

STILL IN NASCENT STAGE
Despite Sebi push, ESG bucket could remain dry



TO BE ARRAIGNED NEXT WEEK
Trump indicted over hush money probe, expected to surrender

MIXED RESULTS
NCLAT's Google order: Handset makers win, app developers lose



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Investors slash Byju's, Swiggy valuation

SALMAN SH Bengaluru, March 31

VALUATION MARKDOWNS OF unicorn startups continue through 2023, with both Swiggy and Byju's investors marking down the value of their holdings by 25% and 48%, respectively. According to TechCrunch, BlackRock has cut Byju's valuation, India's most valuable startup, to half—from \$22 billion to \$11.5 billion. Meanwhile, Invesco has marked down the valuation of Swiggy, India's most valuable food delivery startup — from \$10.7 billion to about \$8 billion. Other startups, including OYO, Snapdeal, Shopclues, Quikr, Hike and Paytm Mall, have previously experienced valuation cuts as investors adjust their estimates in the face of the weakening global economy. In September last year, Softbank, the largest shareholder in OYO, cut its estimated value for the firm to \$2.7 billion in the June quarter from an earlier \$3.4 billion after benchmarking it against peers with similar operations. OYO's valuation had reached \$10 billion in a 2019 funding round.

Continued on Page 12

IN THE NEWS

Centre's dividend receipts exceed RE by 37% to ₹59K cr

THE CENTRE'S dividend receipts exceeded the revised estimate (RE) by 37% to around ₹59,000 crore in 2022-23, helping it comfortably bridge the shortfall in disinvestment receipts during the year, reports Prasanta Sahu in New Delhi.

Forex reserves hit over 8-month high

INDIA'S FOREIGN exchange reserves rose for a second straight week and stood at \$578.78 billion, highest since early July, as of the week ended March 24, Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) statistical supplement showed on Friday, reports Reuters. PAGE 7

EXPLAINER

The new interchange fees' impact

PAGE 14

ASBA-LIKE FACILITY FOR SECONDARY MARKET

Your stock broker may charge more

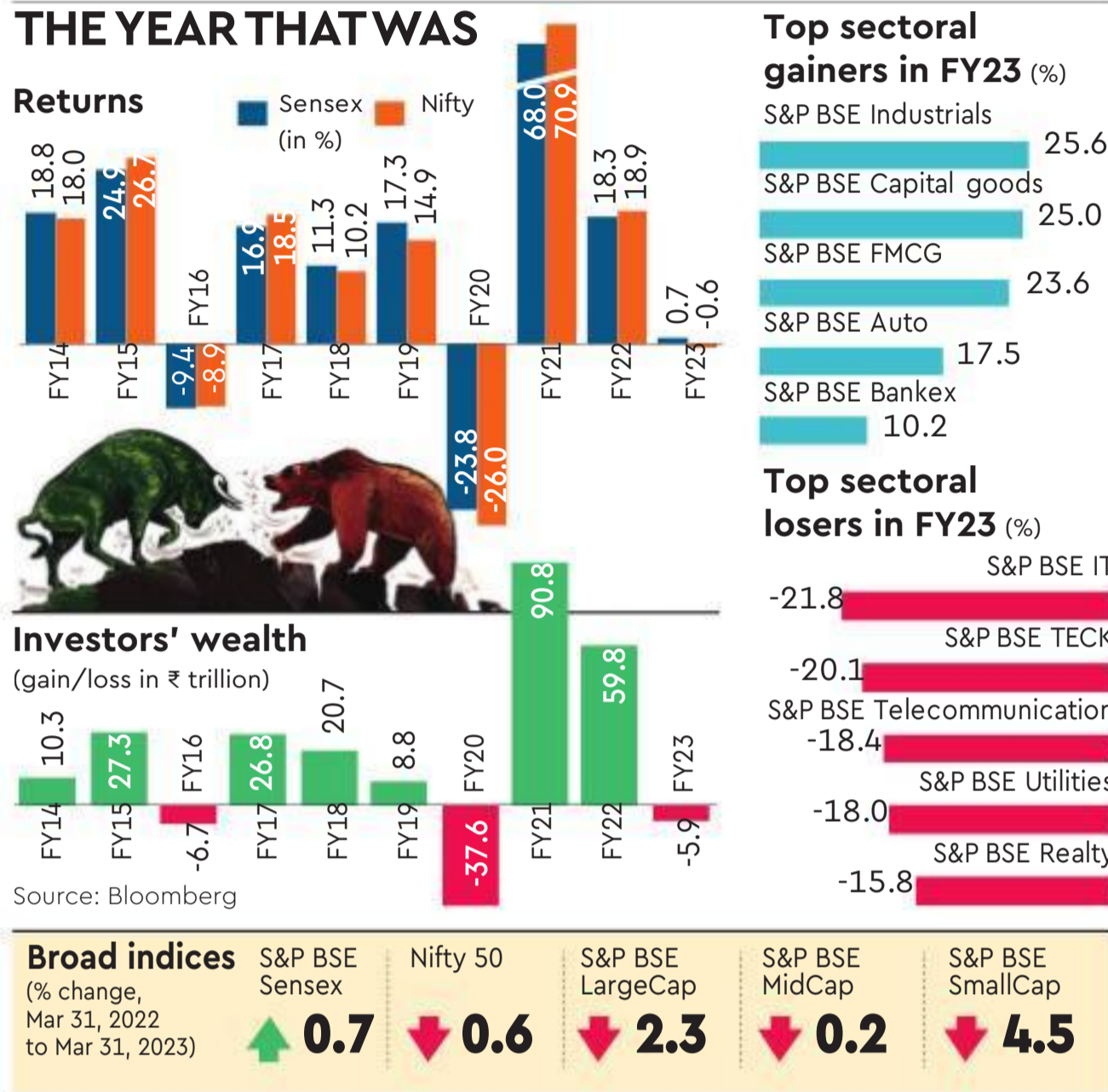
ASHLEY COUTINHO Mumbai, March 31

THE FEE BROKERS charge clients is likely to head north following the markets regulator's decision to curb the pool of clients' money or float lying with the brokers. On Wednesday, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) gave its nod to a broad framework for Application Supported by Blocked Amount (Asba)-like facility being made available to investors for secondary market trading. The facility is based on blocking of funds for trading in the secondary market through Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and is aimed at bringing greater transparency and security to client funds lying with brokers. The move would reduce the brokers' float money lying with intermediaries, which is utilised to avail bank guarantees and deposit with exchanges for position limits. Working capital needs may surge. Gurpreet Sidana, director & COO at Religare Broking, believes that brokers may have to accom-

FIREWORKS ON FRIDAY Street ends flat year with 1,000-point jump

SIDDHANT MISHRA Mumbai, March 31

INDIAN EQUITIES SIGNED off with an over 1.5% surge in the final session of the week and financial year, thanks to strong year-end buying and gains in overseas indices. Friday, which also marked the start of a new F&O (Futures and Options) series, saw the Sensex surging 1,031.43 points or 1.78% to 58,991.52 — the highest single-day jump since the 1,181.34-point rise on November 11, 2022. Meanwhile, the broader Nifty50 jumped 279.05 points or 1.63% to 17,359.75. The Bank Nifty skyrocketed 698.50 points or 1.75% to 40,608.65. The India VIX, a measure of volatility, was down to 12.94. Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services, said: "As the financial year drew to a close, the market witnessed an upward trend marked by bullish moves in the banking and IT sectors driven by robust global cues." According to Nair, an increased interest from foreign institutional investors due to the moderation in Indian stock valuations also aided the market move. "While the US market awaits the release of personal consumption expenditures data, considered a crucial indicator for forecasting the Federal Reserve's future actions, domestic investors await the RBI MPC



meeting scheduled next week," he added. A note by YES Securities said the Nifty lost 2.5% in the current series, down for the straight fourth series. Yet, the Bank Nifty managed to outperform the bench-

mark indices. IT and auto indices were among the key draggers, down 8% and 7% in the current series. Continued on Page 8

Air traffic set to double in 4-5 years: Scindia

ROHIT VAID New Delhi, March 31

DAILY DOMESTIC AIR passenger traffic has crossed the pre-Covid high and is set to soar, civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia told FE on Friday. According to him, the country's air travel growth is going to double in the next 4-5 years. "Today, we have 200 million travellers (domestic and international). In the next four to five years, I look at this number going to about 400 million. This means that the sector will see an explosive growth in the next four to five years," Scindia said. He said that the all-time high growth in the daily domestic passenger traffic is not a 'blip', but quite reassuring as it has happened during an off season — March. The airlines are now operating at 80-90% load factor. Indian carriers have placed 1,200 aircraft on order, which includes 470 by Air India and 490 by IndiGo. More orders are likely to be placed by the end of this year. Scindia said that with the government's focus on creating critical infrastructure such as airports, heliports and waterdromes, air passenger traffic will be on growth trajectory in the days to come. "If you look at daily passenger numbers, the all time high during pre-Covid was roughly 420,000 passengers per day. Now we have crossed 455,000 passengers per day, that too in an off-season since we are in the end of March and before the beginning of the summer season," he said. The minister said that the focus of the government is on creation of more airports at a faster pace. "In the first 65 years of independence, we built 74 airports and in just the last nine years, we have built an additional 74 airports, waterdromes and heliports," Scindia said. "We have doubled the number in nine years over what was constructed in the first 65 years.



In the first 65 years of independence, we built 74 airports and in just the last nine years, we have built an additional 74 airports, waterdromes and heliports — JYOTIRADITYA SCINDIA, MINISTER, CIVIL AVIATION. We have gone from 74 to 148," he added. He said that the number of airports would go up from the current 148 to roughly around 200 in the next four to five years. Scindia further said the capex planned for airports in the next 4-5 years is around ₹98,000 crore and this would include both greenfield and brownfield ones. Of this, around ₹25,000 crore would be from the Airports Authority of India and ₹22,000 crore for the expansion of airports and building of new terminals.

CRICKETING EXTRAVAGANZA KICKS OFF



Gujarat Titans captain Hardik Pandya (left) and Chennai Super Kings skipper MS Dhoni shake hands before the inauguration of the 16th edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL), in Ahmedabad on Friday

Boost to 'merchanting trade', Re settlement in new foreign trade policy

SURABHI New Delhi, March 31

THE GOVERNMENT ON Friday unveiled the new foreign trade policy (FTP) 2023, moving away from incentives to a remission- and entitlement-based regime, even as it stuck to the goods and services exports target of \$2 trillion for 2030. The policy included a new one-time amnesty scheme for defaulters in export obligations, and measures to facilitate international trade settlement in rupee even with countries facing currency crisis. E-commerce exports will be given a leg up. Facilitation of "merchanting trade" — shipment of goods from one foreign country to another with the aid of Indian intermediary and sans contact with Indian ports — and a step to reduce transaction costs for smaller firms, which have a major share in India's goods exports, are the other key features of the policy. The new policy, which replaces the FTP of 2015-20 that was extended up to March 2023 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, refrained from rolling out any new incentive or subsidy schemes for exporters, in recognition of their incompatibility with the multilateral trade rules under the WTO and India's commitments to

PIYUSH GOYAL, MINISTER, COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

We need to work more on goods exports. It should not be the case that services exports are over \$1 trillion by 2030 but goods exports are lagging



the world body. Instead, the policy focussed on tweaking some of the existing schemes. Ongoing tax neutralisation schemes like Export Promotion Capital Goods Scheme, Advance Authorisation and the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) and remission of state and central taxes and levies will continue some amount of process re-engineering. Continued on Page 12

Small savings rates hiked by 10-70 bps for Q1FY24

FE BUREAU New Delhi, March 31

THE CENTRE ON Friday raised interest rates on most small savings schemes by 10-70 basis points (bps) for April-June 2023, with the sharpest 70 bps increase for the National Savings Certificate (NSC), reflecting transmission of policy rate hikes by Reserve Bank of India (RBI). After a gap of 11 quarters, the interest rate on Sukanya Samriddhi Account Scheme for the girl child was also raised by 40 bps to 8%. However, the rate for the other popular tax-free scheme Public Provident Fund (PPF) was kept at 7.1%, unchanged for 12 quarters in a row. FE had reported recently that the PPF rate may remain unchanged, given the high tax-free returns from the scheme. Continued on Page 2

INSIDE

Core sector growth moderates to 6% PAGE 2 Fiscal deficit at 83% of RE in Apr-Feb PAGE 2 CAD narrows to 2.2% of GDP in Q3 PAGE 2

OYO may cut IPO size, pre-files papers

SALMAN SH Bengaluru, March 31

TRAVEL TECH FIRM OYO is back on the path to going public and has refiled its draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) under the confidential pre-filing route which was introduced in November, sources close to the company said. OYO's new DRHP will give the company more leeway on the timing of the listing as well as on fine-tuning the issue size, based on market conditions, to around \$400 million-\$600 million (₹3,280-4,920 crore), all of which will now be a primary issuance, to repay most of its debt, sources said. The company expects the issue timing to be around Diwali, pend-

No exit by existing investors

JOYDEEP GHOSH Mumbai, March 31

EXISTING INVESTORS IN OYO will not take any exit — partial or full. In its earlier DRHP filed with Sebi, four large shareholders in the firm were going to make a partial exit. At that time, OYO was planning to issue fresh equity shares worth ₹7,000 crore and raise another ₹1,430 crore through an offer for sale (OFS) issue. These included giving partial exits by

Softbank Ventures Funds (SVF) India Holding, A1 Holding Inc, China Lodging Holdings and Global Ivy Ventures LLP. SVF India, which held 46% in Oravel Stays (OYO parent firm) was to offload shares of up to ₹1,238.50 crore. A1 Holding, with 1.81%, was expecting to raise ₹51.6 crore. With 0.8% stake, China Lodging wanted to offload ₹23.13-crore shares and Global Ivy wanted to prune its 0.9% stake to raise ₹26.71 crore. by Sebi as part of bringing in progressive and globally popular practices. Continued on Page 2

Companies

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2023



LEARNING CURVE
Divya Gokulnath, co-founder, Byju's

Since the acquisition (by Byju's), Aakash Educational Services has registered a 3X growth in revenue and we look forward to integrating our synergies further to reimagine education for students everywhere.

IN THE NEWS

● TO HIT A THREE-YEAR HIGH OF AROUND 21.05 MILLION UNITS

Auto sales in top gear in FY23, but below pre-pandemic highs

Industry tackling chip shortage, poor pickup in 2-wheeler demand

SWARAJ BAGGONKAR
Mumbai, March 31

DOMESTIC AUTOMOTIVE SALES are expected to hit a three-year high at the close of FY23, but will fall short of the pre-pandemic numbers as the sector continues to tackle the issue of semiconductor shortage and poor pickup in two-wheeler demand.

The industry is expected to end FY23 at around 21.05 million units in domestic sales, better than the pandemic years of FY22 (17.51 million units) and FY21 (18.62 million units) but lower than 21.54 million units in FY20.

Passenger vehicles (PVs) will be a strong exception to the trends seen in other segments, recording sales of around 3.8 million units, a year-on-year growth of 24%. The industry is estimated to have lost between 200,000 and 250,000 units in PV production during the year due to chip shortage. PV market leader Maruti Suzuki is estimated to have lost between 160,000-180,000 units during FY23.

While most carmakers are struggling to raise production further as

A MIXED BAG



■ Auto sales in the current fiscal to be better than the pandemic years of

17.51 in FY22

18.62 in FY21

■ But sales to be lower than 21.54 logged in pre-pandemic year of FY20

(million units)
■ PV sales to be a strong exception with sales of around

3.8

24% y-o-y growth

■ Two-wheeler sector expected to end FY23 with volumes of around

16

lower than

17.4 in FY20



they are already operating their factories at peak capacities, demand continues to outpace supply with pending bookings of around 700,000 units in the industry.

The domestic two-wheeler industry is expected to end the year with volumes of around 16 million units, which will be better than the previous two financial years, but still lower than 17.4 million units in FY20.

Series of increases in purchase

prices (more than 30% increase) over the last in 3 years, crippled demand in the rural markets and the overall inflation have eroded the growth prospects of the industry. The disappointing performance of the segment is despite a bountiful monsoon in the last three consecutive years.

Commercial vehicles, which were the worst-hit post Covid-19, reported a strong pick-up in domestic volumes

in FY23. The segment is expected to end the year with sales exceeding the 900,000 mark, which will be the best since FY19 when the industry clocked 1 million units in sales.

Experts are divided on projections for FY24 but they agree that the high growth momentum seen during FY23 is unlikely to continue into FY24 given the current fiscal's high base and factors such as inflationary pressures, El Nino and expensive automotive loan rates.

Tanvi Shah, director of CareEdge Advisory & Research, said, "The domestic auto industry's sales volume is expected to grow by 7-9% during FY24. Demand will be supported by various government initiatives for rural and urban development."

Some demand slackening is already seen in the market. According to Emkay, in March, the industry saw a deceleration in growth, with moderation seen in PV, two-wheelers and medium and heavy CVs. "Blended vehicle discounts have been on an increasing trend with moderating retail growth, though they still remain below earlier peak levels," Emkay added.

Hemal Thakkar, director, Crisil Market Intelligence and Analytics, said, "In FY24, domestic PVs and tractors are expected to post a sub-5% growth while two-wheelers may post a near double-digit growth assuming normal monsoons."

NCLAT verdict on Google: A jolt for app developers

JATIN GROVER
New Delhi, March 31

APP DEVELOPERS LIKE Indus OS, Epic Games and MapmyIndia, which were leading the fight against Google's alleged anti-competitive policies, will be in for a major disappointment with the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal's (NCLAT) order setting aside four key directions of the Competition Commission of India (CCI), experts said.

Interestingly, the order is in favour of the device makers with regard to licensing arrangement, but since they had never complained to any regulatory body, their victory is superfluous in nature.

App developers stand to lose with the NCLAT setting aside CCI's direction that allowed side-loading of apps and making it clear that Google does not need to uninstall its own apps from phones. Further, Google can continue to impose restrictions on app developers in Play Store and can deny access to its Play Services APIs.

Experts consider the judgment as a partial win for Google even though the NCLAT has upheld the fine amount of ₹1,338 crore on the US giant. "It is a partial relief for Google as the order by NCLAT, which does not mandate Google to allow side-loading, is positive given there might be security issues with other apps," said Tarun Pathak, research director at Counterpoint. According to Pathak, not much will change with regard to



POWER PLAY

■ NCLAT order set aside CCI's direction that allowed side-loading of apps

■ Google can continue to impose restrictions on app developers in Play Store and can deny access to its Play Services APIs

Google's licensing arrangements with handset makers apart from some tweaks based on MADA (mobile application distribution agreement). The order will affect the apps in competition with it, he added.

During the proceedings of the case, MapmyIndia argued that Google's policy ensured that its mapping service app Mapps exit the B2C market. According to the company, it had arrangements with handset makers to allow its own apps. However, with the dominance of Android phones, Google Maps took over the game and did not let it grow.

"Google is like the owner of a mall that has tie-ups with various prod-

ucts. The company says if you want to sell shoes, you will sell only the brand it approves. If you want to sell something else, it will be difficult to survive," said senior counsel Rajshakar Rao, who represented Indus OS during the proceedings.

Indus OS has 400,000 apps in regional languages on its app store, but is restricted to devices such as Samsung as Google does not allow it in its Play Store.

Despite the current tweaks, which Google will have to do with smartphone makers in compliance with other directions of NCLAT, experts believe that these smartphone makers are not going to leave Google apps given their fear of losing market share to competitors if they provide any other pre-installed apps on the phone which are not preferred by large sections of the consumers.

Other directions will prompt Google to allow users to choose their default search engine on Android-based smartphones, giving device makers the liberty to license individual Google apps for pre-installation on their devices, option for alternative billing system and allowing partners to build for forked operating system based on Android. "This decision may not necessarily favour Google as key changes on commercial agreements, the combined offering of apps and placement of apps have to be made," said Saksham Malik, programme manager, Competition Law and Policy at The Dialogue.

SALMAN SH
Bengaluru, March 31

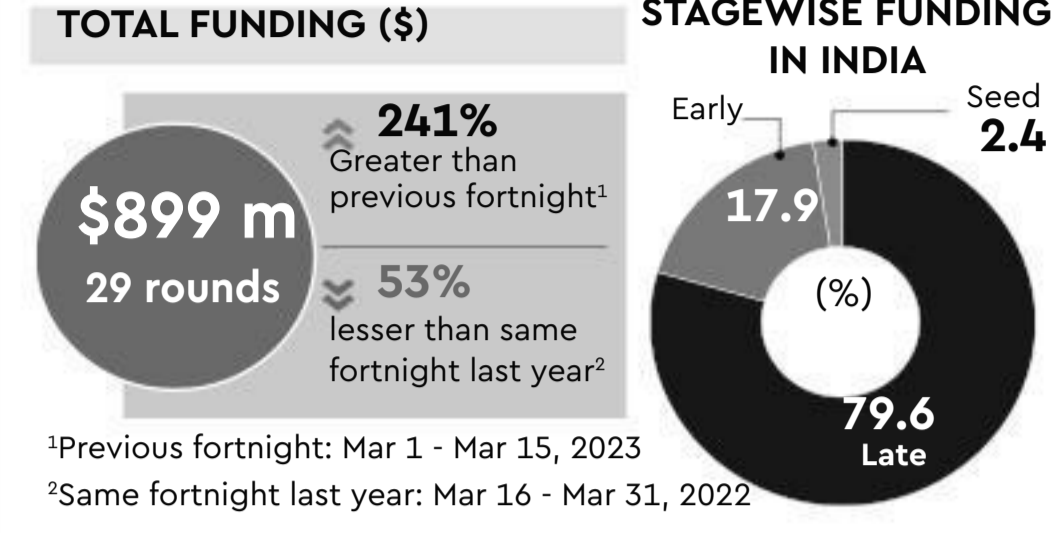
UNACADEMY, AN EDTECH unicorn backed by SoftBank, has decided to implement cost-cutting measures for its leadership team due to slow growth and decreasing venture capital funding. The senior leadership team, which includes the company's founders, will be taking pay cuts of up to 25% for FY24, FE has learnt from sources close to the company.

Gaurav Munjal, Unacademy's co-founder and CEO, informed all employees via an internal note on Slack that the extent of the pay cuts will depend on the leader's current salary, scope and performance. "The salary cuts can go up to 25%. These cuts are permanent and the salaries will only be revised in April 2024," he added in his note to employees.

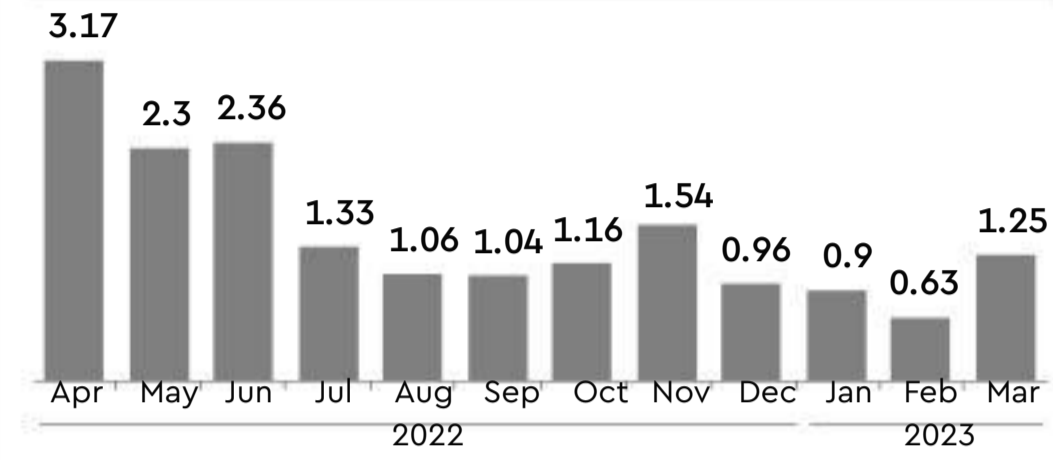
FE has viewed a copy of the inter-

TECH FUNDING SNAPSHOT

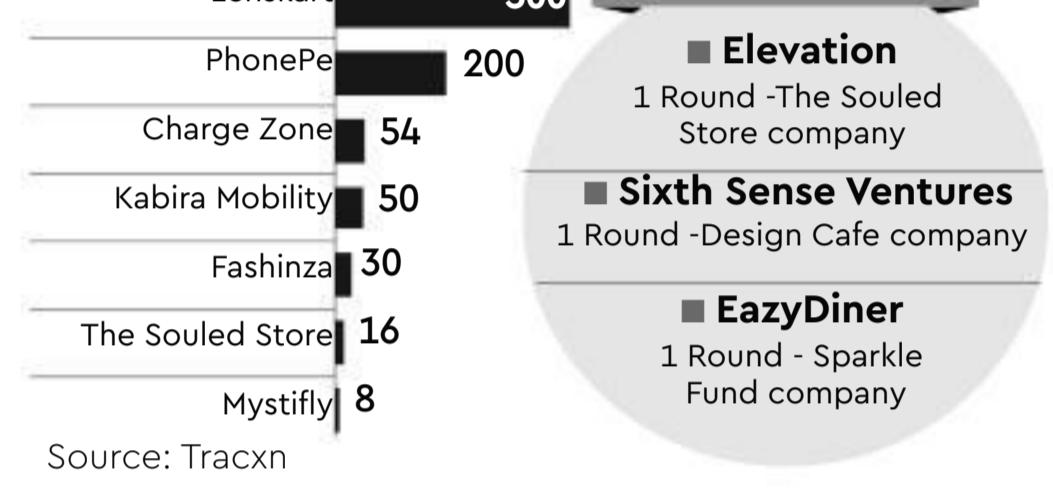
MARCH 16-31, 2023



FUNDING TRENDS (\$ bn) (Last 12 months)



TOP DEALS IN INDIA (\$ m)



Most active VCs in India

- Elevation**
1 Round - The Souled Store company
- Sixth Sense Ventures**
1 Round - Design Cafe company
- EazyDiner**
1 Round - Sparkle Fund company

● KIRAN MAZUMDAR SHAW, EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON, BIOCON BIOLOGICS

'Biocon Biologics will exit FY23 at a \$1-billion trajectory'

With two mega deals — one with Viatris and the other with Serum Institute Life Sciences — under its belt, Biocon Biologics, a subsidiary of the innovation-led biopharmaceutical company Biocon, will capture the full quarter's financial contribution from Viatris' biosimilars business starting Q4FY23, when revenues are expected to touch ₹2,000 crore, executive chairperson Kiran Mazumdar Shaw tells Tushar Goenka. Excerpts:

Biocon Biologics. It includes the scheduled migration of business operations in a phased manner to ensure business continuity and uninterrupted service to customers and patients. We have plans for country-wise migration to optimise revenues and profitability, creating value for all stakeholders.

Is Biocon Biologics on track to achieve its post-deal revenue projection of \$1 billion by FY24?

Post the deal close, Biocon Biologics has started recognising the full revenues and associated profits of the acquired business, a step up from the earlier arrangement. The third quarter captured about a month's contribution from the acquisition, which is reflected in the 54% year-on-year (y-o-y) growth in Q3FY23 revenues to ₹1,507 crore. BBL will capture the full quarter's financial contribution from Viatris' biosimilars business starting Q4FY23,



when revenues are expected to increase to ₹2,000 crore. Directionally, Biocon Biologics will be exiting FY23 at a \$1-billion trajectory, excluding vaccines.

R&D is integral to Biocon. Your spend on R&D (net basis) increased 144% y-o-y in Q3FY23 to ₹337 crore. Can we expect any further increase?

R&D is integral to Biocon as it is an investment in advancing our pipeline to drive future growth. Given that several of BBL's biosimilars are in the clinical stage, which is the most expensive phase of a molecule's 'lab to market journey', its R&D investments during the quarter increased to ₹280 crore, representing 19% of Biocon Biologics' revenues. As we factor in the full revenues from Viatris' biosimilar businesses, we expect R&D investments to stabilise at 12-15% of BBL's revenue.

How is your partnership with Serum Institute Life Sciences shaping up?

Having signed a definitive agreement, our strategic alliance with Serum Institute Life Sciences (SILS) is currently in the phase of obtaining requi-

As we factor in the full revenues from Viatris' biosimilar businesses, we expect R&D investments to stabilise at 12-15% of BBL's revenue.

site regulatory approvals. We believe this alliance is an important step in our strategy of 'expanding our adjacencies' by leveraging our existing strengths. Adding vaccines to our portfolio via the SILS deal will be a potential growth driver for BBL in future.

What could be the challenges going ahead? How is the company planning to strengthen its offerings?

The uncertainty in the global scenario notwithstanding, Biocon continues to enjoy strong fundamentals. This can be seen in the 36% y-o-y growth in our Q3FY23 revenues, which was driven by our Biosimilars Business and Research Services Business delivering strong year-

on-year growth of 54% and 23% respectively, and our Generics Business growing at a healthy 18%. Each of these three businesses is uniquely differentiated and has attained a leadership profile that prepares us for an exciting future.

What revenue mark is the company targeting as we near the end of FY23 and what will the growth in FY24 look like?

We expect to end FY23 on a strong note, with healthy growth across all our businesses. Biocon Biologics will be the key growth driver, as it begins to reflect the full quarter's revenues of the newly acquired Viatris business from Q4FY23. Directionally, Biocon Biologics will be exiting FY23 at a \$1-billion trajectory, excluding vaccines. Growth in FY24 will come from the launch of biosimilar Adalimumab in the US and continued growth in Glargine, Trastuzumab and Pegfilgrastim biosimilars. Launches of biosimilar Aspart and biosimilar Bevacizumab in the US, post approval, will provide additional upside. Biocon is confident of delivering mid-teens growth in the coming fiscal.

Opinion

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2023



MEDICINE A PUBLIC ISSUE
Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya

“Pharma companies who are found involved in the manufacturing of spurious medicines will not be spared...The issues of medicines are definitely linked with public health. Medicine is a public health issue”

Predictable, but stable

Foreign trade policy has done just what the doctor ordered by shunning fiscal incentives

THE MOST STRIKING feature of the new foreign trade policy (FTP) 2023 is, ironically, the tacit admission of its redundancy. Subsequent revisions of the policy “shall be done as and when required and shall not be linked to any date,” the short FTP document avers, while stressing the importance of “policy continuity.” What is needed, it says, is “to respond dynamically to the emerging situations,” leaving little for one to take exception to. The previous version of the FTP was initially for five years till FY20, and saw three extensions, sans any change, till March 31, 2023.

The FTP rightly—and inevitably—shifts away from using fiscal resources to incentivise exports. India’s gross national income surpassed the WTO’s exemption threshold of \$1,000 per capita for nations to keep such incentives in 2015. This has resulted in a series of setbacks for the country, at the world body’s dispute panel in recent years, the latest being the SEZ case in 2021. Fiscal support to India’s goods exporters to offset their cost disadvantage from the country’s infrastructure deficit and general economic inefficiencies came to an end in January 2021. Similar benefits for firms exporting services were last given for the fiscal year 2020-21. Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal has on several occasions asked exporters to get out of “the mindset of subsidies.” Given this context, and the streamlining of the tax remission for exporters and its extension to around 90% of the tariff lines, FTP has become less suspenseful.

The short point is that the relative competitiveness of the economy, logistics efficiency, and swiftness of geographical diversification of export destinations will determine the country’s export prowess. These are largely the function of private enterprise and investment, while the government has the role of a facilitator of infrastructure investments and initiator of necessary structural reforms. The preconditions for infrastructure investments are market-determined utility tariffs, robust revenue streams, and workable concession agreements. Given that India’s infrastructure deficit is still huge, the government would have a subsidiary role for at least a few more years as a major investor too, but without upsetting its own fiscal maths. A policy paradigm that recognises all these, is already being developed.

India’s exports have been outpacing world trade growth in recent years—in FY23, the overall goods-and-services exports are set to be \$770 billion, a neat \$100 billion higher than in FY22. Ratio of goods exports to GDP grew from 18.18% in FY18 to 21.4% in FY22, even amidst global headwinds and geopolitical uncertainties. But this barely hides the country’s sheer under-performance in the world markets and its huge unharvested potential—India’s share in world trade is just 2.1% now, while it accounts for 7.5% of the world GDP (adjusted for purchasing power parity). The FTP target of \$2 trillion exports (goods and services) for 2030 implies a CAGR of 15%, and a tripling of goods exports in eight years. Merchandise exports had grown in the decade to FY22 only by a third. In the near term, the considerable slowing of world trade—from 3.5% growth in 2022 to the projected 1% in 2023—is a dampener. A likely jump in e-commerce, increased agility of exporters in finding new markets, and the easing of logistical constraints are the best bets for the country. A drive to create Indian brands with global recall and the momentum in the settlement of international trade in rupee are potential accelerators too.

Worried about shadow banking? Don't look at China

The size of the US's leveraged finance market is a bigger worry than China's ballooning debt pile

When we talk about shadow banking, we think of China, one of the world’s most indebted nations. Lending by companies that do not own a banking license has reached 50 trillion yuan (\$7.3 trillion), or about 42% of gross domestic product, according to Moody’s Investors Service. As the recent banking crisis is forcing investors to figure out where the next pressure point might be, they are starting to see that the US has quietly built up a huge pile of hidden debt as well. After a decade of a risk-on run, the US leveraged finance market—almost held entirely by shadow lenders which typically operate with little or no regulatory oversight—has topped \$3 trillion. Money managers are worried, and even the slow-moving government has signalled closer scrutiny.

At first glance, it’s perhaps good news that banks have become less exposed to corporate America. Since the global financial crisis, corporate borrowing has shifted away from the traditional lenders—which are subject to stricter regulations—towards institutional and retail clients. Banks’ market share has fallen from more than 50% at the turn of the century to just 37% in 2021, according to Moody’s. This is especially the case in the \$1.3 trillion leveraged loan market, which caters to riskier companies and private equity’s buyout activities. Banks still arrange many of these loans, provide information to investors and put together a group of buyers. However, they often don’t end up holding the debt—or at least try not to.

But the recent demise of SVB Financial Group is raising questions of how much lending banks have given to shadow financiers. Consider, the largest portion of SVB’s \$74 billion loan book consisted of so-called subscription lines given to private equity, a typical nonbank lender. This kind of credit is especially useful when money is tight—they give private funds the flexibility to complete deals without having to go to their investors each time they need cash. But they are also hard to offload, in part because they are not assessed by major credit ratings agencies.

There are other exposures. Fund managers routinely use temporary lines of credit from banks, or warehouse lines, to pay for leveraged loans before packaging them into bonds known as collateralized loan obligations. Products such as CLOs and other asset-backed securities are now the largest non-bank source of corporate loans, commanding a 29% market share as of the end of 2021. Meanwhile, private equity also taps their Wall Street bankers for net-asset-value loans during periods of market upheaval, often times to shore up their portfolio companies. But since there is limited public disclosure, we do not have a clear sense of how much exposure banks have, and whether we should be worried about spillovers. We can only speculate.

This guessing game makes China a bit less scary by comparison. Paranoid about its huge debt pile, the government is keen to assess banks’ exposure to the shadow financiers. Further, China’s shadow banking has been on a decline since the government’s deleveraging campaign began in earnest late 2017. To be sure, I do not see shadow banking as something negative and shady as its name seems to suggest. Often times, nonbanks provide much needed financing to companies shunned by traditional lenders. Consider China’s 18.9 trillion yuan trust sector. They were the early-stage financiers that helped real estate developers launch new projects before banks were willing to give out construction loans. Crackdowns aside, Beijing should also thank these lenders for helping to modernise China.

Nonetheless, while shadow banking often serves a key purpose, it is important that regulators know the contagion risk they pose, and whether they might create chaos in the broader financial sector. In this sense, the US’s known unknown is even worse than China’s scary debt pile.

BACKING GREEN ACTION
THE FINANCIAL WORLD NOW REALISES THAT GREEN ACTION IS A REAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY. BUT THE LACK OF CONSENSUS ON GREEN TAXONOMY IMPEDES ENTHUSIASTIC PARTICIPATION

India's own green taxonomy

SRINATH SRIDHARAN

Policy researcher & corporate advisor
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INDIA HAS MADE emphatic inroads into developing sustainability-related policies and regulations. India’s green transformation will use digital technologies, and develop newer business models to steer the various shades of green—in the current brown-to-green transition movement. For effecting climate mitigation and adaptation towards its Net Zero journey, it will need annual investments of upto 8% of GDP, and upto \$15 trillion in all. Domestic private and government capital will not be sufficient to cover these green-bills.

There is a significantly large availability of green funding globally. The signatories to the UN-backed Principles for Responsible Investment together represent over \$150 trillion in assets under management. The sustainability indexed funds, benchmarked to environmental, social, and governance indices, have another \$300 billion. The impact investing world has another \$1 trillion to add to the green shift. Despite these, the share of global private financing in green is less than 5%.

Going green in India has largely been politically pushed, via policies impacting industry. The Indian financial stakeholders, especially the banks, have been very slow in their green-financing efforts. The banks, like their peers in many parts of the globe, seem to have not factored in climate risks and the need for financing climate action. A 2022 industry assessment notes none of the 34 Indian banks tested had climate-change resilience on their portfolios.

Financiers must understand that green financing is not just ‘affirmative action’—it is a business opportunity. For banks already facing global turmoil, financial extremities, and pressures to digitise and handle the shrinking of the regulatory moat that kept fintech at bay, green ideology can’t be put on the back-burner.

There is hope yet. Bankers under-

stand risks well, especially those defined and measured by regulatory supervisors. For climate risks, the banking sector needs to have a new set of acceptable definitions. Lenders are used to assessing the lending risk in terms of credit, market, liquidity, and business risks. Green finance needs a new paradigm. RBI could help its governed entities by defining what constitutes green risk. For

Lenders are used to assessing risk in terms of credit, market, liquidity, etc. But green finance needs a new set of definitions. RBI must define what constitutes green risk for the banking sector

global green funding. Its green economic activities have to align with the taxonomy.

Today, there is gap in understanding what constitutes green. Detailed green taxonomy will not only move Indian NetZero goal ahead but also allow for efficient deployment of green-capital and more accurate reporting of progress. India faces significant social and environmental challenges. A green taxonomy can help to promote social responsibility by encouraging investment in activities that support sustainable development like affordable housing, access to clean water, and sustainable agriculture.

Investors globally rely on green taxonomies for their investments. They are wary of both green-washing as well as green-shaming. Standardised definitions are their true-north for investing in credible green investment opportunities. Articulate green taxonomy can offer information symmetry and avoid plurality of commercial green interpretations. The taxonomy can help policy-makers develop a system to track green finance at disaggregated levels such as projects, and at aggregated levels, such as funders, companies, and country. The only green taxonomy we have in India is the ORF green taxonomy 2022.

India has championed the cause of

global climate change, despite the poor behaviour of broken promises by the developed economies in funding for climate action. As the second-most populous nation, the world’s fastest-growing economy, and its third-largest emitter, it has made many efforts for going green. Enabling such a transition needs policy firmness, regulatory heft, and supportive investment markets. The way India finances its journey to Net Zero 2070 could well be a framework for other nations to emulate, simply because it would have sustainable financing, social impact, citizenry benefit, and development outcomes, despite geopolitical compulsions and the evolving impact on job creation for a large population.

Global investors ask for uncomplicated and non-politicised green taxonomy. To illustrate, we see the divided houses in the EU green corridor. The assessment and disclosure of climate risks, while needed for India’s financial resilience, are also an opportunity for its financial players to participate in its green transition. It is both an economic window, and a store of social good. Once a green taxonomy is in place, it has to cascade across detailed standardised investor-friendly disclosures, across all regulatory, markets and corporate interfaces. That’s what can lend credibility and ease of regulatory aspects for green-lending to happen. It would be useful to engage with the banking sector to bring their green-concerns to the table. An effective banking sector can bring to the discussion, their end user understanding and what could constitute green-risks, and what can avoid both green shaming as well as green washing. As RBI regulates those entities, has the knowledge, and the global connect to understand what could work within possibilities of Indian financial systemic stability, it should take the lead in shaping GreenT, the Indian Green Taxonomy.

Behind rising manufacturing employment



BISHWANATH GOLDAR & SURESH C AGGARWAL

Respectively, former professor, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi and visiting fellow, Institute for Human Development, Delhi

Enterprises with 10+ workers had a higher rate of employment growth in 2020-21 and 2021-22 than own-account enterprises. So, factors other than distress—very likely, the easing of labour laws—pushed up manufacturing employment during the period

ACCORDING TO THE LATEST Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, manufacturing employment increased by about 5% in 2020-21 and about 8% in 2021-22. This hike is remarkable because manufacturing employment has been falling since 2011. About three million jobs were lost in manufacturing between 2011-12 and 2017-18. This job loss was more than made up in 2020-21 and 2021-22, when about eight million manufacturing jobs were created. These hikes in manufacturing employment are also remarkable as several surveys of manufacturing and services enterprises were undertaken in India in 2020/2021 to assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Indian MSMEs, which showed that the pandemic had a severe adverse effect on employment. Yet, the manufacturing sector could attain fast employment growth in 2020 and 2021, overcoming the negative impact of the pandemic. Due to the recent hikes, manufacturing employment in 2021-22 exceeded 2011-12’s by over six million.

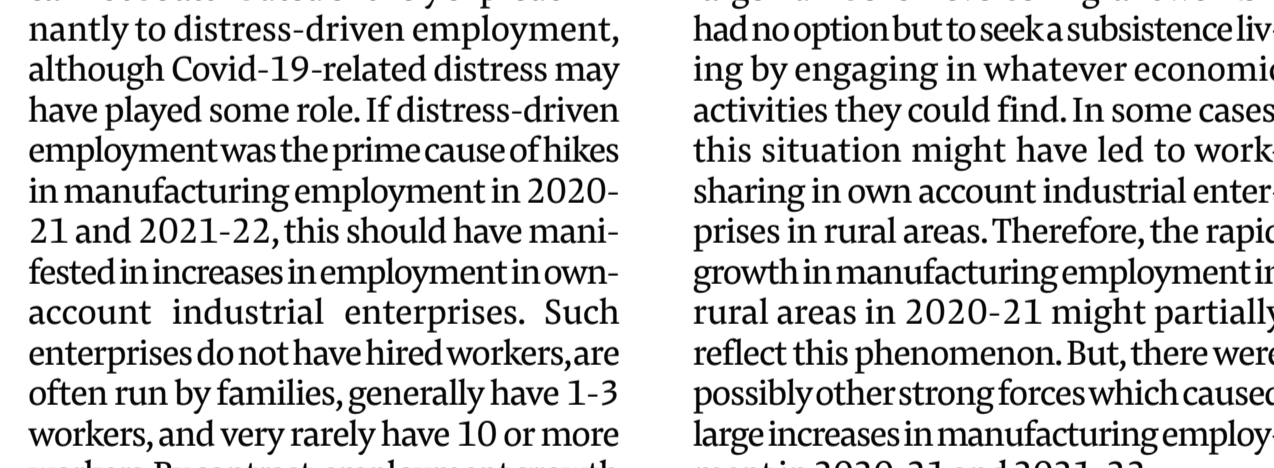
Some commentators have recently drawn attention to the fact that India’s employment structure, which was shifting away from agriculture over past decades, has lately been moving towards agriculture again. Because of this reversal, agricultural employment in 2021-22 exceeded that in 2011-12. This unexpected change in the employment structure has been ascribed to economic distress-driven employment caused by a

slowdown in economic growth and the economic fallout of the pandemic.

The increases in manufacturing employment in 2020-21 and 2021-22 cannot be attributed entirely or predominantly to distress-driven employment, although Covid-19-related distress may have played some role. If distress-driven employment was the prime cause of hikes in manufacturing employment in 2020-21 and 2021-22, this should have manifested in increases in employment in own-account industrial enterprises. Such enterprises do not have hired workers, are often run by families, generally have 1-3 workers, and very rarely have 10 or more workers. By contrast, employment growth in 2020-21 and 2021-22 was relatively high in the size classes of 10-19 workers and 20+ workers.

Growth in manufacturing employ-

GROWTH RATE IN MANUFACTURING EMPLOYMENT (%)



Source and Note: Computed from PLFS data. Those respondents in the survey who did not report the employment size class of the enterprise in which they work have been proportionately distributed

ment during 2020-21 was mostly in rural areas, and during 2021-22, it was mostly in urban areas. With lost job opportunities in the cities because of the pandemic, a large number of reverse migrant workers had no option but to seek a subsistence living by engaging in whatever economic activities they could find. In some cases, this situation might have led to work-sharing in own account industrial enterprises in rural areas. Therefore, the rapid growth in manufacturing employment in rural areas in 2020-21 might partially reflect this phenomenon. But, there were possibly other strong forces which caused large increases in manufacturing employment in 2020-21 and 2021-22.

The easing of labour regulations is probably one of the important factors behind these significant increases. The positive effect of the labour reforms in

Rajasthan in 2014 on industrial employment has been documented in the Economic Survey of 2018-19 (vol. I, chapter 3). By March 2020, such reforms had been undertaken by several other states. The threshold limit for applicability of Chapter V-B of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, was raised from 100 to 300 workers in nine states, and 13 states permitted women to work in factories at night under the Factories Act, 1948. Also, three states enhanced the threshold for the definition of ‘factory’ from 10 to 20 workers (with power) and 20 to 40 workers (without power), and five states enhanced the applicability threshold limit for the Contract Labour Act, 1970. These reforms must have had a significant effect on employment in manufacturing.

Consider the nine states that had, by March 2020, enhanced the threshold limit under Chapter V-B of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, from 100 workers to 300 workers. This set includes states that had raised the threshold limit for defining ‘factory’ under the Factories Act, 1948, and the threshold limit under the Contract Labour Act, 1970. The manufacturing employment in these states was 9% higher in 2020-21 than in 2018-19, and the manufacturing employment in the rest of the states was 4% higher in 2020-21 than in 2018-19. Is this not strongly suggestive of a significant positive effect of labour reforms on manufacturing employment growth in India?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fireworks from China

Xi Jinping is heralding his record third time into office with unprecedented fanfare. Even as pyrotechnic displays over his Saudi-Iran peace mediation is on, he has set off a grander one with Russia and Ukraine. This is no mean feat even as the US is pampering its arms lobby with larger armament despatches to an insane conflagration to be frittering away its diplomacy. It is busy enlisting nations like Poland

and others into NATO. Xi is active on the economic front as well. China and Brazil are settling for trade in Yuan and Rial. Earlier he had settled similarly with the Saudis to move away from dollar centric international transactions. Busy with Trump and 2024 elections, Biden could likely be slipping not only on US political dominance and but left to watch China’s calculated steps to subversion of the dollar.

—R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

Hard road ahead for the Adani Group

The Hindenburg Report has effectively pricked the high valuations of the Adani group companies. The threats to sue the creators of the report have just remained threats. It seems like this course of action has been ruled out. It is hard to envisage the growth of 20% in most of the group companies and therefore the plans

to repay debt in another 3-4 years or so is highly unlikely to be achieved. The cash-strapped group has put the brakes on some high-ticket projects and asked for time to pay for some of its acquisitions. The political climate is such that raising money for the group is not going to be easy, and there is indeed a hard road ahead.

—Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Markets

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2023



STRONG NUMBERS
HO Suri, MD & CEO, IFFCO Tokio

Our active policyholders figure has improved significantly. Overall, the gross premium witnessed a growth of 16% compared to the previous financial year.

IN THE NEWS

● INVESTORS LACK AWARENESS, CONFIDENCE

ESG bucket could remain dry despite Sebi measures

SIDDHANT MISHRA
Mumbai, March 31

THE SECURITIES AND Exchange Board of India's (Sebi) latest guidelines on environmental, social and governance norms (ESG) introduced a slew of measures to promote and streamline investing in the theme. A new category for the theme will be introduced, allowing for launch of multiple schemes.

However, the theme could face hurdles in India, said mutual fund players. "While ESG had taken off globally as a concept, there has been a pause and rethink of late. In India, it's still in its nascent stages as the industry is still working around how to define the theme," said Sahil Kapoor, head of products and market strategist (product management), DSP Investment Managers.

He pointed out that the objective of ESG is the 'impact', so the focus shouldn't be on numbers, but rather the components of the theme — environmental, social and governance. On the other hand, it could take time before it sees traction in India as fund houses will have to strategise on designing products.

Another fund manager (fixed

GROUND NOT PREPARED YET

■ In India, ESG still in its nascent stages as the industry is working around how to define the theme



■ Sebi amended Mutual Funds Regulations, 1996, in order to facilitate a balanced approach to ESG

■ People will not embrace something they lack awareness in, and in which questions are still being asked

■ A market has to be built first for schemes to be introduced, as people still lack confidence

income) of a leading fund house said: "ESG has not seen the kind of traction in India as it has in Europe. While everybody speaks about it as the future, the truth is that it is yet to spark investor interest to that extent. People will not get into something they lack awareness in, and in which questions are still being asked. The regulator is ensuring enablement for the theme to pick up with its efforts, but a market

has to be built first for schemes to be introduced, as people still lack confidence."

The markets watchdog approved inter alia key amendments to the SEBI (Mutual Funds) Regulations, 1996, in order to facilitate a balanced approach to ESG. A new category for the theme will be introduced, allowing for launch of multiple schemes.

According to a Bloomberg Intel-

ligence study last year, ESG assets were on track to reach \$50 trillion by 2025, one-third of the projected total AUM globally.

The Sebi board has mandated that ESG schemes invest at least 65% of their assets under management (AUM) in listed entities, which are compliant with the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) Core. BRSR Core is a planned framework comprising key performance indicators, for which listed entities shall need to obtain reasonable assurance.

In addition, boards of asset management firms (AMCs) have to ensure third party assurance and certification with respect to compliance with the objective of the ESG scheme, while disclosure norms will become more stringent as regards voting on ESG factors. Fund managers also have to provide commentary and case studies highlighting how the strategy is applied on fund/investments.

This is with the objective to "address the risk of mis-selling and greenwashing, enhance stewardship reporting requirements, and promote ESG investing", the regulator said.

● LOW EXPENSE FOR FUND HOUSES

Backstop facility a boon for fragile bond market

To be set up in the form of AIF for purchase of investment-grade corp debt securities

SIDDHANT MISHRA
Mumbai, March 31

THE SECURITIES AND Exchange Board of India (Sebi's) approval for the ₹33,000-crore backstop facility — the Corporate Debt Market Development Fund that will purchase investment-grade corporate debt securities in times of stress — would provide a shot in the arm for the bond market, according to industry players.

The move seeks to shore up confidence by providing mutual funds access to emergency liquidity at times of crisis.

Given the fragile nature of the Indian bond markets, where even higher-rated bonds may find no takers even if there is a small hint of trouble, the Sebi move may prove to be an effective one.

Rajeev Radhakrishnan, fixed income fund manager at SBI MF, said: "Addressing the issue of systemic liquidity in the bond market had become the key. This facility offers fund houses liquidity at a fair price." He explained that the 10% contribution by fund houses will be liquid in nature to ensure immediate availability, and that fund houses will be required to contribute close to 25 bps of their AUM per debt category (excluding G-Sec and overnight).

This facility will be set up in the form of an alternative investment fund (AIF) for purchase of investment-grade corporate debt securities during times of stress.

In February, deputy MD of SBI Mutual Fund DP Singh had said the government was setting up a ₹33,000-crore fund to provide liquidity support to the corporate debt market during times of tension, to which the MF industry would contribute 10%.

"We have seen in the past that whenever there is a credit event, there is a run on the funds for redemption, which, in turn, creates pressure on liquidity... this fund is being created to avoid such a situation in the future and meet the redemption pressure in any such event," Singh had said.



PRUDENT STEP

■ move seeks to shore up confidence by providing mutual funds access to emergency liquidity at times of crisis

■ Addressing the issue of systemic liquidity in the bond market had become the key

■ Fund being created to avoid liquidity crisis situation and meet the redemption pressure in any such event

The proposal for such a facility was first mooted in the Union Budget 2021, with modalities yet to be worked out at that time. It may be noted that Franklin Templeton in 2021 shut down six of its debt schemes, which together had an estimated AUM of ₹25,000 crore, citing heavy redemption pressure.

The fund house had, at the time, cited the severe liquidity crunch in the bond market, coupled with very large redemptions following the outbreak of the Covid, as reasons behind shutting of the schemes.

According to the MD and CEO of a fund house, this brings a much-needed comfort, as fund houses will not have to go for aggressive selling to meet redemption pressures, if they arise. "Strengthening the bond market liquidity was the prime intent, by getting Sebi and industry members to collaborate. MFs will be creating infra for themselves via this investment, and the end goal is development and deepening of the bond market."

He said that given that the contribution is a minor amount of the AUM, it won't put additional pressure on the industry.

India Inc raises ₹8.84 trn via rupee bonds

RAJESH KURUP & KISHOR KADAM
Mumbai, March 31

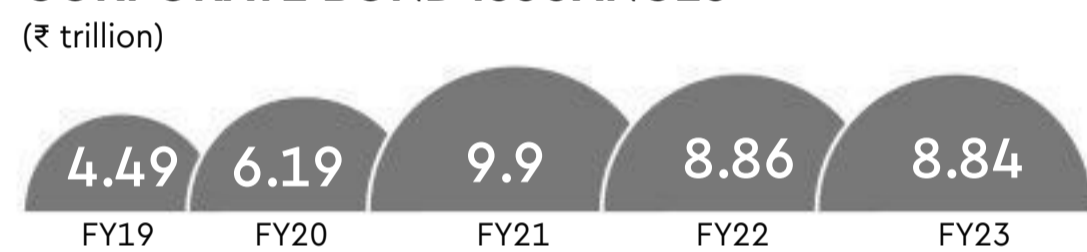
IN A YEAR when the global markets took a knock due to the Russia-Ukraine war and fears of recession, Indian corporates were able to raise ₹8.84 trillion through rupee bonds — marginally down from ₹8.86 trillion raised in FY22. A total of 365 companies mopped up funds through bonds in FY23.

This compares with ₹9.90 trillion IND Inc had raised via bonds in FY21, which was also the highest in the last five years. In FY20, ₹6.19 trillion was raised and ₹4.49 trillion was mopped up in FY19.

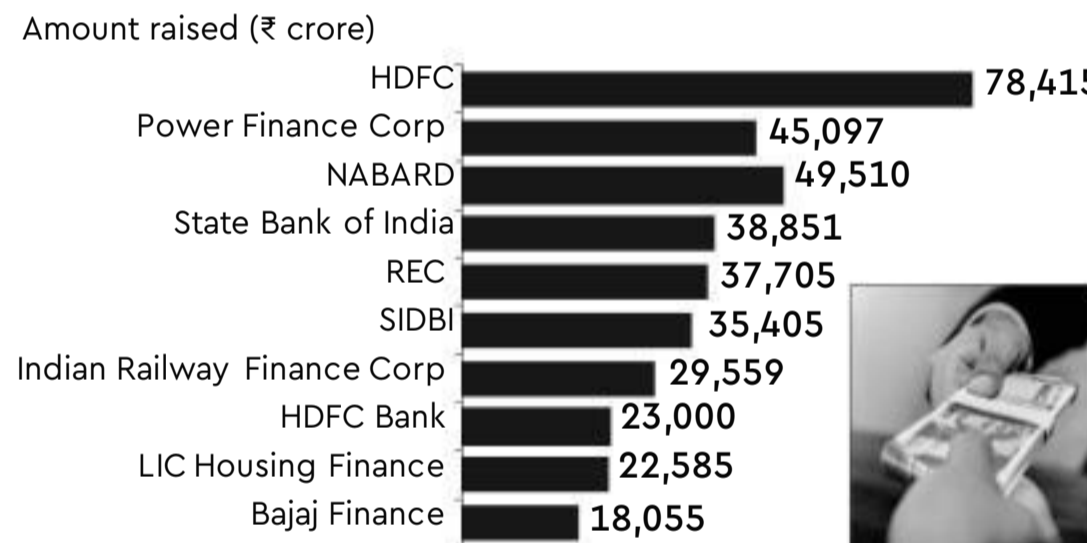
HDFC topped the chart with ₹78,415-crore fundraise through issuance of bonds during the year under review, followed by Power Finance Corporation (₹45,097 crore), Nabard (₹49,510 crore), State Bank of India (₹38,851 crore), REC (₹37,705 crore), SIDBI (₹35,405 crore), Indian Railway Finance Corp (₹29,559 crore) and HDFC Bank (₹23,000 crore), according to data sourced from Bloomberg.

"The lacklustre interest by corporates in raising funds through bonds was mainly due to the rise in

CORPORATE BOND ISSUANCES



TOP CORPORATE BOND ISSUERS IN FY23



interest rates during the financial year, while a rise in global inflation rates also played its part. Due to these factors, raising funds through fresh issuance of bonds would have been comparatively costlier, which also made corporates adopt a wait-and-watch approach. During the

fiscal, corporates stayed away from making real investments, while funds were raised only for refinancing," Mahesh Singhi, founder & MD at investment banking firm Singhi Advisors, said.

"With these issues still hovering, we don't expect much fundraising

through bonds to happen in FY24. The traditional way of borrowing from banks would be the preferred mode," Singhi added.

In FY23, the RBI raised benchmark lending rates by 250 bps.

"In FY23, despite the rate hikes, banking channels were offering loans at rates much below the corporate bond rates. The credit growth of banks has been hovering at 15-16%. Drying up of market liquidity, coupled with slower pace of deposit mobilisation growth, has resulted in transmission of rates by banks, the impact of which will be seen in FY24. The reduction in corporate tax rates during the last couple of years has helped companies to accrue more cash and de-leverage significantly — it has resulted in strengthening of their balance sheets, thereby enhancing their credit rating, making them more attractive for bond market issuance for their next phase of inevitable growth," Vinay Pai, head (fixed income) at Equirus, said.

December 2022 witnessed the highest fundraise in FY23 at ₹1.43 trillion, followed by March 2023 (₹1.11 trillion), November (₹92,565 crore), September (₹92,533 crore) and February 2023 (₹86,087 crore).

Fx reserves rise to over 8-month high of \$579 billion

AGENCIES
Mumbai, March 31

INDIA'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE reserves rose for a second straight week and stood at \$578.78 billion, the highest since early July, for the week ended March 24, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) statistical supplement showed on Friday.

That is an increase of \$5.98 billion over the previous week. Expressed in dollar terms, foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US currencies such as like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves jumped by \$1.37 billion to \$45.48 billion, the RBI said. The special drawing rights (SDRs) were up by \$201 million to \$18.419 billion, the central bank said.

The country's reserve position with the IMF increased by \$27 million to \$5.151 billion for the reporting week.

● AS RAJEEV, MD & CEO, BANK OF MAHARASHTRA

'Reducing high-cost bulk deposits paid off'

From a bank identified by the RBI for prompt corrective action as losses touched ₹5,800 crore to emerging as the top PSB in terms of credit growth, Bank of Maharashtra has scripted a successful turnaround story. MD and CEO AS Rajeev, who has led the bank's turnaround, says its total business grew by 15.77% in the nine months of FY23 to reach ₹3.65 trillion. The target now is to reach the ₹5-trillion mark in FY24, he tells Geeta Nair. Excerpts:

In agriculture advances, there has been a diversification of portfolios from production credit to investment credit. The thrust is now on high-value food and agro-processing industries and financing input suppliers.

What did the bank do to improve profitability?

The bank took a conscious decision to reduce high-cost bulk deposits. The share of high-cost bulk deposits to total deposits has been brought down to zero. There was an improvement in CASA as percentage of total deposits which helped reduce the cost of funds. Bank's CASA base is the highest among the public sector banks at 52.50% as of Q3 FY23. There

was control on operating expenditure and revenue leakages, and branch rationalisation with underperforming branches merged and new branches opened in prospective business areas. The cost-to-income ratio was improved. The focus was on increasing fee-based income, net interest margin (NIM) and also third-party businesses. There was a recovery in prudential written-off accounts in mission mode.

How did the bank improve asset quality?

We implemented a credit monitoring dashboard for better monitoring, and did a critical analysis of probable slippages and

stressed borrower accounts. In the loan life management system, we went live with the module of early warning signals, effective use of loan tracking cells for follow-up of stressed accounts and automated the stressed accounts monitoring with a mobile app.

To enhance the loan book quality, corporate advances with high credit ratings are preferred and advances with sover-

A co-lending model helps traditional banks to give out higher amount of funds using the fintech working model for a greater digital reach

Foreign guarantees are given priority. There is a dedicated cell for project finance and dedicated branches for MSME. The focus was on scouting for new proposals in the manufacturing sector within the mid-corporate segment.

The bank has entered several new segments in the last couple of years. How are these businesses growing?

The gold loan portfolio was non-existent in 2019. We revamped the scheme and established gold loan points in select branches. Our gold loan portfolio was below ₹300 crore in FY20, and reached around ₹6,000 crore by December 2022. We envisage a gold loan portfolio of ₹7,000 crore by the end of this fiscal. Trade financing, channel financing, lease rental discounting and credit cards are the other new businesses we are growing.

In the last two years, the bank has announced many tie-ups with NBFCs, fintech firms and technology companies. How has this progressed?

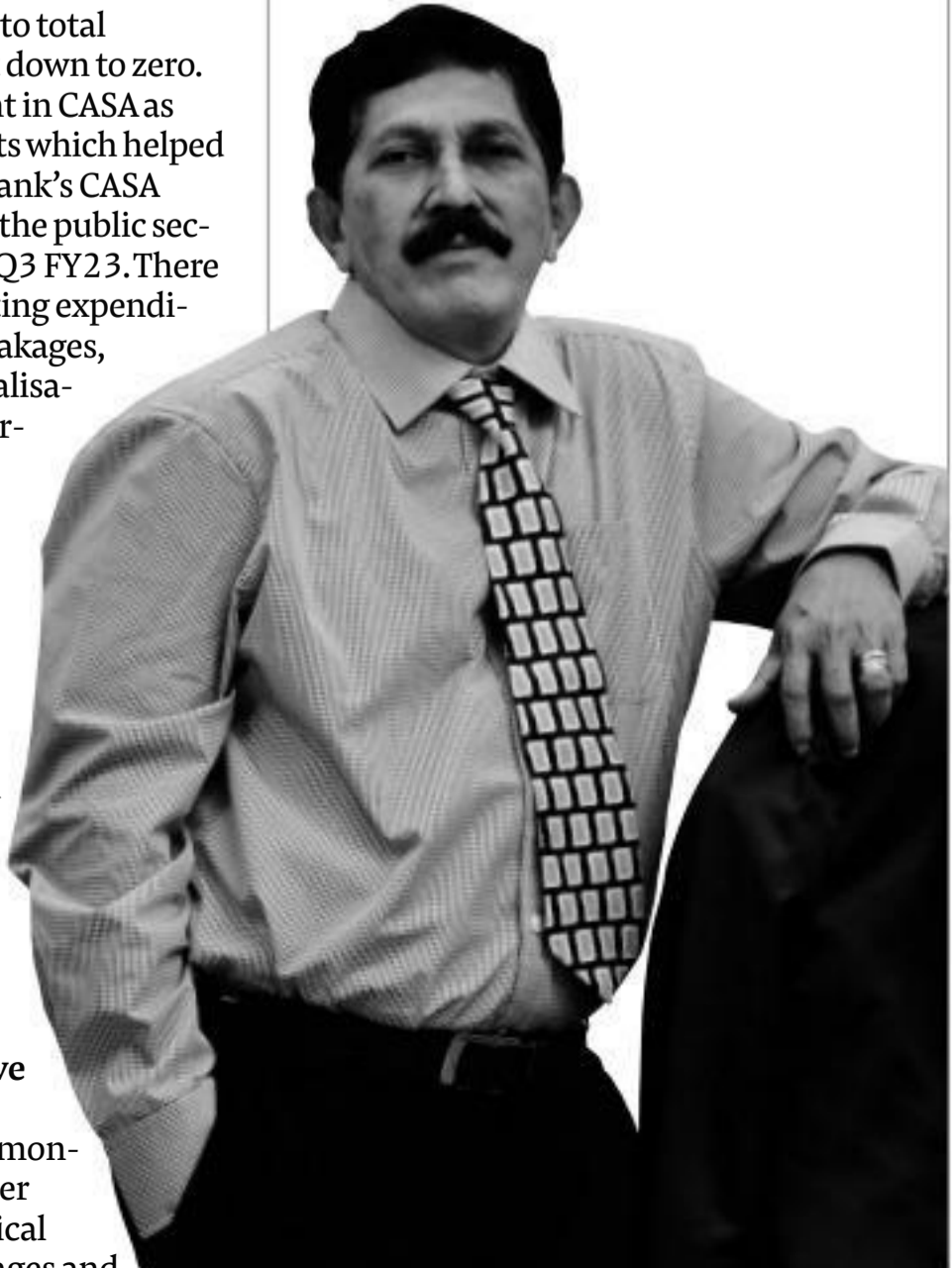
The bank has entered into tie-ups with NBFCs under a co-lending model. The is to improve the flow of credit to the unserved segment of the economy at an affordable cost. The bank has partnered with Loan-

Tap Financial, MAS and LendingKart Financial Services for financing MSMEs. It has partnered with InCred Financial Services to finance education loans in the retail sector. A co-lending model helps traditional banks to give out higher amounts of funds using the fintech working model for a greater digital reach. The bank can tap into the untapped market, improve margins by processing more applications and disbursing more loans in a very short time and expand its priority sector portfolio.

How is the bank adopting technology for enabling digital transformation of the business?

Bank of Maharashtra has launched its private cloud platform, Mahabank Nakshatra, which facilitates high-performance cloud capabilities for digital infrastructure and hosting applications. We have strengthened the bank's asset monitoring mechanism through the adoption of a predictive machine learning model. A mobile app called ARJUN (Automated Remote Junction for Monitoring of Assets Under Stress) has been launched.

This will facilitate the availability snapshot of the stressed asset (Special Mentions Accounts and slippages) to strengthen the recovery mechanism. The bank launched Mykase, a legal case tracking software which will be able to fetch all the cases in various courts of India where Bank of Maharashtra is a party. An upgraded version of the bank's existing mobile banking application has been launched. The bank has also launched four Centres of Excellence for database, cyber security, core banking systems and analytics.



Motobahn

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2023



NEW E-SCOOTER LAUNCHED
Nemin Vora, CEO, Odysse Electric Vehicles

Sustainable mobility should be accessible. The first step towards that is an affordable product. We believe our electric scooter, the Vader (launched on Friday), is a cutting-edge, long-range product (125 km) available at an unbeatable price (₹1.1 lakh).

SIMPLE ENERGY

A not-so-Simple approach to electric mobility



Suhas Rajkumar, founder & CEO, Simple Energy (left), with Shreshth Mishra, co-founder

SIMPLE FACTS

- Simple can make 25,000 units per month; it has gotten 100,000 bookings since August 15, 2021
Customer deliveries of the One got postponed from Dec 2021 to June 2022 to Sept 2022. It will be launched in April-end
Simple Energy has hired people not just from auto sector, but from software, electronics, aerospace
Unlike Ola Electric that doesn't have dealers, Simple Energy has online plus offline approach

The Simple One has been marred by three complex delays, but that gave the team the time to make it best in India: Suhas Rajkumar

VIKRAM CHAUDHARY

THREE DELAYS IN customer deliveries — each lasting a quarter of a year or more — can kill a product. Simple Energy, however, used the time to breathe the new life into it.

What caused delays?

The first delay was attributed to supply chain issues (Covid-19). The second delay was a conscious call taken by the start-up after a spate of EV fires in April 2021, to check its own product. The third delay was to meet the new battery safety guidelines.



The One has a 236 km range, goes from 0-40 km/h in 2.77 seconds, battery of 4.8 kWh, and top speed of 105 km/h. It's priced ₹1.1 lakh

only to meet new safety standards, but also to make our scooter the best in business," Suhas Rajkumar, founder & CEO, Simple Energy, told FE. "Customer interest, however, hasn't waned, as our bookings have crossed 100,000 units."

Rajkumar assured that customer deliveries will finally start by the end of April this year.

Product improvements

"The One is now faster, it has improved on aesthetics, on battery systems; earlier it met seven safety parameters, now it's meeting 18," Rajkumar said. "Rich talent came to our organisation for the past one and a half years and their skill set

has added to product quality." Simple Energy has hired people not only from the auto industry, but also from software, electronics, space start-ups and from Tesla.

Distribution approach

Unlike Ola that doesn't have dealers, Simple Energy will take an online plus offline approach. "Customers will need a service station and a touch point," Rajkumar said.

Supply chain

While most parts, including the battery pack, have been localised, Rajkumar said some electronics come from South Korea, Japan, China and Europe. "We're reliant

on South Korea — the microcontroller comes from there," he said.

Sales target

Rajkumar didn't share sales target, but said for the right product there is enough demand. "We have a production capacity of 25,000 units per month, and we are looking at meeting that first, and then scaling it up," he said. "The market has become more mature. Some low quality players have exited or have been forced to exit either by the market or by regulations."

FAME extension?

In February, the government launched a probe against some EV players about the alleged misappropriation of the FAME II subsidy scheme, and there are reported talks about the scheme not being extended beyond its March 31, 2024, deadline (even though a parliamentary panel has suggested extending it by two years).

"The government should go hard on those who don't comply with the norms, but the scheme should be continued for some time. Make rules more stringent, but FAME (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid & Electric Vehicles) is needed so that the industry doesn't lose the pace it has picked up," he said.

SEDAN vs SUV

Is the new Verna a better buy than the Creta?

Both are similar in size, get almost similar engines and the same gearbox, but have different body shapes



VIKRAM CHAUDHARY

IN INDIA, EVERY second person is now buying an SUV, and only one person in 10 is choosing a sedan. While SUV sales are rising across the world — SUVs have stronger road presence and are apparently better suited for driving on poor roads — a sedan can be a better choice in many aspects. Let's see if the all-new Verna (launched last week) is a better buy than the Creta (India's largest selling midsize SUV)?

In most daily-use aspects (legroom, fuel efficiency, ride, luggage capacity) Verna's sedan body shape appears to be better than SUVs



(more so the turbo-petrol variant). While the Creta suffers from some amount of body roll while taking sharp turns, the Verna drives sticking to the road and is more stable.

much more than Creta (433 litres). Also, the Verna's boot is longer, which allows you to carry more luggage, unlike the Creta whose boot is taller. The Verna has more 'usable space' than the Creta (while the Creta has more cabin volume, most of it is 'over the top', i.e. headroom).

Fuel efficiency

The Verna is more fuel-efficient because it is more aerodynamic and lighter in weight than the Creta.

Verna: 1.5 MT (18.6 km/litre), 1.5 IVT (19.6 km/litre), 1.5 turbo MT (20 km/litre), and 1.5 turbo DCT (20.6 km/litre).

Ground clearance

The Creta has taller ground clearance (190 mm) than the Verna (165 mm). But having driven both these vehicles across India on most kinds of roads, I have found that even 165 mm is good enough to ride over tall speed breakers and occasional off the road drive.

Creta: 1.5 MT and IVT (17 km/litre), 1.4 DCT (17 km/litre), and 1.5 diesel (21 km/litre).

Space

The Verna (4,535 mm) is much longer than the Creta (4,300 mm) and is almost as wide, but its height is lower — Verna (1,475 mm) versus Creta (1,635 mm). It means the Creta has more headroom for very tall people. But the Verna has a longer wheelbase (2,670 mm), and that means it has more legroom than the Creta (2,610 mm).

Off the road

While the Creta is claimed to be an SUV, it's not an SUV in true sense, i.e. it doesn't have 4x4 driving tech like true-blue SUVs have (Mahindra Thar, Toyota Fortuner, Isuzu V-Cross or Jeep Compass). Vehicles like the Creta and the Verna need to be driven on the road, not off it.

Sedan vs SUV

If 4x4 and go-anywhere ability are what define an SUV, the Creta is not one — nor are Kia Seltos, Skoda Kushaq, VW Taigun (Maruti Suzuki Grand Vitara and Toyota Hyryder get all-wheel drive, not 4x4).

The boot space of the Verna is huge (528 litres),

An area where the Creta is better than the Verna is driving over tall speed breakers. But in most daily-use aspects — fuel efficiency, stable ride, legroom, luggage capacity — the sedan body shape appears to be a better choice than SUVs.

Performance

The Verna is peppier to drive



If 4x4 is what defines an SUV, the Creta is not one — nor are Kia Seltos, Skoda Kushaq or VW Taigun. An area where the Creta is better than the Verna is driving over really tall speed breakers



International

COURT APPEARANCE LIKELY ON TUESDAY

Trump indicted over hush money probe, expected to surrender

KAREN FREIFELD, LUC COHEN & TYLER CLIFFORD New York, March 31



This is political persecution and election interference at the highest level in history"

DONALD TRUMP, FORMER US PRESIDENT

DONALD TRUMP, THE ex-president and frontrunner to be Republican nominee in 2024, is set to face a mug shot, fingerprinting and court appearance next week after being indicted over a probe into hush money paid to a porn star in a historic US first.

The possible spectacle of Trump's appearance in Manhattan on Tuesday before a judge as the first sitting or former president to face criminal charges could further divide the world's most powerful country.

Trump is seeking the Republican nomination to challenge Democratic President Joe Biden next year. Even before news of the indictment broke, he had been seeking to use the legal threats to raise money and rally his most faithful supporters.

The first US president to have tried to overthrow an election defeat, whose false claims of election fraud inspired the deadly US Capitol assault on January 6, 2021, signalled that he will continue to campaign even as he faces charges.

Those specific charges have not yet been made public as the indictment remains under seal, but CNN on Thursday reported Trump faced more than 30 counts related to business fraud.

social media post on March 18 that he would be arrested in days, Trump's first reaction at the news was "shock," said one of his attorneys, Joe Tacopina, in a Friday interview on ABC.

"We'll go in there and we'll proceed to see a judge at some point, plead not guilty, start talking about filing motions, which we will do immediately and very aggressively," Tacopina said.

Trump, 76, said he was "completely innocent" and accused Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, the Democrat who led the investigation, of trying to hurt his

electoral chances. "This is Political Persecution and Election Interference at the highest level in history," Trump said in a statement.

Trump claims political motivations for all four criminal investigations he is known to face — including federal probes into his retention of classified documents and attempts to overturn his election defeat, and a separate Georgia probe into his attempt to overturn his loss in that state.

He has also accused Bragg, who is Black, of racial bias.

Shortly after news of his indictment broke, Trump appealed to

supporters to provide money for a legal defense.

As news of Trump's indictment flashed across a news ticker on a Times Square skyscraper on Thursday evening, New York City resident Elizabeth Blaise welcomed the news.

"It shows that democracy is finally at a place where it is supposed to be," she said.

Trump earlier this month called for nationwide protests, recalling his charged rhetoric ahead of the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol by his supporters.

Neither the White House nor Biden, a Democrat who is widely expected to seek re-election, commented. Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer, called for calm: "I encourage both Trump's critics and supporters to let the process proceed peacefully and according to the law."

The Manhattan charges will likely be unsealed by a judge in the coming days and Trump will have to travel there to be photographed, fingerprinted and appear in court, which a court official said was expected on Tuesday. Trump lawyer Susan Necheles confirmed the Tuesday surrender date and said she did not expect charges to be unsealed until that day. The grand jury indictment follows months of hearing evidence about an alleged \$130,000 payment to porn star Stormy Daniels in the waning days of the 2016 campaign.

—REUTERS

Huawei posts first profit fall in a decade after US spurs R&D

BLOOMBERG March 31

HUAWEI TECHNOLOGIES POSTED its first annual profit decline in more than a decade, after years of US sanctions all but obliterated its smartphone arm and compelled the Chinese telecom gear maker to ratchet up research spending.

The Shenzhen-based company said its net income for 2022 fell almost 70% to 35.6 billion yuan (\$5.2 billion), though the year-ago comparison was inflated by the sale of its youth-oriented Honor mobile unit. Yet Huawei on Friday emphasized it poured 25.1% of its 642.3 billion yuan revenue back into research. That's among the highest ratios in the global tech industry and reflects the Chinese telecom gear maker's sustained intent to develop alternatives to the American components and software it can no longer access.



Huawei is trying to open up new markets and businesses after US tech export restrictions gutted its smart-phone business — briefly the world's largest — and curtailed the sale of advanced gear in developed markets. Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou — the daughter of Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei — joined other executives on Friday affirming the company's intent to continue researching ways around a blockade of vital American technologies.

China gives \$2-bn loan to Pak

ASIF SHAHZAD & ARIBA SHAHID Islamabad, March 31

Long-time ally Beijing has provided the only help Islamabad has got so far

PAKISTANI FINANCE MINISTER Ishaq Dar said on Friday China had rolled over a \$2 billion loan that matured last week, providing relief during the South Asian nation's acute balance of payment crisis.

Locking in a rollover had been critical for Pakistan, where reserves have dipped to just four weeks' worth of imports and talks over an International Monetary Fund bailout tranche of \$1.1 billion have hit a stalemate.

"I am happy to confirm that this had been rolled over on March 23,"

—REUTERS

FROM PAGE 1 Street ends flat yr with 1K-pt jump

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) remained net sellers on index futures; the long-short ratio stood at 0.10 vs 0.24 on the February expiry.

Both domestic institutional investors (DIIs) and FIIs were net buyers to the tune of ₹2,479.96 crore and ₹357.86 crore, respectively.

"Indian indices witnessed a smart rally led by the large-caps and supported by small- and mid-caps. They played catch-up to global markets that had witnessed two consecutive days of strong move. Though we saw a decent rally this week, we believe markets may remain volatile in the near term as the banking crisis in US and Europe has not yet stabilised completely. This is against the backdrop of bond yields in the US having risen in the past week, which could further escalate banking issues," said Naveen Kulkarni, chief investment officer, Axis Securities.

Index heavyweight Reliance Industries (RII) led the gains in the Sensex pack, up 4.3% after the company called for a shareholders' meeting on May 2 to take up demerger of its financial services operations.

Market breath was positive, with a total of 2,382 stocks advancing to 1,189 declining. Investor wealth rose by ₹3.5 trillion. In the Nifty universe, RII gained 4.31%, followed by Nestle, Infosys and ICICI Banks, all jumping over 3%. Apollo Hospitals and Sun Pharma were the biggest laggards, down 1.3% and 1%.

All sectoral indices closed in the green, with the tech along with banking and financials leading the way. Indian indices outperformed major Asian markets, even as major global indices gained on the back of waning fears regarding the banking sector overseas. However, both indices traded mostly flat in FY23, with the Sensex edging up 0.7% and the Nifty edging down 0.6%. There was a total of ₹6 trillion lost in investor wealth in the financial year ended Friday.

FROM CHATGPT TO ALGO-BASED PRICING

How AI is changing under the Tatas

ADITI SHAH & TIM HEPHER
New Delhi, March 31

AIR INDIA, UNTIL recently tied to an antiquated manual pricing system when setting airfares, is shifting to algorithm-based software long used by rivals to help it squeeze out more revenue from each flight.

In another sign of the former government-owned carrier's whirlwind transformation under its new owner Tata Group, Air India is testing ChatGPT, OpenAI's popular chatbot, to replace paper-based practices.

The push to modernise underscores the decay left by years of under-investment as Air India looks to shed decades-old bureaucratic processes and recapture customers from Dubai's Emirates and powerful domestic rival IndiGo.

"Frankly the system is almost so bad it's good," chief executive officer Campbell Wilson told Indian airline executives last week, adding that this offered the chance to start from scratch rather than "jury-rig" existing architecture.

Air India is not only reworking every aspect of operations — from systems to supply chains — but integrating four Tata-related airlines, with Air India due to merge with Vistara while low-cost Air India Express and AirAsia India also converge.

Some areas, such as technology, allow for a clean-sheet approach, the 52-year-old New Zealander said, which is why he is putting artificial intelligence (AI) and other tools at the centre of Air India's reboot.

Modern "revenue manage-

This is a transformation as well as a startup. In a startup, you just do what you need to do to get going and then you refine along the way

CAMPBELL WILSON,
CEO, AIR INDIA



ment" software aims to stay one step ahead of demand, continuously anticipating where people want to go and how much each individual flyer is prepared to pay, rather than the old method of having one fare for each block of seats. The result is higher revenue per flight.

Wilson faces a tangle of fleets and staff as daunting as Delhi's zig-zagging traffic, leaving the airline's path to profit strewn with obstacles.

"Complexity is the curse of airlines," said Keith McMullan, partner at UK-based consultancy Aviation Strategy, who has experience in the Indian market. "What they are saying is absolutely right — they should go back to a blank piece of paper,

but saying it and actually doing it are two very different things," he said. "The danger is you keep on fighting legacy-related fires."

Wilson's immediate game plan is to tackle pressing problems to get idle planes flying before Air India starts receiving the 470 jets ordered in a record deal last month. For instance, it is working with Tata Technologies to build locally some plastic components for economy-class seats instead of waiting for suppliers to deliver obsolete parts.

And it is grabbing what planes it can find on lease.

"This is a transformation as well as a startup," said Wilson. "In a startup, you just do what you need to do to get going and then you refine along the way," he told *Reuters*, drawing from this experience of being the founding chief of Singapore Airlines' budget carrier Scoot.

But he said a clean-sheet approach cannot and should not be applied everywhere.

Analysts say Wilson's staggered turnaround plans will be severely tested as Air India executes the twin mergers.

Airline mergers in India have had little success with Air India still hobbled by the botched integration of Indian Airlines in 2007. Jet Airways' takeover of Sahara and Kingfisher's merger with Air Deccan hurt them for years.

Jet and Kingfisher are now bankrupt.

Air India's planes are already a mix of Airbus and Boeing jets with multiple cabin configurations. This will be further complicated when it absorbs the new carriers.

— REUTERS

EXPLAINER

THE NEW INTERCHANGE FEES' IMPACT

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) guidelines on the interoperability of wallets now require an interchange fee for the use of wallets, to be paid to wallet issuers, and a UPI-wallet-loading charge to be paid by the issuer to the remitter bank. These pertain to merchant transactions, consumers do not pay. **FE** decodes the changes



Inferences from data on wallets

BASED ON FEBRUARY 2023 annualised wallet payment transactions of ~₹2 trillion, Citibank estimates wallet-loading charges could be more than ₹100 crore across all wallet issuers. This assumes 30% of wallet transactions are eligible — given the transaction-size rule — and an estimated 60% share of UPI in wallet-loading. India has ~250-300 mn digitally-paying users (cards, UPI & wallets).

How will the interchange fee work?

A FEE OF 1.1% will be paid to wallet-issuers like Paytm Payments Bank or Mobikwik by payments service providers like Google Pay or PhonePe to cover the costs like accepting and processing, for merchant transactions of ₹2,000 and above. The fee is not applicable to peer-to-peer (P2P) transactions. The interchange rates will vary between 0.5-1.1% based on the profile of the merchant. At fuel service stations, it could be 0.5% while for education fees, it is 0.7%. The cap is ₹15 per transaction.

The wallet-loading charge, of 15 basis points, is to be paid by the wallet-issuer like Paytm Payments Bank or Ola Financial Services to the remitter bank, i.e., the bank of the account-holder, again for a transaction value of more than ₹2,000.

35-40%

OF LOADING OF DIGITAL WALLETS HAPPENS VIA UPI

>55%

OF LOADS AMOUNT TO MORE THAN ₹2,000

~80%

OF WALLET-SPENDS ARE FOR AMOUNTS OF LESS THAN ₹2,000

₹100 crore

ONE ESTIMATE OF WALLET LOADING CHARGE

Does anything change for the customer?

WHILE THE CHARGES may not be passed on to the consumer immediately, experts believe that, at some point, they will be even though the NPCI has said that the charges apply only to merchant wallet transactions. The transactions are essentially going to be customer-driven and, therefore, it is convenience, seamlessness and reliability of the process that will determine the volumes.

The inter-operability of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) makes it convenient for users, who don't need to use the savings accounts each time for small-ticket transactions and can use the wallets instead. Opinion, though, is divided on the security angle. Some say using a digital wallet with a QR code could be safer than using a bank account while others say the risks remain the same in both cases.

Key points to watch out for

PPI ON THE UPI track will boost merchant transactions in rural areas through a host of use-cases. How much the acquirers will recover from the merchants will be watched. The ability and the willingness of payment companies to pass on the interchange fees as higher MDRs will also be watched.

Analysts believe that the introduction of the fee could pave the way for the imposition of MDRs on all UPI merchant (P2M) transactions.

The impact on merchants, and on the overall payments ecosystem

CURRENTLY, THE regulations specify a zero Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) for bank-to-bank UPI transactions. Also, since there is no MDR applicable, presently, up to a transaction-value of ₹2,000 for the wallet-on-UPI, there may be no big changes in the market immediately. The estimated

share of transactions above ₹2,000 remains relatively small. In any case, pre-paid instruments (PPIs) such as wallets account for a very small proportion of digital transactions.

Today, most merchants are used to paying an MDR of 2% or thereabouts on credit cards; so,

experts say, they may not mind an MDR of even 1.5-2% on wallets if it results in bigger transaction volumes.

The introduction of the interchange fees should encourage players in the payments ecosystem to innovate since they will now be paid for their efforts. By one

estimate, today, around 35-40% of loading of wallets happens via the UPI, so the 15-bps per load is significant. Around 55% of the loads amount to more than ₹2,000, an indication that in future these could go up. Again, around 80% of spends are for amounts less than ₹2,000 on which there is no interchange.

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