perhaps the government has



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more information than we have. They know who is approaching them for various approvals. When that fructifies and starts showing in the numbers, then we will be on the same page,” says Devendra Kumar Pant, chief economist at India Ratings and Research.

One of the reasons that explains lagging private investments is the tepid demand in the Indian economy. In the December quarter, the private final consumption expenditure (PFCE), a measure of the final consumption of goods and services by resident households, showed a growth rate of 3.5%, substantially lower than the headline GDP number—8.4%—for the same quarter.

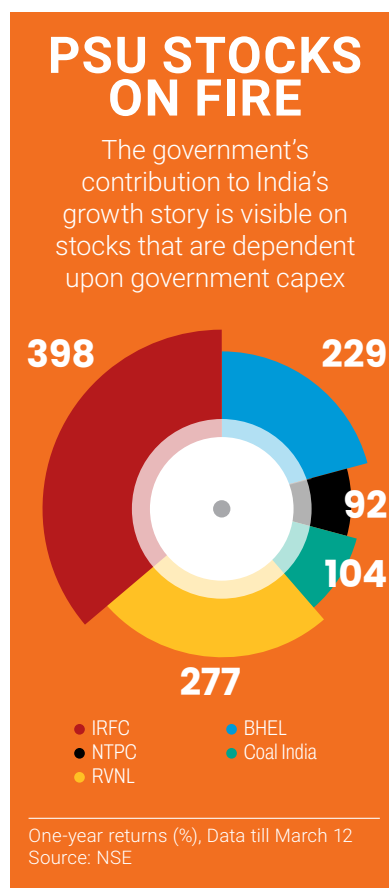
This seems to be an anomaly. Consumption growth is typically at the same level as GDP growth or slightly lower, according to Pronab Sen, India’s former chief statistician.

The relatively low consumption number comes at a time when net financial savings of households were recorded at nearly a five-decade low of 5.1% of GDP in 2022–23.

Economists at Nomura, a brokerage, say the Indian economy still relies heavily on public expenditure, while private expenditure and consumption remain restrained. Moreover, the firm said in a note that underlying growth needs to be analysed to see the true picture. It looked at core GDP, which is GDP without valuables, inventories and discrepancies. The data reflects how private consumption expenditure, government expenditure, export-import and fixed capital formation grew in a specified period.

Nomura’s data showed that in the third quarter, core GDP slowed to 4% from 4.7% in the second quarter. This reflected a similar trend in the slowdown recorded in GVA. “The moderation in core GDP growth and in GVA growth suggests growth remains uneven,” the note said.

Based on these numbers, econ-



omists are of the view that the increase in incomes is not in line with the growth story, and has resulted in weak demand, making India non-lucrative for private sector investment.

The wages of agriculture workers and non-agriculture workers in rural areas experienced minimal yearly growth of 0.6% and 0.3%, respectively during the first half of 2023–24, according to data by India Ratings. In contrast, urban wages surged by 5.6%, while corporate India witnessed a robust growth of 7.9%.

“The sustainability of investment growth in the medium term hinges significantly on the strength of consumption growth,” says Rajani Sinha, chief economist at CareEdge.

Debt Burden

What should worry all the backers of the India growth story is the fact that the Centre has accumulated a

substantial debt on its books to keep the GDP growth at an enviable rate. India’s debt-to-GDP ratio has gone over 82% in 2023 from 70% in 2018. The Centre has benefitted from rise in GST collections at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.9% in the past five years, but it is unlikely to sustain it in the long run.

A significant increase in debt burden can be a factor for recession in any economy. Countries such as Greece and Argentina faced crises due to unsustainable levels of public debt stemming from excessive borrowing and economic mismanagement. Argentina’s public debt-to-GDP ratio jumped from 54% in 2001 to 153% at the end of 2002, while Greece’s public debt levels equated to over 155% of GDP in 2008.

India’s fiscal deficit estimate in 2023–24 is 5.8%, down from 9.2% in 2020–21. According to the Union government’s fiscal consolidation glide path, it would want the deficit to come down to 5.1% in 2024–25.

The government’s fiscal pipeline is drying up. In the interim budget presented in February this year, the Centre increased the budget for capex by just 17% at Rs 11.1 lakh crore for 2024–25 compared to a CAGR of 30% between 2019–20 and 2023–24. The limits of government capex are beginning to show.

An economist, speaking on condition of anonymity, cautioned that India could attract scrutiny from global investors if the government fails to maintain fiscal conservatism, especially following the inclusion of the country’s bonds in the JP Morgan Emerging Markets Bond Index and Bloomberg Bond Index.

The expansion of India’s exposure to global investors occurs as the impetus driving growth momentum may diminish. Weak private consumption, which consequently hinders private investment, has emerged as a significant flaw in India’s growth narrative. **OB**

OUTLOOK BUSINESS



MINNIE BODHANWALA



SATYAJIT BOSE



NARESH TREHAN



NITA AMBANI



LAKSHMI RAO



UDAY KOTAK



RUPINDER MALIK



BARKHA DUTT



NEHA SUNDESHA



MEEHIR KULKARNI



RIDHIMA NARULA



AMITABH KANT



ANEEL MURARKA



RONAK CHIRIPAL



KANTILAL KOLI

Change Makers

LEADERS OF NEW AGE INDIA

In the bustling corridors of India’s contemporary landscape, a revolution is underway—a revolution led by a cohort of dynamic and visionary individuals who are reshaping the very fabric of society. These individuals, aptly dubbed as “changemakers,” are the driving force behind the country’s transition into a new era of progress and innovation. In this feature, we delve into the stories of these remarkable leaders who are spearheading change across various sectors

CHANGEMAKERS: Leaders of New Age India

In the vibrant tapestry that is India, a new era is being woven by the hands of determined and innovative leaders. These changemakers are not just participants in the narrative of progress but are the architects shaping the future of the nation. Their contributions span across various sectors such as technology, education, environmental sustainability, and social entrepreneurship, marking the dawn of a New Age India.

The Catalysts of Innovation

At the forefront of this transformation are the tech innovators and entrepreneurs. They are leveraging technology to address long-standing challenges, bringing about social and economic changes. From fintech startups democratizing access to financial services to edtech platforms making quality education accessible to remote areas, these leaders are redefining what's possible.



Uday Suresh Kotak
Founder,
Kotak Mahindra Bank

“We need to see many flowers bloom. And I'm not a believer that a few companies should define India's destiny, We need broad-based growth of the Indian economy, with many winners.”

Naresh Trehan

Founder Chairman,
Medanta The Medicity



“Good medicine will make good business but good business does not make good medicine. So you never lose sight of your core goal, which is to deliver the highest end of healthcare that can be provided anywhere in the world at the most affordable prices so that more and more people can actually benefit from it.”



Nita Ambani

Founder,
Reliance Foundation

“Nita Ambani Quote I am extremely optimistic about India. I believe that in the next 25 years, they're going to do much more than what we did in the last 75 years.”

Social Entrepreneurs: The Fabric of Change

Social entrepreneurship in India has seen a significant rise, with leaders focusing on solving complex social issues through innovative solutions. Whether it's through providing affordable healthcare, improving sanitation, or empowering marginalized communities, these social entrepreneurs are making a profound impact. Their work is not just about profit but about creating a societal impact, reflecting the ethos of New Age India.

Education: The Keystone of Progress Education is another critical area where changemakers are making significant strides. By integrating technology and focusing on skill development, these leaders are preparing the next generation for the challenges of the future. Initiatives to improve literacy rates, promote STEM education, especially among girls, and vocational training programs are crucial in building a resilient and skilled workforce.

The Path Forward

The leaders of New Age India are characterized by their resilience,

innovation, and a deep-rooted desire to make a difference. Their work transcends the traditional boundaries of business and social service, embodying the spirit of a rapidly evolving India. However, the journey is far from over. It requires collective action, sustained effort, and an unwavering belief in the potential of India.

As we stand on the brink of this new era, the stories of these changemakers inspire us all to contribute to the nation's progress. Their legacy is a testament to the fact that with passion and perseverance, it is possible to shape a future that reflects our highest aspirations and dreams for India. The leaders of New Age India are not just changing the narrative; they are inspiring a movement, one that promises to carry India towards an unprecedented era of growth and prosperity.

Amitabh Kant

India's G20 Sherpa,
Former CEO, NITI Aayog



“India's startup ecosystem has risen to become the 3rd largest globally, but our sights are set higher. To claim the Number 1 spot as envisaged by PM we must focus on robust corporate governance, deep tech and mobilising domestic capital from insurance firms, pension funds, and high net individuals. We need Indian resources fuelling startups, along with a push for greater women led Startups and VC.”

NEHA KAMANI SUNDESHA- HEAD COACH-SEVEN HATS CONSULTING

“The need to help kids and parents de-stress has never been higher. And we continue to insist - if you search for your seventh hat, and believe in yourself, in the unique stardust that makes you different, nothing can stop you. Ever.”



Rather than pressure it is the love and self-acceptance of who they are as people which has created this enabling environment. Exam fever, navigating the career choice landscape, your first job interview... It's a story, a stress-filled path all of us have walked. Little surprise then that education and career consultants have mushroomed across the country in response to this burgeoning market. Standing head and shoulders above many of them is Seven Hats, an inspirational and leading education and careers consulting firm. Powered by its standalone non-competitive approach to guiding children and young adults to success, rooted firmly in mindfulness. Self-reflection, and slowly developing and accepting their own potential, it has created a special niche for itself in this space.

Helmed by Founder & CEO Neha Kamani Sundesha, Seven Hats Consulting has been imbued with healthy doses of her own experiences to create a realistic framework for the firm's counselling programmes



As memory serves her, she recalls enjoying every step of that journey, never worrying about what was next, and really unleashing the various aspects of my potential through a meandering, beautiful pathway. “I was always very curious about the idea of innate potential and decided to start Seven Hats in 2012, to dedicate wholeheartedly to this cause and mission in society,” she says.

Education, career and life counselling are the three pillars on which Seven Hats has staked its reputation as a leading education and careers consulting firm. Ms Sundesha's confidence in the off-beat path she has chosen also stems from her invaluable experiences working with over 500 professionals from around the world, with aspirants as diverse as Private Equity investors to entrepreneurs and creative artists, to help them achieve their goals.

Seven Hats operates across the Undergraduate, Masters, MBA, and Career Change verticals. The programmes bear the stamp of her experiences of living and working across the world-from exploring history, economics, comparative literature and theatre at UPenn before finally pursuing a major in Mathematics and working at Bear Stearns, Investment Banking, in New York City and at the World Bank in Washington DC Ms Sundesha has also travelled worked in an ed-tech company in Silicon Valley, started by a Stanford Professor.

Under her steerage Seven Hats treads the most off-beat path to align with

candidates educational and career success. Its template is quite opposed to the prevalent world where numbers, statistics, rankings continue to weigh down the creative potential of kids. Its mindful approach and propensity for handholding to ensure fantastic results are driven by its stand on serving as personal coaches and using motivation, intellect and emotional well-being to help people reach their full potential. Over 1000+ children and young adults in the past 10 years have leveraged the counselling sessions to step into leading Ivy League schools like Harvard Business School, Wharton, Stanford, Columbia, MIT. Undergraduate programmes are being pursued by their clients at Brown, Penn Cornell, Berkeley, Johns Hopkin. We have a seven leadership consulting program working with corporate leaders for executive coaching powered by the Seven Hats mindset.

Amongst its clientele are 14-year-old students to 50+ professionals looking to upskill themselves holistically to stay relevant in today's rapidly changing world Knowledge and skills are critical components to prepare to enjoy life's journey-and Seven Hats shines the torch on the many benefit's that can accrue along the way with a mindful approach.

“The need to help kids and parents de-stress has never been higher. And we continue to insist if you search for your Seventh Hat, and believe in yourself, in the unique stardust that makes you different, nothing can stop you. Ever.”



The Mission Hospital, Durgapur



● **Dr. Satyajit Bose**
Chairman & Senior Cardiac Surgeon, The Mission Hospital, Durgapur

How a Cardiac Surgeon is All Set to Lead the Best in Oncology & Organ Transplant

His pioneering work in Cardiac Surgery and entrepreneurship efforts over the years has won many plaudits and global recognition for Dr. Satyajit Bose.

Andal is a tiny census town in Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal. Never heard of it? Well, you will, soon. Why? Because it is going to have one of the most futuristic Cancer, Organ Transplant Super speciality Hospitals in the country. Something that is modelled on the iconic Hospitals in the US and UK. But why Andal? A small town tucked away in Bengal? Well, to look for that answer you'll have to go a bit deeper. You'll have to start with the story of Dr. Satyajit Bose, the mastermind

behind this project, and understand why he believes that the future of healthcare is not just relegated to the cities, it needs to find its real purpose in the hinterlands where people have next to nothing when it comes to accessing a proper healthcare infrastructure.

Dr. Satyajit Bose worked hard in his early years to get into the best medical college in Kolkata. Secured a post-graduation in surgery and post-doctoral degree in Cardiac Surgery. Then dived into a phase where he could develop his craft as

a surgeon by assisting, observing, volunteering at every opportunity he got. There was this intense urge to push himself harder with every passing day, almost tirelessly. His surgical journey took him to various hospitals in India – The famous Breach Candy Hospital & Bombay Hospital in Mumbai, B. M. Birla Heart Centre and subsequently Apollo Hospital in Kolkata, where he was given the role of the Chief Cardiac Surgeon. This rise was meteoric. And somewhere Bose, now the renowned Dr. Satyajit Bose, realised

something was amiss. Something made him restless.

He realised he was doing surgeries for the rich and privileged. The ones who wouldn't flinch at spending huge amounts of money to get the best doctors at their disposal. But he realised soon that there's a large section of the society, people below the poverty line, the middle class living in the non-metropolitan areas, who still can't afford to access doctors and treatment that they need.

He started doing free heart camps in various parts of Eastern India, the first baby step towards what would finally become his true calling. He started opening up his access to people who never had any access to specialist Doctors like him. He realised that there is a giant gap. And people were losing lives unnecessarily. Cardiac care was just one thing. As a heart surgeon he saw millions of other things that were becoming fatal. This, kept him restless and edgy. He had to find a way to cure these people. Solve their problems. He quit his secure job at Apollo and decided to set up the first super specialty tertiary care hospital outside the city limits of Kolkata, a first in the Eastern part of India. He found a group of likeminded people in Durgapur, people like Tarun Bhattacharya, Samit Chatterjee and Siddhartha Banerjee, who shared the same passion and interest towards this and forged a partnership that became the foundation of The Mission Hospital, Durgapur.

Today, The Mission Hospital, Durgapur is now a 550 bed, NABH accredited hospital, catering to people across Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, North Eastern States, Sikkim, Nepal and has even extended to SAARC countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Afghanistan, etc. It's ranked as the 4th best Cardiac hospital in India. But this was just the tip of the iceberg for Dr. Satyajit Bose. Soon, he realised that there was a lacuna in the treatment of eye problems. A lot of patients were travelling to the southern part of India for

complex problems of the eye. Most centres in Eastern India were local ophthalmologist led small set ups with primary focus on a basic service like Cataract. Now, the Cardiac Surgeon pushed beyond his domain of expertise and started acquiring



Dr. Bose has dedicated his life towards a service and he continues to build on it. Even if it makes him push beyond the realms of his own expertise as a Cardiac Surgeon. For a country that lacks access to the basic healthcare needs, especially for the larger population residing beyond cities and the metropolis.



the best talent and set up a real Super-specialty Eye Hospital, which is a final destination for all complex Eye problems. He christened it as Dvita Eye Hospital, and opened access to people all across the Eastern part of India. In just about a year, Dvita has become equipped to offer treatments that can give the best of eye centres in the country a run for its money and has become the 10th best Eye Hospital in India. It already has cured 60000 patients, done more than 5000 surgeries and run more than a 100 free camps.

The mission to bring the best of healthcare to the doorstep of everyone who needs it, is the engine that runs the initiatives that Dr. Bose embarks on. Based on the same philosophy, he initiated the construction of a state of the art Cancer and Organ transplantation unit spread across a 10 acre plot in Andal at the Bengal Aerotropolis area in Kazi Nazrul Airport, Durgapur - A one-of-a-kind oncology care centre modelled on international standards for the people of the entire country. He went across all the best hospitals in the world and US to understand what it takes to build a large facility like the hospital he is building at Andal. And since then there has been no holds barred. He is ensuring that this Cancer hospital and organ transplant unit has nothing but the best of equipments and facilities that are available globally in super speciality outfits and has deployed a team of experts to bring this dream alive.

Dr. Bose has dedicated his life towards a service and he continues to build on it. Even if it makes him push beyond the realms of his own expertise as a Cardiac Surgeon. For a country that lacks access to the basic healthcare needs, especially for the larger population residing beyond cities and the metropolis, Dr. Bose is literally like a messiah - A man who is fuelled by his vision to reach out to the larger community, diagnose their ailments, give proper medical and surgical care and alleviate suffering from their lives.



“Forging A Path of Unparalleled Distinction in The Realm Of Law.”

Rupinder Malik is a Partner and an Executive Committee member at JSA, a top tier law firm in India. Rupinder has nearly three decades of experience and is a Corporate/M&A and white-collar crime investigations lawyer. She is also the Vice Chair of IBA (International Bar Association) – LFMC Committee and Chapter leader of India Chapter of WWCD. Prior to JSA, Rupinder was at Baker McKenzie.

● **Let me begin by asking you if it is an exciting time in India today, because there's so much going on in the M&A and white-collar landscape. Considering the stability and initiatives of the current government. It must be exciting?** Indeed, it is an exhilarating time. The current government

has introduced several reforms aimed at enhancing economic growth and ensuring corporate governance and transparency. Amid global challenges, India's economy stands out as a beacon of growth, outpacing some of the world's major economies. Despite geopolitical tensions

● **Rupinder Malik**
Partner and an Executive Committee member, JSA

and economic pressures abroad slowing down mergers and acquisitions (M&A) momentum, and parliamentary elections on the horizon, India's sectors like aviation, FinTech, defense, space, manufacturing, pharma, and healthcare remain poised for a promising outlook in 2024.

Also, the legal community is at the forefront of addressing an increasingly sophisticated array of economic offences, from cybercrime, money laundering, and corruption to financial frauds, which are becoming more nuanced due to technological advancements and global financial integrations. The government's stance coupled with the judiciary's interpretation of laws, the legal ecosystem is being challenged and enriched. This not only enhances the scope of legal practice in white-collar crime but also contributes to the broader

objective of maintaining business ethics in India's growing economy.

I think the role of legal professionals has never been more critical, presenting unparalleled opportunities for contributing to India's legal evolution and tackling the multifaceted challenges that lie ahead.

● **Given your involvement in numerous transactions, how do you interpret the trend's contribution to industry growth and innovation?**

The trend towards increasing M&A activity, especially in technology, healthcare, and e-commerce, has been a key contributor to industry growth and innovation in India. As someone deeply involved in facilitating these transactions, I have witnessed first-hand on how these transactions not only bring in fresh investments but also foster the exchange of knowledge and technology, pushing companies towards innovation and competitiveness on a global scale.

I would like to emphasize that the Indian legal landscape is evolving rapidly, with regulators being highly active. And so, it is imperative that we concentrate on implementing the best legal solutions that align with innovative transactional structures while also ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

● **Can you share the moment or experience that made you realize you wanted to pursue a career in law?**

At the time when I had to make career choice between journalism and law, both of which piqued my interest deeply, I found myself in a dilemma that many young aspirants face - selecting a path that would define my career and shape my future. Having cleared the entrance tests for both fields, I sought advice from my father, hoping for some direction. His response, simple yet profound, was, "You need to take your own call." This advice, though seemingly straightforward, prompted me to introspect about where my true capabilities and interests lay.

After much thought, I realized that the attributes I possessed were more in line with the discipline of law rather than journalism. This self-reflection led me to choose law, a decision that has not led to a single day of regret.

The journey in law has been both challenging and rewarding, filled with continuous learning and opportunities to make a significant impact. It has affirmed my belief that taking the time to understand one's strength and passion is crucial in making career decisions that align with one's inherent attributes.

● **As an expert in the realm of law, what are the emerging legal issues or trends, and how do you anticipate them shaping the future?**

Currently, the legal issues and trends include the implications of emerging technologies, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria in corporate governance, and the evolving landscape of international trade and data privacy laws. These trends are not only reshaping the legal profession but also the way businesses operate globally. The emergence of AI, aviation laws and space laws are expected to be very interesting and exciting for lawyers



Never allow the fear of failure to deter you from taking on new challenges. Embrace every opportunity to step out of your comfort zone and find your true potential"

in near future.

The integration of emerging technologies in businesses, especially blockchain, AI, and IoT, is raising complex legal questions around data privacy, intellectual property rights, and liability. The challenge is to develop legal frameworks that can accommodate the rapid pace of technological advancements while protecting the rights and interests of all stakeholders.

Similarly, the increasing emphasis on ESG criteria signifies a shift towards more sustainable and ethical business practices. This trend is likely to lead to more stringent regulations, shaping a future where businesses are not just evaluated on their financial performance.

In international trade, the ongoing changes in trade policies, tariffs, and cross-border transactions due to geopolitical tensions and economic alliances will necessitate adaptive legal strategies.

● **If you were to distill your experiences and expertise into a motivational message for law students aspiring to corporate law, what would be the core takeaway you'd want them to remember?**

As a first-generation woman in the legal profession for nearly three decades, my journey has been reinforced by a profound belief in self, positivity, and the conviction that there is no substitute for hard work and perseverance. To all the aspiring law students, aiming to make their mark in corporate law or any legal field, here is my message: Believe in yourself, in your unique abilities, and in the difference you can make. Never allow the fear of failure to deter you from taking on new challenges. Embrace every opportunity to step out of your comfort zone and find your true potential.

In a world that often underestimates the power of positivity and self-belief, I truly believe that with determination, passion, and a positive outlook, there is nothing you can't achieve.

Trendsetting Leaders Playing a Pivotal Role in Altering the Healthcare Narrative in New Age India



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 Bodhanwala**
CEO, Wadia Hospitals

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

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

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



Dr. Minnie possesses strong domain knowledge in implementation and execution of business strategies, ensuring high-quality standards in service delivery, identifying control enhancement modules

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

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.

“The New Generation of Entrepreneurs is Revolutionizing The Business Ecosystem in India.”



● **Ronak Chiripal**
CEO, Nandan Terry Pvt. Ltd.

- **What inspired you to venture into a new project despite the success of your current businesses?**
Since my student days, my goal has been to set up my own entrepreneurial venture. I wanted to venture into a product that is in the textile domain but not covered by Chiripal Group. Thus Nandan Terry came into existence in the niche towel segment in 2016. Despite stiff competition from established players, Nandan Terry is today one of the top five manufacturers of terry towels in India and has even forayed into non-conventional geographies across the US, Japan, the UK, West Asia, and Australia. The company has been certified by reputed certification agencies for its processes, manufacturing facilities, employee practices, and customer services and is creating new benchmarks in the bath line segment in the textile industry.
- **How does Nandan Terry leverage cultural nuances in its branding to engage with markets both within India and overseas?**

At Nandan Terry, we recognize the importance of cultural nuances in branding to effectively engage with diverse markets, both domestically and internationally. Our approach involves a deep understanding of local customs, preferences, and traditions, which allows us to tailor our branding strategies accordingly. Whether it's through our product design, marketing campaigns, or customer interactions, we strive to resonate with our target audience on a cultural level, fostering stronger connections and brand loyalty.

- **How does China's presence in the terry towel industry impact your strategic planning?**
The Indian Terry Towel industry faces competition from countries like China and Bangladesh. Their presence in the terry towel industry undoubtedly influences our strategic planning. We closely monitor market dynamics and the competitive landscape to identify opportunities and challenges. While the scale and efficiency present formidable competition, we leverage our strengths in innovation, quality, and customer-centric approach to differentiate ourselves. Our strategic planning involves continuous adaptation and agility to navigate the evolving industry landscape while staying true to our core values and commitment to excellence.
- **With the growing consumer preference for sustainable products, how is Nandan Terry adapting to this trend?**
As the demand for sustainable products continues to rise, Nandan Terry is dedicated to meeting this trend head-on. We recognize our responsibility to the environment and society, and thus, sustainability is deeply embedded in our business

ethos. From sourcing eco-friendly materials to implementing energy-efficient manufacturing processes and promoting ethical labor practices, we are committed to minimizing our environmental footprint and contributing to a greener future. Our ongoing efforts in research and development focus on creating innovative, sustainable solutions without compromising on quality or performance.

- **What wisdom would you impart to individuals embarking on their first entrepreneurial venture?**
To aspiring entrepreneurs embarking on their first venture, I would advise the following:
 - Stay true to your passion and vision, but remain adaptable and open to learning.
 - Surround yourself with a diverse team of talented individuals who share your values and complement your skills.
 - Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth and never underestimate the power of resilience and perseverance.
 - Finally, always prioritize integrity, transparency, and customer satisfaction, as they form the foundation of long-term success in any entrepreneurial journey.

Nandan Terry remains committed to delivering excellence and innovation in the textile industry while upholding the highest standards of corporate responsibility. Our company will also continue innovating in towel design and product development with an increased focus on self-developed, technology-driven OSMOSE towels, which provide better functionality and aesthetics due to their superior quality.”

Visionary Female Entrepreneurs Shaping India's Business Landscape

Ridhima Narula's vision for expanding Meethi REET overseas is founded on the idea of sharing Indian traditions through the universal language of sweets



● **Ridhima Narula**
Founder, Meethi REET

- **What inspired you to embark on the journey of entrepreneurship, particularly in the sweet industry?**
From an early age, I was captivated by the art of confectionery, thanks to those traditional grandmother recipes and techniques for crafting mouth-watering Indian desserts. This childhood fascination eventually led me to experiment with these recipes in my own kitchen, driven by a deep love for the craft. Initially, my sweet creations were meant to be shared with family and friends during special occasions and festivals. The overwhelming joy and appreciation I received from my loved ones fuelled my desire to explore this passion further. It was this drive to preserve the rich cultural heritage of Indian sweets while infusing them with my own creativity that laid the foundation for Meethi REET. As the business flourished, I realized the need to expand our operations. I built a team of dedicated staff, training them single-handedly to deliver exceptional sweets to our customers. With their support, Meethi REET ventured into catering services, online orders, and even opened a quaint little sweet shop which has now expanded into 4 stores nationally and internationally.

taste, texture, and overall product quality became a top priority. This necessitated optimizing our processes, providing comprehensive training to our team members, and implementing rigorous quality control measures. Additionally, navigating through regulatory requirements and logistics presented its own set of obstacles, especially as we ventured into new markets. Ensuring compliance with food



One of the greatest lessons so far is the significance of resilience—it's what transforms hard work into a powerful force for moving forward.”

- **You frequently address themes of female empowerment and inclusiveness. Could you expand on your views and initiatives in this area?**
As a female entrepreneur and the driving force behind Meethi REET, I am deeply committed to the cause of female empowerment and inclusivity. At Meethi REET, we recognize the immense safety standards, obtaining necessary permits, and managing intricate supply chain logistics demanded meticulous planning and meticulous attention to detail.

- **potential of women and strive to provide them with opportunities for economic and social empowerment. Ultimately, our goal is to create a workplace where everyone, especially women, feels empowered to reach their full potential.**
- **You've expressed your vision to take 'Meethi REET' (sweet traditions) to a global level. Can you share your strategic plan on achieving this global expansion?**
At Meethi REET, our vision is to share the rich traditions of Indian sweets on a global scale. Our plan involves collaborating with cultural organizations and participating in international food festivals to introduce our sweets to diverse audiences. With our recent entry into the global market and the opening of our first international outlet in Dubai, UAE, we are excited to embark on this journey of cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Our ultimate goal is to leave a lasting impact by sharing the richness and diversity of India's culinary heritage with the world.
- **As an accomplished entrepreneur, what guidance would you offer to those embarking on their entrepreneurial journey?**
My advice to those starting is rooted in my own experiences and the lessons I've learned along the way. Firstly, embrace resilience - setbacks are inevitable, but they only serve to make us stronger. Stay true to your vision, even when faced with obstacles, and remember that every challenge is an opportunity for growth.

An Oasis Amidst The Urban Desert: Dr Aneel Kashi Murarka's Philanthropic Legacy

Aneel Murarka's legacy is not just in the projects he has funded but in the lives he has changed, the hope he has instilled, and the model of compassion and resilience he embodies for future philanthropists.

● **Dr Aneel Kashi Murarka**
Managing Director,
Mirachem Industries



In the bustling metropolis of Mumbai, amidst the clamor of business and the pursuit of success, stands a beacon of altruism and compassion: Dr Aneel Kashi Murarka. As the Managing Director of Mirachem Industries, Dr Murarka's entrepreneurial acumen is matched only by his fervent dedication to social causes. Over the past three decades and more, he has carved out a legacy of philanthropy that transcends mere charity, enriching lives and communities across India.

At the heart of Dr Murarka's philanthropic journey lies a deep-seated commitment to effecting tangible change. Through his esteemed social organizations, Ample Mission and the Samarpan – C B Murarka Charitable Trust, he has spearheaded a myriad of initiatives aimed at uplifting the marginalized communities, empowering women, fostering education, enhancing healthcare, employment creation, short films and sanitation. He built many public utility infrastructure projects like crematoriums, AC bus stands, temples, libraries, multi-purpose auditoriums, lady police

quarters, lawyer's chambers, water fountains and public toilets. Yet, his philanthropic ethos extends beyond mere financial contributions; Dr Murarka champions a holistic approach, leveraging partnerships and implementing sustainable solutions to address societal challenges effectively.

In an era where transparency and accountability reign supreme, Dr Murarka epitomizes the modern philanthropist. With a keen eye for impactful outcomes, he has overseen the execution of over 130 social projects on different concepts and still counting, each meticulously tailored to meet the diverse needs of India's diverse populace. From supporting transgender communities to aiding acid attack survivors and empowering tribal communities, Dr Murarka's interventions resonate with a profound sense of empathy and purpose.

As a champion of the common man, Dr Murarka remains steadfast in his pledge to alleviate the plight of the underprivileged. Recognizing that access to essentials such as education, employment, healthcare, and food security remains elusive for

many, he remains unwavering in his commitment to bridging these gaps and fostering inclusive growth.

Dr Murarka's philanthropic journey is not merely a solitary endeavor but a continuation of a rich familial legacy rooted in selflessness and compassion. Inspired by the altruism of his grandfather, the late Chiranjilal Murarka, and the benevolence of his father, Kashi Murarka, Dr Murarka embodies a generational commitment to social responsibility. Now, with his son, Sidhaant Murarka, following in his footsteps, the Murarka family's philanthropic endeavors are poised to transcend temporal boundaries, leaving an indelible mark on future generations.

In a world fraught with uncertainty and disparity, Dr Aneel Kashi Murarka stands as a beacon of hope, illuminating pathways to a brighter, more equitable future. Through his unwavering dedication to philanthropy, he not only honors the past but also shapes the destiny of generations yet to come, proving that true wealth lies not in material possessions but in the transformative power of giving.

Breaking Barriers: The Journey of A Successful Woman In A Male Dominated Landscape

A motivational case in point is Lakshmi Rao, who established Solvix Focus India. She obtained her B.Sc. in Chemistry from Allahabad University in 1994 and went on to earn an MBA in HR from Symbiosis.



The evolving role of women in business is exemplified by individuals like Lakshmi Rao, the visionary founder of Solvix Focus India. Lakshmi's journey is a testament to the transformative power of perseverance and determination. Done directors program in advanced technology with World council of directors.

Motivated by the pervasive issue of unemployment, especially among women, Lakshmi Rao founded Solvix Focus India in 2009. Despite societal norms that frowned upon women working outside the home, Lakshmi Rao persisted, transforming her small proprietary company into a leading private limited entity. Witnessing firsthand the struggles of freshers grappling with unemployment, particularly in families where women's employment was taboo, Lakshmi Rao was driven to action. This determination led to the establishment of Solvix Focus India, with a mission to combat unemployment through skilling services.

In 2012, Solvix Focus India began offering skilling services, specializing in the pharmaceutical and life science sectors. Despite initial skepticism and challenges securing financial assistance, Lakshmi's unwavering commitment saw the company onboard major players such as HCL and Mphasis. Notably, Solvix Focus India has successfully trained and placed candidates at esteemed companies like Workhardt BKC Mumbai, contributing to the growth and development of the

pharmaceutical industry.

As a business leader, Lakshmi Rao has encountered numerous challenges, including being dismissed or ignored when initially speaking out. Lacs of students provided training in free and given jobs till date. However, she persevered, overcoming obstacles with patience and a wholehearted



My next project is Skill University. Where graduates get skilling diploma or degree equivalent to a so-called traditional degree and get a job based on that were my efforts to change the education system too .

- Best Employee In Maruti Suzuki
- Best Personality Award A Mrs India 2016
- Pageant Mrs Asia International
- Iconic Business Women Of Years 2024 Award

● **Lakshmi Rao**
Founder, Solvix Focus India

commitment to her goals. Lakshmi Rao emphasizes the importance of working smart, embracing technological advancements, and persisting through ups and downs. Her focus on quality, persistence, and interest has been key to her success.

Reflecting on her journey, Lakshmi Rao shares valuable advice for aspiring women entrepreneurs. She encourages them to step out of their comfort zones, gain knowledge and experience, and embrace changes in the evolving work culture. Lakshmi's vision extends to expanding her business within her state, seeking individuals who share her vision to provide opportunities to others.

Her venture into the IT/ITES/ PHARMA Industry began in 2012, during which she assisted in placing numerous students. Today, Solvix Focus India is a leading skilling center for the pharmaceutical industry in Telangana. Lakshmi's accolades, including being recognized as Best Corporate Woman of the Year and receiving prestigious pageant titles, underscore her exemplary contributions to business and society.

In conclusion, Peddu Rao Lakshmi's journey with Solvix Focus India serves as an inspiration for aspiring women leaders and entrepreneurs. Through determination, perseverance, and a commitment to quality.



● **Dr. Meehir Kulkarni**
Chairman, Gravity Group

Energetic Young Pioneer Driving India's Progress and Setting New Milestones

Dr. Kulkarni, born on 4th June 1987, is the visionary philanthropist and Chairman of Gravity Group, one of the youngest entrepreneurs in India. Established in 2008, Gravity Group began its journey with the fitness industry

Dr. Meehir Kulkarni, born on 4th June 1987, is the visionary philanthropist and Chairman of Gravity Group, one of the youngest entrepreneurs in India. Established in 2008, Gravity Group began its journey with the fitness industry, spearheaded by Dr. Kulkarni. Under his leadership, the Gravity Fitness Club has flourished across India and expanded internationally.

The Gravity Mr. Universe Contest, a brainchild of Dr. Kulkarni, garnered immense success, attracting celebrities like the Great Khali, Ronnie Coleman, and Flex Wheeler, thereby catapulting the franchise into unprecedented fame.

Dr. Kulkarni's entrepreneurial endeavors extended beyond fitness into infrastructure with the establishment of Gravity Infrastructure. Committed to quality and sustainable development, Gravity Infrastructure focuses on responsible infrastructural development while preserving the environment.

Gravity Infrastructure has successfully developed Premium Residential Projects Like Grand Heritage in Wakad Pune & Grand Edifice in Kandivali, Mumbai.

Dr. Kulkarni also serves as the

Director of HASBER International, pioneering revolutionary initiatives like the First Mobile Concrete Batching Plant in India.

Diversifying further, Gravity Entertainment emerged as another segment under the Gravity Group umbrella.

Dr. Kulkarni's foray into film production yielded the Marathi feature film, A.B.C, starring renowned actors Suniel Shetty, Tamanna Bhatia & Ravi Kishan.

The Film was Credited with Big Names from the Indian Film Industry, Music by Legendary Music Directors- Sajid-Wajid, and most importantly it had



Recognized for his contributions, Dr. Kulkarni has received numerous awards, including the Pune Times Leadership Award, Udyog Bhushan Puraskar, and Times Power Men Award

the privilege to incorporate our Honorable Prime Minister Shree Narendra Modiji's Voice in the film. Gravity Entertainment had legal rights to do so with prior permission from the PMO promoting National Welfare Causes like "Beti Bachao- Beti Padhao". The film garnered acclaim and nominations at prestigious film festivals.

Gravity Entertainments Latest Update is the Upcoming Film Titled as "Aho Vikramma" Directed by Thrikoti Peta Protege of S.S Rajamouli the maker of Legendary Films like Bahubali, RRR and more. Music is again curated by Ravi Basrur, Music Director and Composer for the all time Hit "KGF" Franchise. The Film is almost ready for the Release with 7 Languages Pan India.

Dr. Kulkarni, through the Gravity Foundation, is dedicated to philanthropy, notably offering free ambulance services and redevelopment efforts, and has adopted Balhegaon in Sambhaji Nagar for rural development and welfare by the hands of "Shri Devendra Fadnavis Ji and Shri Ujwal Nikam Ji in Pune." He serves as the Chairman of BVCI-Board of Veteran Cricket India, aligning his vision with esteemed personalities like The Hon. Shri Nitin Gadkari the President of BVCI.

Sandhya Group, Where Excellence Sets The Standard

Sandhya Group is at the forefront of industry innovation, continuously setting new standards and addressing challenges with cutting-edge solutions. With a relentless focus on excellence and quality, this dynamic group leads by example, pioneering developments that not only meet but exceed the expectations and needs of the market.



● **Kantilal Koli**
CMD, Sandhya Group

Sandhya Group is deeply involved in the exploration of Industrial Chemicals, Agro Chemicals, Antioxidants, Phosphites, Phosphate esters, and international trading Defoamers. The journey began in 1984 and is still growing stronger with experience and time. Shri Kantilal Koli, a dynamic and foresighted individual, established Sandhya Group with a vision to manufacture Phosphorus-based chemicals. Born on March 1, 1948, he hails from the Koli community and completed his B.Sc from South Gujarat University, Daman, in 1971. Starting his career as a Production Chemist at United Phosphorous Ltd for six years, followed by a five-year tenure at Atul Product Ltd, he gained valuable experience in the chemical field. In 1984, he ventured into establishing a small chemical unit in Sarigam under Sandhya Dyes and Chemicals.

Sandhya was the first company to start a chemical plant in the newly developed Sarigam industrial estate, with support from GIDC and GSFC. The initial financial assistance from GSFC was solely based on technical expertise, without guarantees.

Recently, Shri Kantilal Koli was awarded the Maharashtra Gourav Award 2023 by Maharashtra Governor Shri Bhagat Singh Koshyari Ji, recognizing Sandhya Group as the "Best Chemicals & Agro Chemicals Manufacturer in India." The company's commitment to quality, consistency, and prompt delivery

has led to increasing demand in domestic and international markets. Serving diverse industries across 45 countries, Sandhya's products cater to leading multinational corporations worldwide. With advanced manufacturing facilities and state-of-the-art testing equipment, the company ensures quality chemicals with quick turnaround times.

With seven manufacturing plants strategically located in Gujarat, India, Sandhya Group has a strong product portfolio and an expanding distribution network. The focus remains on value addition through forward integration into various agrochemicals, industrial, and specialty chemicals, enhancing



The strategy focuses on sustained expansion through outstanding performance and adaptability in business. Prioritizing customer needs is essential, as it enables a deep comprehension of client requirements and market trends.

global brand presence.

Over the years, the group has grown with four strategically positioned facilities, offering a wide array of products, establishing a niche through vertical integration. The dedicated team ensures that manufacturing facilities meet international accreditation standards for exports.

At Sandhya, delivering quality products at competitive prices meeting global standards across Industrial Chemicals, Speciality Chemicals, and Agrochemicals is the ethos. Significant investments in building quality infrastructure have propelled Sandhya Group toward becoming a manufacturing powerhouse across the nation.

The vision is committed to consistent growth driven by superior performance and business agility. Customer-centricity remains fundamental, understanding client needs and market dynamics to deliver optimal solutions.

The mission is to remain independent while operating as a global team, diversifying business beyond borders, and enhancing lives through products.

Core values include innovation, excellence, and integrity, ensuring Sandhya Group remains synonymous with world-class products, cost-effectiveness, prompt deliveries, and environmental sustainability.

Embracing Technology: Revolutionising Education Across Disciplines

Technology is transforming education in India, bridging gaps and providing personalised learning experiences, empowering students for the digital future.

By Amit Shanbaug

Technology is fundamentally reshaping education in India, revolutionising traditional learning methods and opening up new avenues for teaching and learning. With over 820 million active internet users and smart-phone penetration rate close to around 71 percent, India boasts of

being one of the largest online markets globally. This digital revolution has led to a surge in the adoption of online learning platforms.

The e-learning market in India is projected to reach \$14.85 billion by 2028, growing at a CAGR of 21.56% from 2024 to 2028. The government has launched several initiatives to promote digital learning, including the Digital

India campaign and the National Education Policy 2020, emphasising the use of technology in education.

India has also seen a surge in EdTech startups. As of February 28, 2024, there are 15,374 EdTech startups in India. These startups are driving innovation and providing learners with access to high-quality educational resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the adoption of online learning in India, with schools and colleges shifting to remote learning platforms to ensure continuity of education. As a result, there was a significant increase in the usage of online learning platforms across the country.

Through digital platforms, students now have access to a vast array of educational resources, breaking down geographical barriers and democratising access to knowledge. Interactive online lessons, virtual labs, and educational apps offer personalised learning experiences tailored to individual needs, fostering a deeper understanding of subjects.

Realising this importance, Outlook Business organised a first of its kind Edtech Summit at Hyderabad. The Edtech Summit - Transforming Education with Technology was the first edition of the education conclave and was organised at the Sheraton Hyderabad on 29th February 2024.

With a focus on integrating various technological tools and resources, the conclave sought to enhance the teaching and learning experience, propelling traditional education methods into the digital age.

Esteemed speakers, included top



(Clockwise from above) 1st Panel Discussion; Mr Shrikant Sinha, CEO of Telangana Academy for Skills and Knowledge (TASK); Ms Suchetna Ray, Editor, Outlook Business



educators, policymakers, and industry leaders, convened to discuss key topics shaping the future of education.

The event began with the welcome address of Ms Suchetna Ray, Editor of Outlook Business.

This was followed by a key note address by the Guest of honour, Mr Shrikant Sinha, CEO of Telangana Academy for Skills and Knowledge (TASK).

He highlighted their innovative approach to skill development. Established in 2014, TASK has trained over nine and a half lakh students and 18,000 faculty members across various industries. Their ladder learning approach ensures students receive comprehensive training from the first year itself, making them industry-ready upon graduation. In partnerships with over 80 organisations and programs spanning 110 disciplines, they have become a hub for employment opportunities, with over 500 companies advertising entry-level jobs through their portal. He explained that they collaborate with colleges and

corporations, tailoring training programs to meet specific industry needs.

The first panel discussion titled - 'Tech Tools and Future of Examination Processes' was moderated by the Associate Editor of Outlook Business, Amit Shanbaug. The panel discussion brought together respected experts from academia to talk about how technology is changing education, especially in exams and evaluations. They shared their thoughts on the growing use of digital tools in these areas.

Dr. Gomathi Devi L, Vice Chancellor of the Maharani Cluster University highlighted the transformative potential of digital valuation in not only

saving time but also mitigating malpractices, underscoring its efficiency and effectiveness. Prof. Dr. T Arumugam, Vice Chancellor of Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore spoke about the inclusive nature of digitalisation in examinations, pointing out its advantages in expediting result dissemination and enhancing accessibility. Prof. Ramesh Chandra, Vice Chancellor, Maharaja Surajmal Brij University brought attention to the practical challenges faced by institutions in implementing online examination systems, emphasising the importance of addressing infrastructure and affordability issues. Dr. Riyaz Basha, Registrar (Evaluation) Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences

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(Above and left) 2nd Panel Discussion; VSN Raju, Director & CEO, COEMPT EduTeck Pvt Ltd

technology, COEMPT EduTeck aims to mitigate challenges such as leaks, cheating, and fake degrees, ushering in a new era of efficiency and reliability in the examination process, he said.

The second panel discussion titled- 'Regulatory Frontiers: Navigating the digital landscape' was moderated by Vinita Bhatia, Editor- Startups at Outlook Business.

The panel discussion highlighted the evolving landscape of education technology and the importance of collaboration between private sectors and governments.

Dr. N R Bhanumurthy, Vice Chancellor, Dr B R Ambedkar School of Economics University explained the need for public-private partnerships (PPP) to democratise education and alleviate burdens on universities, urging technology players to consider scalability for wider accessibility. Prof. N S Nigam, Registrar, National Law School of Indian University spoke on the importance of distinguishing between traditional education and

shared insightful experiences from Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, showcasing successful implementations of digital assessment platforms and advanced surveillance measures to ensure authenticity and security. Together, the conversation emphasised how important it is to use technology to make education better. They also recognised the many different challenges we need to overcome to make sure everyone can benefit from it.

VSN Raju, Director & CEO of COEMPT EduTeck Pvt Ltd gave a small presentation on some of the latest trends and services in the industry. He

stated that COEMPT EduTeck Pvt Ltd, a pioneer in technology-enabled learning and examination solutions since 2001, under the visionary leadership of Mr. M.P. Chary, has revolutionised the Indian examination landscape. With an unwavering commitment to integrity, excellence, collaboration, and innovation, the company has served over 2000 colleges and 25 universities nationwide. Their forthcoming products, Digitab and DCPad, signify a bold leap towards paperless examinations, offering students a seamless and secure testing experience. By leveraging cutting-edge

executive programs in quality control measures, emphasising inclusivity in the latter. Dr. S Kadhiravan, COE, Periyar University, Salem stressed the significance of self-regulation in light of technological challenges, citing instances of unethical behaviour and financial pressures faced by universities, calling for innovative solutions like the adoption of digipads for examination processes.

D.P. Sreenivas, Co-founder of Duranc, in his presentation explained the evolution of their integrated video management and analytics solutions since their inception in 2014. With a firm commitment to providing cutting-edge technology made in India, Duranc has revolutionised surveillance systems by enabling centralised management and monitoring across diverse campuses. By leveraging artificial intelligence, their solution empowers existing cameras with intelligence, eliminating the need for costly upgrades. Sreenivas emphasised Duranc's focus on the education sector, while ensuring that campuses remain safe and secure, allowing administrators to concentrate on fostering the next generation of citizens. Through their innovative solutions, Duranc exemplifies the seamless integration of technology to enhance safety and efficiency across various industries, including education, he said.

The third panel discussion titled- Innovations in Ed Tech: Collaborative Solutions for Academic Excellence was moderated by Ms Suchetna Ray, Editor- Outlook Business.

The panel discussion featuring Prof. Kuldeep K Raina, Vice Chancellor, Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences, Dr. Korukonda Babji, Vice Chancellor, Dr YSRUHS, Vijaywada, Dr. Srinivasa Raghavan, COE, Bharathidasan University, Trichy, and Prof. Amiya Kumar Rath, Vice Chancellor, Biju Patnaik University of Technology (BPUT), Roukela shed light on the transformative impact of technology in education.

Prof. Raina talked about how the

costs of using technology in education can change over time. He suggested that we need to carefully consider different needs in education when using technology. Dr. Babji explained how important technology is in teaching medical students and caring for patients. He gave examples of how advanced tools like deep brain stimulation and digital pathology have improved teaching methods and patient diagnoses. Dr. Raghavan mentioned how technology has made education cheaper and more accessible. He also talked about how it helps with research projects like genome sequencing, where scientists work together on big projects. While, Prof. Rath praised how well technology has been used in exams. He thinks that combining traditional teaching with online courses can make teachers better and help students learn more. Overall, they all agreed that technology is changing education for the better in many different areas. Their insights highlighted the important role of technology in revolutionising education across diverse disciplines.

Overall, The EdTech Summit provided a comprehensive insight into the evolving landscape of education technology in India. From discussions on the dynamic nature of costs to the indispensable role of technology in

medical education and patient care, the summit highlighted the transformative potential of digital innovations across diverse disciplines. Speakers emphasised the importance of collaboration between private sectors and governments in navigating regulatory frontiers and promoting inclusive digital learning initiatives. The summit also showcased the growing adoption of online learning platforms, driven by increased internet penetration and government initiatives like Digital India. As technology continues to revolutionise education, it promises to democratise access to knowledge, enhance teaching methodologies, and foster collaborative learning environments nationwide, ultimately empowering students for the digital future.



(From top) D.P. Sreenivas, Co-founder, Duranc; 3rd Panel Discussion



In the David and Goliath battle for quick-commerce supremacy, underdogs like Blinkit and Zepto are winning against giants Walmart and Amazon. Instant shopping is not only heralding in a new era of convenience but is also rewriting the rules of the game



FAST-MOVER ADVANTAGE

» Mahima Sinha

T

he quick-commerce pie is getting bigger, but ecommerce giants are failing to grab a slice. Retail behemoths such as Amazon, Walmart, Reliance and Tata are used to eating

up big shares of the market. But in quick commerce, these companies have managed to take control of just about 12%.

The remaining 88% of the market rests with new age start-ups. Zomato-owned Blinkit holds 34.7% of the market share, Swiggy's Instamart 28.5% and Zepto 24.8%, according to Datum Intelligence, a market intelligence company.

And it is not as if the big players

are not keen on the contest. While it is true that many of them had initially called quick commerce unsustainable and the business model doomed to failure, the success of start-ups in the space has made bigger companies want to make a mark. But such attempts have had little success.

Take, for example, Flipkart, the Walmart-backed e-commerce giant. Flipkart is gearing up to launch a system to deliver orders in 10–15 min-

utes in around 10 cities. This is going to be the company's third attempt at quick commerce. Its earlier efforts, Flipkart SuperMart and Flipkart Quick, were shut down abruptly.

BigBasket is investing heavily in building its ultra-fast delivery arm BBNOW. Launched in 2022, BBNOW aims to deliver its orders within 18–20 minutes in over 20 cities.

Once one of India's biggest e-grocers, BigBasket's entry into the quick-commerce space came after it was acquired by Tata Digital in April 2021. In the two years since the launch of BBNOW, the quick-commerce platform has managed to secure around 9% share of the market.

Reliance-owned JioMart also attempted to venture into quick commerce but shut it down within a year. Dunzo, also backed by Reliance,

launched DunzoDaily—a quick-commerce platform, but even that failed to take off.

Path to Profitability

Quick commerce has not always been profitable. In the initial years, the start-ups were bleeding money. At the end of the third quarter of 2023–24, Blinkit clocked in a revenue of Rs 644 crore, up from Rs 505 crore the previous quarter, while its earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA)-adjusted loss reduced from Rs 125 crore to Rs 89 crore. The company reported a revenue of Rs 1,533 crore till December and has set itself a target of becoming EBITDA-adjusted breakeven by the end of the first quarter of 2024–25.

Similarly, Zepto saw a huge reduc-

tion in its net loss margin from 277% to 63%. The start-up expects to turn profitable at an EBITDA-level in the next two-and-a-half quarters. Initial public offering (IPO)-bound Swiggy, which turned profitable in 2023–24, expects Instamart to turn profitable in upcoming quarters. Swiggy generated a revenue of Rs 3,221.40 crore selling fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) via Instamart, an increase of 39.7% from Rs 2,035.6 crore in the previous fiscal year.

To turn profitable quickly, quick-commerce platforms are jumping into segments such as cosmetics and garments. *Unveiling India's Q-Commerce Revolution*, a report by strategy consulting group Redseer, says: "Quick commerce has been able to sustain the momentum triggered by Covid-19 between 2019 and

2022 by registering a 77% growth in gross merchandise value (GMV) last year. This is despite 2023 being a slow consumption year." The report goes on to say that quick-commerce platforms are not staying confined to fruits, vegetables, meat, staples and FMCG, but have ventured into the broader retail pie of beauty, electronics, home decor, wellness and other merchandise.

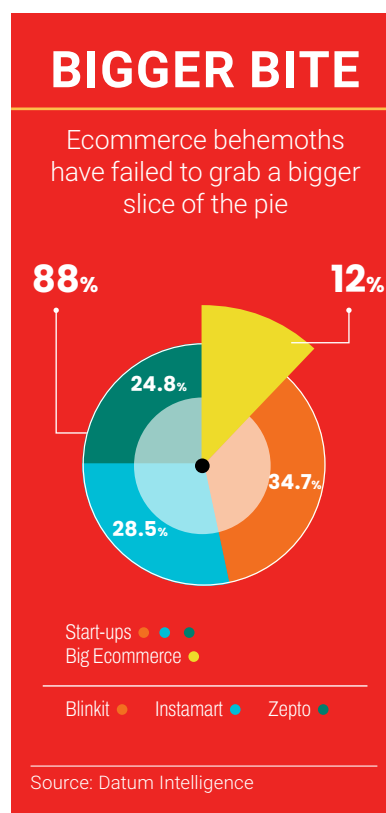
Turnaround Time

Blinkit says it takes around eight to 10 minutes to deliver an order. Zepto claims an average delivery time of 11.08 minutes with time taken to deliver an order ranging between 10 minutes and 25 minutes. Instamart delivers orders in 15–30 minutes, according to multiple data platforms. The 10-minute model of quick commerce stands on the shoulders of 'dark stores', storage units in urban areas that store and package products for quick delivery.

Quick-commerce businesses rely on their dark stores to manage an efficient supply chain by integrating technologies such as real-time demand sensing and dynamic pricing. The inventory in these dark stores shows up on the apps. The moment an order is placed, the nearest dark store gets a notification. Within two minutes, executives at the dark store pack the goods.

Simultaneously, a delivery partner, within a radius of 1–2 kilometres, gets an alert and reaches the store within a minute. The delivery partner then delivers the goods in another 4–5 minutes to locations typically within a 2-kilometre radius. The goal is to deliver the items to the customers before they pick up their phone again to track the order.

While quick-commerce start-ups count on dark stores, bigger players like Amazon and Flipkart depend on their big warehouses and fulfilment centres located in industrial zones to store inventory.



Quick-commerce businesses store nearly 6,000 stock-keeping units (SKUs) in their dark stores and 1,000–1,500 SKUs in local shops, a JM Financial report says. Warehouses of big companies, on the other hand, store lakhs of SKUs.

Thus, when an order is placed on Amazon, the availability of the item is checked at the nearest warehouse or fulfilment centre. Time is spent on scanning the barcode, labelling the product and packaging it for delivery. After that, a delivery executive picks up all orders for a particular locality and then delivers them. All of this takes at least a day and can even take up to a week.

Price to Pay

Quick deliveries, however, come at a steep cost. Zepto spends Rs 95–105 per order, according to a report in Moneycontrol.com, a business portal. Swiggy's Instamart spends between Rs 140 and Rs 145 per order, while

for Blinkit, the cost is around Rs 130–135, the same report says.

The costs had made players like Flipkart and BigBasket earlier say that 10-minute deliveries were loss-making and unsustainable. But now, even these companies are venturing into the dark-store model. Amazon started Amazon Fresh, a grocery-delivery platform, in 2020 that was able to process same-day orders. But even that platform takes at least two hours to deliver an order.

"The current demands are met with 25 Amazon Fresh fulfilment centres across 60 cities in 10 states," says Srikant Sree Ram, director of Amazon Fresh India.

One Step at a Time

While brands like Amazon, BigBasket and JioMart are making forays into the quick-commerce space, they seem cautious in their approach. One of the major problems for big e-commerce platforms venturing into quick commerce is the risk of lower average order values (AOVs). Storing specific inventories in units like dark stores can lead to lower AOVs, while holding a broad inventory can lead to unsold stocks. For example, the AOV on Amazon in the second quarter of 2023–24 was Rs 1,000 while the same for Blinkit was Rs 635, according to Vumonics Datalabs, a consumer data analytics company.

The quick-delivery model often caters to smaller, more frequent purchases which may not align with the higher AOV model of bigger brands. Additionally, bigger brands do not want to go head-to-head with quick-commerce start-ups because they prioritise a comprehensive range of products and services.

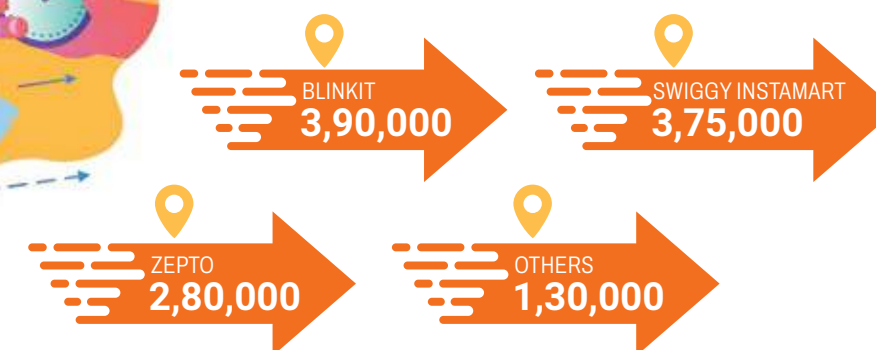
A strategic and sharp focus on their primary business enables them to maintain a broad market presence, says Roshan S. Bisht, co-founder and chief executive officer of Asort, an ecommerce-enabling platform. "The



Time period: Q2, FY23;
Source: Datum Intelligence

ZIPPY DELIVERIES

Daily orders served by quick-commerce players



big players like to co-exist in ecommerce and experiment with quick commerce, but do not specifically want to compete with players whose one and only focus is delivering within 10–15 minutes," he says.

According to him, players like Zepto, Blinkit and Instamart are restricted to Tier I and II cities, but brands like JioMart and BigBasket have wider reach and are available even in remote locations. Start-ups like Zepto cannot open dark stores in Tier II and III cities because of low demand, but bigger brands can open warehouses at such locations and deliver orders as per their convenience, says Bisht.

According to Jeetu Bairathi, partner at business and management consulting firm BDO India, quick-commerce companies and ecommerce companies work on different goals. "While the focus at quick commerce is to generate a higher AOV at the hyperlocal level, especially in Tier I cities, the focus at an ecommerce platform is to grow by onboarding new internet users and shoppers in Tier II and III cities," he says.

Moreover, bigger brands are hesitant to fully embrace the quick-commerce segment because they are aware of the advantage start-ups have when it comes to making quick decisions and pivot rapidly, according to Meher Patel,

founder of Hector, an ad optimisation platform for ecommerce businesses. "The nimbleness required to execute decisions quickly are crucial factors that distinguish start-ups like Blinkit and Zepto from larger players such as Jio Mart and Amazon Fresh," he says.

Future Perfect?

Since its advent, quick commerce has been seen as a challenging business model due to inherent issues of cash burn and dark-store management. Many start-ups in the business faced staggering losses at the end of the 2022–23. But industry experts predict that the Indian quick commerce market is on the brink of a revolution. They say the market will display a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 27.42% between 2023–24 and 2027–28, resulting in an estimated market size of \$9 billion by 2027–28.

A Bank of America report states that the top quick-commerce players in India have the potential to reach an estimated 25 million households, who are likely to go on to spend an average of Rs 4,000–5,000 per month. The estimate bodes well for quick-commerce players. To stay ahead in the race, start-ups are innovating quickly and finding ways to turn profitable. For example, Zepto recently launched Zepto Pass, a paid membership programme. The

Zepto Pass offers free deliveries and discounts to members. The company also introduced a platform fee of Rs 2 for select users. Some that do not charge a platform fee charge a nominal amount for deliveries, handling or convenience.

The real question for quick-commerce players is whether consumers are willing to pay for the convenience, says Vaibhav Arora, vice president of ecommerce at WOW Skin Science, a cosmetics brand. "Despite being a cost-sensitive market, India has adopted quick commerce. Consumers are ready to pay for it."

A recent report from consultants PwC, titled *How India Shops Online*, states that India's Gen Z prefers to make smaller-value purchases, prioritising quick delivery and is not particularly concerned about additional delivery charges. Nearly 50% of consumers in metros and Tier I cities value quick deliveries and the convenience they bring.

For now, quick-commerce start-ups need to keep up the momentum by expanding into higher-margin categories, increasing their AOV and enhancing unit economics through growth in dark stores in major cities. Ecommerce giants, on the other hand, will have to find ways to compete with start-ups in the quick-commerce space or risk losing out on business, especially in urban centres. **DB**



Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Deputy Chief Minister of Telangana addressing the Attendees

Nudging MSMEs Towards A New Era of Innovation

MSMEs are the “unsung heroes who keep our industries humming and our dreams soaring. It is crucial to recognize the global impact of the MSMEs,” Deputy Chief Minister of Telangana Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, who also holds the portfolio of Finance and Energy, stated at a well-attended ‘Outlook Business Spotlight – Indo Global Business Excellence Awards 2024’ ceremony held in Hyderabad.

As India’s economic growth revives and business confidence grows, the spotlight remains on the crucial micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which besides being one of the largest job creators, has 30% share in the country’s GDP and accounts for 50% of exports. During the pandemic, many MSMEs were badly hit, leading to cutting down of operations, liquidity crunch and layoff. Despite

many government schemes, some had to stop operations while many others barely survived, leading to downsizing of operations and staff. Despite all the travails, many are back on the growth path, charting greater successes, even as new startups enter the scene with innovative business models both in manufacturing and services sector.

Outlook Business Spotlight – Indo Global Business Excellence Awards

2024, has attempted to put focus on some of the MSMEs business leaders and organizations who have evinced exceptional prowess in their respective industries. These awards are a testament to the fact that these industry stalwarts have showcased remarkable acumen, leadership qualities, and exemplary strategic thinking, which have been instrumental in delivering sustainable growth and profitability for

their organizations. They have displayed new eras of innovation and development in their organizations, and in the process, redefined the rules of business while promoting unity and tenacity to push through times of uncertainty. The awards speak of this spirit and enterprise.

In his address to the delegates and awardees at a function held in Hyderabad, Deputy Chief Minister of Telangana Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, who also holds the portfolio of Finance and Energy, described the MSMEs as “partners in progress”. Citing the example of enterprises selling “secret spices” used in the world famous Hyderabad biryani, the minister stated that though they are small but they pack a punch as they are engines of innovation and creators of jobs and heartbeat of the state economy.

“In Telangana, we owe a great deal to the MSMEs. They are the unsung heroes who keep our industries humming and our dreams soaring. It is crucial to recognize the global impact of

the MSMEs,” Chief guest Vikramarka stated. As the global workforce expands, projections indicate that there will be a need for 600 million jobs by 2030. Highlighting the crucial role of MSMEs in job creation, governments worldwide have prioritized the development of MSMEs due to their immense importance particularly in the emerging markets where they account for creation of 7 out of every 10 formal jobs. On a global scale, MSMEs continue to account for a staggering 90% of business contributing significantly to employment and GDP. They serve as the backbone of societies, providing sustenance to livelihoods especially among marginalized groups such as working women, youth and vulnerable populations.

In India alone the MSME stands robust, boosting around 7 crore MSMEs, with around 3.9 crore registered entities, Vikramarka pointed out. Micro enterprises form the majority of the MSMEs, representing around 98.25% of the registered MSME entities. Small enterprises account for 1.5% of the registered enterprises and medium enterprises form a small

fraction at around 0.014%. These MSMEs collectively account for a remarkable 17.5 crore individuals, underscoring their significant contribution to India’s economy. In the past MSMEs were typically associated with the concept of factories, shop-floors, and basic toolkits. However, today the MSMEs have transcended these conventional boundaries and have embraced a new era of innovation. They are harnessing cutting edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and reaching unprecedented heights both figuratively and literally. “In Telangana, we witnessed MSMEs at the forefront of pioneering initiatives including advancements in biosciences, innovative packaging, utilizing solar energy, innovative water generation from the atmosphere, reshaping of rural e-commerce landscapes,” Telangana Deputy CM Vikramarka stated. “Our MSMEs are the driving force behind adopting ground breaking technologies, smart missions, artificial intelligence, catapulting our industries to unparalleled heights.” Vikramarka stated that Telangana government is in

the process of crafting an enhanced MSME policy designed to fortify the economy and provide it stability to be the backbone of the state economy.

Srinivas Rao Mahankali, CEO, T-Hub, Hyderabad, and Guest of Honour at the Indo Global Business Excellence Awards 2024, told the august gathering that though in the last one year, in headline numbers, funding has dried up dramatically. But “if you analyse, this has happened in later stage startups. A lot of investors are looking at paths to profitability. But early stage funding is still happening. Investors are being a little more choosy and careful. Earlier it used to be the fear of missing out. Now we have got to a point where you see some rationality in terms of valuation, etc. Good ideas even today get funded,” Mahankali stated.

He pointed to the fact that there is a lot of liquidity in the market. Investors across India are sitting on close to 7 billion dollars of funds looking for good ideas, good solutions, quality of the team, good execution, etc. “We are starting to see the emergence of deep tech funds which are willing to back startups, which earlier they would not,” Mahankali stressed.

On T-Hub’s plans, Mahankali stated that the company is helping fulfil the global ambition of our start-ups, while helping their counterparts in developed markets like the US, the UK, Australia, Germany, etc., explore opportunities in India. “At this point we are incubating with two different x’government entities under Innovate UK. We currently have 10 clean energy start-ups which are looking to leverage India both as a market and base for talent. We also have start-ups in the space sector and in the semiconductor space which are looking to come in,” he told delegates and awardees at the glittering event. T-Hub has also completed a couple of programmes with universities in Australia, which have a

Fireside Chat – Suchetana Ray,
Editor Outlook Business with Srinivas Rao Mahankali, CEO, T-Hub, Hyderabad

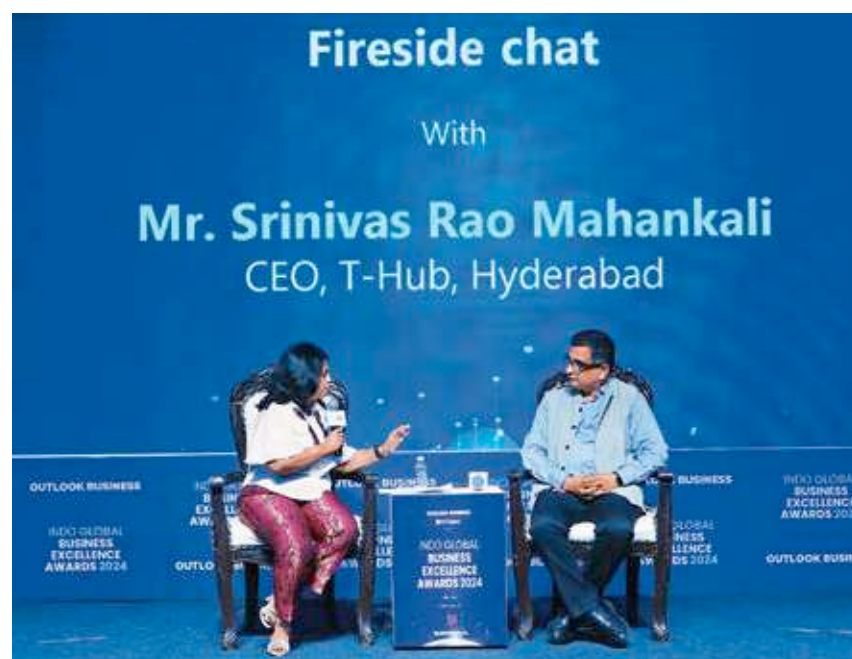
dozen of start-ups. A few months ago, the company hosted a team of about 15 entrepreneurs from Armenia. It has done similar programmes with Korea, Germany and Japan to help these start-ups to understand the regulatory framework in India and build a team here. T-Hub CEO shared that besides healthcare and life sciences, the company is looking at making Hyderabad the space tech capital of the world. Another area is defence as the company has 12 defense labs and a large supplier eco-system in the tech city. T-Hub runs a programme called IDEX with the government of India and already has around 37 startups in the domain of defense. Among the emerging areas, T-Hub is looking at sport tech. Next month, T-Hub is launching a Department of Science and Technology funded AI Centre of Excellence, which fits well with its ongoing work. The company already has 58 startups in AI already in the process of incubation. Some of the challenges before these startups are shortage of talent, access to computers and computer resources, both of these are being provided for. Also getting them working with clients for market access.

The well-attended gala event with

representatives from various sectors also heard a panel discussion on ‘Indian MSME sector: Fast-tracking Growth with digitization’. The participants included CEOs of companies that provide the knowhow and those who have or are investing in digitization, beyond just accounting.

Speaking from experience of working with a lot of MSMEs, Sandeep Goel, Managing Director, Moglix, a B2B platform, stated that out of around 63 million MSMEs in the country, 99% are micro units. “There is a very small portion that falls under small and mid-segment, which are tech ready. If you look at the tech infrastructure which India has created, and a lot has happened in the last 6-7 years, platforms like UPI, ONDC and GeM portal are all targeted at MSMEs – making the markets more accessible to them, making tech and financing available to them,” Mahesh stated. Unfortunately, they are addressing only a portion of the problem. For example through GeM you can access the opportunities that are available to you. On TReDS you can put your invoice and expect your payment early.

But the fact remains that India is a tough market as though huge, the



Christopher Blessing, MD - Caere India



Sandeep Goel, MD Moglix

buyers don’t want to pay so the margins are pretty squeezed. There are several layers so the MSMEs have to figure where the margins are going to come from. That is why there is a need to create more end to end platforms that take the MSMEs through the entire journey and not just addressing one portion of it. “To some extent we at Moglix are trying to play that role. We have created an entire supply chain of over 20,000 MSMEs who supply to us. Through our warehouses and logistics we take our products to the end consumers in different parts of the country. So while MSMEs are ready as the awareness is quite high – as we have

UPI, GooglePay, etc., and people use ecommerce platforms for B2C purpose, for the MSMEs to use it a lot more end to end infrastructure needs to come in place,” Goel stressed.

Christopher Blessing, CEO, Caere India Pvt Ltd, stressed that even within the mid segment, there are challenges about adoption even among those who realize its importance. He cited the example of companies like Caere India, which are more oriented to people services but not very high on technology. “As there are so many things available in the market that we need to go slow through trial and error processes. The result is so many of us

start off and slow down,” Blessings stated, stressing that when it comes to the micro players the education, the awareness and handholding is a big problem. For instance, while everyone is aware of digitization, there is still a huge gap when it comes to taking it forward.

K Kranti Kiran Reddy, Executive Director of Janapriya Group, a leading real estate development company in South India, pointed out that in his industry “we are struck somewhere with digitization meaning only a 3D model of a house or apartment, especially in the MSME sector, as the big boys have learnt to do it”. Though in the service industry there are a lot of tools to reach the customers but most companies/ enterprises have failed to adopt a lot of them. “I don’t know whether we need hand holding or not but it is a top down effort. It is the top management which has to gear itself up and decide to put the budget aside and make the implementation. Whether it is the top line you are trying to implement or the bottom line that you are going to save, it is the management that matters,” Reddy stressed. This problem is more so in a legacy industry, with the son taking over the business. “It is not an industry where we appoint CEOs, but an industry where land and



Attendees



K Kranti Kiran Reddy,
Executive Director, Janapriya Group

development and emotion is more involved, and things are taken care of within the family. In the case of MSME, somebody in the family has to be tech savvy to push things forward. It is a big space where mindset is an issue," Reddy admitted.

Dr. Mahesh M, CEO, Creaticity, a venture of Deepak Fertilizers & Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd, pointed out that in the retail space where they work, the company is in contact with a lot of companies in various towns and cities across the country including Jaipur, Jodhpur, Saharanpur, Moradabad, apart from artisan hubs in the South. "What we have discovered is that the artisans are very good at their work, which is primarily production. The balance part of the work - bar coding, packaging, sending it for organized retail - was something that was missing," stated Mahesh. The reluctance to be on-board with the latest in tech or the way the retail systems work, was challenging. Mahesh strongly advocated that more corporates probably need to come together and work on only mindset management so that everything falls in place as there are enough tech and

service providers out there who can help us.

"If there is a legacy issue, somebody in that family business has to be able to go beyond mobile and mobile use for basic stuff to absorbing tech.... There is a lot that needs to be done on the mindset. Some of us are trying to do it, but we have our own pressures and quarters to match. When that happens, this (tech absorption) takes a back seat," Mahesh pointed out. His solution is that the corporates need to come together to actually create a platform to change mindsets, which is going to be a big step, in fact generational.

Girish Avantsa, CEO, Accellor Software Pvt Ltd, agreed that such a step would be in the right direction. "When we talk about change management, in our language it is not just about MSMEs in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, but it is about change management processes in place," Avantsa stated. Pointing to the various government schemes enabling MSMEs to explore and try and get benefit from different tools available, Avantsa pointed out that the challenge is that there are no standard operating procedures to define these are the steps you need to follow to get from one point

to the goal. "Are we as a country training and adopting, making sure it is all pervasive across the landscape? This is where all the effort - private and public - needs to be put in to bring in corporates, because they are obviously the best. We should bring in VCs. The key is that there should be discipline in how we invest and the various schemes that are being adopted and funded to see how digitization is coming along," Avantsa stated. So while there are tools, technology and processes, in India it is the people who matter so we need more checks and balances.

Blessings pointed to a flaw with most companies in that "when companies slow down, like us, and we look back, we realize that companies don't set aside a budget to get a product or create a product to solve your problem". Due to lack of such foresight, companies are bound to hit roadblocks very soon. Post COVID, "now that we are getting back, we are correcting the course in the process of digitization. This time we are involving all the stakeholders including those who are going to use it. So we did that together with some design thinking methodology and quite a few ground crew and other representatives. The insights that came up were so very

different then if only the senior leaders had come up with solutions to the problems," Blessing pointed out.

Reddy pointed out that it is not just your team or employees who are important but also the implementation partners too. The challenge comes from the fact that while half of India's IT service industry is supporting companies in Europe, the US, Australia, etc., the competition is huge as the IT budgets of those companies are unimaginable. Therefore, when Indian companies go to a similar IT company to get solutions implemented with a smaller budget, "you are not a priority and as such you can't expect your implementation partner to put the best team for you. So it is important to have some knowledge of the processes," Reddy said.

In terms of the adoption of digitization and where we are in that particular segment, the tools and technologies are a medium or a means to an end. So adoption of digitization needs some handholding. There are a lot of areas where we can improve. Corporates can help by segmenting the problem into those segments where you can address them. What are the tools for marketing? What are the good markets for those



Dr. Mahesh M
CEO, Creaticity



Girish Avantsa
CEO, Accellor

tools? If in the supply chain, then you know how transparent the process should be to understand your inventory and where the purchasing cycle is.

Mahesh pointed to another emerging challenge - rise of D2C (direct to consumers), which is driven by MSME, who are closer to them and digitally enthusiastic - willing to absorb and so implement processes to ensure they are able to deliver products at the right time and right price. Thereby cutting off the middleman to reach the consumers. This is a huge revolution that is happening silently. Lot more

investment is happening in the D2C segment. Instead of legacy issues, corporates need to see what some of the family owned businesses are doing, some of which are doing up to 1000 transactions a day besides producing, packaging, shipping, delivering and getting their ratings. And see to it that they do so continuously. And see to it that they do so consistently.

The minister handed over the awards to 30 stalwarts of the MSME sector, honoring the achievements in their respective fields ranging from manufacturing, logistics, IT and other services.

Awardees of the Indo Global Business Excellence Awards 2024

Company Name	Person Name	Awardee Person Designation	Award Title
Pinnacle Blooms Network Unit Of Bharath Healthcare P Limited	Dr Sreeja Reddy Saripalli	Chief Strategist & CEO	#1 Autism Therapy Centers Network
Corporate Aesthetic Refurbishing Enterprise Pvt. Ltd	Christopher Blessing	Managing Director	Company of the Year (Facility Management Services)
Ek Design	Prajwal Degwekar	Founder	Artistry and Design Innovation in Furniture Manufacturing
Moglix	Sandeep Goel	MD	Asia's Greatest Brand of the Year
Brantford India	Prasoon Mishra	COO	Best Real Estate Aggregator Tech Innovation Award
Areteans Tech	Maresh Agarwal	CEO	CEO of the Year
IFINGlobal Group	Seshadri Vangala	Group CEO	CEO of the Year
EFC India Limited	Umeash Sahhaai	Founder & MD	Real-Estate as a Service Award
Biju Patnaik University of Technology	Prof. (Dr.) Amiya Kumar Rath	Hon'ble Vice Chancellor	Academic Excellence Award
Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences	Dr. Riyaz Basha	Registrar (Evaluation)	Academic Excellence Award
Gujarat Technological University	Dr. Viral H. Borisagar	Controller of Examination	Academic Excellence Award
TryThat.ai	Abhishek Narbaria	Co-Founder	Best Artificial Intelligence Innovation in Real Estate & CRM Award
Croissance Clinical Research Pvt Ltd	Satish Marukurthi	CEO	Quality Driven CRO of the Year
Accellor	Girish Avantsa	CEO	Company of the Year - Excellence in IT Services.
Radhey Constructions	Radhey Daggumalla Prasada Rao Daggumalla	MD & Chairman	Developer of the Year Award
BrandingEx Solutions Pvt Ltd	Rahbah Samha	CEO	Digital Maestro Award for Strategic Brilliance in Marketing
Speed Infra Developers LLP	K Shankar Reddy	Chairman	Real Estate Project of the Year- Constella
Mouri Tech	Anil Yerramreddy	Chairman & Global CEO	Enterprise Innovator CEO Award
D2K Technologies India Pvt. Ltd	V.K. Sudhakar	Director and Chief Operating Officer	Excellence in BFSI Software Solution
Creaticity	Dr. Mahesh M	CEO	Home Retail Brand of the Year
Chennai's Amirta International Institute of Hotel Management	R.Boominathan	Chairman	Hotel Management Institute of the Year
Jaipuria School of Business	Dr. Rajiv R Thakur	Director General	India's Premier Business School of Excellence
Blossom Multispecialty Hospital	Dr. Chandan Dash	Founder & CEO	Innovative Health Care Entrepreneur of the Year 2024
TCC Concepts Ltd	Vishal Sharma	Executive Director	Innovative Tech Product Company Award
BrandingEx Solutions Pvt Ltd	Syed Abdul Sattar	Founder	Digital Marketing Maestro Award of the Year
GUS Education India LLP	Shashi Jaligama	Managing Director	Outstanding Contribution to Educational Services
Janapriya Upscale	K Kranti Kiran Reddy	Managing Director	Pinnacle Leader in Real Estate Development
Radhey Constructions	Radhey Daggumalla & Prasada Rao Daggumalla	MD & Chairman	Project of the Year Award - Skye
MEDESUN® Medical Coding Academy	Dr Meriyala Santosh Kumar Guptha	CEO	Best Medical Coding Training Academy in India
Redbridz Realtors LLP	K Raj Prasad	Founder & CEO	Rising Star in Real Estate Development

Is Your Succession and Estate Plan Ready?

Throughout his career as a Professor in a reputed educational institute, Satish invested in land and upon his retirement, he had amassed quite a large property. Given that he and his wife had his handsome pension sum to fall back on, the couple were keen on leaving their real estate to their two children, a son and a daughter and for the same; they approached their CA for advice. It was at this juncture that they came to know about the aspect of succession and estate planning, an avenue which would enable them to optimally chart out the nitty gritty of their children's inheritance. If you are also considering transferring your assets to your successors, here is everything you need to know about the often overlooked landscape of succession and estate planning.

What is estate and succession planning?

The practice of succession planning involves the transfer of duties or property ownership from one individual to another, and the same is typically undertaken to safeguard the interests of the owner. It is often mistaken for estate planning, although both aim to secure and allocate assets to rightful beneficiaries, albeit with differing scopes. Specifically, succession planning entails determining or designating the individual who will take over a business upon the retirement of the owner or founder while estate planning revolves around managing and dispersing one's assets following death. Based on your personal requirements, you can opt for either or both of the options to ensure a seamless transfer of your assets to your successors.

Why is succession and estate planning important?

Now, you may wonder about the

importance of succession and estate planning – after all, your successors are likely to be privy to your desires about how your assets should be managed or distributed, in the event of your retirement or demise. This inherent knowledge and understanding among your successors may, in your opinion, be as binding as a succession and estate plan but data suggests otherwise. According to a report, 70% of generational wealth gets lost by the next generation, with 90% being lost by the time it reaches the generation after that, indicating the transient nature of wealth which is not enabled by necessary paperwork. Further, a survey indicated that over 80% of investors were worried about the smooth transfer of assets, whereas only about 40% had undertaken discussions with their successors, about their wishes for their assets.

In this scenario, optimal succession and estate planning can facilitate wealth preservation, ensuring the continuity of prosperity for both present and future generations, in addition to prompting the smooth transition of assets and responsibilities within families or businesses – thereby averting conflicts and enabling the precise execution of intentions. Further, estate planning extends beyond finances, encompassing guardianship decisions for minors or special needs dependents and fostering security amid uncertainty. By crafting comprehensive estate plans, you can also pre-empt legal challenges and reduce the risk of prolonged court battles even as utilising trusts and other tools can effectively shield your assets from potential legal threats.

Do you need estate and succession planning?

Every individual who plans to set aside an inheritance for their successors requires either estate or succession



Mr. Vidit Bhura CFP^{cm} & CTEP
Mr. Nitish Purohit CFP^{cm} & CTEP
Partners at JNV Financial Services LLP

planning but how should you choose between the two? Usually, when an individual possesses several assets or businesses, it is advisable to integrate both estate and succession planning to ensure a smooth transition both during their lifetime and after their passing. Alternatively, if your goal is to plan for your heirs, then succession planning becomes essential to ensure that your assets are distributed among your descendants, according to your wishes, after your death.

What tools can you leverage?

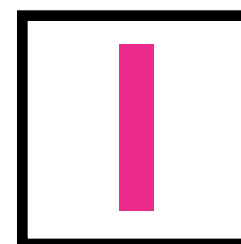
There are four popular tools which can come in handy while undertaking estate and succession planning – while a last will and testament allows you to dictate asset distribution after death, superseding intestate laws, a private family trust, established during your lifetime, can manage assets during and after life, aiding succession planning and protecting assets. Separately, a gift deed transfers your assets, during your lifetime, to the chosen beneficiaries even as a Power of Attorney authorises a trusted individual to manage your finances in the case of your incapacitation.

With these imperative aspects in mind, you can move ahead with your succession and estate plan in a seamless manner and ensure optimal wealth transfer to your inheritors.

AI'S NEW PORN POSITION

Deepfakes and artificial intelligence-generated images have breathed new life into the porn industry. Celebrities have become the latest victims and revenge porn is on the rise

» Nandini Keshari



Nora Fatehi, Rashmika Mandanna, Samantha Ruth Prabhu, Shraddha Kapoor, Tom Hanks and Sachin Tendulkar are among the celebrities who have had their deepfake videos or photos circulated online. While those of men are used to market various business plans, the women's are of a pornographic nature.

Disturbing Data

The numbers are a cause for worry: MrDeepFakes, a website, had 88.4

million visits in January alone, according to Semrush, a US-based online traffic analytics service. The number of synthetic adult videos has increased 24-fold between 2019 and 2023. Last year 143,868 new deepfake videos were uploaded online, according to Genevieve Oh, a South Korea-based independent data analyst for live-streaming platforms. "More deepfake videos have been posted online in 2023 than every other year combined," she says and goes on to add that there are over 40 dedicated websites and 61 "nudifier" apps—apps used to edit photos to show the subject without clothes—the majority of which have sprung up in 2023.

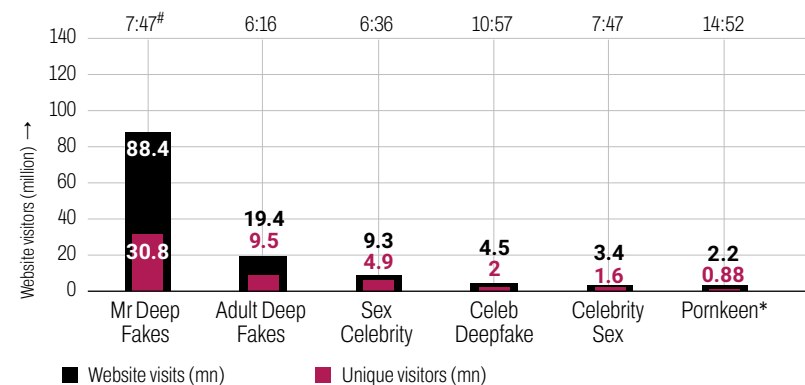
One of the worrying trends that have popped up in recent years is the proliferation of websites exclusively for celebrity porn videos. MrDeepFakes is the most viewed among these websites. It features faces of celebrities grafted over the bodies of porn stars. Anyone can post a paid request for a celebrity deepfake on the forum section of the website.

Another website, AdultDeepFakes, features actresses, YouTubers, televi-

GENEVIEVE OH
INDEPENDENT
ANALYST

THE DEEPAKE PORN UNIVERSE

The visits on a few of the most popular deepfake porn websites are in millions. Here are six of the most popular deepfake porn websites



*Pornkeen has deepfake porn content of Indian celebrities #Avg visit duration (mins) Data is for January 2023 Source: Semrush

sion personalities and other celebrities. In January, the website had 19.4 million visits, of which 9.5 million were unique visitors.

A report by Centre for International Governance Innovation, a think tank, says that 96% of deepfake images are pornographic in nature, and 99% of those target women. In a study titled *2023 State of Deepfakes*, Home Security Heroes, a team of online experts, found that 94% of the individuals featured in deepfake pornographic videos are affiliated with the entertainment sector.

Difficult to Detect

Swapping faces is not a new phenomenon. Earlier Photoshop and similar software were used. “The basic difference between the two technologies is that, with Photoshop, different images were combined into one image and in generative AI, a part of the image is actually generated. Therefore, it is a lot harder to detect,” says Abhinanda Sarkar, academic director for data science and machine learning at Great Learning, an online teaching platform.

The current technology is far more dangerous than the previous one

also because the similarity quotient between the real and the fake is so high that the difference is imperceptible to a human eye. “The major concern around deepfake is the way



Anyone can create a digital wallet with the fake email id and phone numbers to receive payments either from the wallet or in the form of cryptocurrency where we cannot track it back

UMMED MEEL
CYBER SECURITY PROFESSIONAL

it makes use of images of real people to generate either a hyper-realistic image or superimpose a real face on to another body,” says Darshana Sreedhar Mini, assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who has worked on the subject of pornography.

With deepfake technology, the creation of revenge porn videos is on the rise. Perpetrators use face-swapping websites or apps which use machine-learning algorithms and neural networks to swap faces. Photos or videos of the victims are taken from social media to record their voice, facial expressions and body movements and are uploaded on one of the AI-based tools.

The images created are then used to blackmail the target. The ransom amount ranges between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh, according to experts. If the victims do not give in to the demands, the images are usually circulated on social media.

There are ways perpetrators can hide their identity using secured virtual private network (VPN) connections. “To hide their IP [internet protocol] address, they use a VPN account. It is nearly impossible to track these criminals,” says Ummad Meel, a cyber security professional.

Payments are received in digital wallets and in cryptocurrencies, according to him.

Made in India

While India does not have a dedicated porn industry, the country is not far behind when it comes to adult deepfake video production

COST OF PRODUCTION

Subscription for some of the most popular AI-based pornographic image or video creation websites can cost just \$15 a month. Some websites provide the service for free

Sites/Apps	Monthly Subscription Cost	Payment Method
DeepFaceLab	Free	N/A
DeepSwap	\$9.99	PayPal/Crypto
Face Swapper	\$6.9 – \$19	N/A
PornJourney	€14.99	Credit cards/Crypto
PornPen	\$15	N/A
PornJoy	\$4.99 – \$7.99	PayPal/Credit cards/Crypto
SoulGen	\$12.99	N/A

Source: Respective sites

and consumption. “We do not have a full-fledged porn industry in India, except amateur porn as well as videos uploaded through aggregators,” says Mini of University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Although the exact number is hard to come by, dedicated deepfake porn sites based in India do exist. Pornkeen—featuring Bollywood actresses—catered to 22 lakh visitors in January. Another one, Bollyxxx, had 4.84 lakh visitors in the same month.

MrDeepFakes has a forum for catering to requests by users. The deal is often finalised on Telegram. An Indian creator on the website by the username @xkingmr charges Rs 500–650 for a video of a celebrity available in his stock. When asked to make a deepfake porn of a celebrity whose video has not yet been created, he demanded Rs 1,200–1,500.

A subreddit, Unstable Diffusion, earns \$25,000 a month from several hundred donors who create AI-generated porn which is then sold to consumers through the server’s Patreon account, according to technology news website TechCrunch. Many porn-generating platforms provide subscriptions through anonymous Discord or Patreon accounts. The subscription plans on these deepfake image- or video-generation websites go up to \$15 a month.

The majority of the income on MrDeepFakes is concentrated in the hands of the most active career deepfakers. “Within six months, one of the leading creators earned \$74,000 from 75 subscribers,” Oh says.

According to her, India is one of the fastest-growing regions in traffic. “Out of the total traffic on the top 40 dedicated deepfake-hosting websites, India represents 14.5% of the monthly traffic; Indian-targeting content [on MrDeepFakes] got over 33 crore views [between February 2018 and February 2024], representing 18.5% of the content,” she says.

Deepfake has become a way to earn quick money. As a result, multiple video tutorials and step-by-step guides for how to utilise these apps have emerged. They also provide recommendations and ratings to the available apps. The ease with which these can be created is evident in the Home Security Heroes report which says that a 60-second deepfake pornographic video can be produced for free in less than 25 minutes.

Handy Tools

The first pornographic deepfakes appeared in 2017 on social networking platform Reddit. Using the large number of images available on the internet, a user uploaded fake pornographic videos of celebrities. Gal

Gadot, Emma Watson, Katy Perry, Taylor Swift and Scarlett Johansson were the early targets. This gave rise to a dedicated subreddit called r/deepfakes where thousands of users shared AI-manipulated videos and adult content. Later, Reddit banned the subreddit.

Reddit continues to be a platform where the content and the technology are shared for others to use. While subreddit “deepfake” is banned, there are numerous AI-generated porn images and videos available on the platform. Although the platform has a “safe search” option to hide mature content, “AI porn” search returns more than a hundred communities facilitating the creation and distribution of AI-based pornographic images and videos. The subreddit, r/unstable_diffusion has a community of over one lakh members.

The messaging app Telegram also had a bot service. An October 2020 report by Sensity AI, a cybersecurity firm, says that the bot allowed users to create realistic nude images of women. Users just needed to submit the target’s picture to the bot which returned processed stripped images. Sensity found stripped personal pictures of at least 104,852 women were shared publicly.

According to an article in *Wired* magazine, the bot sent out a gallery



Pagariya points to a loophole. “This provision talks about recording without consent but in deepfake, the content is generated. This is the one major difference that is preventing [Section] 66E from being applicable in cases like these,” he says.

“Various other sections including Section 67 [dealing with transmission of obscene material], Section 67A [addressing sexually explicit material transmission] and Section 67B [related to child pornography] provide legal grounds for prosecuting such offences,” says Sanhita Chauriha, project fellow at Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, Delhi.

Still Not Enough

The Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021 provide grounds on which any content can be removed from a platform. Rule 3(1)(b)(ii) mandates that intermediaries observe due diligence where content falls under obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, invasive of another’s privacy, racially/ethnically objectionable or other such categories. But not every platform complies.

“The rules mention that if the platform is not complying and not replying within 30 days, then one can report to Grievance Appellate Committees. If you key in a name [on the website] that is not recognised as an intermediary by the committee, there is a very good chance that they will not even admit your appeal,” says Pagariya.

Section 8(5) of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 makes it obligatory on the data fiduciary (an entity that determines the means and purpose for the use of personal data) to protect all personal data in its possession from any breach.

With the proliferation of deepfake pornography, it is evident that the existing provisions are not enough. It demands urgent attention to protect individuals, especially women, from harm. **OB**

Given the size of the platforms and their user base, I think there is a pressing need that their response time is better, the reporting options are more simplified and are easily accessible for not just people who are working in this domain but also for the public at large

RAJ PAGARIA
PARTNER, TECHNOLOGY LAW, THE CYBER BLOG INDIA

of such images to an associated Telegram channel with almost 25,000 subscribers in the same month. Another channel, serving as a platform for promoting the bot, had over 50,000 subscribers.

Microsoft’s cloud-based software development platform GitHub also offers ways to engage in the business. DeepFaceLab, a deepfake-generating app, is hosted by the platform. Multiple versions of the DeepNude code, which powered the Telegram bot undressing women, were available on the platform in 2020, after which these versions were removed.

Putting Up Guard Rails

Social media platforms have started to put measures in place. X has restrictions on adult content and allows users to filter out sensitive content through its settings. Instagram allows users to report inappropriate content. Telegram allows users to report and block channels that contain pornographic content.

Despite these measures, the proportion of AI and celebrity deepfakes in the porn industry is increasing,

and non-consensual pornographic content is still prevalent on these platforms. Meel, the cyber security professional, says, “They cannot block the content upfront until they receive a complaint. It is partially controlled and manageable, it cannot be controlled 100% on social media.”

Raj Pagaria, partner, technology law at The Cyber Blog India, says “Given the size of the platforms and their user base, I think there is a pressing need that their response time is better, the reporting options are more simplified and are easily accessible for not just people who are working in this domain but also for the public at large,” he says.

In India, there are legal provisions such as Section 66E of the Information Technology Act, 2000 that can be used to safeguard privacy. There are other legislations preventing obscenity, combating pornography-related offences, preventing harming of reputation or spreading false information. Violators can face imprisonment for up to three years or a fine of up to Rs 2 lakh. However,

TiEcon Delhi 2024: Propelling India Towards AI Leadership and Startup Success

AMIT SHANBAUG

He recently concluded, TiEcon Delhi 2024 made a significant impact on India’s entrepreneurial landscape.

With over 2000 delegates, 100 speakers, and 50 investors in attendance, the event served as a symbol of innovation and resilience in the startup ecosystem. The spotlight was firmly on Artificial Intelligence (AI), with key stakeholders outlining ambitious plans to leverage this transformative technology.

Government officials set the tone by reaffirming their commitment to fostering innovation. S Krishnan, Secretary of MeitY, revealed plans to make AI graphics processing units (GPUs) available under the Rs 10,372 crore AI Mission within the next 18-24 months. This initiative aligns with India’s broader vision for AI, aiming to propel the nation into a global leadership position while ensuring ethical deployment and democratising its benefits.

The investment landscape also received a significant boost, with the Fund of Funds for Start-ups (FFS) committing Rs 9,500 crore to support new ventures. This infusion of capital is expected to catalyse innovation-driven enterprises and provide vital funding for startups through Alternative Investment Funds.

Vishal Dhupar, MD Asia South at NVIDIA, emphasised the potential for India to become a powerhouse in accelerated computing. India is well-positioned to benefit from this emerging market, moving from being a back-office hub to a global leader in AI innovation, while holding only a 1-2 percent share of the global data center business.

TiEcon Delhi 2024 wasn’t just about AI; it showcased the diversity and



L- Arvind Kumar, Director General, STPI, Middle -S Krishnan, Secretary, MeitY, Right -Alok Mittal, President - TIE Delhi-NCR & Co-Founder & MD - Indifi Technologies.

dynamism of India’s startup ecosystem. Geetika Dayal, Executive Director of TIE Delhi-NCR, highlighted the enthusiastic participation across various sectors, from space and geospatial technology to food, auto, and sports. The occasion served as a reminder of the strong entrepreneurial spirit that exists across the nation.

In a bid to further empower startups, TiEcon Delhi 2024 threw its weight behind the ‘Startup Mahakumbh,’ an initiative by the Government of India aimed at bringing together key players in the ecosystem.

Rajan Anandan, MD of PeakXV & Surge, emphasised the collaborative nature of this endeavor, uniting startups, investors, incubators, and industry experts to showcase innovation on a grand scale.

The event also shed light on the important role of regional influencers in shaping cultural narratives and driving consumer behavior in tier 2 and 3 cities. A report by Havas Media

Network India highlighted the growing influence of regional content creators, providing valuable insights for brands seeking to engage diverse audiences across the country.

TiEcon Delhi 2024 culminated in the celebration of entrepreneurial excellence, with awards honoring startups in the manufacturing domain, those demonstrating resilience, and outstanding CFOs. These accolades underscored the power of innovation and determination within the startup community.

Supported by leading business partners such as Startup India, Maruti Suzuki Innovation, and SAP, TiEcon Delhi 2024 epitomised the collaborative spirit driving India’s startup ecosystem forward. With a strong emphasis on AI, investment, and inclusivity, the event charted a course towards a future where Indian startups lead the way in innovation and impact.

‘Outlook Business was media partner for the event’



Panelists at the roundtable discussion, in Mumbai

Transforming Financial Services Through The Power of Data

In an age of rapid technological progress, businesses, especially in the financial services sector, are leveraging cloud computing to drive growth and improve customer satisfaction.

Amit Shanbaug

In recent years, the financial services industry has witnessed a transformative shift towards cloud-based solutions, revolutionising how institutions interact with their customers. This transition has been accelerated by technological advancements, evolving customer preferences, and the need for greater flexibility and scalability.

As financial institutions navigate this new terrain, understanding and adapting to the demands of the modern customer is paramount.

A recent roundtable discussion,

titled 'Cloud-Based Financial Services: Navigating the New Customer', organised by Outlook Business in collaboration with Snowflake, shed light on the transformative impact of cloud computing within the financial services sector. The event, held at the Jio World Convention Center, BKC in Mumbai on March 18, 2024, highlighted the important role of cloud technology in reshaping the landscape of financial services. As the industry evolves, the adoption of cloud-based solutions emerges as a driving force, empowering organisations to meet the changing needs of customers and markets alike.

Among the distinguished attendees, key stakeholders shared valuable insights into harnessing the potential of cloud-based financial services to enhance scalability, efficiency, and customer experience.

The event began with the welcome address by the Editor of Outlook Business, Suchetana Ray.

Jennifer Belissent, Principal Data Strategist at Snowflake spoke about the recurring challenge in the retrieval of data from customers across various industries, which is a common obstacle.

She stated that they have developed a solution centered around privacy-preserving collaboration, enabling individuals to access pertinent data without compromising its confidentiality, a concept aptly described as 'Data Clean Rooms'. This approach allows for targeted queries while ensuring sensitive data remains secure with its custodian. This model

finds application in sectors like media, where advertisers seek insights without accessing individual customer data, instead leveraging aggregated information to make informed decisions about ad placement, maximising return on investment.

Belissent stated that it is imperative to shift focus from mere cost considerations to evaluating the value generated.

"Customers typically benchmark their performance before and after implementing AI solutions, measuring changes in various metrics such as customer churn. By attributing these changes to the data-driven initiatives, businesses can recognise the value added by the data team, thereby fostering a culture of accountability and maturity in data utilisation practices," she said.

As organisations progress through this journey, establishing frameworks to quantify and attribute business impact to data becomes essential, ensuring alignment between data-related expenditures and the tangible benefits derived from them.

Giving the example of the transformative journey of Capital One, in the US, Jon Robertson, President, APJ Snowflake spoke about the transition from a predominantly on-premises infrastructure to an impressive 80% cloud-based model within a four-year span.

"Despite the arduous nature of this transition, it significantly enhanced data accessibility, enabling real-time reporting and fostering an environment conducive to innovation. In the Asian markets, we find ourselves a bit behind our American counterparts in embracing similar digital transformations. This lag is evident in the substantial strides made by leading financial institutions which not only prioritise digitisation and customer-centric approaches but also effectively curtail infrastructure costs, thereby facilitating novel product ideation and data-driven decision-making," he said.

THE EVOLVING CUSTOMER LANDSCAPE

The advent of cloud technology has empowered customers with unprecedented access to financial

services anytime, anywhere. Today's customers demand seamless digital experiences, personalised interactions, and real-time access to their financial information. They expect services that are agile, secure, and tailored to their individual needs. Moreover, the rise of fintech disruptors has heightened competition, forcing traditional institutions to innovate and differentiate themselves in the marketplace.

Sanjay Deshmukh, Senior Regional Vice President, ASEAN and India at Snowflake, explains that companies are actively shaping their data strategies and laying foundational frameworks, an area where they strive to provide assistance.

"Within this context, we observe two prominent use cases gaining traction. Firstly, there's a growing interest in democratising access to data, a long-standing goal for many organisations. With advanced tools, users can seamlessly access data through conversational interfaces, thus realising the vision of democratisation. Secondly, there's an increased interest in leveraging unstructured data, an untapped resource for many. Snowflake aims to address this with innovations like Document AI, which converts unstructured data into valuable insights, enabling users to extract pertinent information efficiently," he said.

The chief technology officer of Yes Securities, Kinjal Shah stated that amidst stringent regulatory environments, companies are reshaping their AI strategies to align with evolving consumer needs and compliance mandates.

"At the experimentation stage, they focus on enhancing customer experiences by leveraging untapped data reservoirs. Initiatives like aggregating customer data facilitate a deeper understanding of consumer landscapes, aiding product tailoring and market targeting efforts," he explains.

According to Shah, digital channels play an important role in customer acquisition, necessitating innovative data-driven approaches to bridge the gap between virtual interactions and personalised services.

"Companies deploy data strategies to

bolster market penetration, particularly in regions witnessing a surge in financial literacy. Programmes like college outreach initiatives aim to educate and engage potential clients, fostering brand loyalty and expanding market reach. However, the transition to AI integration remains gradual, with current strategies primarily leveraging digital data analytics for informed decision-making,” he points out.

As regulatory complexities loom, companies confront challenges in data privacy and cloud governance. The DPDP Act introduces privacy restrictions, necessitating strategic adjustments to data collection practices and storage protocols. Additionally, evolving regulatory frameworks demand nuanced cloud and data strategies, with impending legislation shaping future compliance measures.

Amidst talent shortages and shifting industry dynamics, companies are grappling with the complex landscape of AI adoption and regulatory compliance. As they adapt their strategies to harness the power of data analytics, they remain vigilant to emerging regulatory mandates and technological advancements, ensuring sustainable growth and consumer-centric innovation.

CHALLENGES IN MEETING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

While cloud-based solutions offer numerous benefits, including cost-efficiency, scalability, and agility, they also present unique challenges in meeting the evolving expectations of customers. Security concerns, data privacy regulations, and the



Jennifer Belissent, Principal Data Strategist at Snowflake giving a presentation



R. S. Srinivas Jain, Executive Director & Head of Strategy at SBI Mutual Fund, sharing his views

complexity of migrating legacy systems to the cloud are among the key hurdles faced by financial institutions. Additionally, ensuring a consistent and seamless customer experience across various digital channels requires robust

infrastructure and advanced analytics capabilities.

Rahul Dayal, Group CTO, WhiteOak Capital, stated that though the AMC is relatively new, it is rapidly growing, presenting a mixture of advantages and challenges.

“While it diverges from traditional AMC setups by opting for fewer branches, it recognises the importance of embracing technology, including AI, to stay competitive, akin to fintech firms. Initial steps have been taken to implement innovative tools for website search and customer service, but full integration across investment teams and operations remains a work in progress,” he pointed out.

Dayal explained that accessing and utilising data effectively poses a challenge, especially in the B2B model where significant customer data resides with distributors. “Integrating this data into the central warehouse is crucial for understanding customer behaviour and enhancing services, highlighting a key area of focus to meet evolving customer expectations,” he adds.

Echoing Dayal’s sentiments, Bhagwatiprasad Dubey, AVP-Information Security Officer of Axis Mutual Fund, also observes that the industry’s movement towards experimentation and implementation, indicating that while progress is being made, clear use cases have yet to be defined.

Giving the example of SBI Mutual Fund, its Executive director & Head of Strategy, R. S. Srinivas Jain, stated that they embarked on the data



(left to right) Jon Robertson, President, APJ Snowflake, with Suchetana Ray, Editor, Outlook Business, and Jennifer Belissent, Principal Data Strategist at Snowflake

journey by establishing an internal data lake, prioritising the formulation of a robust data strategy before delving into an AI strategy.

“While we’re still in the experimental phase, particularly focusing on quant and ESG aspects. With this we are committed to refining our AI mission through collaborations and investments, aiming to leverage our substantial data pool and industry position to drive actionable insights,” he said.

He added that they have adopted a hybrid approach to their cloud strategy, recognising the complexity of managing vast amounts of data effectively.

“Predicting storage and compute costs has become a CEO-level responsibility, given the evolving regulatory landscape and data privacy concerns. Despite these challenges, we are actively engaged in addressing them by leveraging technological innovations and regulatory frameworks to enhance data management and utilization.” he said.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

To thrive in this dynamic landscape, financial institutions must adopt a customer-centric approach to cloud-based services. This entails leveraging data analytics and artificial intelligence to gain insights into customer behaviour and preferences. By harnessing the power of predictive

analytics, institutions can anticipate customer needs and deliver personalised solutions in real-time. Moreover, prioritising cybersecurity measures and compliance with regulatory requirements is essential to building trust and confidence among customers.

Ananth Subramanian, Executive Vice President and Head IT, Kotak Mutual Fund, provides valuable insights into strategies for success amidst fluctuating market conditions and evolving technology landscapes. He explains that their focus lies in optimising cloud strategies to balance cost, scalability, and data management.

He informed that they recognise the challenges associated with data replication, AI utilisation, and regulatory compliance, stressing the significance of informed decision-making in cloud adoption. “There is a critical need for aligning technology choices with overarching business objectives and understanding how to effectively leverage data insights,” he said.

Despite the plethora of technology solutions available, Subramanian emphasises the importance of strategic decision-making to ensure sustainable business success. “I believe one of the larger challenges for companies is how

to get the data right and generating output from that, especially when they are doing a lot of experimentations,” he said.

Additionally, collaboration with fintech partners and third-party developers can enable institutions to rapidly innovate and deploy new services to market. Embracing open banking initiatives and APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) facilitates seamless integration with third-party platforms, enhancing the overall customer experience. Also, investing in employee training and upskilling is crucial to building a culture of innovation and agility within the organisation.

As cloud-based technology continues to reshape the financial services landscape, understanding and meeting the needs of the new customer are imperative for success. By embracing a customer-centric approach, prioritising security and compliance, and fostering innovation through collaboration, financial institutions can navigate this new terrain with confidence. By staying agile and responsive to evolving customer expectations, institutions can position themselves for sustained growth and competitiveness in the digital age of finance.



(left to right)- Sanjay Deshmukh, Senior Regional Vice President, ASEAN and India at Snowflake listening to the conversation along with Rahul Dayal, Group CTO, WhiteOak Capital and Ananth Subramanian, Executive Vice President and Head IT, Kotak Mutual Fund.

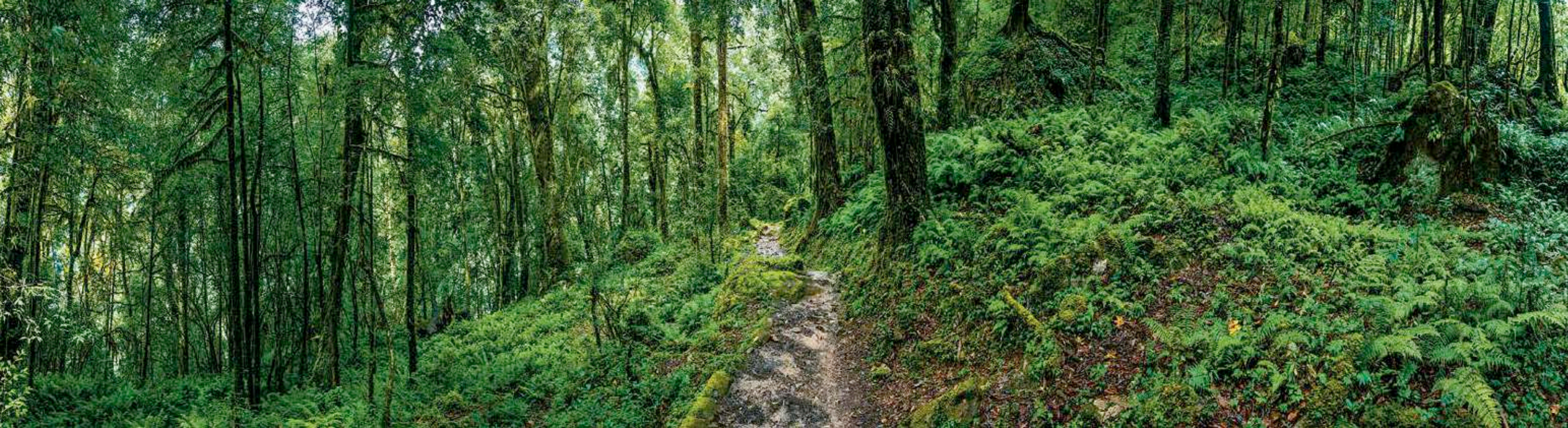


Photo: Shutterstock

MONEY PLANT

Firms are popping up to help people and companies plant saplings. Reasons for this green consciousness range from earning carbon credits to a desire to fight deforestation

» Naina Gautam



On the northern outskirts of Mumbai, a red heart is painted on a green board.

On the heart is written Taimur Ali Khan Pataudi Forest. The board is on the edge of a forest that actor Kareena Kapoor Khan had planted when her son Taimur turned one in 2017.

Mumbai-based dietician Rujuta Diwekar had helped Khan in creating this green patch. Diwekar wrote on Instagram: “The forest has about 100 trees on a 100 sq ft plot. The trees are as young as Taimur, even younger, actually each of them is a local, native, climate resilient species...”

It is not only celebrities who are going green. Take the example of Delhi-based artist Smriti Chaturvedi Shankar who has planted saplings to mark her son’s birthday. “I planted a few trees in farmlands with the help of farmers. It is a way of giving back to nature,” she says.

Planting trees is trending and entrepreneurs have sniffed a business

opportunity. Not just birthdays but also on Valentine’s Day and Women’s Day. A popular tree-planting website, recently, offered to plant trees on the occasion of the *pran pratishtha* ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The site charges Rs 199 for a single sapling and Rs 14,925 for 75 trees for birthdays. Prices are bumped up on occasions such as Valentine’s Day—Rs 299 for one and Rs 2.99 lakh for 1,000 trees. Planting for a once-in-a-lifetime event is more expensive.

Business is Booming

India Inc. too has taken up tree planting in a big way. Clients include companies that have active corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds, want to meet environmental, social and governance (ESG) compliances and chase carbon credits.

“Companies are increasingly publishing sustainability reports to communicate their environmental and social performance to stakeholders,” says Nidhi Singh, chief executive and co-founder of Pune-based tree-plantation company Grow Billion Trees.

The company has catered to clients such as CarDekho, Tata AIG Insur-

ance, Pernod Ricard and Concept Public Relations among others.

According to Satender Kumar, chief operating officer and co-founder, Grow Billion Trees, there are three kinds of forestry—the first in which the produce goes to farmers and is mostly funded by companies through their CSR initiatives; second is managed by plantations for private companies and individuals, paid for by the corporate or individual, where the produce goes to them; and the third type where government and forest land is used for biodiversity, paid for by corporates.

Some of the current project locations for agroforestry by Grow Billion Trees are in West Bengal, Maharashtra, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra

Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan among others.

The tree-plantation sector being relatively new, data regarding the number of companies and the market size is hard to come by. But as government spending has increased, a corresponding growth in the number of firms is only to be expected.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change through the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) had approved Rs 8,980.04 crore to state authorities in 2021–22, up from Rs 7,467.49 crore in 2020–21 and Rs 6,771.59 crore in 2019–20.

Since these funds are disbursed for compensatory afforestation when trees are chopped because of infra projects, they create opportunities for tree-plantation companies. Subhendu Sharma, founder and director of Afforestt, says that since such companies like his do not have to acquire land for planting trees, they can be in profit if they manage their affairs well. “We did not need a lot of investment to start our company. We were frugal and bootstrapped. It



Photo: Rujuta Diwekar’s Instagram



We did not need a lot of investment to start our company. We were frugal and bootstrapped. It has been 13 years now and we have a presence in 16 countries. Whoever is doing this business professionally is making money

SUBHENDU SHARMA
FOUNDER, AFFORESTT

30 lakh trees and planting two lakh saplings on the premises of some of its manufacturing units.

The Mahindra Group is also part of the It.org initiative and practises social forestry through Project Hariyali in the Araku area of Andhra Pradesh. Under Project Hariyali, the group has planted over two crore trees between 2007 and 2022.

Afforestt's Sharma, who claims to have created 138 forests in 44 cities in 10 countries, says, "In the conventional landscaping, you see palm trees planted in a row or manicured lawns in shopping malls

and gated communities. But people are becoming aware of the benefits of native trees. As aesthetic sensibilities change and environmental awareness increases, I think all these spaces are going to be converted into either forest planted using the Miyawaki method or landscaping."

The Miyawaki technique is fast catching on. It is based on the tenets popularised by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki, in which native species are planted close to each other, which develop a symbiotic relationship and grows faster than a regular forest by as much as three times.

has been 13 years now and we have a presence in 16 countries. Whoever is doing this business professionally is making money," he says.

Pledge to Plant

Like the government, India Inc. too is doing its bit to check deforestation. In 2020, the World Economic Forum (WEF) launched the It.org initiative to support the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–30), in which it plans collaborative efforts from diverse industries dedicated to conserving, restoring and cultivating a trillion trees by 2030. The WEF claims that over 100 global companies have committed to planting more than 12 billion trees spanning 100-plus countries.

In January 2024, Bharat Heavy Electricals (BHEL) and the RPG Group committed to be part of It.org. "The RPG Group aims to grow trees in the regions we work in—Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Rajasthan. We aim to add to the green cover in the region and find ways to maximise benefits to the community as well as the environment," RPG had said in a statement.

On the other hand, BHEL has set a target of conserving approximately



THE CREDITS EARNED BY PLANTING TREES CAN BE TRADED IN THE CARBON MARKETS WHICH HAS BECOME A FINANCIAL INCENTIVE FOR TREE-PLANTING INITIATIVES



In India, both private individuals and green entrepreneurs have become its advocates.

The Delhi government and the city's civic body have been working on developing empty and abandoned spaces on the Miyawaki technique since 2020.

TVS Industrial & Logistics Parks, a logistics giant, has built a Miyawaki forest around its premises in Tamil Nadu. "Our annual reports provide comprehensive insights on performance and strategies of sustainability initiatives, including the Miyawaki method," says Manikandan Ramachandran, the company's chief operating officer. He adds that his organisation has spent roughly Rs 1 crore setting up a Miyawaki forest in its premises.

Xynteo, a consultant, has teamed up with Grow Trees in its efforts to protect the environment. "We have taken part in their Trees for Leopards project in Nainital. We also planted 350 trees on behalf of the participants who attended one of our

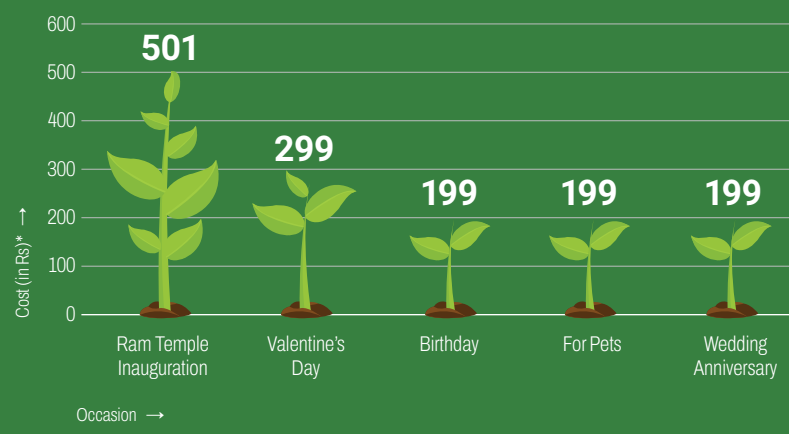


Companies are increasingly publishing sustainability reports to communicate their environmental and social performance to stakeholders

NIDHI SINGH
CEO, GROW BILLION TREES

PAY 'N' PLANT

Planting saplings on special occasions or for a once-in-a-lifetime event is more expensive than normal tree planting



*Cost of planting one sapling

events," says Vipul Kumar, senior partner, Xynteo.

Benefits of Going Green

The credits earned by planting trees can be traded in the carbon markets which has become a financial incentive for tree-planting initiatives. According to Global Market Insights, the carbon credit market was valued at \$103.8 billion in 2023 and has a potential of compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.8% in 2024–32.

Grow Billion Trees' Kumar highlights the conventional revenue sources that a forest creates, like selling high-quality timber and sales made through fruit production, honey-keeping and agro-tourism. His colleague Singh says, "Ecotourism generates employment in hospital-

ity, conservation, carbon auditing, carbon finance management, ESG analysis and climate risk and sustainability data analysis."

Anirban Mukherjee, lead for climate and sustainability in India at BCG, a consultant, feels that it is important to differentiate between growing and nurturing trees as a social initiative, as against developing it as a business proposition. "Younger generations are increasingly eco-conscious and are propelling demand for sustainable products and services. Companies are also progressively adopting ESG practices, making tree planting a popular option for offsetting carbon emissions and fulfilling CSR goals," he says.

A joint study of the WEF and PwC concluded in a report *Nature Risk Rising: Why the Crisis Engulfing Nature Matters for Business and the Economy* in January 2020 that "\$44 trillion of economic value generation—more than half of the world's total GDP—is moderately or highly dependent on nature and its services, and therefore exposed to risks from nature loss." All this means there is a market for forestry.

Exploring the Potential of HYPERCONNECTED START-UP NETWORKS

Amit Shanbaug

Hyperconnected ecosystems are reshaping the start-up landscape in India by fostering collaboration, innovation, and scalability. These ecosystems leverage technology to connect entrepreneurs, investors, mentors, and support organisations seamlessly, transcending geographical barriers. Start-ups benefit from access to a diverse pool of talent, resources, and market insights, driving rapid experimentation and iteration. Businesses are increasingly recognising the significance of hyper-connected ecosystems in enhancing productivity levels and fostering greater engagement among users. A recent round-table titled, titled 'Hyperconnected Ecosystems for Start-ups: A Path to Higher Productivity and User Engagement' organised jointly by Outlook Business and Tata Communications, highlighted the transformative potential of connectivity. The event which took place in Jio World at BKC, Mumbai on March 14, 2024, stressed on how interconnected systems are revolutionising the start-up landscape. The distinguished attendees shared insights shaping the start-up landscape.

Pratik Jain, GM Sales, Tata Communications

"At Tata Communications, our core focus lies in ensuring seamless connectivity for individuals amidst their daily activities. Each person has unique personas and requirements, which became even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, revolutionising the way we work. With the freedom to work from anywhere, our challenge is to ensure that individuals remain connected, productive, and content. To address this challenge, Tata Communications has strategically developed infrastructure tailored to these needs. We pride ourselves not on being merely a product-oriented company, but rather on being solution-driven. Leveraging this approach, we strive to fuel

growth and deliver innovative solutions to our clients."

Jeetendra Upadhyay, GM Technology, Tata Communications

"Enabling seamless connections between IoT devices enhances both B2C and B2B experiences. Prioritising user experience and site persona is crucial, as LAN bandwidth may be insufficient and app prioritisation lacks control. Collaboration and location prioritisation are key, ensuring hyperconnected ecosystems justify ROI."

Amit Ray, Chief Information Officer, Reliance Digital Retail Limited

"Significant human intervention exists, necessitating technology to assess product availability. Key is guiding

customers through informed decisions by analysing their inputs, providing tailored options. Leveraging technology in this process is essential for efficiency and personalised service."

Vivek Katyayan, Head of Credit & Operations, Kissht

"There is a need to develop various customer journey dashboards spanning regulated touch points. By maintaining operational efficiency, a holistic overview is sustained, negating the constant need for data retrieval. These dashboards ensure continuous access to relevant data, streamlining operations effectively."

Sudhakar Sharma, Sr. Vice President, Wellness Forever Medicare Pvt Ltd

"Technology aids in streamlining various processes, from inventory management to customer assistance, including wellness counseling. Pharmacists can share relevant data with customers, promoting awareness and empowerment. With vast SKU varieties, technology mitigates the risk of dispensing errors, ensuring accurate transactions and enhanced consumer safety."

Devendra Dariya, CPO, Coverstack (Coverfox Insurance)

"As an insurance market aggregator and partner, we rigorously monitor data integrity to ensure regulatory compliance. Frequent changes pose challenges, yet our platform, devoid of constant tech interventions, minimises costs. Outsourcing exploration is vital, leveraging analytics to optimise expenses such as call center charges can lead to enhanced operational efficiency."

Subhadeep Kundu, Head - Digital Engineering, Auxilo Finserve Private Limited

"Infrastructure is key, relying on vendor knowledge for tech insights and vision, even for applications. Global vendors can be costly, so startups' security plans are crucial. Engaging with these start-ups presents valuable opportunities for interaction and collaboration in this rapidly evolving landscape."

Kapil Kapoor, CTO, Credable

"In meeting evolving customer needs, companies need to prioritise partners with flexible tech integrations, aligned with API design and cloud capabilities. Ensuring portability across multiple clouds is crucial, alongside prioritising security. Flexibility is key; avoiding lock-in enables adaptability to changing landscapes and customer demands."

Nishit Saurav, Head, C.S. Engineering, LogiNext

"In multiple delivery markets, data plays a pivotal role from supplier to manufacturer to delivery. Real-time data is essential, with opportunities for data reuse. Capitalising on data reuse is crucial, especially as channels continue to expand rapidly."

Aman Bapna, Director of Engineering, Kuku FM

"We face the challenge of relying on data touch-points over physical ones. Analyzing and attributing data is crucial, involving content creators in problem-solving remotely. Understanding and deriving insights from data is paramount, especially in binary outcomes. Innovation and multiple fallbacks aid in uniquely addressing every issue, while timely feedback fosters growth and iterative improvements."

Kapil Kini, Business Head & VP - Alliances, FlexiLoans.com

"In the era of fintech, rapid customer

service is important, heavily reliant on technology. Secured loans entail high risk, necessitating thorough fraud checks before disbursement. Each loan requires meticulous documentation verification for compliance. While turnaround time (TAT) is crucial, it must not compromise mandatory checks."

Vaibhav Parekh, Business Head, API Holdings

"In the warehouse, technology minimizes time wastage. In the era of rapid commerce, medicine delivery must be under 4 hours, with most orders chronic. Agility is crucial for acquiring new customers. Robust tech infrastructure, including a unified cloud system, is vital. Service differentiation is key, facilitated by tech-driven market acceleration."

Kavitha Chowdhary Iyer, Head Process and Transaction Monitoring, BillDesk

"Managing transaction complexity entails collaboration with various banks and merchants, each with distinct processes. Data validation adds to agility demands, straining IT teams. Centralising operations is vital for efficiency. Ensuring adherence to timelines is crucial to avoid penalties, emphasising the importance of streamlined transaction flow and reporting."

Akbar Mohammed, Head Innovation - AI Engineering, Fractal

"Increasing data volume prompts system integration strategies. Manufacturing seeks waste reduction solutions. Healthcare gathers data from doctors, requiring regulatory buy-in. Finance industry secrecy challenges necessitate problem-solving. Effective data processing is vital across sectors to address diverse touch points, including patient care and regulatory compliance."

Ankur Goel, Founding Member & COO, Epigamia

"From FMCG to ad companies, technology now takes center stage. While traditionally reliant on manual processes, today's emphasis is on data utilisation for real-time insights. While not always at the forefront, integrating technology proves advantageous, especially in leveraging data across value chains for scalability."

In conclusion, Hyperconnected ecosystems revolutionize start-ups, nurturing their development, creativity, and cooperation. Enterprises embracing connectivity, strategic data management, and robust security measures excel in this dynamic environment, propelling forward with innovation and resilience.



L to R: Devendra Dariya, CPO, Coverstack (Coverfox Insurance); Subhadeep Kundu, Head - Digital Engineering, Auxilo Finserve Private Limited



L to R: Kapil Kapoor, CTO, Credable; Nishit Saurav, Head, C.S. Engineering, LogiNext



L to R: Aman Bapna, Director of Engineering, Kuku FM; Kavitha Chowdhary Iyer, Head Process and Transaction Monitoring, BillDesk



L to R: Kapil Kini, Business Head & VP - Alliances, FlexiLoans.com; Akbar Mohammed, Head Innovation - AI Engineering, Fractal



L to R: Pratik Jain, GM Sales, Tata Communications; Amit Ray, Chief Information Officer, Reliance Digital Retail Limited



L to R: Jeetendra Upadhyay, GM Technology, Tata Communications; Sudhakar Sharma, Sr. Vice President, Wellness Forever Medicare Pvt Ltd



» Vinita Bhatia

H

e was repeatedly stopped by burly security guards near the prime minister's official residence

on Delhi's Lok Kalyan Marg (at the time called Race Course Road) and grilled about why he was in the neighbourhood. His frequent visits to the Bharat Petroleum station nearby had raised suspicion. It took a lot of reasoning and a bit of charm for him to convince the guards posted there that he was getting in on the ground floor of the technology that would transform how consumers bought and businesses sold things in future.

This was how Anil Bhatt started his career, after finishing a computer science and engineering course from the BSF Institute of Technology in Bengaluru. Today, Bhatt is the global chief information officer (CIO) of Elevance Health—a Fortune 500 company and one of America's biggest health insurance providers. Bhatt has been at the forefront of Elevance Health's digital-enabling of healthcare.

Back in the 1990s, when Bhatt had frequent run-ins with security personnel guarding the lane that leads to the PM's home, he was installing the code for a point-of-sale (PoS) system at the store in the petrol pump, the first-of-its-kind in New Delhi, a system that helped turn consumers into datasets for companies to mine.

"I would instal the software code on the system from a floppy disk and later, the salespeople would tell me about the issues they faced. I would then rework the program to fix these problems; this went on for several days," he recalls.

Looking back, Bhatt says the store



DRIVEN BY DATA

That is how **Anil Bhatt**, global CIO of Elevance Health, gets his way in the boardroom and brings about techquity—his coinage for combining technology and equity for the benefit of customers

visits are among the highlights of his three-decade-long career. It shaped his perspective on how to approach technology as an enabler and build solutions based on customer feedback instead of working within a tech bubble.

Starting Small

Kashmir-born Bhatt's father worked in the army, so his family moved around a lot before they finally settled in Delhi. Growing up, he spent the better part of his day playing outdoors and was more inclined towards sports and even captained his school's football team. Early exposure to team sports showed him why teamwork and strategy are critical if one wants to achieve a common goal.

Bhatt grew up in a small one-room apartment where the entire family

nexions Technologies, where he built the first PoS for Bharat Petroleum. His other big project was creating a three-dimensional floor plan for the first Oracle OpenWorld—a global conference—in India. Visitors to the event could select the sessions they wanted to attend on a digital screen and be guided to them. "CGI [computer-generated imagery] and graphics were not big back then and given the technology, or lack of it, it was cutting-edge work," he says.

In 1998, he moved to the US to join consumer goods major Procter & Gamble (P&G). One of the projects he worked on was developing a virtual try-on technology for its beauty-care department. It allowed users to see how a particular lipstick would look on them before they bought it. While similar applications

challenges, I realised the importance of embracing this new culture and extracting the best from it," he says.

In 2004, he joined IAC, a New York-headquartered conglomerate, to help its multi-channel retail brand HSN, which wanted to augment its consumer-focused approach and enable people to use technology in their day-to-day life.

He developed HSN Shop's ecommerce platforms and mobile applications that offered consumers a round-the-clock, industry-first live-video three-screen experience, helping browse through the network's 35,000-plus products. "I do not look at technology from a binary perspective, but instead believe in a human-centred design keeping in mind how consumers are going to use it," Bhatt says.

HE USED USAGE METRICS, USER ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION TO SHOW THE BOARD HOW SYDNEY COULD BECOME THE CORNERSTONE OF THE COMPANY'S DIGITAL HEALTH STRATEGY

slept in the living room. Those were chaotic days, surrounded by relatives, where he got what he needed, but had to work hard to get what he desired. Returning to Delhi after his graduation, Bhatt decided to do coding and advanced software export technology from Aptech, an information technology training institute.

"I was enamoured by the assembly-level language programming 8086. I loved how a small program built within a relay could be used by entities like the railways to shift tracks and control the lives of thousands of people," he says. "Moreover, I figured that getting into software would open opportunities for me to work with multinational companies and travel the world."

His coding journey began when he joined a five-member start-up, Con-

are run-of-the-mill today, in the early 2000s it was a novelty. Bhatt spent days trying to create a tool, working with P&G's sales teams, to understand how it could cater to their customer expectations.

Moving to the US at the cusp of the century was a milestone many a young Indian aspired to, but accompanying it was the fear of culture shock. The allure of the opportunity overshadowed any potential negatives initially for Bhatt and the daily demands of work kept him focused. However, with time, he began to recognise the disparities between the US and his native country.

"It became evident that we were navigating through a different cultural landscape, one that required [us] to be aware and [have] a willingness to adapt. Despite the initial

Elevated by Elevance

It was in 2008 when Bhatt got the opportunity to lead the development team for integration architecture and services at Elevance Health (formerly Anthem Inc.). This was the big break he was looking for. "I joined Elevance as a senior engineer with a small team. Our core mandate was to keep the systems stable and identify new capabilities," he recalls.

However, Bhatt soon realised that Elevance was not just a health insurance provider; it was a customer-focused entity where users relied on it for their daily healthcare needs and to ensure their prescriptions were delivered on time. They also wanted to engage with it to get their insurance queries answered, which meant that they needed a user-friendly digital platform.

He rose up the ranks. In 2020, he became the company's global CIO and was tasked with developing tech strategies that would offer customer-centric healthcare solutions. He was also put in charge of leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) and data insights to enhance operational efficiency, improve care access and elevate digital experiences while managing enterprise-wide technology strategy and execution, and overseeing a global workforce of over 10,000 employees.

This task was made onerous because it was also the year when Covid-19 hit. With healthcare emerging as a focal point for most economies, Bhatt had to floor the accelerator to provide data-driven insights to various stakeholders. He and his team worked tirelessly to enhance customer access to better healthcare services and take greater control of their health management with technological advancements like Sydney Health.

When in Doubt, Dive into Data

Through this rumble and tumble in the tech rollercoaster ride, Bhatt has attempted to leave his stamp on all processes "People on the ground should feel that you are involved and are not just telling them what needs to be done. I have an open-door policy and encourage everyone to ask questions," he says.

This culture of questioning is a two-way street and extends to the company's board. Bhatt recalls that his proposal to introduce Sydney as an in-house health app was met with scepticism. This is where he fell back on his penchant for backing his ideas with data.



Anil Bhatt with his family

"Data never lies and is the best tool to kill preconceptions," he says. So, he used usage metrics, user engagement and retention to show the board how Sydney could become the cornerstone of the company's digital health strategy. Now, Elevance leans heavily on Sydney to offer access to benefits, tools and resources to over 117 million users.

Today, Bhatt plays a pivotal role in Elevance Health's expansion and partnerships. He champions diversity and inclusion, spearheading initiatives for women in information technology, neurodivergence inclusion and youth in tech. He has been part of the top CIO roll of honour several times.

As CIOs get a bigger say in boardrooms, Bhatt believes that technocrats should leverage this opportunity judiciously. "There are a lot of expectations from CIOs and CTOs [chief technology officers] on how they can transform things. It is best to take a few bold bets where you can achieve historic results rather than doing multiple things. Your business might not be able to


keep up with the complexities of change management if you propose too many things," he says.

Bhatt is currently focused on how Elevance Health can change its internal processes by enabling technologies like generative AI. He is also working with co-pilots from various companies to change how their engineers can code faster using large language models.

For young graduates, he has a single piece of advice—go where your passion lies, but do not presume that you truly know it is your passion. Be flexible to shift gears when needed. However, once you find your calling, pursue it zealously.

This is the same advice he gives to his young son and daughter. Having seen how his career has unfolded, he recommends that rather than dreaming up a 10-year roadmap, they should have shorter milestones. He also urges that they always maintain a work-life balance to avoid burn out.

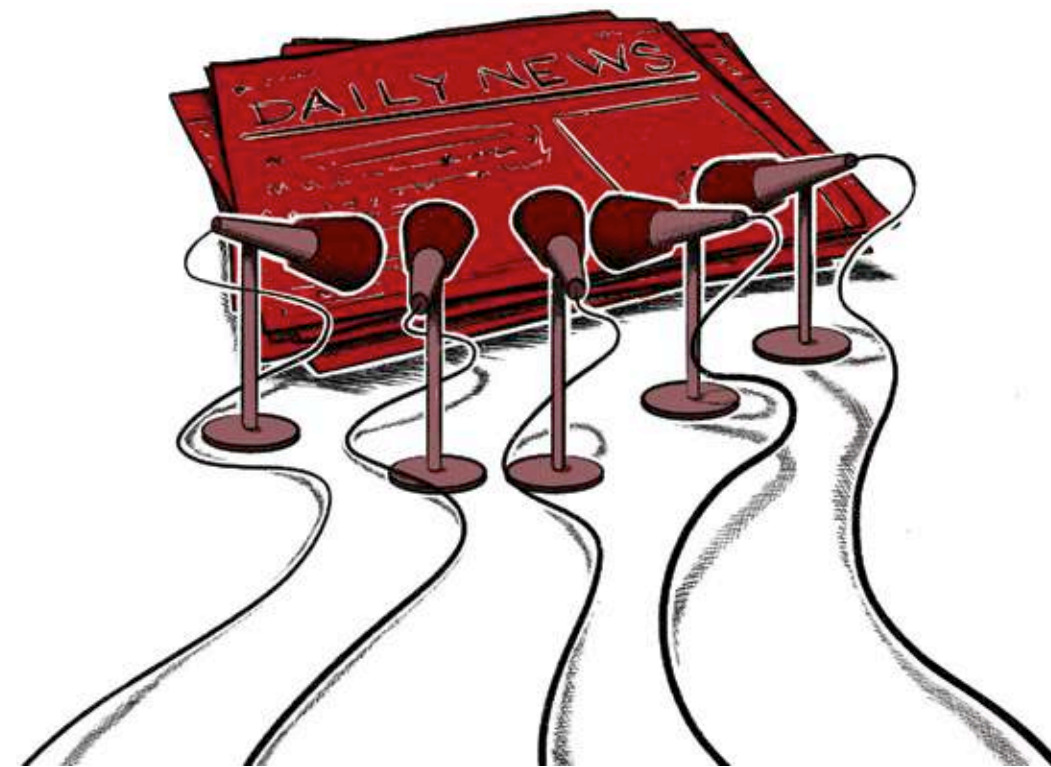
Reflecting on his journey, he has realised that he often sacrificed personal time in pursuit of professional validation. The absence of familial support compounded the challenge, leading to moments of loneliness and isolation. In such instances, his wife and he leaned on each other for solace and strength.

Over time, Bhatt considers the US his *karmbhoomi* (place of work) while still cherishing India as his *janmabhoomi* (place of birth). "As life settled into a rhythm, I found myself anchored here. Yet, as time progresses, I feel a pull to return to my roots and to contribute to my community. This sense of longing shapes my future aspirations," he says. 

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the pain will not
be published



Return to Reading





Outlook

INDIAN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM SUMMIT & AWARDS 2024



2024 is a momentous year for us. We turned 9 this year, and we're very proud of the wonderful community we've built over these years... A community that understands and values the power of collective wisdom and collective action. Which is why, at Outlook's annual Indian Responsible Tourism Summit & Awards 2024 in New Delhi, we made a simple wish of 'Growing Together, Growing Responsibly'.

As travel bounces back, we ask ourselves whether we are ready to make the most of this post-pandemic swell. Are we ready to do what it takes to create a tourism ecosystem in India that will not only survive but thrive in the long-haul? As we shift gears again, and look for a new roadmap for the future, we take inspiration from initiatives like the Travel for

Life campaign that the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has been actively promoting to make India a truly sustainable destination.

The 9th Indian Responsible Tourism Summit & Awards invited inspiring people from all over the country to share their learnings and their journeys in adventure, architecture, food, craft, community initiatives and wildlife tourism, on stage and off it. The Summit also took a deep dive into key subjects like consumer behaviour and adapting to change in the global tourism sector with experts who travelled all the way from Bulgaria and the Nordics. It invited everyone in the responsible travel community in India to dream, to dare, to DO!



THE WINNERS

SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP HOMESTAYS

Jade House, Leh, Ladakh (Gold)

Jade House is home to Tsezin Angmo, who believes in building community networks, particularly with local entrepreneurs and women-led initiatives, to make sure travellers have a deeper sense of place and purpose in Ladakh.

...

Mystic Village, Chamba, Himachal Pradesh (Silver)

This is a community initiative by members of the pastoral Himalayan tribe of Gaddis. Five homes, local youth, and an entire village come together to preserve their own heritage, and create new opportunities for cultural exchange.

...

PaliGhar, Kalimpong, West Bengal (One to Watch)

A seventh-generation farm-turned-farmstay, PaliGhar is known for its conservation efforts, resilience during the pandemic years, and business innovations that could be replicated by other small and sustainable family-run units.

SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP BNBS & GUESTHOUSES

Jujurana Stays, Banjar, Himachal Pradesh (Gold)

Named after the critically endangered Western Tragopan, the jujurana or king of birds, this cottage by a stream in the Great Himalayan National Park harnesses renewable energy and manages its water and waste efficiently.

...

Binsar Forest Retreat, Kumaon, Uttarakhand (Silver)

Planted in the Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary, the Retreat encourages travellers to engage with nature and with the local community in meaningful ways, and assumes responsibility for actions that have an impact beyond its own boundaries.

SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP HOTELS

Lchang Nang Retreat, Nubra Valley, Ladakh (Gold)

A champion of local culture, community and architecture, Lchang Nang shows serious commitment to sustainability by relying almost entirely on renewable energy, solar water heating, gravity-fed water and local supply chains.

...

Nine Furlongs, Kumaon, Uttarakhand (Silver)

A restored colonial property in Binsar, the lodge takes its environmental and social responsibilities seriously by investing in solar power and rainwater harvesting, and focusing on the welfare of its local staff, including medical insurance.

SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP TRAVEL ENTERPRISES

Healing Himalayas, Himachal Pradesh (Gold)

From 'Trekks with Purpose' — to clean up popular trails — to setting up Material Recovery Facilities at tourism hubs, they work towards safeguarding the delicate Himalayan ecosystem.

...

Sadhana Forest, Auroville, Tamil Nadu (Silver)

For 20 years, this global non-profit has engaged over a thousand volunteers every year in sustainable projects in India, focusing on reforestation, food security and rural resilience, impacting lives and landscapes.

...

Dakshin Endeavours, Andamans & Karnataka (One to Watch)

Using travel as a springboard for awareness and education, this initiative sparks curiosity and encourages critical thinking in children, while helping them understand the symbiotic relationships between people, places and nature.

...

Astrostays, Ladakh (One to Watch)

Stargazing meets social change in remote rural destinations of Ladakh through this initiative that encourages local youth to become astro-preneurs by offering dark sky experiences to guests at their homestays, or at community-run experience centres.

SUSTAINABILITY CHAMPIONS PATHFINDERS

Ishita Khanna, Himachal Pradesh (Gold)

For over two decades, Ishita Khanna and her organisation, Spiti Ecosphere, have worked with the local community to build resilience in an extremely eco-fragile landscape, and created opportunities for travellers to contribute to these efforts.

...

Nirmal Kulkarni, Goa (Silver)

Known as a seasoned snakeman and ecologist, Nirmal Kulkarni has been a leading stakeholder in key conservation efforts in the Western Ghats, especially in his home state of Goa, with a significant impact on the environment and local community.

...

Mackinlay Barreto, Goa (One to Watch)

Mackinlay Barreto is opening up the Goa of 70s and 80s as a practitioner of mindful tourism. The limited capacity, micro-local experiences he offers employs locals, bans the use of single use plastic and forbids the geo-tagging of locations.

SUSTAINABILITY CHAMPIONS GRASSROOTS HEROES

Punyo Chada, Arunachal Pradesh (Gold)

A teacher and changemaker, Punyo Chada, planted the seed and nurtured the idea of sustainable development for years in Ziro Valley, home to the Apatani tribe. Through the initiative, NgunuZiro, or Our Ziro, he continues to set a wonderful example of community action for rural destinations. **Kartik**

...

Gaggar, Rajasthan (Silver)

Through his enterprise Rajasthan Studio, Kartik Gaggar connects the custodians of traditional arts, crafts, textiles and music, and local businesses, with culturally curious travellers, both online and offline.

JOURNEYS OF SUSTAINABILITY

At the Outlook Indian Responsible Tourism Initiative, we believe in travel that is gentle on the earth and invested in the growth and happiness of the local communities. We also believe in collective wisdom and sharing knowledge. So, we invited leading experts from remote corners of our country to share their learnings and help us open our hearts and minds to new possibilities and opportunities.



“When you take people to the **source** of the food, get them to meet **communities**, & **taste** food, it's transformative.”

Chef Thomas Zacharias, Founder, The Locavore
Falling in Love with Indian Ingredients (Again)



Punyo Chada, Secretary, NgunuZiro, Arunachal Pradesh
When a Village is the Destination



Sandeep Virmani, Chairman, Hunnarshala Foundation
Celebrating Local Architecture



Dhritiman Mukherjee, Wildlife Photographer
Wildlife, Conservation & Tourism in India: Then & Now



Sumantha Ghosh,
Managing Director, Vanghat
Wildlife, Conservation & Tourism in India: Then & Now



James Champion, Wildlife Tour Leader, & Grandson
of Late Forester FW Champion
Wildlife, Conservation & Tourism in India: Then & Now

OVERALL WINNERS



Lchang Nang Retreat



Healing Himalayas

CONVERSATIONS OF CHANGE



“ The **intent** of a **traveller** has to come from the **ground up**. Ideally it should be... “How is it possible for me to gently **challenge myself?**”

Adil Hussain, Award-Winning Actor

“ My aim is to create a thousand more **Poornas.**”

Malavath Poorna, Youngest Woman to Scale Mt. Everest, & Team Leader, TARC Academy
Inspiring Young Indians to Find their Own Peak ▶



▼ (Left to right) **CB Ramkumar**, Vice Chair, Global Sustainable Tourism Council, **Raj Basu**, Co-founder, Help Tourism, & Advisor, Rural Tourism & Homestays, States in the Northeast, Myanmar, Bhutan & Nepal, **Malika Viridi**, Mountaineer, Former Sarpanch, Sarmoli-Jainti Van Panchayat, Munsiri, & Founder-Director, Himalayan Ark, **Paras Loomba**, Founder, Global Himalayan Expedition



“ **Bhraman** means a state of mind. It means as much as you **travel outside**, you should be able to **travel inside.**”

Raj Basu, Co-founder, Help Tourism, & Advisor, Rural Tourism & Homestays, States in the Northeast, Myanmar, Bhutan & Nepal



Indranil Roy, CEO, Outlook Group

Special Messages



Shri Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu,
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Himachal Pradesh



Shri Brijmohan Agrawal,
Hon'ble Minister of Culture and Tourism, Government of Chhattisgarh

“ **Travel** is about **people**. It is at the core of why we embark on a journey.”

Milena Nikolova, Founder, BehaviorSmart, Bulgaria
Decoding & Reshaping Consumer Behaviour ▶



Sanjeev Nayar,
Head (North),
Jaipur Rugs



Dr. M. K. Singh,
Director (Skill Development),
Madhya Pradesh Tourism



“ That’s one of the fantastic things about humanity. When we put our **minds together**, we can really create something new and we can **change things.**”

▲ Hjörtur Smárason, Founder & Lead Strategist, Saltworks, Denmark, & Former CEO, Visit Greenland
*Adapting to a Changing World...
Climate, Sustainability, & Destination Management*



Partha DeSarkar, executive director and CEO of Hinduja Global Solutions, not only advocates making small adjustments but also taking oneself less seriously to remain happy

THE JOY OF ADJUSTING A LITTLE

» Chitra Nair



Partha DeSarkar's fondest childhood memory is of the time he spent in the tea gardens of Kalimpong in West Bengal, watching Mount Kanchenjunga when he looked into the distance and the river Teesta flowing when he looked below. The executive director and chief executive officer of Hinduja Global Solutions, a digital customer experience leader and part of the multi-conglomerate Hinduja Group, grew up there, so one is in for a surprise when he effortlessly mouths the Kannada-English phrase "*Swalpa adjust maadi*". Literally translated, it means, "Please adjust a little," he explains, pointing out that this popular Bengaluru usage describes him the best—he is always willing to adjust a little.

DeSarkar has over 25 years of experience in customer services. But, his first love was aviation. Even though his parents did not approve of it, he studied the subject and got into Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL). "That was a *swalpa-adjust-maadi* thing. If you cannot fly planes, you might as well make them," he quips. "At that time, HAL was the only employer in aviation and it did not pay [well]. So, I did an MBA and got into banking. That then got me into customer service," he says.

He admits that he had a hard time adapting from blue to white collar. "I think logically. For me, problem-solving is what gives me the great escape. I started applying problem-solving to customer service. That is how I was able to reconcile between my urge for technology and problem-solving skills," he says.

DeSarkar holds a master's degree in technology from IIT Delhi and another in business administration from IIM Bangalore. He also has a PhD in internet banking from IIT Delhi, which he credits for his understanding of technology and its ability to change business models. He now wants to do another PhD, this time on generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). "There is a lot to learn. If I do not learn, I will become obsolete," he avers.

DeSarkar is quite optimistic about the




DeSarkar with golfer Anirban Lahiri (left), earlier the brand ambassador of HGS

impact of GenAI on customer service. He recalls an instance when he overheard a conversation on AI tools and how a call by an AI bot could eliminate a natural person's speech. "That Indian companies would like to explore with such cutting-edge tech, I thought, was amazing. India has a lot to give. I am amazed at how much we think outside the box and how we deploy tech so quickly," he beams. It was a eureka moment for him, he adds.

Otherwise flexible and accommodating, DeSarkar is a self-confessed perfectionist when it comes to food. He took to cooking when he relocated to New York a year-and-a-half back. "I am getting better at everything," he announces proudly, referring to his culinary skills.

While his family time is spent on grocery shopping, cooking, watching television, among other activities, DeSarkar loves playing golf with his son. It is the greatest stress-buster, he says. "No other sport will consume four to five hours in a day. When you play golf, you have to switch off your mind from whatever is your stress for the day, whether it is from your work or your home. Golf takes you away from stress," he says. However, he clarifies, he never gets stressed as he has learned to take himself less seriously.

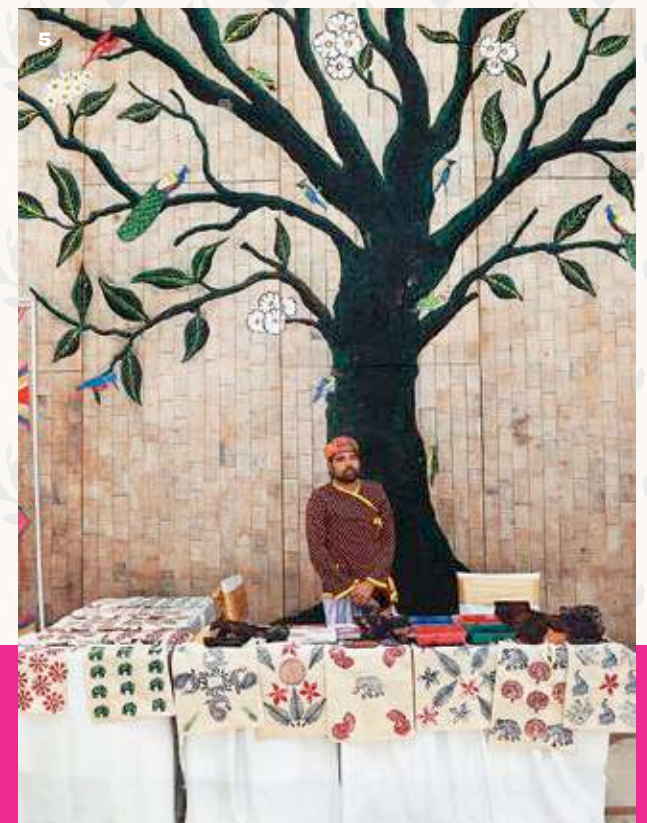
"You get stressed if you take yourself very seriously. The moment you are able to cross that divide of saying that whatever you do is not important to the larger scheme of things, I think you are good. You will not take that much of stress." His mantra for happiness is equally simple. Success is equal to love which is equal to happiness. 

“

You get stressed if you take yourself very seriously. The moment you are able to cross that divide of saying that whatever you do is not important to the larger scheme of things, I think you are good. You will not take that much of stress

INDIAN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATE SUMMIT & AWARDS RAJASTHAN 2023

2nd Edition



We partnered with Rajasthan Tourism for the second consecutive year to host the **Indian Responsible Tourism State Summit & Awards 2023 – Rajasthan**. Our aim is to not only discover and celebrate a Rajasthan of havelis, forts, hills, lakes, wildlife, textiles, music, crafts, fairs, and festivals, but also a Rajasthan of incredible stories, of incredible people!

We look forward to sharing these stories, and putting the spotlight on those who are quietly carrying the torch of sustainable and responsible tourism in the state... Come join us on this beautiful journey!

(Clockwise from left) 1. Guest of Honour HRH Diya Kumari, Deputy Chief Minister, Rajasthan; 2. Manganiyar musical ensemble, Latif Khan & Group, from the village of Hamira, enthral the audience; 3. Indranil Roy, CEO, Outlook Group, shares his vision of scaling responsible tourism initiatives in Rajasthan; 4. The Overall Winner accepting the award from Indranil Roy, Dr. Rashmi Sharma and Apurv Kumar, MD, Clarks Group of Hotels; 5. An artisan from Bagru encouraging guests to try their hand at block-printing. 6. Dr. Rashmi Sharma IAS, Director, Rajasthan Tourism, outlines the roadmap to mainstream responsible tourism in the state; 7. Ms Gayatri Rathore, IAS, Principal Secretary, Rajasthan Tourism, at the awards ceremony, lending her support to the winners and participants





THE WINNERS

Overall Winner

Castle Mandawa, Mandawa

Sustainable Leadership – Homestays

Gold Little Bus Homestay, Jaipur

Gold The Bhagwanpura Homestead, Jaipur

Silver Jorbeer Inn, Bikaner

One to Watch Ratlam House, Jaipur

One to Watch Jai Villa Homestay, Udaipur

One to Watch Friends & Family Homestay, Udaipur

Sustainable Leadership – BNBs & Guesthouses

Gold Nimera House, Jaipur

Silver Padmini Haveli, Chittorgarh

One to Watch The BNB World, Jaipur

Sustainable Leadership – Hotels

Gold Kaner Retreat, Hapusar

Gold Shahpura House, Jaipur

Silver Dera Amer Wilderness Camp, Kukas

One to Watch Astroport Sariska Treetop by Eight Continents, Sariska

Sustainable Leadership – Travel Enterprises

Gold Pink City Rickshaw Ltd, Jaipur

Silver Mharokhet, Jodhpur

Silver Rajeshwari Jawai Safari, Jawai

One to Watch Rajasthan Studio, Jaipur

Sustainable Experiences – Heritage Conservation

Gold Castle Kanota, Jaipur

Gold Castle Mandawa, Mandawa

One to Watch Shahpura Haveli, Shahpura

Sustainability Champions – Grassroots Heroes

Gold Sambhali Trust, Jodhpur

Silver Sevaram Mali, Kheechan

One to Watch Deepak Dixit & Kirti Dixit, Udaipur



8. The winners of the Indian Responsible Tourism State Awards 2023 – Rajasthan
9. Ratish Nanda, Conservation Architect and CEO, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, India
10. Dharmen Gabil Momin, Proprietor, Do Paatchi Homestay, Meghalaya
11. Eesha Singh, Co-Founder, No Footprints
12. Sapna Bhatia, Journalist, Filmmaker, Botanist and Founder-Owner of Kaner Retreat, near Jodhpur
13. Sonal Asgotraa, Founder, Astrostays, Ladakh
14. Soity Banerjee, Project Editor, Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative
15. Shrutika Dewan, Director, Brand & Marketing, Outlook Group
16. Nabih Tasnim, Project Manager, Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative
17. Guests participate in an interactive session on the intangible cultural heritage of Rajasthan



MY FAVOURITE

AMIT JAIN, GLOBAL CEO,
STERLING AND WILSON RENEWABLE ENERGY



FAVOURITE BOOK

I am an avid reader and I feel that reading rejuvenates the mind and the body. My favourite is *The Glass Palace* by Amitav Ghosh. It wonderfully presents an evaluation of the horrors of colonialism and capitalist exploitation.



FAVOURITE MOVIE

I feel that movies must entertain and, at the same time, also improve one's outlook towards life and society. I like *3 Idiots*, which not only entertains but also touches upon an important topic facing the society today. Recently, I watched *Scoop*, a Hindi show based on a true story, which was also very interesting.



FAVOURITE SPORT

Cricket. It is truly fascinating that 13 players on the field—two batsmen and 11 fielders—mesmerise thousands of cheering fans in the stands. The electrifying mood in the stadium is unimaginable and further stimulates the millions of fans watching the telecast worldwide.



FAVOURITE CUISINE

North Indian food is close to my heart. However, frequent international travel has resulted in my exploration of various cuisines from around the globe. Out of these, I think Thai and Japanese are my favourite.



FAVOURITE HOLIDAY DESTINATION

I have travelled around the world, but South Africa is special for me. It gives a visitor everything—the finest beaches, enchanting natural beauty, unmatched wildlife and beautiful cityscape. It has excellent weather, which is rarely very hot or very cold, and its bright sunshine makes one feel reenergised.



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