Global Growth Conundrum

India's Strides In Chip-Making

Reliance-Disney Merger

India Business Journal

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EFTA

WESTERLY SHIFT

India's trade pact with EFTA signals a strategic westward turn and marks a major milestone in its engagement with the Western world.

NECC Board Approves Allotment Of Equity Shares & Warrants On Preferential Basis

North Eastern Carrying Corporation Ltd (NECC) (BSE: 534615, NSE: NECCLTD), a leading player in domestic, international, commercial and industrial goods transportation, has announced that its board of directors has approved the allotment of 6,70,000 equity shares and 39,55,062 share warrants convertible into equity shares on preferential basis of face value of Rs 10/- at a price of Rs 32.05/-, which includes a premium of Rs 22.05/- per equity share, to promoters and other non-promoter group persons for cash consideration by way of preferential issue on a private placement basis in accordance with the Companies Act, 2013, SEBI (ICDR) Regulations and other applicable laws.

NECC

Moving You Ahead

Earlier, the company had announced that it had bagged an order from GAIL (India) Ltd for transportation of polymer under a contract value of Rs 52.48 crore for a period of three years. The company had recently entered into an MoU with SG Logistic Management Pvt Ltd to invest up to Rs 20 crore for up to 20 per cent of shares or securities for the purpose of trucking through electric vehicles (EVs).

Since its inception, NECC has been providing clients with flexible, responsive and affordable services that they deserve. The company utilises its deep operating knowledge to offer extraordinary solutions tailored to the unique needs of its clients. Specialising in domestic, international, commercial and industrial goods transportation, along with warehousing services, NECC has established itself as a leading freight forwarding company in India.

For those seeking to transport goods from one destination to another, NECC offers cost-effective solutions. Its services encompass a wide array of freight management and customised logistics solutions, supported by an automated ERP-based software system. Leveraging its operational expertise, extensive transportation network and advanced technology, the team is dedicated to providing nationwide transport services in Nepal, Bhutan and India.

Currently, NECC offers services, including part-truck load (PTL), full-truck load (FTL), bulk movements, ODC movements, warehousing and 3PL. With its PTL service, NECC facilitates the movement of goods and small parcels (<50 kgs) from various locations across India to the eastern and north-eastern regions of the country. This segment represents the flagship business of the company, which prides itself on being the foremost player in the entire region in terms of network density and serviceability. NECC extends its FTL service to major corporate clients, providing the flexibility to transport trucks from any origin to any destination as per the specific requirements of the client.

NECC specialises in domestic, international, commercial and industrial goods transportation, along with warehousing services.

As one of the top freight forwarding companies in India and among the best goods transport agencies in the region, NECC continues to set the standard for excellence in the industry.

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YOUR GATEWAY TO INDIA INC

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The new policy is a fine mix of incentives and conditions, aimed at making India an attractive manufacturing hub for EVs.

Building A Robust EV Market

A lot of thought seems to have gone into India's newly-unveiled electric vehicle (EV) policy. The policy is a fine mix of incentives and conditions, on which the incentives will be available, making India an attractive manufacturing hub for EVs.

Under the EV policy, Customs Duty on imported EVs has been brought down to 15 per cent from the current range of 70 per cent (for vehicles priced lower than $40,000) to 100 per cent (for vehicles priced over $40,000). The concessional Import Duty will be applicable to EVs priced at $35,000 and above for a five-year period.

However, a company importing EVs under the new policy will have to set up a manufacturing facility in the country within a three-year period. In addition, 25 per cent of localisation has to be met within three years. By the end of the fifth year, the localisation content should be expanded to 50 per cent.

Moreover, the benefit of lower Import Duty will be available only for companies that commit a minimum investment of Rs 4,150 crore or $500 million to manufacture EVs in the country. Total number of EVs permitted for import has been capped at the investment made or Rs 6,484 crore, which is equal to the incentive under the PLI Scheme. A maximum import of 40,000 EVs at a rate not exceeding 8,000 per year will be allowed if the investment crosses $800 million. Companies will have to back their commitments with a bank guarantee in lieu of the duty forgone, and this will be encashed if they fail to meet the investment criteria.

The policy, which facilitates imports at a lower duty, shows that the government is ready to go the extra mile to attract big companies to set up EV manufacturing plants in the country. EVs account for a minuscule 1 per cent of the passenger vehicle market in the country, with the overwhelming majority of vehicles running on fossil fuel-based internal combustion engine (ICE). Moreover, the policy strikes a delicate balance between nurturing domestic manufacturers and luring foreign investments by providing the lower Customs Duty for imported EVs priced at $35,000 and above. Most of the Indian EVs are priced below $35,000, and the policy ensures that imported and domestic EVs can coexist and lead to a vibrant EV market.

The lower Customs Duty tied to stringent and time-bound conditions appears to be the right way to attract global automobile companies, including Tesla – which had been seeking lower Import Duty for an initial short period – to manufacture EVs in India. Besides, higher volume of production and ensuing economies of scale are poised to drive down prices of EVs and to tilt the passenger vehicle market in favour of the EVs.

The new EV policy is significant, given the climate goals India has set out to achieve by 2030 in the short term and by 2070 in the long term. India has committed to reducing the emission intensity of its GDP by 45 per cent by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2070. The new policy will see more EV options for customers in India as domestic manufacturers, barring a few, have largely played a wait-and-watch game. It will also force many ICE manufacturers in India to wake up to the need for having an EV market plan in place.

The new EV policy marks a significant stride towards establishing India as a premier manufacturing hub and attracting global investment. With a focus on tax relief and incentives, this policy heralds a new era in promoting EV adoption. Simultaneously, it drives India towards a clean and green sustainable future.

The policy strikes a delicate balance between nurturing domestic manufacturers and luring foreign investments by providing the lower Customs Duty for imported EVs priced at $35,000 and above. Most of the Indian EVs are priced below $35,000, and the policy ensures that imported and domestic EVs can coexist and lead to a vibrant EV market.

Gensol Engineering's Subsidiary, Scorpius Trackers, Achieves Milestone Of 1,000$^+$ MW Contracted Orders Globally

Scorpius Trackers, a leading solar-tracking technology company and subsidiary of Gensol Engineering Ltd (BSE: 542851, NSE: GENSOL), has announced the achievement of reaching a significant milestone of over 1,000 mw in contracted orders across India, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Uganda, solidifying its position as a key player in the global solar-tracking industry.

With a steadfast commitment to excellence, Scorpius Trackers has established itself as a frontrunner in delivering reliable and bankable single-axis trackers. The company's cutting-edge, solar-tracking technology, featuring maintenance-free bearings, real-time GPS- enabled tracking, IoT (Internet of Things) and Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) have set new benchmarks for efficiency and performance in solar power generation.

Commenting on reaching this significant milestone, Scorpius Trackers CEO Shailesh Vaidya notes: "Crossing the over 1,000-mw mark of contracted orders is not just a milestone but a testament to our unwavering dedication to providing best-in-class solar-tracking solutions that enhance efficiency, reliability and cost-effectiveness for our clients. This achievement is a result of the hard work and dedication of our team over the years. We remain committed to collaborating with global and local partners to accelerate the world's energy transition journey."

The company's client portfolio includes ReNew, Hero Future, Shapoorji, Tata Power, Sterling Wilson, Azure Power, Kosol Energy and many others. Notably, the company has achieved the highest performing tracker generation at a commercial and industrial (C&I) site with the client Ajanta Clocks in Gujarat with more than 21 lakh units per mwp using mono-facial modules. As Scorpius Trackers celebrates this milestone, the company remains committed to pushing the boundaries of innovation in solar-tracking technology and delivering unparallelled value to its clients worldwide.

Established in 2012, Gensol Engineering, the flagship company within the Gensol Group, specialises in engineering, procurement and construct//ion (EPC) services, focusing on the solar power sector. Boasting a robust team of over 240 professionals, Gensol has demonstrated expertise in executing turnkey projects globally, having installed both ground-mounted and rooftop solar installations totalling more than 600 mw. Venturing beyond solar, Gensol has established a state-of-the-art electric vehicle (EV) production facility in Pune, dedicated to crafting electric three-wheelers and four-wheelers.

GENSOL

GENSOL ENGINEERING LIMITED

Scorpius Trackers has established itself as a frontrunner in delivering reliable and bankable single-axis trackers.

Gensol EV has received approval from the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI). In pursuit of revolutionising India's EV landscape, Gensol not only manufactures but also provides comprehensive EV leasing solutions, catering to a diverse clientele that includes PSUs, educational institutions, government entities, multinational corporations, ride-hailing services, employee transport companies, rental services, logistics and last-mile delivery enterprises. Recently, Gensol acquired Scorpius Trackers, an innovative and world-class bankable solar-tracking technology company primarily engaged in the design, development, marketing and servicing of single-axis trackers for solar power generation to enhance its offerings in the renewable energy sector.

MISCELLANEOUS

Odisha nod for 22 projects worth Rs 4,066 cr Odisha government has approved 22 projects with an investment of Rs 4,066 crore. The proposals have got the State government's nod at the State-Level Single-Window Clearance Authority meeting chaired by Chief Secretary P K Jena last month. The projects are in different sectors such as green energy equipment, chemicals, textile and apparel, steel, iron and ferro alloys, aluminium downstream, food processing, power and renewable energy, IT infrastructure and infrastructure and logistics, a media release from the State government has said. The projects are likely to generate 25,525 jobs in 12 districts.

SEBI chief sees price manipulation in market SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch has said that the capital market is seeing "signs" of price manipulation in the small and medium enterprises (SME) segment. The manipulation is both at the initial public offer (IPO) and also in trading, Ms Buch has said, advising caution to investors. "We do see the signs (of price manipulation), we have the technology to do it. We are able to see certain patterns. I would say it is still on the kitchen table, it is not yet gone into the oven," Ms Buch has said, speaking to women journalists on the sidelines of a conference in Mumbai.

Centre rolls out IndiaAI Mission for startups The Union Cabinet has approved the IndiaAI Mission with an outlay of Rs 10,372 crore for the next five years. Under the scheme, the government will allocate funds for subsidising private companies looking to set up AI computing capacity in the country, among other things. While still a blueprint, the approval could spur investments in this sector – with private companies setting up data centres in the country and allowing startups access so that they can test and build their generative AI models. Computing capacity is among the most important elements of building a large AI system, apart from algorithmic innovation and data sets.

Next round of spectrum auction on May 20 Upcoming spectrum auction, which will see airwaves worth Rs 96,317.65-crore across bands being put up for sale, will start from May 20, according to notice inviting applications released by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). The country's three telecom service providers, Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, will be participating in it. A total of 10,523.15 mhz spectrum across 800 mhz, 900 mhz, 1,800 mhz, 2,100 mhz, 2,300 mhz, 2,500 mhz, 3,300 mhz and 26 ghz bands worth Rs 96,317.65 crore will be auctioned. Companies will have to apply till April 22, after which the DoT will conduct a mock auction on May 13 and 14 before starting the actual auction.

India's first underwater metro flagged off Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated India's first metro line "under any mighty river" in Kolkata. This is a landmark project, showcasing the nation's stride towards infrastructure development. The underwater service is a part of the Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section of Kolkata Metro's East-West corridor, which will cover a distance of 4.8 km under the Hooghly river. The metro service will connect Howrah and Salt Lake – the West Bengal State capital's twin cities. Three out of six stations will be underground. The metro train is expected to zoom through a 520-metre stretch under the Hooghly in just 45 seconds.

India adds record open access solar capacity India has added a record 3.2 gw of open access solar capacity during 2023, posting a 6.66 per cent rise supported by factors, including reduced module cost, according to a report by Mercom Capital. In its latest report, the US-based research firm has said that the open access solar capacity addition was 3 gw during 2022.

Solar power through open access is an arrangement where a power producer establishes a solar power plant to supply green energy to consumers. It is the record high open access solar capacity addition in a calendar year. The cumulative installed solar capacity in the open access segment stood at 12.2 gw as of December 2023.

Big tech companies oppose ex-ante rules Large technology companies such as Google, Apple, Flipkart, Amazon and Uber have opposed pre-emptive regulation proposed in the draft Digital Competition Bill to curb dominance of a few companies in the digital space. The Ministry of Corporate Affairs had solicited public feedback on an expert committee's report and the draft bill. Twitter and Paytm are the only leading tech firms that have extended support. The proposed ex-ante regulations seek to pre-emptively address potential abuse of dominance and monopolistic behaviour by large digital companies. India faces an urgent need for robust regulation, with more than 35 crore users engaging in online transactions across various sectors.

Indo-UK FTA talks to restart after polls The 14th round of free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations between India and the UK has closed. Formal negotiations have been put on hold as India heads into general elections between April and June. According to UK officials familiar with the discussions, a lot of progress has been made, but the teams are not in a position to conclude an agreement which has led to closing of round 14. The next round of formal trade talks can commence only after the Lok Sabha polls are concluded. The India-UK FTA negotiations, which opened in January 2022, are aimed at securing an "ambitious" outcome for bilateral trade, currently worth around 38.1 billion pounds a year.

India's low computing infra has hit research India's computing infrastructure is less than 2 per cent of global capacity, which is a limiting factor in its contribution to research that remains in the range of 2 per cent, according to NVIDIA Asia South Managing Director Vishal Dhupar. The NVIDIA top executive adds that contribution of research from Indians abroad is around 12 per cent due to availability of computing infrastructure. Demand for graphics processing unit (GPU)-based servers or accelerated computing has increased as they can process data at a higher speed compared to central processing unit (CPU)-based servers. Besides, the race for AI development among global companies has led to a shortage of GPUs.

Richest 1% Indians own 40.1% of wealth Wealth concentrated in the richest 1 per cent of India's population is at its highest in six decades, research group World Inequality Lab has found. Since India, which won its independence in 1947 from Britain, opened its markets to foreign investment in 1992, its number of billionaires has surged. "The Billionaire Raj headed by India's modern bourgeoisie is now more unequal than the British Raj headed by the colonialist forces," the authors note. By the end of 2023, India's richest citizens owned 40.1 per cent of the country's wealth, the highest since 1961, and their share of total income was 22.6 per cent, the most since 1922. ■

Verbatim...

"I would not suggest that you own stocks for five years. If I were in India now, looking for something, I guess agriculture in India would be a fantastic investment for the next five years. If any of you know how to drive a tractor, go and become a farmer."

Jim Rogers
ACE INVESTOR

"Government does not tailor policy for any one individual company or its interests. Everybody is free to make their demands. But that does not mean that the government will necessarily take a decision based on what you demand."

Piyush Goyal
COMMERCE & INDUSTRY MINISTER

"At this stage, we are nowhere near that risk. There are enough checks and balances in our stock market today. It is not right to compare ourselves to serious bubble territory. I would say it is still frothy, a little bubbly, but not out of control."

Uday Kotak
FOUNDER,
KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK

"There aren't many other aviation markets like that of India in the world. India can be home to at least three hubs and a plenty of point-to-point services."

Campbell Wilson
CEO, AIR INDIA

PFRDA's app for financial inclusion PFRDA Chairperson Deepak Mohanty launched a web application developed by Zerodha Broking last month to provide easy access to NPS for subscribers. The app offers seamless access to NPS to a wider subscriber base, the PFRDA said in a statement. Mr Mohanty said that there was merit in joining NPS at a young age to harness the benefit of compounding. NPS provided continuity to retirement saving accounts irrespective of one's employment status and was available for non-resident Indians (NRIs), he said. As youngsters were tech savvy, the facilitation by Zerodha Broking would expand access to NPS, he added.

RBI tightens norms for card payments The RBI has tightened rules for credit and debit cards used for business accounts. The RBI has asked business card-issuers to put in place an effective mechanism to monitor end use of funds. Last month, the RBI had ordered Visa to stop using an unauthorised route to make business-to-business card payments which used fintech companies as an intermediary. The regulator has also said that card-issuers cannot share data of customers with outsourcing partners, unless it is "essential to discharge the functions" of the outsourcing partners. If data needs to be shared, explicit consent from cardholders will need to be obtained, the RBI has added.

PSB employees to get 17% hike in salary Indian Banks' Association and bank employees' unions have agreed on an annual wage hike of 17 per cent. This will result in an additional yearly outgo of around Rs 8,284 crore for public sector banks.

NPCI grants TPAP licence to Paytm Digital payments company One97 Communications, which operates under the application (app), Paytm, has been granted a third-party application provider (TPAP) licence by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). The licence allows customers to continue using the Paytm app for payments through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), after Paytm Payments Bank ceased operations on March 15, following regulatory action due to non-compliance with certain norms. Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, State Bank of India and Yes Bank will act as payment system provider banks to Paytm. Yes Bank will also act as a merchant acquiring bank for existing and new UPI merchants for Paytm.

As many as 8 lakh bank employees are set to benefit from the wage hike, which will be effective from November 2022. The All India Bank Officers' Confederation has said that a joint note has agreed to recognise all Saturdays as holidays, pending government notification. The revised working hours will be effective after notification by the government. All women employees will be allowed to take one day sick leave per month without giving a medical certificate.

HDFC Bank sells stake in HDFC Credila HDFC Bank has completed sale of its stake in education finance arm HDFC Credila for Rs 9,553 crore to private equity firms BPEA EQT and ChrysCapital. After the deal, HDFC Credila will cease to be a subsidiary of the bank. "HDFC Bank has, as of March 19, 2024, sold 14,01,72,180 equity shares of HDFC Credila to the acquirers. Accordingly, HDFC Credila has ceased to be a subsidiary of HDFC Bank," the lender has said in an exchange filing. The acquirer companies include Kopvoorn, Moss Investments, Defati Investments Holding and Infinity Partners. HDFC Bank will maintain a 9.99 per cent stake in HDFC Credila, the bank has said.

RBI bans IIFL from disbursing gold loans The RBI has barred IIFL Finance from sanctioning or disbursing gold loans after certain material supervisory concerns were observed in its gold loan portfolio. IIFL Finance can, however, continue to service its existing gold loan portfolio through the usual collection and recovery processes, the RBI has said in a statement. "The RBI has directed IIFL Finance to cease and desist, with immediate effect, from sanctioning or disbursing gold loans or assigning/ securitising/ selling any of its gold loans," the central bank has said. The RBI has said that an inspection of the company was carried out by it with reference to IIFL's financial position as of March 31, 2023.

CBI raids in 7 cities linked to IMPS scam The CBI conducted searches at 67 locations in seven cities across Rajasthan and Maharashtra in connection with suspicious Rs 820-crore Immediate Payment System (IMPS) transactions at UCO Bank last month. Last year, over 8,53,049 IMPS transactions took place between November 10 and 13, in which Rs 820 crore was wrongfully transferred to the accounts of over 41,000 UCO Bank account-holders. IMPS inward transactions initiated from around 14,600 account-holders of seven private banks were wrongfully posted in the accounts of over 41,000 UCO Bank account-holders. This resulted in Rs 820 crore being credited to UCO Bank accounts without actual debiting from the originating banks.

Small savings scheme rates stay unchanged Interest rates of small savings schemes for the coming quarter of April 1 to June 30, 2024, remain unchanged, the government has announced. "The rates of interest on various small savings schemes for the first quarter of FY2024-25, starting from April 1, 2024, and ending on June 30, 2024, shall remain unchanged from those notified for the fourth quarter (January 1, 2024, to March 31, 2024,) of FY2023-24," the Department of Economic Affairs under the Ministry of Finance has said in its office memorandum. It may be noted that the interest rates on key small savings schemes have remained unchanged during the fourth quarter of the current financial year. ■

ONGC's first oil reaches MRPL refinery First oil from State-owned ONGC's just-started Krishna Godavari deepsea oilfield has gone to its subsidiary MRPL. ONGC in January had started oil production from its Krishna Godavari basin, KG-DWN-98/2 (KG-D5) block, lying off the coast of Andhra Pradesh. The field produces about 12,500 barrels of oil per day currently, using a floating production and storage offloading (FPSO). The oil is stored on the FPSO, and once it reaches a critical level, it is transferred to a ship, which carries it to a refinery. ONGC's oil was loaded on a ship in the Bay of Bengal, and it travelled around the southern tip of India to reach MRPL's refinery in Mangaluru on the west coast.

IOCL set to make F1 fuel in three months Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL) will start producing fuel used in Formula One or F1 motor racing soon. The company's refinery in Paradip, Odisha, will in three months produce the petrol used in F1 car racing, IOCL Chairman Shrikant Madhav Vaidya has said. IOCL, the country's largest oil company, controlling roughly 40 per cent of the fuel market share, will be the first Indian company and only a handful globally that will produce the fuel used in F1 racing. Mr Vaidya adds that IOCL expects to get its Formula 1 fuel certified in around three months, after which it will start competing with other global majors like Shell to supply it to F1 teams.

NTPC, NGEL to set up units in Rajasthan NTPC and its subsidiary NTPC Green Energy (NGEL) have signed two separate initial pacts to explore the possibility of developing supercritical thermal plants and renewable energy as well as green hydrogen in Rajasthan. The MoU between NTPC and Rajasthan Rajya Vidyut Utpadan Nigam (RVUNL) looks to explore opportunities for adding supercritical units to the existing Chhabra Thermal Power Plant. The MoU also includes undertaking of 15- to 20-year annuity-based renovation and modernisation of old thermal units of RVUNL by NTPC or its affiliates. The MoU between NGEL and RVUNL aims to set up renewable energy projects and produce green hydrogen derivatives up to 25-gw and 1-mt capacities respectively in Rajasthan.

MoD inks Rs 2,890-crore contract with HAL The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has signed a contract with Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) for Mid-Life Upgrade (MLU) of 25 Dornier aircraft along with associated equipment for the Indian Navy at a cost of Rs 2,890 crore. The MLU for Dornier aircraft includes an upgrade to incorporate state-of-the art avionics systems and primary role sensors. The MoD has said that the upgrade will significantly enhance the operational capability of the Dornier aircraft of the Indian Navy to perform primary roles of maritime surveillance, coastal surveillance, electronic intelligence and development of maritime domain awareness. This upgrade will also enable Indian Navy Dorniers to carry out secondary roles of search and rescue, medical or casualty evacuation and communication link.

GAIL plans Rs 650-crore retail LNG foray GAIL is planning a foray in retail liquefied natural gas (LNG) sector by increasing use of LNG as a transportation fuel, the company has said in an exchange filing. The company plans to invest Rs 650 crore for this foray, and it aims to capture a 50 per cent market share in this segment in the next five years. GAIL is planning s to set up LNG dispensing stations across the Golden Quadrilateral and other major national highways to grow its retail LNG business. GAIL's new business plan coincides with the government's target to increase the share of natural gas in the energy mix from 6 to 15 per cent by 2030.

BHEL bags 1,600-mw order from NTPC BHEL has bagged an order for setting up 1,600-mw Singrauli Supercritical Thermal Power Plant Stage-III from NTPC. The plant will be set up adjacent to the existing 2,000-mw thermal power station in Singrauli in Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh, BHEL has said in a statement. Set up by BHEL in 1982, Singrauli plant was NTPC's first power plant in the State. The machines installed earlier by BHEL at the plant have been performing exceedingly well since commissioning, it has said.

Don't take action against IL&FS: NCLAT The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has directed 11 public sector banks (PSBs) not to take coercive action against IL&FS group companies and directors till its next hearing on May 14. A two-member NCLAT bench also issued notices to the banks, along with the RBI, directing them to file a reply. On October 15, 2018, the NCLAT had stayed all proceedings against IL&FS and other group companies till its further order. It had also restrained creditors of IL&FS from filing suits in the case of non-repayment of loans. IL&FS had filed a petition with the NCLAT that its lenders continued to harass IL&FS group companies and their directors despite the appellate tribunal's 2018 order.

NMDC crosses 40-mt milestone in FY24 NMDC, India's largest iron ore producer, has delivered its best-ever cumulative volumes up to February 2024. NMDC has produced 3.92 mt and sold 3.99 mt of iron ore in February 2024, taking the cumulative tally to 40.24 mt production and 40.48 mt sales in the 11 months of FY24. NMDC's sales performance in February 2024 is the company's best-ever February sales since inception. The 3.99 mt sales are 6 per cent higher than the volume of iron ore sold in February 2023. The company has reported growth of 13 per cent in cumulative production and 21 per cent in cumulative sales up to February 2024 over the last year's numbers.

CORPORATE

Tata Motors to split CV, PV into two cos

Tata Motors' (TML) board has approved a proposal to demerge the company into two separate listed entities. The company has said in a statement that the demerger will birth two companies – a commercial vehicles (CV) business and a passenger vehicles (PV) business. "The demerger will be implemented through an NCLT scheme of arrangement and all shareholders of TML shall continue to have the identical shareholding in both the listed entities," the company has said in the statement. The demerger is a logical progression of the subsidiarisation of PV and EV businesses done earlier in 2022 and shall further empower the respective businesses to deliver higher growths with greater agility.

Women-led startups bag 15% of tech funds India currently has over 8,000 tech-based startups that have a women founder, which have raised $23 billion till date, according to a report by data intelligence Tracxn. The tech startups have raised $155 billion in total funding, with women-led startups raising $23 billion, representing 14.8 per cent share of the overall tech funding pie. Of the 8,000 startups, 2,316 have received funding till date, according to the report. Nearly 6,000 firms are unfunded, of which 590 companies have revenue of more than $30,000. The share of funding raised by women-led startups in the country has risen in the past decade, the report adds.

Rakesh Gangwal sells 5.8% stake in IndiGo

IndiGo co-founder Rakesh Gangwal has sold a 5.8% stake in InterGlobe Aviation, the parent company of India's largest airline. According to BSE data, Mr Gangwal sold 2.25 crore shares worth Rs 6,785 crore in InterGlobe Aviation at an average price of Rs 3,015 per share. Morgan Stanley Asia bought 21 lakh shares of InterGlobe Aviation at Rs 3,015.10 apiece, showed BSE data. Following this transaction, Mr Gangwal's personal stake in IndiGo has come down to 6 per cent. The Chinkerpoo Family Trust, where Mr Gangwal's wife Shobha Gangwal is a trustee, holds another 13.49 per cent.

MSMEs' output growth rises after COVID Productivity growth for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), in particular, recovered sharply after the pandemic in the backdrop of several policy initiatives taken by the government and the RBI, a paper authored by the central bank has said. "The post-COVID-19 recovery trajectory indicates the resilience and catching-up potential in the sector, which may have benefited from various policy measures undertaken by the government and the RBI," the paper notes. The paper has used alternative estimation approaches to estimate firm-level production functions for MSMEs and large firms in the Indian manufacturing sector for the period of 2011-12 to 2021-22.

Singtel sells 0.8% in Airtel for Rs 5,850 cr Singapore Telecommunications (Singtel) has sold 4.9 crore shares, representing a 0.8 per cent stake in Bharti Airtel for Rs 5,850 crore to US investment firm GQG Partners. After the transaction, Singtel will hold a stake of 29 per cent in Airtel, which will be valued at around 33 billion Singaporean dollar, or Rs 2 lakh crore. "Airtel continues to see steady growth across all its businesses and has been rewarded with strong market valuations," Arthur Lang, the CFO of Singtel Group, has said. The transaction marks Singtel's move to unlock value by recycling its assets, bringing the total capital recycled to Rs 49,000 crore since its strategic reset in 2021.

Zepto levies Rs 2 platform fee per order

Zepto has become the first quick-commerce company to introduce a platform fee of Rs 2 per order. The platform fee will apply to a select set of users. At present, Zomato-owned Blinkit and Swiggy Instamart, both competitors of Zepto, do not charge a fee on grocery orders, but collect a platform fee from food delivery orders. Zepto also charges a late-night handling fee of Rs 15 on orders placed after 11 pm in certain instances. "We do not believe in being over-dependent on delivery fees to be profitable. We believe in core operating efficiency and cost reduction to be profitable," Zepto has said.

Xiaomi India moves towards premiumisation Smartphone-maker Xiaomi India is undergoing a noteworthy transformation in its business approach by introducing two high-end smartphones to the market. Currently, 85 per cent of the company's smartphone revenue is derived from devices priced below $300 (approximately Rs 25,000). Although Xiaomi has been venturing into the premium phone segment since 2019, it is currently intensifying its presence in the premium smartphone market, targeting a price range between Rs 50,000 and Rs 1 lakh, with the introduction of the Xiaomi 14 Ultra and Xiaomi 14. The move follows Xiaomi's loss of the top smartphone brand position to Samsung in 2022.

CCI fines now based on cos' global turnover

Competition Commission of India (CCI) can now impose penalties on companies for violations based on their global turnover, with the government notifying the amended competition norms. Till now, the CCI had been deciding penalties on the basis of a company's turnover from a particular business segment where violations have been found. The Corporate Affairs Ministry has notified the provisions under the amended the Competition Act with effect from March 6.

Tatas sell Air India building to Maharashtra govt Nearly 50 years after it was built, Tata Group-owned Air India's iconic building has been sold to Maharashtra government for Rs 1,601 crore. The building is situated in Nariman Point in Mumbai. Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey has announced that the Maharashtra government has decided to waive dues of Rs 298.42 crore payable by AI Assets Holding Company (AIAHL) to the State for this transaction. The non-core assets that were not included in the government's strategic sale of Air India to the Tata Group for Rs 18,000 crore, which was completed in early 2022, are held by the State-run AIAHL.

AGL ropes in Ranbir as brand ambassador Asian Granito India (AGL), one of the country's leading tiles, engineered marble, quartz and bathware brand, has signed actor Ranbir Kapoor as its brand ambassador. Recognised for his charm, versatility and youthfulness, Mr Kapoor perfectly embodies the spirit of Asian Granito – innovative, dynamic and constantly evolving, the company has said in a media release. With strong and sturdy reputation built on years of excellence, Asian Granito continues to push boundaries and set new benchmarks in the industry. With over 235 franchisee showrooms, 11 company-owned display centres and a vast distribution network across India, including more than 14,000 touchpoints, Asian Granito has expanded its reach to over 100 countries.

Bajaj Group sets aside Rs 5,000 cr for CSR The Bajaj Group has committed Rs 5,000 crore towards social impact initiatives over five years, with a sharp focus on skill development, under Bajaj Beyond – the group's new identity for all its corporate social responsibility (CSR) and charitable programmes. This initiative is expected to benefit over 2 crore youth and enable them to take advantage of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities offered by India's growing economy. In the last 10 years alone, the Bajaj Group has contributed close to Rs 4,000 crore towards CSR initiatives

Jet set to fly again after NCLAT's nod The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has cleared the decks for revival of Jet Airways as it upheld the resolution plan of the airline and approved the transfer of its ownership to Jalan Kalrock Consortium (JKC). Jet will be the first airline to undergo insolvency resolution under India's bankruptcy laws when it starts flying. "NCLAT has approved the implementation of the resolution plan as originally approved without any deviations and has given directions to lenders for specific and immediate implementation," Jet Airways has said in a statement. After it was grounded in 2019, Jet had undergone an insolvency resolution, following which JKC had emerged as the successful bidder.

Myntra is India franchisee of UK's NEXT
E-commerce platform Myntra has said that it has bagged franchise rights for the UK's fashion brand NEXT for the country. Myntra has signed a franchise agreement with the UK's fashion brand NEXT to this effect. The association allows Myntra Jabong, Myntra's B2B wholesale entity, the right to distribute NEXT's range of products, while holistically scaling NEXT's omni-channel presence in India, a company statement has said. "As a part of this franchise agreement, Myntra's B2B entity will set up NEXT branded stores in India," it said. It has added that the association enables NEXT to tap into the vast, diverse and ever-evolving Indian market.

Maruti recalls 16,000 units of WagonR, Baleno
Maruti Suzuki has disclosed plans to recall 11,851 units of Baleno and 4,190 units of WagonR produced between July 30, 2019, and November 1, 2019. The company has identified a defect in the fuel pump motor component, which, although rare, could result in engine stalling or starting issues. The automaker has assured affected vehicle owners that they would be promptly contacted by Maruti Suzuki's authorised dealer workshops for replacement of the faulty part at no additional cost. This proactive measure aims to address safety concerns and ensure the optimal performance of the vehicles. The recall comes amid Maruti's 15 per cent increase in the wholesale segment.

Bengaluru firm develops India's fastest router A Bengaluru-based firm Nivetti Systems has introduced an indigenous 2.4-terabits per second (tbps) router, setting a new benchmark in the field of networking. The cutting-edge router marks a significant milestone for India's technology sector. Development of this high-speed router by Nivetti Systems carries numerous benefits for India's technological landscape. Firstly, it represents a momentous achievement for the country, highlighting the strides made in advancing indigenous technology solutions. By relying on domestic expertise and resources, the router underscores India's ability to innovate and compete on a global scale. With its impressive speed and efficiency, the router can significantly facilitating faster data transmission and connectivity.

Signature to invest Rs 2,200 cr in Gurugram
Realty firm Signature Global will invest Rs 2,200 crore over the next five years to develop a new luxury housing project in Gurugram as a part of its expansion plan amid strong consumer demand. "We have launched a new housing project in Sector 37D, Gurugram on Dwarka Expressway. The total units will be 1,008 in the project," Signature Global Chairman Pradeep Aggarwal hss said. The company has already sold the entire 1,008 luxury flats for over Rs 3,600 crore, reflecting strong consumer demand despite price rise. Mr Aggarwal adds that the company had received 5,400 EoIs from customers in this new 16.5-acre housing project.

New House For The Mouse

The Reliance-Disney merger is set to create an entertainment behemoth that could alter the dynamics of the Indian media industry.

SHIVANAND PANDIT

Reliance Industries (RIL), along with its subsidiary Viacom18, and renowned US media giant Walt Disney, announced the long-awaited merger of their media assets last month. This binding definitive agreement brings together Viacom18's assets with Disney's Star India, forming a new entity valued at $8.5 billion. The merger promises to revolutionise the landscape of media, entertainment and sports in India.

With RIL's direct and indirect ownership in Viacom18, it holds an estimated 49-50 per cent stake in the merged company, translating to roughly Rs 40-50 per share based on RIL's current share price. This value largely accounts for RIL's existing ownership in Viacom18 and is already reflected in its share price.

Why the buzz?

The merger forms India's foremost media conglomerate, boasting of a combined portfolio of over 120 channels. The merged entity will span various genres nationwide and reach a viewership of more than 75 crore across broadcast and streaming platforms. This consolidation grants the merged entity substantial leverage in advertising and content negotiations across both television and digital mediums.

By leveraging exclusive rights to distribute Disney films and production in India, along with access to Disney's extensive library of 30,000 content assets spanning a century, the merged entity is positioned to amplify the retention of its streaming services and achieve substantial long-term expansion.

This development is seen as advantageous for RIL's telecom business as the merged media entity's streaming services will likely be bundled with it. However, the impact may not be transformative for RIL, given its already substantial size and scale. Nevertheless, this merger represents a significant milestone for the Indian media industry and its surrounding ecosystem. A successful conclusion of the deal is expected to pave the way for a new era in the evolution of the Indian media landscape.

Impact on media

Uday Shankar, who had served as the CEO of Star India from 2007 to 2020, spearheaded an impressive growth trajectory for the company, catapulting revenues from approximately Rs 1,600 crore to around Rs 18,000 crore. In 2018, when Walt Disney Company acquired Star's parent, Fox's entertainment assets, Star India was valued at an estimated $13-15 billion. However, Mr Shankar, along with a consortium of investors, is now acquiring Star India at a valuation significantly lower than its previous assessment, which analysts approximate to be around one-third of its prior value. Upon the completion of the deal, Mr Shankar is expected to assume the role of vice-chairperson in the entertainment conglomerate formed through the collaboration of RIL and Walt Disney.

Notably, the remarkable aspect of this transaction lies in its pricing dynamics. Just two years ago, speculations about the valuation of Disney's operations in India might have hovered around four times the current estimation. This swift decline in value underscores a notable turnaround, with Star India now being appraised at less than $5 billion. Although the press release announcing the merger indicates a post-money valuation of the combined entity at $8.5 billion, it remains uncertain what proportion of this valuation pertains specifically to Star India.

The remarkable level of consolidation achieved is evident in the amalgamation of Disney-Star's broadcast, digital and studio assets, which encompass a vast array, including Star Plus and 70 other channels, the prominent pay-streaming platform Disney+Hotstar and blockbuster movies like *Neerja* and *Brahmastra*. Coupled with the extensive portfolio of 58 news, entertainment and digital brands, along with films from Network18 – *Drishyam2, OMG2* – and its subsidiary Viacom18 (such as Colors, Moneycontrol), this conglomerate commands a staggering 32 per cent share of all TV viewership in India. Should Voot, Jio Cinema and Disney+Hotstar merge into a unified entertainment app, the resulting streaming service would boast of a staggering 25.5 crore unique visitors, nearly half the reach of the world's largest streaming platform, Google's YouTube in India.

This transformative shift heralds a new narrative, pivoting from the notion that TV is dwindling to the recognition that the future lies in the synergy of TV and digital platforms. Building on his track record at Star, Mr Shankar is poised to cultivate a content powerhouse that caters to both digital and traditional television, thus driving up its value. It is noteworthy that TV commands four times the advertising rates compared to digital platforms. With their dominant presence in linear television

The merged company will boast of a combined viewership reach of over 75 crore across broadcast and streaming platforms.

and digital realms, the Reliance-Disney alliance is strategically positioned to capitalise on the burgeoning adoption of smart TVs, which are increasingly connected to high-speed internet broadband, thereby elevating streaming rates as well.

The RIL-Disney merger heralds a new narrative of a future, driven by the synergy of TV and digital platforms.

The potential merger between Reliance and Disney has stirred speculation both within and outside the companies, prompting considerations from the Competition Commission of India (CCI). Many believe that both the companies have meticulously strategised for this move, possibly involving restructuring into a holding company or streamlining their operations. For instance, Viacom18 and Disney Star's overlapping strengths in Marathi, Hindi and Kannada television may necessitate consolidation. Analysts suggest that while some anti-trust concerns may have eased, they could resurface.

If the merger materialises, it would simultaneously evoke both concern and excitement among advertisers. The prospect of harnessing synergies from owning both digital and linear TV rights, such as those for the Indian Premier League, is enticing. However, it would likely tip the balance towards a sellers' market in both TV and digital domains. Historically, India's media space has favoured buyers due to fragmentation, constraining revenue potential. This deal could potentially alter this dynamic, possibly enhancing investors' returns in the long run.

Despite India's burgeoning media and entertainment industry, its per-unit monetisation metrics remain relatively low compared to global standards. If the merger proceeds, it could help mitigate market volatility and potentially improve investors' returns. The true impact on wealth creation and investors' returns will only be discernible when the joint venture seeks further capitalisation.

(The author is a tax specialist based in Goa.)

Growth Conundrum

Robust manufacturing numbers in India and China and vibrant Indian economic growth stand in contrast to weakness across other powerhouses in Asia.

IBJ BUREAU

China has emerged as a silver lining in the Asian dark cloud. Factory activity in many Asian economies has weakened in March. But a steady hum across industries in China in March and robust factory output in India in March point to a turn for the better in some major parts of Asia. The uneven trend of industrial expansion in Asia – once a fast-expanding, key driver of the global economy – is also a cause of concern for global policymakers, central bankers and economists.

The soft Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) readings highlight the challenge the region's policymakers face as they wrestle with patchy signs of recovery in global demand. They are also staring at an uncertainty over when the US Federal Reserve would start cutting interest rates.

"China's exports are picking up a bit, but that's because their goods are cheap. That means other Asian countries must compete with China for demand that's not growing," notes Toru Nishihama, the chief emerging market economist of Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. "With no clear driver of global growth, it's hard to paint a rosy outlook for Asia," he adds.

Weaker Asia

In Japan, while big manufacturers' sentiment has soured, optimism

"India's March manufacturing PMI rose to its highest level since 2008 on the back of strong demand and a slight tightening in capacity."

INES LAM
Economist, HSBC

India has continued to remain the fastest-growing economy in the world. Besides, India's manufacturing industry has had a robust run in March with activity expanding at its fastest pace in 16 years. The factory output is led by accelerated global demand and lower inflationary pressures, a private survey shows.

The manufacturing sector growth has climbed to a 16-year high in March on the back of the strongest increase in output and new orders since October 2020, amid reports of buoyant demand conditions.

The seasonally-adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing PMI has surged to a 16-year high of 59.1 in March from 56.9 in February, reflecting stronger growth of new orders, output and input stocks as well as renewed job creation.

In the PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. The HSBC India Manufacturing PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to purchasing managers in a among services sector companies has hit a more than three-decade high in the first quarter, the Japanese central bank's survey shows. Manufacturing activity has weakened in most parts of Asia, including export powerhouses Japan and South Korea, as well as Taiwan, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Japan's final au Jibun Bank PMI has stood at 48.2 in March, the highest level since November 2023 and recovering from February's 47.2 which marked the fastest pace of contraction in over three-and-a-half years.

However, industrial activity has contracted for the 10th straight month as new export orders slumped, reflecting souring sentiment in key markets like China and North America, the survey shows.

"China's exports are picking up a bit, but that's because their goods are cheap. That means other Asian countries must compete with China for demand that's not growing. With no clear driver of global growth, it's hard to paint a rosy outlook for Asia."

TORU NISHIHAMA
Chief Economist
Dai-ichi Life Institute

South Korea's manufacturing activity has also weakened in March as slowing domestic demand has offset robust overseas sales with the PMI falling to 49.8 in March from 50.7 in February.

Taiwan's PMI has fallen to 49.3 in March from 48.6 in February, while that for Vietnam has dropped to 49.9 from 50.4 and Malaysia's has declined to 48.4 from 49.5, the surveys adds. By contrast, manufacturing activity has expanded in March in the Philippines and Indonesia.

Chinese rebound

China's Caixin-S&P Global manufacturing PMI has risen to 51.1 in March from 50.9 in the previous month, a private survey has showed. China's manufacturing

India's Factories Are Humming

panel of around 400 manufacturers.

"India's March manufacturing PMI rose to its highest level since 2008. Manufacturing companies expanded hiring in response to strong production and new orders. On the back of strong demand and a slight tightening in capacity, input cost inflation picked up in March," HSBC Economist Ines Lam has said.

Manufacturing output has risen for the 33rd month running in March, and to the greatest extent since October 2020. Growth has quickened across the consumer, intermediate and investment goods sectors.

Inflows of new work have strengthened from both domestic and export markets. New export orders have increased at the fastest pace since May 2022, the survey adds.

Quantities of purchase have increased at the quickest rate since mid-2023, and one that was among the strongest in nearly 13 years, as companies have sought to build up stocks in advance of expected improvements in sales.

On the job front, after leaving payroll numbers broadly unchanged in the previous two months, manufacturers in India have taken on additional workers in March. The pace of job creation has been mild but the best since September 2023, the survey notes.

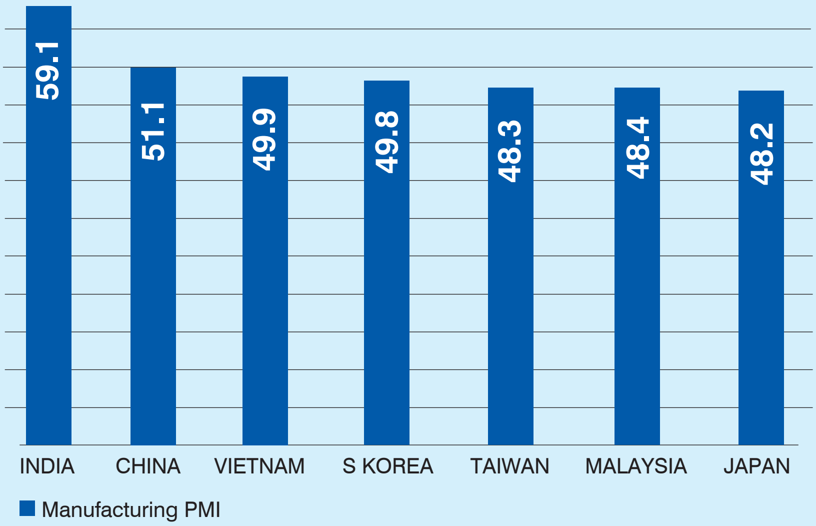
India's manufacturing in March has expanded at its fastest pace in 16 years.

On the price front, despite remaining modest by historical standards, cost pressures have been at their highest in five months. Companies have reported having paid more for cotton, iron, machinery tools, plastics and steel. However, customer retention has remained a priority for goods producers who have raised their charges to the least extent in over a year.

On the outlook for the Indian manufacturing sector, companies have remained confident on an average, with 28 per cent forecasting output growth in the year ahead and 1 per cent expecting contraction. The overall level of sentiment has remained elevated but slipped to a four-month low as inflation concerns have weighed on confidence.

Factory Output Across Asia

Industrial activity in Japan has contracted for the 10th straight month in March as new export orders have slumped.



PMI figures above 50 denote expansion, and those below 50 mean contraction. All figures are for March 2024.

expansion is at the fastest pace in 13 months with business confidence hitting an 11-month high.

The finding joins an official PMI survey released earlier that showed that China's factory activity has expanded for the first time in six months. The rebound in China, which is struggling to mount a strong economic revival, partly due to a protracted property crisis, provides some welcome relief to Beijing and investors globally.

China's $18.6-trillion economy has skirted some near-term downside risks as suggested by recent indicators, analysts note. These developments buy officials more time to convince investors that they can fire up a new growth engine for 2024 and the years ahead.

Economic data over the January-February period and a factory owners' survey for March offers relief to Chinese policymakers seeking to convince foreign investors that they can rekindle the world's No 2 economy after it had failed to post a sustainable recovery following Beijing abandoning strict COVID curbs in late 2022.

But analysts and investors are cautious that while things may not be getting worse, unless officials can figure out how to get it to fire on all cylinders again, the market once seen as the engine of global growth will stall later in the year.

China has taken a series of steps to invigorate its economy, including guiding banks to lend more to high-end manufacturing rather than real estate and reducing the amount banks must hold in reserve. But such policy measures are becoming less effective and could even be scaled back, they add.

Uneven revival

In revised forecasts issued in January, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had projected Asia's economy to expand by 4.5 per cent this year, driven by robust US demand and the boost from expected stimulus measures in China.

But the IMF had said that the recovery would be divergent across economies with Japan likely to see growth slowing to 0.9 per cent in contrast to an expected 6.5 per cent expansion in India. The IMF expects China's economy to expand by 4.6 per cent this year, slowing from 5.2 per cent in 2023.

So, while China's manufacturing may be soaring high, its economy is still shaky and looks to be recovering to be recovering at a slower pace. On the other hand, India seems to be making giant strides, with its manufacturing sector as vibrant as ever, especially a decade since the Narendra Modi government's ambitious Make In India policy was rolled out. Besides, the Indian economy also looks to be in the pink of health.

India and China are yet again in the forefront of economic recovery in Asia. However, the other powerhouses of the continent are still struggling to stage a full-fledged revival. How long will it take for Asia – the powerful engine of global growth – to get back into form? That question has no definite answers for now.

Apollo Micro Systems Enters Into A Rs 252-Crore Term Loan Agreement With SBI

Apollo Micro Systems Ltd (BSE: 540879, NSE: APOLLO), a pioneer in design, development and assembly of custom-built electronics and electromechanical solutions, has announced that it has entered into a term loan agreement worth Rs 252.5 crore with State Bank of India (SBI). The nature of the loan is term loan (TL) and renewal-cum-enhancement of the working capital (WC) credit facilities. The total loan amount is split as term loan of Rs 110 crore and renewal and enhancement of credit facilities of Rs 142.50 crore.

Earlier, in February, the company had announced that it had performed the groundbreaking ceremony and foundation stone laying for Integrated Plant for Ingenious Defence Systems (IPiDS).

The company has laid a roadmap to expand its manufacturing infrastructure by augmenting the facilities with capacity expansion in 5 acres at Hardware Park-2 situated at Pahadi Sharif, Hyderabad, Telangana. Apollo Micro Systems intends to manufacture missiles and sub-systems and also undertake MRO of weapons in this facility. The company is also working closely to manufacture unmanned aerial systems and unmanned ground systems through this facility.

This manufacturing facility will be built on around five acres with total built-up area of 3,50,000 sq ft with end-to-end manufacturing and qualification set-up according to international standards with a total investment of Rs 210 crore. The company intends to provide an additional employment to around 400 people.

The foundation stone laying and groundbreaking ceremony of the IPiDS facility was performed by Sri Duddilla Sridhar Babu Garu, the Hon'ble Minister for ITE&C, Industries & Commerce and Legislative Affairs, Government of Telangana, on February 19, 2024, in the presence of Principal Secretary ITE&C, Industries and Commerce Sri Jayesh Ranjan - IAS, Managing Director TSIIC Sri Vishnu Vardhan Reddy - IFS, and Sri P A Praveen, Director Aerospace, Government of Telangana.

The Hon'ble Minister stated that Telangana was at the forefront and had established itself as a hub for aerospace and fefence manufacturing in India. He added that Telangana had consistently been ranked as the Best State for Aerospace by Government of India and had won the biennial Best State Award for Aerospace from Ministry of Civil Aviation four times in a row (2018, 2020, 2022 and 2024). Additionally, he highlighted that Hyderabad was also ranked No 1 in cost-effectiveness by the Financial Times Global rankings for Aerospace Cities of the Future (2020-21).

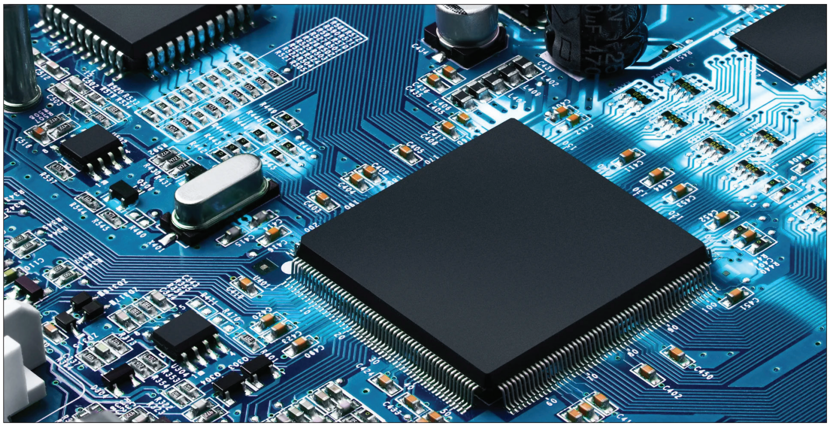
Apollo Micro Systems, established in 1985, offers solutions based on state-of-the-art technologies for aerospace, defence and space as primary customers and also caters to solutions for railways, automotive and homeland security markets. The company is into development of indigenous technologies and is one among the first companies in Hyderabad working for Department of Space and Defence, offering design services.

The company offers diverse solutions based on state-of-the-art technologies for aerospace, defence and space.

The home-grown technologies are developed for land, air and Sea applications for defence and also for the Department of Space. The company also offers state-of-the-art surveillance solutions for homeland security applications. The company employs around 350 people in permanent roles, of which 150 experienced engineers are exclusively engaged in design and development activity.

Its wide spectrum of technological solutions and end-to-end design, assembly and testing capabilities gives it an edge over competition. It has a pool of engineers who demonstrate their design, engineering capabilities and offer product lifecycle support. The company's engineering services team offers build-to-specifications and build-to-print services. Apollo's vision is "To emerge as a world-class company and a unique solution provider with Total Solutions Under One Roof".

Capturing The Future



As India makes giant strides in manufacturing semiconductors, a supportive policy framework can help build a dynamic ecosystem.

SHIVANAND PANDIT

India is actively engaging in the evolving global semiconductor production landscape, leveraging its position as one of the largest electronics markets and a significant hub for technical expertise. With its substantial presence in the global technology ecosystem, India emerges as a key player in driving technological advancements.

Learning from the disruptions witnessed in the global semiconductor value chain during the COVID-19 pandemic, India is now diversifying its approach in the post-pandemic era. This entails venturing into all facets of the semiconductor industry, including research and development (R&D), fabless chip-making, design, fabrication and equipment supply. Additionally, there is a concerted effort to nurture a skilled talent pool to support this burgeoning sector.

India is undergoing a pivotal technological transformation with the government's recent announcement of partnerships aimed at kick-starting semiconductor manufacturing. This bold move signifies a departure from India's predominantly service-oriented reputation, as it focuses on bolstering its manufacturing sector. With a massive investment of $15.2 billion, the government is spearheading efforts to enhance its semiconductor and electronics manufacturing capabilities.

This strategic initiative includes establishment of India's inaugural state-of-the-art semiconductor fab, along with the development of two advanced packaging and test facilities. The ambitious plan aims to commence construction on these three plants within a swift timeframe of 100 days, indicating the country's commitment to technological advancement and economic growth.

In 2019, the semiconductor market in India was valued at $22 billion. Since then, it has been experiencing remarkable growth, with projections to reach $64 billion by 2026 and an even more impressive $110 billion by 2030. This expansion is fuelled by India's significant reservoir of semiconductor design engineers, constituting approximately 20 per cent of the global total.

A trailblazing debut

India's semiconductor manufacturing endeavours are marked by an $11-billion partnership between Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor (PSMC) and Tata Electronics, a subsidiary of the $370-billion Indian conglomerate, the Tata Group. This collaboration aims to produce chips utilizing 28-, 40-, 55- and 110-nanometer (nm) technology nodes, initially capable of manufacturing 50,000 wafers per month. While these nodes may not represent cutting-edge chip technology, they are pivotal for various chip-making applications, with 28 nm standing out as the most advanced planar complementary metal-oxide semiconductor (CMOS) transistor technology within the venture's scope.

The proposed semiconductor fabrication facility will be situated in the newly-established industrial zone in Dholera, Gujarat – the home State of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is projected to generate over 20,000 skilled jobs, both directly and indirectly. Tata Electronics envisions this facility producing chips for diverse applications such as power management, display drivers, microcontrollers and high-performance computing logic, addressing critical needs highlighted during the pandemic-induced chip shortage.

In addition to the semiconductor fab, country's investments extend to two assembly, test and packaging facilities, thereby diversifying India's role in the semiconductor supply chain, which has traditionally been centred in South-East Asia. Tata Electronics plans to construct a $3.25-billion plant in Jagiroad, Assam, introducing various packaging technologies and aiming for future advancements in 3D integration and other advanced packaging methods. Scheduled to commence production in 2025, this facility is expected to significantly bolster the local economy by creating 27,000 jobs.

Furthermore, a collaborative effort involving Japan's Renesas, Thailand's Stars Microelectronics and India's CG Power and Industrial Solutions will establish a $900-million packaging plant in Sanand, Gujarat, contributing to the region's growing semiconductor ecosystem. This development complements the anticipation of a Micron packaging and test facility as outlined in a previous agreement.

Supportive policy

Despite its growth potential, the semiconductor industry faces hurdles such as cost competitiveness, infrastructure limitations and shortage in skilled labour. Vietnam, for instance, grapples with reliance on Western chipmakers, highlighting the risks of supply chain dependency. To break free from this cycle, India needs to foster a supportive policy environment for its indigenous market. Already, Indian fabless chipmakers have established partnerships with global foundries, laying the groundwork for expanding India's design intellectual property (IP) capabilities.

The Odisha government has actively supported the growth of fabless chipmakers and the provision of advanced electronic design (EDA) automation tools for chip development. Similarly, the government of Tamil Nadu subsidises the expenses involved in prototype development and further R&D as a part of its semiconductor policy. By concentrating on nurturing policymaking, such targeted initiatives can position India as a potential semiconductor powerhouse. This can enable the creation of design IP, catering to global manufacturers in various sectors such as personal computing, smartphones, wearables and high-performance computing.

Building Industry, Chip By Chip

Beyond computing and AI, India's semiconductor prowess will power renewable energy, EVs and other new-age industries.

- A joint venture of Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor and Tata Electronics building a $11-billion plant in Dholera, Gujarat
- Tata Electronics setting up a $3.25-billion facility in Jagiroad, Assam, for various packaging technologies
- A three-way partnership of Japan's Renesas, Thailand's Stars Microelectronics and India's CG Power and Industrial Solutions putting up a $900-million packaging plant in Sanand, Gujarat
- US-based Micron Technology constructing a $2.75-billion assembly, testing and packaging unit in Sanand, Gujarat

In the rapidly-evolving landscape of technology, semiconductors are poised to take the centre stage. Experts in the industry are asserting their pivotal role in shaping the future, particularly in the advancement of quantum computing. These cutting-edge computers promise exponential leaps in computing power, with profound implications for fields such as cryptography, material science and complex system simulation. Moreover, semiconductors are set to underpin the next wave of innovation in artificial intelligence (AI), enabling more robust and efficient AI systems. This advancement will drive progress in autonomous vehicles, robotics, natural language processing and predictive analytics.

Beyond computing and AI, semiconductors are integral to renewable energy technologies. They are crucial components in solar panels, wind turbines and energy storage systems, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of renewable energy sources. Additionally, in power conversion, semiconductors are poised to revolutionise the field. Advanced materials like silicon carbide (SiC) and gallium nitride (GaN) are driving greater efficiency in power conversion systems, essential for applications such as electric vehicles (EVs) and smart grid technology. These next-generation semiconductors are poised to redefine the landscape of power electronics.

Creating a supportive policy framework, including incentives, subsidies and regulatory reforms, is crucial to stimulate semiconductor investments and cultivate industry expansion. Simplifying regulatory processes, implementing tax incentives and bolstering infrastructure are vital steps in nurturing a dynamic semiconductor ecosystem in India. ■

(The author is a tax specialist based in Goa.)

Progressive Partnership

Servotech Power Systems and Electra EV join hands to create India's first, fast-charging, interoperability solutions between GB/T and CCS2 protocols.

IBJ BUREAU

Servotech Power Systems Ltd, a leader in the development of electric vehicle (EV) chargers and solar solutions, and Electra EV, India's leading electric vehicle powertrain solutions company, have announced a collaboration for a jointly-owned, revolutionary, EV-charger technology, for which they filed for patents recently.

These ground-breaking solutions enable fast DC charging of any GB/T Bharat DC 001 vehicles (which are on sub-200V DC platforms) from the CCS2 charging network through the addition of a connector using a small additional gadget. This need was established by Electra EV serving its OEM and fleet customers. The innovation paves the way for seamless charging compatibility, eliminates the need for expensive, dual-infrastructure deployment and benefits both passenger services and commercial vehicles that rely on the GB/T Bharat DC 001 protocol.

"We are thrilled to partner with Electra EV, a company that shares our vision for a sustainable and accessible e-mobility future," notes Arun Handa, the chief technical officer of Servotech Power Systems Ltd. "This collaboration brings together exceptional technological expertise and a commitment to innovation. The joint ownership of these patents will accelerate the development of next-generation EV-charging ecosystem that benefits businesses and consumers alike," adds Mr Handa.

"Electra EV is delighted to announce the collaboration with Servotech Power Systems, which is working towards reimagining the EV- charging landscape with solutions that are fit for purpose," reveals Samir Yajnik, the CEO of Electra EV. "This breakthrough

The JV between Servotech and Electra signifies a pivotal moment in advancement of EV industry across India.

technology aligns perfectly with Electra EV's mission to pioneer the transition to electric vehicles. We see incredible potential for solutions from this collaboration in progressing India's EV growth journey," Mr Yajnik adds.

The partnership between Servotech Power Systems Ltd and Electra EV signifies a pivotal moment in the advancement of the EV industry across India and other countries adopting the GB/T Bharat DC 001 standard. By streamlining charging infrastructure and driving down costs, this united front paves the way for the widespread adoption of EVs.

Servotech Power Systems is an NSE-listed organisation that develops tech-enabled, EV-charging solutions, leveraging its over two decades of experience and expertise in the electronics space. The company offers an extensive range of AC and DC chargers which are compatible with different EVs and serve multiple applications such as commercial and domestic. With its comprehensive engineering capabilities, the company plans to play a pivotal role in developing India's EV tech infrastructure. A trusted brand with a strong pan-India presence, Servotech Power Systems' legacy is marked by proven innovation and distribution of high-end LED lighting and UV-C disinfection products, along with medical-grade oxygen concentrators and its makings.

Electra EV (Electrodrive Powertrain Solutions Pvt Ltd), founded by Ratan N Tata, is amongst India's leading electric powertrain solutions company with offerings in complex high- and low-voltage platforms across vehicle categories. It has a range of solutions covering battery packs, drivetrains, vehicle software, control solutions and fully- integrated powertrain manufacture and supply and caters to leading automotive OEMs. ■

GENSOL ENGINEERING LIMITED

Gensol Records Highest-Ever Revenue Of Rs 960 Crore In FY24, Growing 141% YoY

Gensol Engineering Limited (BSE: 542851, NSE: GENSOL), a leading player in the renewable energy sector, specialising in solar power engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) services and electric mobility solutions, recorded its highest-ever revenue from operations, surpassing Rs 960 crore (provisional and unaudited) in the financial year ended March 31, 2024. This remarkable achievement represents an extraordinary growth rate of 141 per cent compared to that of the previous financial year. The corresponding figure for the previous year was Rs 398 crore. Gensol's exceptional performance emphasises its position as a frontrunner in the industry, demonstrating its ability to capitalise on emerging opportunities and deliver value to its stakeholders.

Upon achieving this notable revenue in FY24, Gensol Engineering Ltd Chairman and Managing Director Anmol Singh Jaggi said: "This financial performance of the company reflects robust and commendable growth trajectory exceeding the guidance given in our last earnings conference call in January 2024. This achievement solidifies our status as a frontrunner in the renewable energy industry, emphasising our unwavering commitment to growth. I thank all the shareholders, customers and the Gensol family for their continued support that is vital to our success, and we remain dedicated to delivering value and sustainable growth."

Earlier, Scorpius Trackers, a leading solar-tracking technology company and subsidiary of Gensol Engineering Ltd, had proudly announced the achievement of reaching a significant milestone of over 1,000 mw in contracted orders across India, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Uganda, solidifying its position as a key player in the global solar-tracking industry.

Established in 2012, Gensol Engineering Limited, the flagship company within the Gensol Group, specialises in EPC services, focusing on the solar power sector. Boasting of a robust team of over 240 professionals, Gensol has demonstrated expertise in executing turnkey projects globally, having installed both ground-mounted and rooftop solar installations totalling more than 600 mw. Venturing beyond solar, Gensol has established a state-of-the-art electric vehicle (EV) production facility in Pune, India, dedicated to crafting electric three-wheelers and four-wheelers. Gensol EV has received approval from the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI).

GENSOL

GENSOL ENGINEERING LIMITED

Venturing beyond solar, Gensol has set up a state-of-the-art EV production facility in Pune.

In pursuit of revolutionising India's EV landscape, Gensol not only manufactures but also provides comprehensive EV-leasing solutions, catering to a diverse clientele that includes PSUs, educational institutions, government entities, multinational corporations, ride-hailing services, employee transport companies, rental services, logistics and last-mile delivery enterprises. Recently, Gensol acquired Scorpius Trackers, an innovative and world-class bankable solar-tracking technology company, primarily engaged in the design, development, marketing and servicing

WESTERLY SHIFT

India's trade pact with EFTA signals a strategic westward turn and marks a major milestone in its engagement with the Western world.

SHIVANAND PANDIT

In recent years, the Indian government has been proactive in its pursuit of trade agreements. It reflects a concerted effort to bolster economic ties on the global stage. Notable among these endeavours is the successful negotiation of an economic cooperation and trade pact with Australia as well as establishment of a comprehensive economic partnership with the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Additionally, ongoing discussions with the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) underscore India's commitment to expanding its trade network.

A significant milestone in India's recent trade diplomacy was achieved on March 10, 2024, with the formal signing of the India-European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA). This agreement, aimed at stimulating investment and amplifying exports – particularly in key domestic services sectors such as information technology (IT), audio-visual industries and skilled professional mobility – marks a pivotal moment in India's economic engagement strategy.

The TEPA between India and the EFTA marks a significant addition to India's expanding array of free trade agreements (FTAs). This agreement centres on enhancing economic relations and targets closer collaboration with the EFTA nations – the four non-EU countries of Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Notably, this pact signals a strategic shift westwards in India's FTA landscape, representing the country's first such agreement with European nations and marking an important milestone in its engagement with the Western world.

The successful finalisation of an

FTA with developed nations such as Switzerland and Norway sends a powerful and positive message to the global community. It underscores India's unwavering dedication to liberalisation of trade amidst a backdrop of increasing protectionism worldwide, spanning both developed and developing economies.

For our trading partners, securing an FTA with India holds immense appeal, as it signifies overcoming India's historically high tariff barriers to access a vast and lucrative market. Although discussions on this pact commenced as far back as 2008, they fell off India's agenda following the exit of the UPA government. However, negotiations for the TEPA initiated nearly 16 years ago have recently been swiftly concluded within the past few months.

Exploring new ground

The TEPA outlines an ambitious target of attracting $100 billion in investments from the EFTA countries into India, with the potential to create 10 lakh jobs over 15 years. However, the agreement includes provisions allowing India to reconsider its tariff concessions if these investment and job creation targets are not met.

A careful examination of the legal document reveals that for these anticipated investments and job opportunities to materialise two conditions must be fulfilled: India's economy must grow at a robust rate of 9.5 per cent, and the annual return on investments made by EFTA countries in India must exceed 16 per cent over the 15 years. Failure to meet these conditions may prompt both parties to adjust their expectations accordingly.

Should India find the outcomes unsatisfactory, it reserves the right to proportionally withdraw its tariff concessions after 18 years. Notably, the investment chapter of the agreement does not entail dispute resolution mechanisms and primarily serves as a declaration of mutual intent, with its success contingent upon the private sector's receptiveness to the terms outlined in the TEPA.

EFTA stands to benefit significantly from increased market access to India, facilitated by tariff concessions. India has committed to phasing out tariffs on a wide array of products within a span of seven to ten years. This move will particularly favour EFTA's exports, spanning seafood such as tuna and salmon, fruits like olives and avocados, coffee capsules,

TEPA: SOME GAINS

- Targeting $100 billion in investments from EFTA countries with potential to create 10 lakh jobs over 15 years
- India to phase out tariffs on a wide array of products in ten years and provide market access to EFTA nations at concessional duties
- India free to reconsider tariff concessions if investment and job targets not met
- If outcomes unsatisfactory, India permitted to withdraw tariff concessions proportionally after 18 years
- Gains for EFTA nations' exports of seafood, wines, fruits, confectioneries, processed foods, chocolates and biscuits
- Exports of smartphones, bicycle parts, medical equipment, timepieces, steel products and machinery from EFTA to get a leg-up
- Relief for India with EFTA imports of gold, dairy, soybean, coal and select agricultural products excluded from India's tariff concession
- Norway to grant access to Yoga instructors and traditional medicine practitioners from India
- Norway and Switzerland to facilitate movement of highly-skilled Indian professionals as intra-corporate transferees for four and three years respectively
- Simplifying recognition of qualifications for service providers from India and EFTA by harmonising various requirements

The TEPA between India and the EFTA marks a significant addition to India's expanding array of free trade agreements.

oils including cod liver and olive oil, as well as various confectioneries and processed foods such as chocolates and biscuits. The agreement also encompasses items like smartphones, bicycle parts, medical equipment, timepieces, medication, dyes, textile, apparel, iron and steel products and a majority of machinery.

Moreover, tariffs on cut and polished diamonds will gradually decrease from 5 to 2.5 per cent over five years. With regard to wines, India has outlined a phased reduction plan: wines priced between \$5 and less than \$15 will experience an initial duty reduction from 150 to 100 per cent within the first year, subsequently decreasing to 50 per cent over a decade. For wines priced at \$15 or more, the initial duty cut will be from 150 to 75 per cent, eventually reaching 25 per cent after 10 years. However, certain commodities such as gold, which constitutes 80 per cent of EFTA countries' merchandise imports to India – along with dairy, soybean, coal and select agricultural products – have been excluded from India's tariff concession list.

EFTA COUNTRIES' COMBINED GDP IS SLIGHTLY LESS THAN ONE-THIRDS OF INDIA'S, OR ABOUT ONE-FOURTHS IN TERMS OF PURCHASING POWER PARITY. HOWEVER, THEIR PER CAPITA GDP SURPASSES INDIA'S BY ABOUT 40 TIMES

As for India's exports to EFTA, the impact is expected to be minimal, as most products already enjoy low or zero tariffs under the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status in EFTA countries. For instance, nearly 98 per cent of India's \$1.3-billion merchandise exports to Switzerland are industrial products, benefiting from zero tariffs. The remaining 2 per cent of India's exports, comprising agricultural products, are unlikely to see significant gains due to their low trade values.

In the realm of services, both India and the EFTA members have committed to broad liberalisation across multiple sectors. Notable advantages for India include Norway's pledge to grant access to Yoga instructors and traditional medicine practitioners from India, provided they adhere to its legal framework. Additionally, Norway and Switzerland have agreed to facilitate the movement of highly-skilled Indian professionals as intra-corporate transferees for periods of four and three years respectively, contingent upon obtaining work permits.

However, the practical delivery of services is often influenced by regulatory obligations in each country. A distinct annexe within the TEPA outlines a framework aimed at simplifying the recognition of qualifications for service providers by harmonising various requirements. It includes the option of achieving equivalence by supplementing academic or training prerequisites, thereby avoiding the need to repeat entire professional degrees. Separate annexes about financial and telecom services similarly establish regulations to facilitate the provision of these services.

In a departure from India's previous FTAs, the benefits outlined in the trade-in services chapter extend to any corporate entity incorporated in an EFTA member, regardless of its actual operational location, including countries where India lacks FTAs. This provision allows for free riders to capitalise on the TEPA's benefits. However, the investment chapter mitigates this risk by confining benefits to entities with substantial business activities within the EFTA. Nonetheless, services linked to commercial presence are governed by the services chapter.

The TEPA signifies a significant leap forward for India as it includes a pioneering Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter. This marks India's first-ever commitment to incorporating environmental and labour considerations into an FTA. Previously, India had been hesitant to include such provisions, fearing potential veiled protectionist agendas. However, the inclusion of the TSD chapter now incorporates references to various international environmental agreements and labour conventions. It underscores the importance of striking a balance between rights and responsibilities in their implementation.

Noteworthy agreements such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement recognise the differing responsibilities of developed and de-

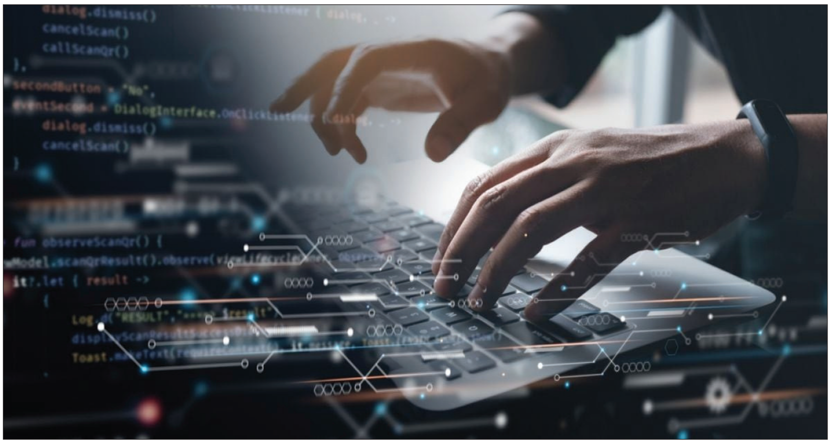
"For the first time in history of FTAs, binding commitment of $100-billion investment and 1 million direct jobs in the next 15 years has been given. The agreement will give a boost to Make In India and provide opportunities to young and talented workforce."

PIYUSH GOYAL
Commerce Minister

veloping nations. Similarly, labour conventions under the International Labour Organization (ILO) operate within a tripartite framework involving government, employers and employee organisations. While the TSD chapter does not involve dispute resolution mechanisms, India must tread carefully to ensure that any scrutiny of its adherence to environmental and labour commitments within the TSD framework respects the intricate balance inherent in multilateral agreements.

The EFTA nations host numerous multinational corporations in pharmaceutical and high-technology sectors, which have been advocating for stronger protection of intellectual property rights (IPRs) beyond the scope of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) TRIPS Agreement. The TEPA addresses some of these concerns. For instance, India's Patents Act allows for pre-grant opposition to patent applications. The TEPA's IPR Annexe requires swift dismissal of the opposition's deemed "prima facie unfounded", potentially subjecting India's internal regulatory processes to external evaluation regarding the application of this standard.

Similarly, Indian law mandates the submission of an annual statement on patent usage. The TEPA stipulates extending this requirement to every three years, with annual submissions necessary only under specific circumstances, prompting a re-evaluation of India's current statutory obligations. Although amendments to India's patent regulations were announced on March 15, five days after signing the TEPA, ideally, FTA commitments should align with such changes. In essence, the TEPA navi-



The trade agreement is aimed at stimulating investment and amplifying exports, particularly in key Indian services sectors like IT..

TEPA: A FEW CONCERNS

- EFTA investment and job targets to be met on two conditions of Indian economy growing by 9.5% and EFTA's investments providing a return of 16%
- No dispute resolution mechanism in most provisions of the agreement
- Impact on India's exports to EFTA set to be minimal as low or zero tariffs on most Indian exports under the MFN status
- Vital for India to be doubly careful not to violate sustainable trade provisions related to environment and labour issues
- Some provisions of TEPA stressing on stronger protection of IPRs beyond the scope of WTO norms worrisome for India
- Fears of Chinese goods entering India via Switzerland and Iceland, which have FTAs with China
- Gains for India likely to be modest amid complexities of global trade dynamics

gates new terrain, and its long-term impact hinges on its implementation.

Stumbling blocks

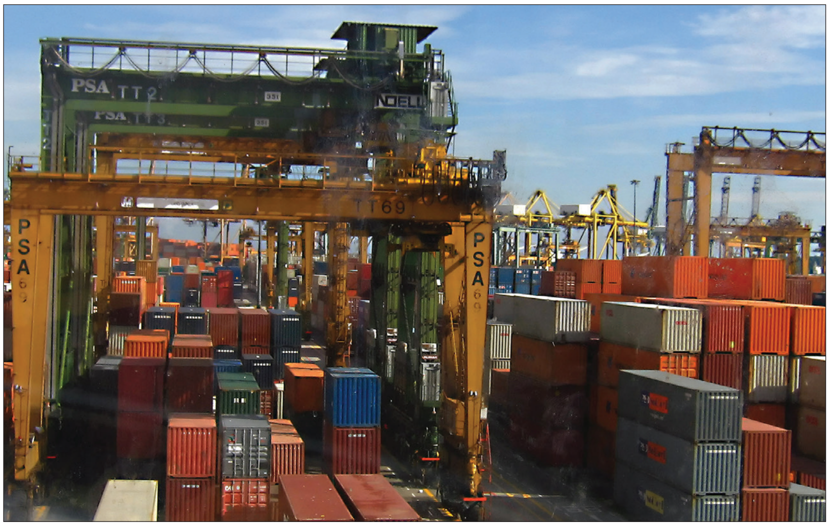
The India-EFTA TEPA deal, though signed, awaits implementation, pending ratification by all five member countries. Following its enactment, several external factors demand careful consideration. Notably, Switzerland, the largest partner within the bloc, has a robust FTA with China, evidenced by a recent agreement signed in January 2024 aimed at deepening their trade ties. Additionally, Iceland, another EFTA member, boasts of an FTA with China, making it pertinent to assess potential implications for India's trade dynamics.

Concerns arise over the potential ease with which Chinese goods may enter India via Switzerland and Iceland, given their existing FTAs with China. India has historically been reserved about forging trade agreements with China, making this a significant point of concern. Despite the presence of rules of origin clauses, worries persist regarding the potential circumvention of these regulations, necessitating thorough examination.

Another critical aspect is the evolving Swiss-EU relationship, undergoing a fundamental reset following years of deadlock in negotiation. The cessation of Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) between Switzerland and the EU, coupled with the termination of bilateral negotiations for an Institutional Framework Agreement (IFA), has introduced uncertainty. This termination has had tangible repercussions, such as the loss of duty-free access for Swiss medical device exports to the EU, valued at over 5.5 billion euros annually.

The EU's stringent stance, demonstrated by measures like excluding Swiss entities from flagship research funding programmes like Horizon 2020, highlights the importance it places on regulatory compliance. The EU's insistence on adherence to its rules underscores the challenges Switzerland faces in maintaining its independent stance while prioritising its relationship with the EU.

India, therefore, needs to remain vigilant regarding its investment commitments within the EFTA framework, especially given Switzerland's reliance on the EU's pressure to fulfil its cohesion fund obligations. Despite Switzerland's historical preference for independence, recent developments suggest that a reorientation towards prioritising relations with the EU, potentially impacting its stance on global partnerships. The Swiss Federal Council's recognition of India's adeptness in navigating diverse global relationships underscores India's strategic positioning. However, Switzerland's market access priorities may overshadow its desire for global independence, particularly with the resurgence of bilateral talks aimed at



EFTA stands to benefit significantly from increased market access to India, which will phase out tariffs on a wide array of products in a decade.

A significant portion of imports from EFTA, particularly from Switzerland, is attributed to gold, which alone accounts for about 74.82 per cent of total imports.

aligning Swiss and EU regulations.

Minimal impact

The FTA between India and the EFTA marks a step forward, although assessing its gains poses challenges. Together, the populations of these four EFTA countries are approximately 1.45 crore – less than some of India's major cities. Their combined GDP is slightly less than one-thirds of India's, or about one-fourths in terms of purchasing power parity. However, their per capita GDP surpasses India's by about 40 times.

In the financial year 2022-23, two-way trade between India and EFTA amounted to $18.65 billion, with India facing a trade deficit of $14.8 billion. However, in the broader context of India's overall exports and imports, these figures constitute a relatively small portion. Notably, a significant portion of imports from EFTA, particularly from Switzerland, is attributed to gold, which alone accounts for about 74.82 per cent of total imports. While Swiss manufacturing companies have presence in India, the impact of Indian software companies in Switzerland is limited.

Regarding market access, the EFTA's offer encompasses 100 per cent of non-agricultural products and tariff concessions on processed agricultural goods. India, in return, is offering tariff concessions on 82.7 per cent of its tariff lines, covering 95.3 per cent of EFTA exports, with exceptions for sectors like dairy, soybean, coal and certain sensitive agricultural products. Notably, the duty on gold remains unchanged.

A significant aspect of the TEPA is the EFTA countries' intention to promote investments in India, with a target of increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) by $50 billion over the next decade and an additional $50 billion in the following five years. However, this commitment is not legally binding, relying on commercial motivations for realisation. The TEPA comprises 14 chapters, addressing various aspects such as market access, rules of origin, trade facilitation, investment promotion and IPRs, signalling a departure from India's previous rigid stances and a willingness to incorporate non-trade-related issues.

While the TEPA represents a shift in India's approach, moving away from protectionism and self-sufficiency, its overall impact may be limited. Trade agreements often result in trade diversion rather than creation, and the benefits may diminish if partner countries establish similar agreements with competing economies. Additionally, countries with higher tariffs tend to concede more market access than those with lower tariffs.

In conclusion, while the TEPA warrants acknowledgement, expectations for substantial benefits should be tempered. It serves as a precursor to India's negotiations with other economic entities like the EU and the UK, demonstrating a willingness to engage in broader economic partnerships. However, its impact may be modest, considering the complexities of global trade dynamics and the challenges inherent in such agreements. ■

"Don't Discount Your Instincts"

Sanjay Ghare is a seasoned technology professional with over 20 years of experience in implementing enterprise applications. Mr Ghare is based in Pune and is the co-Founder and CEO of Vervotech, a leading provider of travel technology solutions specialising in hotel accommodation data. Prior to his role at Vervotech, Mr Ghare was vice-president of the software as a service (SaaS) business at Tavisca, a division of JPMorgan Chase & Co, where he had honed his expertise in the travel technology domain for over a decade. He has been an active member of prestigious forums such as the Forbes Tech Council and various national technology forums, contributing his insights and expertise to the industry. In an interesting conversation with ***Sharmila Chand***, the Vervotech CEO speaks about his management principles and practices that have helped him succeed in the world of business.

What are your five management *mantras*?

- Giving autonomy to managers and trusting their expertise fosters a sense of ownership and accountability within the team, leading to better outcomes.
- While data is essential for decision-making, it is equally important not to discount your instincts, as they often provide valuable insights that data alone may not capture.
- Investing in the workforce through training, development and support creates a motivated and skilled team that drives organisational success.
- Cultivating a positive team environment promotes collaboration, innovation and overall productivity.
- Celebrating small victories and milestones along the way fosters a culture of appreciation and motivation within the team.

Do you play any game that helps you in your career?

Yes, I play cricket, and I find it incredibly insightful for my work. Cricket teaches me that I am only as good as my last performance, emphasising the importance of consistency and continuous improvement. Every time I step onto the field, I strive to be at my best, knowing that my intent and effort count towards achieving success.

Would you share with us the turning point in your career?

A significant turning point in my career was when I made the decision to leave my job and venture into entrepreneurship with minimal backup resources. It was a risky move, but it ultimately led to the founding of Vervotech and has been instrumental in shaping my professional journey.

What is the secret of your success?

I attribute my success to a combination of hard work, effective relationship management and the ability to foster meaningful connections within my professional network. These elements have been crucial in driving both personal and organisational growth throughout my career.

What is your philosophy of work?

My philosophy of work centres upon finding satisfaction in my endeavours before calling it a day. Whether it is completing a project, solving a problem or making progress towards a goal, I believe that personal fulfilment and a sense of accomplishment are essential aspects of a fulfilling career.

Is there any particular person you admire who has inspired you?

I greatly admire Sridhar Vembu for his remarkable achievements in scaling up technology solutions globally while maintaining a sound business model and ethical practices. His journey and accomplishments serve as a constant source of inspiration for me, motivating me to strive for excellence in my own endeavours.

What is the best advice you got?

The best advice I have received is to trust my instincts and intuition, even when faced with data-driven decisions. I have learnt that the most impactful decisions often stem from a combination of analytical reasoning and gut feeling, highlighting the importance of embrac-

> "Cultivating a culture of learning and experimentation promotes personal and professional development, enabling individuals and organisations to adapt and thrive in ever-changing landscapes."

ing both aspects in decision-making.

Who is your sounding board?

My team serves as my sounding board, providing valuable insights, perspectives and feedback that help me make informed decisions and navigate challenges effectively. Their collective expertise and collaboration are invaluable assets in driving organisational success.

ing in regular physical activity not only keeps me healthy but also helps me stay focused and energised in my work.

What are your five *mantras* for success?

- I believe that finding passion and excitement in the process is the key to sustained motivation and dedication.
- Building lean and agile teams fosters adaptability and innovation, enabling organisations to thrive in dynamic environments.
- Prioritising profitability and sustainable growth over vanity metrics ensures long-term success and value creation.
- Embracing challenges and taking calculated risks foster growth and resilience, driving continuous improvement and innovation.
- Cultivating a culture of learning and experimentation promotes personal and professional development, enabling individuals and organisations to adapt and thrive in ever-changing landscapes.

What message on management you would like to convey to youngsters?

To young professionals, I would advise not to be overly fixated on long-term planning but rather focus on continually improving and experimenting in their careers. Embrace opportunities for growth, learning and exploration, and do not shy away from taking risks or pursuing unconventional paths. Success often lies in the journey, not just the destination.

SANJAY GHARE
Co- Founder & CEO,
Vervotech

“While data is essential for decision-making, it is equally important not to discount your instincts, as they often provide valuable insights that data alone may not capture.”

What are your favourite books and why?

One of my favourite books is *Creative Confidence* by Tom Kelley and David Kelley. It challenged me to think differently and embrace creativity in both my personal and professional lives. The book underscores the importance of innovation and encourages readers to unleash their creative potential, inspiring me to approach challenges with an open mind and a willingness to explore new ideas.

What is your fitness regime?

I remain fit through active sports, prioritising physical well-being as an essential aspect of maintaining overall productivity and mental acuity. Engag-

Lastly, how would you define yourself in one sentence?

As a technology professional, I am primarily driven by instincts and emotions, recognising the importance of intuition and empathy in my approach to work and leadership. ■

Write to us at chand.sharmila@gmail.com

Neways to set up plant in Malaysia

Neways, a key supplier to Dutch computer chip equipment-maker ASML, will be building a new plant in Klang, Malaysia. The facility will begin production in the fourth quarter of 2024, giving the company additional capacity in Asia, where it also has a plant in Wuxi, China. "Neways will focus on developing and producing advanced modules and cabinets for some of the world's most renowned players in the semiconductor sector," the company has said in a statement announcing the decision. A spokesperson for Neways has said that the size of the investment cannot be disclosed, but the company intends to grow its operation in Malaysia to 200 employees.

United Rentals to buy Yak Access

Industrial equipment and tool rental company United Rentals has said that it has agreed to buy construction company Yak Access for about $1.1 billion in cash from Platinum Equity as it expands its portfolio to include matting. Yak Access provides temporary mats for surface protection across construction and maintenance, repair and operations (MRO) applications. United Rentals expects significant potential to grow the matting business over the next several years, supported by opportunities in energy and power markets, where mats are used to hold long lengths of pipe during installation and maintenance. United Rentals expects to use a combination of new debt financing and existing funds to finance the deal.

China's $27-bn chip fund to counter US

China is setting up a $27-billion chip fund. The move is aimed at boosting its technological prowess amid rising tech curbs from the US. China's National Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund is pooling resources from local governments in the country as well as State-owned enterprises. Notably, this will be the third such investment vehicle in the country. China is the largest semiconductor market globally. The country is increasingly pushing for self-reliance and the use of domestically-developed technologies, both in hardware and software. This has meant that government officials are being urged to ditch their iPhones for Chinese phones and source hardware from Chinese manufacturers.

Lanka seeks debt moratorium till 2028

Sri Lanka's President **Ranil Wickremesinghe** has said that he is seeking a moratorium on foreign debt repayments until 2028, following a government default during its unprecedented economic crisis two years ago. A collapse in foreign exchange reserves saw months of food and fuel shortages along with street protests that had forced the ouster of Mr Wickremesinghe's predecessor in 2022. Sri Lanka has since signed up to an IMF rescue package and is working to repair public finances since the government default in April of that year. Mr Wickremesinghe has said that talks are still going on with both bilateral and private creditors to restructure its billions of dollars in loans and bonds.

Swisscom, Vodafone arm in $8.5-bn deal

Vodafone has agreed to sell its Italian business to Bern-based telecommunication company Swisscom for 8 billion euros in cash, according to a statement by Vodafone. Swisscom will merge Vodafone Italia with its existing business, Fastweb, to create Italy's second-biggest, fixed-line broadband operator, behind TIM. As a part of the agreement, Vodafone has said that it will return 4 billion euros to shareholders via stock buybacks and cut its dividend to 4.5 cents a share from next year, down from 9 cents in 2024. The deal is expected to be closed in the first quarter of 2025. "Vodafone Italia and Fastweb will create a leading converged challenger in the market," Swisscom has said.

EQT to acquire Equitrans Midstream

Top US natural gas producer EQT Corp has agreed to buy Equitrans Midstream in an all-stock deal that values its former pipeline unit at about $14 billion, including debt, as companies look to navigate decade-low prices for the commodity. Merger activity in US shale oil and gas has soared in pursuit of greater scale and cost efficiencies amid volatile prices, with $250 billion in deals in the oil and gas industry in 2023. The combination will allow EQT to lower costs to produce and transport its natural gas to market by adding more than 2,000 miles of pipelines, the companies have said.

Toyota agrees to biggest wage hike

Toyota Motor has agreed to give factory workers their biggest pay increase in 25 years. Toyota, Panasonic, Nissan and a number of other of Japan's biggest companies have agreed to fully meet labour unions' demands for pay increases at annual wage negotiations. The annual talks, long a defining feature of the usually-collaborative relationship between Japanese management and labour, are being closely watched this year as the pay increases are expected to help clear the way for the central bank to end its years-long policy of negative interest rates soon. Toyota, th3e world's biggest carmaker, has agreed to monthly pay increase of $193 and record bonus payments.

EU's nod for world's most complete AI rules

The European Parliament has approved the world's first comprehensive framework for constraining the risks of artificial intelligence (AI). The sector has seen explosive growth, driving huge profits but also stoking fears about bias, privacy and even the future of humanity. The European Union's (EU) AI Act works by classifying products according to risk and adjusting scrutiny accordingly. The law's creators have said that it will make the technology more "human-centric". AI applications that pose a "clear risk to fundamental rights" will be banned, for example some of those that involve the processing of biometric data. The Act also creates provisions to tackle risks posed by AI tools such as OpenAI's ChatGPT.

Sarveshwar Foods Completes Acquisition Of Singapore-Based Green Point

Sarveshwar Foods, a renowned name in the food industry, has announced that in continuation to its earlier intimation regarding acquisition of 100 per cent ordinary shares, i.e., one ordinary share of face value of 1 Singapore Dollar (SGD) and Business of Green point Pte Ltd, the company has acquired 100 per cent ordinary shares and business of Green Point Pte Ltd. Henceforth, Green Point becomes a wholly-owned subsidiary of Sarveshwar Foods Limited. Green point Pte Ltd had a turnover of $3,139,471 (according to the financial statements as on March 31, 2023).

Earlier, the company had informed that it had successfully been awarded bids to supply 90,000 quintals of premium white rice to Africa through the government's nodal agency, NAFED, amounting approximately to $6 million (Rs 50 crore). Sarveshwar Foods remains steadfast in its mission to deliver superior-quality rice products that nourish and delight consumers around the world.

NAFED (National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd) is an apex government organisation of marketing cooperatives for agricultural produce in India, founded with the sole objective to promote the trade of agricultural produces, forest resources and to organise, promote and develop marketing, processing and storage of agricultural, horticultural and forest produce; distribution of agricultural machinery, implements and other inputs; undertake inter-State, import and export trade, wholesale or retail as the case may be; and to act and assist for technical advice in agricultural production for the promotion and the working of its members, partners, associates and cooperative marketing, processing and supply societies functional across India.

Sarveshwar Foods Limited is an ISO 22000:2018 and USFDA (United States Food and Drug Administration)-certified company. The company also has BRC (biggest global standard for food safety), Kosher, NPPO USA and CHINA, along with NOP -USDA organic certifications for its products.

The company is engaged in the business of manufacturing, trading, processing and marketing of branded and unbranded Basmati and non-Basmati rice in the domestic and international markets. Its operations are based out of the Jammu region in Jammu and Kashmir. Sarveshwar has sustainable and eco-positive legacy of serving healthy and tasty rice for more than 130 years, and in the last couple of decades, it has proliferated its heritage to other premium categories of FMCG and organic products.

Sarveshwar is the first private sector NSE- and BSE-listed food company from Jammu and Kashmir.

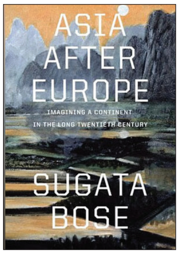
Sarveshwar belongs to the lands in foothills of the Himalayas which are nourished by fertile mineral-rich soil, organic manure and snow-melted waters of river Chenab, wherein without using any artificial fertilisers and chemicals, the company produces a full range of organic products, sold with brand name NIMBARK. The company has been conceptualised to spread the philosophy of Satvik-conscious lifestyle.

To sell its products, Sarveshwar has adopted three-way strategies – first through conventional channels; another to have its own retail outlets; and to tap young and tech-savvy generations' growing tendency of buying products online through www.nimbarkfoods.com. Sarveshwar is the first private sector NSE- and BSE-listed food company in Jammu and Kashmir with NSE Symbol: SARVESHWAR and BSE Scrip Code: 543688

The Asian Way

This is a concise new history of a century of struggles to define Asian identity and express alternatives to European forms of universalism.

ASIA AFTER EUROPE



Author: Sugata Bose

Publisher: Harvard University Press

Pages: 288

Price: Rs 699

This is a concise new history of a century of struggles to define Asian identity and express alternatives to European forms of universalism. The balance of global power changed profoundly over the course of the 20th century, above all with the economic and political rise of Asia. This book is a bold new interpretation of the period, focusing on the conflicting and overlapping ways in which Asians have conceived their bonds and their roles in the world. Tracking the circulation of ideas and people across colonial and national borders, author Sugata Bose explores developments in Asian thought, art and politics that defied Euro-American models and defined Asianness as a locus of solidarity for all humanity.

Impressive in scale, yet driven by the stories of fascinating and influential individuals, the book examines early intimations of Asian solidarity and universalism preceding Japan's victory over Russia in 1905; the revolutionary collaborations of the First World War and its aftermath, when Asian universalism took shape alongside Wilsonian internationalism and Bolshevism; the impact of the Great Depression and Second World War on the idea of Asia; and the persistence of forms of Asian universalism in the post-war period, despite the consolidation of post-colonial nation States on a European model.

Asia has been a space traversed through its long history by traders, pilgrims, adventurers and invaders, whose myriad encounters created, over time, a deeper affinity co-existing with immense plurality and diversity. These inter-connections were overlaid and often interrupted by the succeeding European imperialist and colonial systems during the 18th to the 20th centuries.

Mr Bose's book focuses on the history of a group of extraordinary Asian intellectuals who played a seminal role in reviving the idea of Asia as a distinct civilisational zone, with shared values and sensibilities very different from Europe. The author recounts in a most vivid and readable style the history of the "intellectual, cultural and political conversations across Asia" among those who "challenged European colonial domination to dream of the futurism of young Asia". In its seven chapters, the book traces the history of how Asia confronted the challenge of Western domination and its brand of modernity.

There was a harking back to a remembered and shared spirituality, distinct from and superior to Western materialism. Pan-Asianism was born out of this, with Buddhism playing the role of a universalising carrier. Towering intellectuals like Rabindranath Tagore from India, Okakura Tenshin from Japan and Liang Qichao from China sought other sources of Asian revival. But the importance of Mr Bose's rigorously-researched book lies in the pioneering exploration of the literary and artistic streams which flowed back and forth in the Asian space, leading to the flowering of new and exciting idioms in painting, sculpture, poetry and literature drawing from Japanese, Indian and Chinese traditions.

Diverse Asian universalisms were forged and fractured through phases of poverty and prosperity among elites and common people throughout the span of the 20th century. Noting the endurance of nationalist rivalries, often tied to religious exclusion and violence, Mr Bose concludes with reflections on the continuing potential of political thought beyond European definitions of reason, nation and identity.

About the author

***Sugata Bose** is Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University. He is the author of* His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose *and* India's Struggle against Empire *and* A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire. *Mr Bose's field of specialisation is modern South Asian and Indian Ocean history. He obtained his PhD from the University of Cambridge. Mr Bose is also the director of the Netaji Research Bureau in Kolkata, a research centre and archives devoted to the life and work of great freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who happens to be Mr Bose's grand-uncle.*

Financial Planning 101

How should you save? Where should you invest? Is your insurance enough? How do you start on the journey of fulfilling your aspirations?

The financial world is a jungle of sorts. Dangers lurk everywhere. So, how can you foray into this jungle to feast on its bounties but stay clear of the traps?

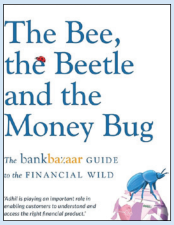
Authors Adhil Shetty and A R Hemant take you on a journey through the financial wild, accompanied by the bee, the beetle and the 'money' bug. But what do these creatures have to do with finance? A lot! The authors employ case studies and data to nudge you towards common sense money management.

Through the 5S Pyramid concept – Save, Secure, Savour, Strengthen and Serenity – the book provides a structured money management plan for investors. However, the book is categorical in asserting that one will not become rich in a year.

With many tables and illustrations, the book will be of interest to academicians and students of financial management too. The book emphasises the advantage of starting investments at an early age. The authors tap into their personal experience as well as use anecdotes to explain the basics of investing, managing money and wealth creation.

The authors demystify jargon-heavy financial literature and confusing sales pitches. They pull you out of your decision fatigue. They tell you how to enjoy your money responsibly. With this book, they will help you structure your finances, avoid bad decisions and cement your financial legacy.

THE BEE, THE BEETLE AND THE MONEY BUG



Authors:
A R Hemant & Adhil Shetty

Publisher:
Rupa Publications India

Pages:
312

Price:
Rs 395

About the authors

Adhil Shetty *is chief executive officer and co-founder of BankBazaar.com, a fintech co-branded credit card issuer and free credit score platform. Mr Shetty is one of the most widely-read columnists in India. A native of Chennai, Mr Shetty graduated with a master's degree from Columbia University, New York.*

A R Hemant *is head of communication of BankBazaar. A journalist by training, Mr Hemant has worked with and written for the* Hindustan Times*, the* NDTV*, the* India Today *and the Yahoo! India before finding his calling in consumer finance. He is an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi.*

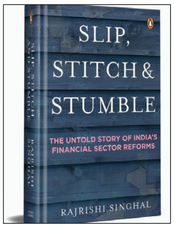
The Story Of Financial Reforms

Manmohan Singh's 1991 Union Budget speech made history by altering the course of the Indian economy, especially its financial sector. His measures took a broom to multiple cobwebs in this sector. What Mr Singh started over three decades ago is still a work in progress today, but it does raise some questions: Why did he focus on financial sector reforms? What has motivated continuing these reforms?

This book tries to answer questions like these while focusing on the evolution of financial sector reforms which, oddly, remain incomplete even after 30 years. The fabric of this sector has been fraying, and initiatives over the past three decades have resembled hasty, temporary needlework; the patchwork, incomplete reforms make the sector further vulnerable to failure. Hence, the book's title: Slip, Stitch & Stumble.

This book does not claim to present an exhaustive history of financial sector reforms. Instead, it examines the provocations behind some of India's big-ticket reforms while trying to understand the motivation of players who have been putting roadblocks on the path to progress.

SLIP, STITCH & STUMBLE



Author:
Rajrishi Singhal

Publisher:
Penguin Random House India

Pages:
304

Price:
Rs 699

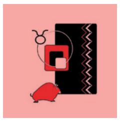
About the author

Rajrishi Singhal *is a veteran journalist with years of experience in covering the financial sector. Mr Singhal has been a senior journalist, banker and public policy analyst-cum-consultant. He has a master's degree in economics from Jadavpur University, Kolkata.*

Aries
Mar 21-Apr 20

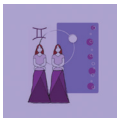
This can be an important month for your financial planning, transactions or dealings. Check and recheck your investments before making any vital decisions. Also, check on contracts that can legally bind you. You will soon feel like you are stuck in the same old issues, and you may not be earning according to your expectations. Reassess your strategies, and stop getting carried away by soft options.

Taurus
Apr 21-May 20



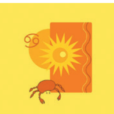
You may have good financial status this month, but the financial condition will largely depend on cost control. Impact of planets indicates stable profits, including investments or passive income. A big obstacle on the way to material well-being can be your passionate or impulsive actions. As the month advances, money matters will get better. It will be a good phase for investing excess funds in the most reliable and understandable tools.

Gemini
May 22-Jun 21



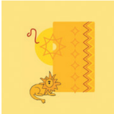
There will be some complicated financial matters to face in the beginning of this month. You should unleash your smart ideas and try to generate more gains from those ideas. There will be some constraints and obstacles. It may also provoke you to take some ambitious steps, but you will have to maintain a balance in your financial planning. Around the mid-month, you will face some tricky situations.

Cancer
Jun 22-Jul 21



This month will impact your financial life radically. You will have to formulate entirely new ways of working to generate high income. All these changes will be for the better, though at times you may find it difficult. In the beginning of the month, impact of planets may bring somewhat complex matters to the fore, and it could also affect your financial status to quite an extent. As the month advances, impact of planets may make you overambitious and force you to take undue risk, which can be very disruptive for your financial planning. If you keep yourself disciplined, planets may lead you towards financial prosperity. But money flow will not be spontaneous.

Leo
Jul 23-Aug 23



Planets are set to bring great financial prospects for you during this month. You are expected to get many favourable opportunities for financial gains. As the month advances, planets may bring you some good earning opportunities, but it is important to consult an expert adviser before making any major deals or investment. Around the mid-month, planets may test your money management skills as some unexpected challenges may arise. So, you will need to handle financial matters and investments carefully. Your financial condition may improve gradually during the latter part.

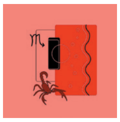
Virgo
Aug 24-Sep 23

Financial dealings or any contracts done in the beginning of this month look set to give you favourable results. You may buy property, vehicle or give a new look to your abode. It also looks good for investing money in real estate or a new residence. But as the month advances, you may face some tricky period. Hence, you must refrain from making any new investments or promise financial involvement. In spite of an increase in earnings and spare funds, you are likely to face problems in saving enough due to more expenses.

Libra
Sep 24-Oct 23

Pace of your financial progress is likely to start picking positive momentum during this month. You will be able to enhance your financial status. However, planets may force you to work hard to achieve what you have set out to. Results will take time, but carry on patiently. This month suggests that you may need to review or recreate your financial plans to enhance your financial strength and accomplish desired results. There may be some confusion regarding some important financial matters.

Scorpio
Oct 24-Nov 23



The beginning of this month may provide you ample opportunities to enhance your financial fortune. One of the best ways to stay productive is to stay organised. You may find some lucrative deals if you are planning to purchase something valuable for your family, or this could be a good time to invest in land or property. However, in the middle of this month, you may make a wrong decision in a hurry. You need to plan exhaustively and take the opinion of an expert before embarking on a journey to progress. Impact of stars will be in your favour for a majority of days. You will exploit opportunities to boost earnings.

No Point In Banking Too Much On TCS

The TCS stock looks good through April 2024.

Introduction

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is an Indian multinational information technology (IT) service, consulting company headquartered in Mumbai, Maharashtra. It is part of the Tata Group and operates in 46 countries.

Astrological observations

Venus, the lord of the finance house, and Saturn, the lord of the speculation house, are in a combination in the profession house in the horoscope created for TCS.

Important timeframes

- If you want to trust the Tata Group this year, TCS then looks good. This much of clarity will not be available in Tata Motors and Tata Steel.
- The TCS stock will remain up overall from April 1, 2024, to May 1, 2024.
- There is strength in Nifty from May 2, 2024, to July 13, 2024, but the share or contribution of this stock is not that much in it. Therefore, work only with small margin. No need to trust too much.

Sagittarius

Nov 24-Dec 21

As the month begins, some new opportunity seems to be in the offing for you. Your efforts may bring positive results. It would also bring some moments of amusement and bliss. You are likely to get some pending dues, and that may also increase happiness in your life. Pace of your financial progress will pick up positive momentum as the month advances. Some good earning opportunities may make you able to enhance your financial status. The mid-month will be a good phase to finalise investment matters. The latter half of the month may demand you to review or recreate your financial plan. You are likely to face some obstacles.

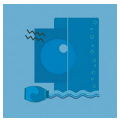
Capricorn

Dec 22-Jan 20

As the month begins, you may get some good opportunities for growth. But you must refrain from making any new investments. There may be better opportunities and clarity about how to proceed further during the latter part of the month. Your strong financial management and your actions will lead you to growth gradually as the month progresses. Profits will be high. So, you can expect to strengthen your financial status around the mid-month. It will also help you to resolve some pending issues regarding your property or inheritance. As time rolls on, you are likely to make good progress at the financial front. This may also help you get some pending dues back.

Aquarius

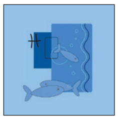
Jan 21-Feb 18



The stars for finances suggest that money flow will be satisfactory in the beginning of the month. Finances are boosted with the help of family and social connections. Speculations may not be profitable and you should avoid such risky investments. Gradually, planetary aspects will enhance your financial strength. Here is a good chance of making long-term gains owing to your good luck. You have the potential for achieving your financial goals now. The latter half of the month may present a promising picture for the finances. You will be working hard, and the outcome will be very encouraging.

Pisces

Feb 19-Mar 20



As the month begins, your ongoing financial activities and other financial transactions will be on a smooth sail. Overall, planetary forces may bring some hopeful results for your financial prospects. You can expect slow but steady progress during this phase. But the mid-month may require special care and attention to all matters related to wealth and finances. As the period progresses, it will bring many favourable opportunities on the financial front. It may bring some new opportunities to strengthen your financial segment. During the end of the month, you will have good income flow, and you will spend on auspicious work.

AT THE HELM

NAVNEET KUMAR SEHGAL

Every Indian bureaucrat aspires to remain relevant and be most sought after, irrespective of a political party in power. For most bureaucrats, this is an unachievable dream. But it was this dream career that Navneet Kumar Sehgal – the retired IAS officer of the 1988 batch from the Uttar Pradesh cadre – had for over three-and-a-half decades.

Mr Sehgal, who retired as the additional chief secretary of the Department of Sports in the UP government last July, took charge as chairman of public broadcaster Prasar Bharati – which runs the Akashvani or the All India Radio and the Doordarshan – last month. The plum, post-retirement posting appears to be as alluring as it is challenging, and the 60-year-old top bureaucrat certainly knows it.

Hailing from Chandigarh, Mr Sehgal emerged as a troubleshooter bureaucrat who served across key posts in the UP government. He was a popular bureaucrat with every chief minister, cutting across party lines since 2002.

Mr Sehgal's posting as the district magistrate of Lucknow during the brief tenure of then Chief Minister Mayawati of the BSP between 2002 and 2003 had brought him closer to Ms Mayawati. He was brought back from Central deputation, when the BSP returned to power in 2007. He rose to become Ms Mayawati's most trusted bureaucrat and held key posts, including that of the secretary to the chief minister. At one point, he was in charge of 12 key departments in the government and had also served as managing director of UP Power Corporation.

Mr Sehgal was removed from all the key posts in 2012, when the SP came to power under Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav. He was appointed principal secretary of the Department of Religious Affairs, considered a punishment posting. However, Mr Sehgal proved his administrative mettle by efficiently implementing government schemes for prominent temples. He also introduced train pilgrimage facilities for the elderly, something unknown and unheard of a decade ago.

Mr Yadav soon realised the significance of Mr Sehgal and brought him back as principal secretary (information) to handle the crisis arising from the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. He was also made CEO of Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority. Mr Sehgal was

FACTS FOR YOU

UPPER LAYER NBFCs

Tata Sons, the huge holding company of the Tata Group, is of late in the news for rather strange reasons. The Mumbai-headquartered holding company is reportedly looking to shed its upper-layer non-banking financial company (NBFC-UL) tag by exploring various corporate restructuring options. Bajaj Finance, yet another NBFC-UL, is also learnt to be similarly weighing options to wriggle out of the upper layer category.

So, what is this NBFC-UL, and why are companies unhappy to be categorised on the top? Last September, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released a list of 15 NBFCs, categorising them in the upper layer. LIC Housing Finance tops this list, followed by Bajaj Finance Shriram Finance, Tata Sons and eleven other top companies.

The central bank's scale-based regulation framework comes against the backdrop of collapse of IL&FS and DHFL.

The central bank's scale-based regulation framework categorises NBFCs into base layer (NBFC-BL), middle layer (NBFC-ML), upper layer (NBFC-UL) and top layer (NBFC-TL). The top layer has currently been kept vacant, and the RBI can place NBFCs into this layer if there is a substantial increase in potential systemic risk from specific lenders in the upper layer. Under the RBI guidelines, NBFC-ULs have to implement a board-approved policy for adopting enhanced regulatory framework applicable to them and mandatorily list within three years of being categorised in the upper layer.

The central bank's decision to put

chiefly instrumental in realising Mr Yadav's ambitious Lucknow-Agra Expressway project.

Mr Sehgal underwent the same ritual of initial demotion followed by promotion when Yogi Adityanath became the chief minister in 2017. The top bureaucrat was shunted to Khadi and Village Industries Department as principal secretary. Recognising his potential, Mr Adityanath gave Mr Sehgal the additional charge of the MSME Department. In fact, the networking skills of Mr Sehgal played a vital role in making UP's Global Investors' Summit 2018 a grand success. Mr Sehgal is also chiefly credited with formulating the State's Sports Policy 2023 and for hosting the first edition of MotoGP in India in Noida in 2023. Mr Sehgal was a prominent member of the elite Team 9, the team of nine most influential officers who worked closely with chief minister Adityanath.

It would be interesting to see how Mr Sehgal would drive Doordarshan and AIR in his tenure. ■

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in place the scale-based regulation framework comes against the backdrop of collapse of IL&FS in 2018 and later DHFL. The debacle of these companies had a spillover impact on the entire financial system, especially in terms of liquidity woes.

The central bank's scale-based regulation framework is aimed at pre-empting any financial crisis and bringing the country's biggest NBFCs under greater regulatory scrutiny. However, experts tracking the financial markets opine that increased compliance requirements may discourage some NBFCs from climbing into the upper-layer. NBFCs see the new regulatory norms increasing their compliance costs and ending their regulatory arbitrage. ■

SPIRITUAL CORNER

How Does Prarabdha Unfold?

Questioner: *What is* prarabdha*?*
Dadashri: Prarabdha *(effect of* karma*) means the* bhaavkarma *('cause') was created in the past life. That cause (*bhaavkarma*) gets fed into this 'computer' and it is issued into the universe where it encounters Nature. Then, along with all the other natural causes that come together, we receive it here as a visible effect of that. It is '*Vyavasthit shakti*' that brings the 'effect' here. Then you have to get up when it makes you get up, and walk the way it makes you walk. Even the good and bad thoughts arise as a consequence of this very process. This is a very subtle phenomenon.*

Questioner: *Is the current* prarabdha*, the fruit of the 'cause' (*bhaav*) from our previous life?*
Dadashri: *Yes. It is the fruit of the 'cause' (*bhaav*) from the previous life. And the new 'causes' (*bhaavs*) that occur today, are the 'causes' for the next life.*

Questioner: *Do these new intents (*bhaavs*) that arise today not give fruit here in this very lifetime?*
Dadashri: *No, they will not give fruition here. New* bhaavs *are 'causes', the effects of which will be experienced in the next life. And so, the cycle of cause and effect, effect and cause, continues for endless lifetimes. Unless the* Gnani Purush *stops the 'causes', and puts an end to one's 'doership' of the cause* karma *(*bhaavkarma*), this cycle of cause and effect will go on and on...*

That Which Brings The Ultimate Result Is Purusharth

Questioner: *Can* prarabdha *be changed through a strong* purusharth*?*
Dadashri: *If it is only the* purusharth*, then it can be changed. But you have to know what* purusharth *is, don't you? Without knowing that, what good is it? If out of this money, one of the bills is genuine and the other is fake; however you cannot distinguish the one that is genuine, so you take the fake bill with you. Who will cash it for you? What do you call a* purusharth*?*

Questioner: *Whatever we do for religion and* moksha *is* purusharth*!*
Dadashri: *That is not called* purusharth*. That is just something you do that is beneficial (*hitkari*). And anything you do other than that, is detrimental (*ahitkari*). Hence, all that is either beneficial or detrimental, but what is* purusharth*? Whatever you succeed in doing (*safada*) is* purusharth.

Questioner*: Some say that you can attain* prarabdha *only if you work for it, and some say that you get an opportunity to work, only if it is in your* prarabdha*. What is the truth in this?*
Dadashri*: Whatever you see through your eyes, hear through your ears, smell through your nose, taste through your tongue, feel through your skin; whatever you can experience through the five senses is all* prarabdha*. Now, tell me, how can anyone understand this?*

Questioner: *Then there is a need for* purusharth*, isn't there?*
Dadashri: *Actually, all this is nothing but* prarabdha*. People did not understand real* purusharth*, and so, they created* bhrant *(illusory)* purusharth*. Such* purusharth *is like an 'illusion'. It is not easy to find something like* purusharth*. If it were easy to find* purusharth*, everyone would do* purusharth *and go to* moksha *tomorrow! But all they do is keep trying to change* prarabdha*, and, therefore, all their efforts are wasted. But I show them the real* purusharth *in no time, and that is why their efforts are rewarded.*

For more information on Dadashri's spiritual science, visit dadabhagwan.org

The Artist & Her Art

BHAVNA MINOCHA
Founder & Creative Director,
The Art Hub

Bhavna Minocha underwent training in commercial art and joined her family garment export business at 18. From production to working with a lot of designers in the business, she used her art by specialising in embroideries. In between, she did a series of huge art pieces on Ghazals (oil colours on canvas). Her interior designing project for ISKCON Temple in Delhi kindled her creativity, and she began selling art works of the masters in 2010. Several art exhibitions organised by her, including the art masters of Bengal, like Rabindranath Tagore, were a great hit. Then, eight years ago, she founded The Art Hub to train young people in the nuances of art. At The Art Hub, every student has a customised syllabus. The teachers at The Art Hub are themselves masters and graduates in visual arts from different universities in India. **Sharmila Chand** *meets up with Ms Minocha and is amazed at how she literally lives and breathes art.*

How do you define yourself?
A dreamer and artist who is madly in love with her work

Your philosophy in life...
Always wear an invisible crown.

Your passion in life...
My family – little moments, big memories

What is your management *mantra*?
Your direction is more important than your speed.

Your work is...
It is the love of my life. I learnt it from my dad. If work is your passion, it will not feel like work.

Business leaders you admire the most...
Mukesh Ambani and my dad Prem Khurana – they both ran their businesses like a father and a boss.

Your source of inspiration...
Law of attraction

What do you enjoy the most in life?
Peaceful environment with some music in the background

How do you de-stress?
By spending time with family and loved ones

Your fitness regime...
Yoga and meditation

Your *mantra* for success...
Stop waiting for tomorrow. Start now.
I deserve to be successful.

Your dream...
Got many dreams and chasing many right now

Ten years from now, where do we see you?
Running The Art Hub globally

Three lessons you have learnt in life as an entrepreneur...
- Dream it.
- Believe it.
- Achieve and enjoy it, and if you want it, work for it.

Write to us at chand.sharmila@gmail.com

Paramount Communications Ltd Assigned BBB-(Stable) Credit Rating By ICRA

Paramount Communications Ltd (BSE: 530555, NSE: PARACABLES), a prominent player in India's wire and cable industry, has announced that credit rating agency ICRA has assigned its long-term ratings on the bank facilities of the company at [ICRA]BBB-(Stable).

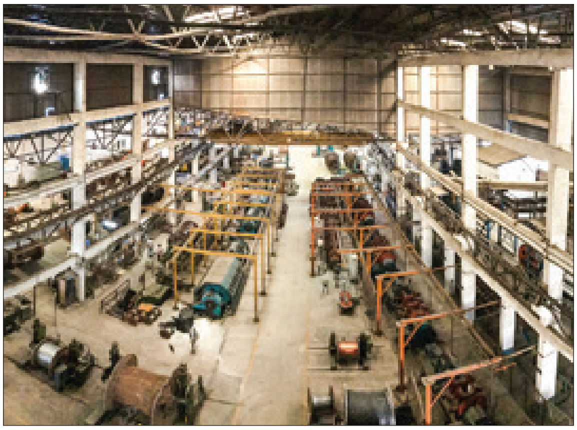
For Q3FY24 and 9MFY24, revenue from operations of Paramount grew by 30.3 per cent from Rs 2,180.9 million in Q3FY23 to Rs 2,842.5 million in Q3FY24 and by 25.7 per cent from Rs 5,943.9 million in 9MFY23 to Rs 7,472.3 million in 9MFY24. This growth was led by robust demand for its products and efficient execution of its order book, reflecting the strength and resilience of its business.

Paramount's PAT increased by 53.8 per cent from Rs 143.2 million in Q3FY23 to Rs 220.2 million in Q3 FY24 and by 65 per cent from Rs 339.7 million in 9MFY23 to Rs 560.6 million in 9MFY24. PAT margins increased by 130 bps and by 180 bps to 7.7 per cent in Q3FY23 and to 7.4 per cent in 9MFY24 respectively.

Earlier, the company on January 29, 2024, had approved the allotment of 2,03,74,980 shares at a price of 66.50/- per share, raising a total of Rs. 1,354.94 million by way of preferential allotment of equity shares to non-promoter, public category.

Incorporated in 1955, Paramount Communications is a prominent player in India's wire and cable industry, renowned for manufacturing high-quality products catering to diverse infrastructure segments. The company operates through two state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities situated in Khushkhera, Rajasthan, and Dharuhera, Haryana. These facilities hold certifications from various Indian and global agencies, testifying their strict compliance with high-quality standards.

The company boasts of an expansive product portfolio that comprises over 25 distinct products and an impressive array of over 2,500 stock-keeping units (SKUs). This diverse selection serves a wide spectrum of markets, including government, B2B and B2C segments encompassing industries like power, railway, telecom, construction, defence and space research and residential spaces. The company has extensive pre-qualification credentials, and competencies have been instrumental in establishing its nationwide and international presence, notably in the USA. Paramount holds the prestigious status of a three-star export house by the Government of India.



The company operates through two state-of-the-art plants in Khushkhera, Rajasthan, and Dharuhera, Haryana.

Over the years, the company has successfully served more than 500 institutional clients, broadened its outreach via a network of over 400 channel partners, encompassing over 250 retail points, and has formed active partnerships with over 5,000 electricians across India. Further, the company has created direct connections with all these stakeholders through its newly-launched Paramount Parivar app. Its R&D team comprises highly-skilled and qualified individuals, making the company an industry trailblazer in India to lay and repair undersea cables, introduce non-toxic, lead-free house wires, offer an impressive 20-year warranty and supply axle counter-cables to Indian Railways. Paramount Communications holds most of the prestigious Indian and International accreditations and approvals, including BIS, NTPC, PGCIL, EIL, RDSO, TEC, UL-USA, LPCB-UK and also ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and ISO 45001.

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