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SUNEESH K

Prime Minister Hails Judiciary for "Safeguarding People's Rights"



Ahmedabad: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday praised the country's judiciary, saying that it has performed its duty well in safeguarding people's rights and upholding personal freedom, and added that it has also strengthened the Constitution.

He said the Supreme Court has conducted the highest number of hearings via video-conferencing among the top courts of all the countries during the pandemic. Modi also said in order to make the country's justice system future-ready, the possibility of using artificial intelligence was being explored. He was speaking after virtually releasing a commemorative postage stamp on the Gujarat High Court for 60 years of its establishment. "Every countryman can say that our judiciary has worked with firmness to uphold our Constitution. Our judiciary has strengthened the Constitution by its positive interpretation," Modi said. —PTI

India, EU Plan to Restart Trade, Investment Pacts

New Delhi: India and the European Union have agreed to hold talks for reinitiation of bilateral trade and investment agreements, with an interim agreement to start with, the government said on Saturday.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and the European Union Executive Vice-President and Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis had the first high-level dialogue on Friday. They agreed to meet within three months and reach a consensus on a host of bilateral trade and investment cooperation issues. These include a bilateral Regulatory Dialogue and an India-EU Multilateral Dialogue to explore further possibilities of cooperation. "In a significant step forward, regular interactions for reinitiation of bilateral trade and investment agreements, with an interim agreement, to start with, were also discussed," the commerce and industry ministry said in a statement. —Our Bureau

Govt to Make Apprenticeship Act Employer Friendly

The government will soon revise the definition of establishments to widen its coverage, while allowing third-party aggregators to manage apprentices for the companies.

The changes will be a part of the amended Apprenticeship Act, 1961, and are aimed at further enhancing apprenticeship opportunities for Indian youth. It wants to make apprentice hiring and training more employer friendly.

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship would finalise the changes to the Apprenticeship Act in two weeks, after which the draft would be put up in the public domain for comments from the stakeholders, the ministry said in a statement. This would be followed by a draft Cabinet note in April on amendments to the Apprenticeship Act, after which it would be tabled in Parliament for approval.

According to a note prepared by the ministry and shared with the Prime Minister's Office, the new definition of establishment under the amended act would include "any place where any trade, commerce or industrial activity is tak-

ing place, including educational and training institutions. This will further expand the institutions available for apprenticeship."

Further, the ministry has proposed to relieve industry from the burden of paperwork for apprenticeship by enabling empanelled third-party aggregators (TPAs) to support employers in all functionalities of apprentice engagement, stipend payment and other paperwork. Even mandatory provisions of signing of apprenticeship contracts by employers may be replaced.

Proposals are being firmed up to allow part-time apprenticeship to even students under the formal education system, while replacing the provision of contract approval by authorities. It will also permit virtual training, instead of the physical mode prescribed in the present act, in select sectors such as IT.

Further, there will be no monetary penalty on employers while allowing industries registered in India to send apprentices abroad as far as the health, safety and welfare measures for apprentices are maintained under the relevant labour codes. —Our Bureau/New Delhi



TRAINING TOOLS

MSDE will move amendments to Apprenticeship Act

Says changes needed to align to changing nature of work

Proposes to open up apprenticeship to more sectors

This would require widening the definition of establishments

Third-party aggregators proposed to manage apprentices

Proposes to do away with monetary penalty on employers

Govt has Until October 2 to Repeal Farm Laws: Tikait



Farmers block KMP Expressway during the chakka jam on Saturday as part of their agitation over new farm laws, near New Delhi

New Delhi: Thousands of farmers across the country blocked roads on Saturday with makeshift tents, tractors, trucks and boulders to pressure the government to roll back agricultural reforms that have triggered months-long protests.

The three-hour chakka jam started around noon across the country, except in New Delhi and a couple of neighbouring states. The protests were largely held on national and state highways but it was business as usual in most cities. Tens of thousands of police were deployed across the country.

Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait Saturday said the protesters on Delhi's outskirts will stay put till October 2. "After this, we will do further planning. We won't hold discussions with the government under pressure." Tikait, the national spokesperson of the Bharatiya Kisan Union, is camping with his supporters in Ghazipur

since November. Interacting with journalists, he claimed they had reports some "miscreants might try to disrupt peace" during the chakka jam. "Because of these inputs, we had decided to call off the chakka jam in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand," he said.

Avik Saha, a secretary of the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, an umbrella organisation of farmer groups, said about 10,000 places across India were blocked in the three hours. "Today's chakka jam clearly showed the government that this is an all-India protest," Saha said in a video address.

Traffic movement was normal in the national capital, said Delhi Police Public Relation Officer Chinmoy Biswal, adding that no violent incidents took place.

Farmer leaders claimed that their three-hour stir remained peaceful in Punjab and Haryana. —Agencies

Nadda Slams Mamata for Neglecting Bengal Farmers

Malda: BJP chief JP Nadda shared khichdi with farmers as he reached out to them on Saturday



in election-bound West Bengal. He criticised the Mamata Banerjee government for depriving farmers of the benefits of the PM Kisan

Scheme to "satisfy her ego". On a day when farmer unions have called a chakka jam against three contentious agricultural laws, he reaffirmed the BJP and the Narendra Modi government's commitment to the welfare of the farming community. Mocking Banerjee for agreeing to implement the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana only after realising that her party is fast losing ground among the farmers in the state, Nadda vowed justice for them once the BJP is voted to power in West Bengal. "This has affected over 70 lakh farmers who for the last two years have been deprived of annual aid of Rs 6,000," he said.

Nadda was addressing a rally that is part of BJP's outreach to farmers to blunt the opposition's charge that the Modi government was "anti-farmer" following farm protests at Delhi's border points. —PTI

Assam to Revise Wages of Tea Estate Workers

Guwahati: Assam Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said a notification for revision of wages of tea estate workers would be out in 10 days.

Addressing a public rally here in the presence of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, he said the proposal to raise the minimum wage of tea labourers would be approved in the next cabinet meeting. Sitharaman said the government would do everything possible for the welfare of people engaged in tea gardens. The budget provision of ₹1,000 crore for the welfare of tea workers, especially women and their children in Assam and West Bengal, would benefit these workers, she said.

She kickstarted the third phase of direct benefits transfer for 8 lakh bank accounts in tea estates. Each account will get ₹3,000.

—Bikash Singh

Duty Bound

The government is recalibrating the entire range of tariffs on imports and exports to build and support the AatmaNirbhar Bharat programme



:: Dinesh Narayanan

The Economic Survey 2020-21 and the Union Budget 2021-22 are remarkably different from previous ones. While the survey provides the analytical backstop for the government's intent to borrow, build and grow, the budget itself is directionally clear and unambiguous about broad strategy. To build and support local industry – the AatmaNirbhar Bharat (ANB) programme – it is recalibrating the entire range of tariffs on imports and exports.

“Our customs duty policy should have the twin objectives of promoting domestic manufacturing and helping India get onto global value chain and export better,” Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her budget speech. “The thrust now has to be on easy access to raw materials and exports of value-added products.”

“Segmented duty structures lead to ambiguity and micro-management of public policy by customs. If we continue to stay with it (high customs tariffs), it will have an adverse impact on domestic producers. There will be permanent damage to export competitiveness”

NR Bhanumurthy, vice-chancellor, Bengaluru Dr BR Ambedkar School of Economics University



The Medium-Term Fiscal Policy cum Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement in the budget says the customs duty rate structure was guided by a conscious policy of the government to

incentivise local value addition under Make in India and ANB. That requires low duty on raw materials and high tax on imported products that compete with local goods.

“Since the 2000s, every government has been trying to find a way to raise the share of manufacturing in GDP, without reverting to the failed policies of 1950-80,” says Arvind Virmani, former chief economic advisor (CEA) and chairman, Foundation for Economic Growth and Welfare. Virmani points to IMF estimates which show that average tariff rates rose by 1.3-1.5% during 2014-19 while the Make in India policy was in operation. The AatmaNirbhar Bharat policy brings the focus back on increasing competitiveness through domestic policy reforms.

Duties are now structured to incentivise investment in areas like petroleum exploration and electronics manufacturing. They have been raised on products that are already made in India or which domestic manufacturers aspire to make. Over the past six years, basic customs duty (BCD) on 4,000 tariff lines or about a third of the total has been raised. The BCD rates on components used in mobile phones, for instance, are set differently under what it calls a phased manufacturing plan.

“Domestic electronic manufacturing has grown rapidly,” said Sitharaman in her speech. “We are now exporting items like mobiles and chargers. For greater domestic value addition, we are withdrawing a few exemptions on parts of chargers and sub-parts of mobiles. Further, some parts of mobiles will move from ‘nil’ rate to a moderate 2.5% (customs duty).”

In a bid to encourage local manufacturing, the 2016 Budget removed BCD

Since 2011, India's share in global merchandise exports has stagnated at **1.6%-1.7%**

India's share in global merchandise imports has risen fast and stood at **2.5% in 2019**

Global merchandise exports declined by **3% in 2019** due to US-China trade tensions but India's export decline started long before that



Source: “FTAs and Export Competitiveness” by Smittha Francis

exemption for chargers, adapters, battery, wired headsets and speakers used in manufacturing mobile phones and inputs used to make these components duty free.

The 2021 Budget points out that free trade agreements and information technology agreements under the WTO have badly hit domestic manufacturing.

“In the absence of an industrial policy, India's WTO-plus tariff liberalisation under these FTAs was carried out without any strategic coherence,” says Smittha Francis, economist and consultant at Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, in her paper “FTAs and Export Competitiveness: Policy Lessons from a Decade of WTO-Plus Tariff Liberalisation”. Francis points out that a tell-

ing indicator of weak export competitiveness is that India's exports rose in capital- and technology-intensive sectors such as vehicles and parts, non-electrical machinery, organic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, electrical machinery, iron and steel and articles of iron and steel. But “the share of its manufactured exports going to the mature developed country markets has declined. It is in the case of developing country markets that India's exports have been relatively strong”, she points out in the paper.

The Union budget says an analysis of import data of manufactured commodities showed that wherever import taxes were raised, the import volumes from FTA partner countries increased, indicating re-routing to take advantage of the treaty. It, however, remains to be seen whether moving customs duty up and down can raise competitiveness of domestic industry.

“Starting with corporate tax reforms in September 2019, there has been a series of economic reforms, including in the 2021-22 Budget, designed to improve the productivity and competitiveness of the Indian economy, including the manufacturing sector,” says Virmani.

Building a tariff wall may be counter-productive in the long run, says NR Bhanumurthy, vice-chancellor, Bengaluru Dr BR Ambedkar School of Economics University. “Segmented duty structures lead to ambiguity and micro-management of public policy by customs,” says Bhanumurthy. “If we continue to stay with it (high customs tariffs), it will have an adverse impact on domestic producers. There will be permanent damage to export competitiveness.”

Virmani says India needs a dualistic foreign trade policy, which reduces import dependence on a monopolistic manufactured goods producer like China, while attracting supply chains from the rest of the world, through lower, more uniform import tariffs. “There are some hints of this in Part B of FM's budget speech, relating to numerous customs duty exemptions and inverted tariff structure. Though the production-linked incentive scheme is a good start (for efficient import substitution in manufacturing), the government needs to go much further in reforming customs tariff structure, to achieve the goals of a dual trade policy,” he says. ■

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Good Budget. Good Growth?

The plus in FM's big bet on spending is the clear incentive for infrastructure creation. What is now needed are quick fund release and faster project approvals

:: Shantanu Nandan Sharma & Prerna Katlyar

The coronavirus pandemic seems to be on the wane in India and vaccination is well underway. The glimmer of light that we are waiting for at the end of a long pandemic year is still not visible but it could be close by, possibly around the bend.

In her budget speech on February 1, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman quoted from Rabindranath Tagore's *Fireflies*, "Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark," adding that India is well-poised to be the land of promise and hope at first light.

In pursuit of that, the finance minister has loosened the purse strings, winking at fiscal discipline for now. Even more surprisingly, she has slashed subsidies, a politically sensitive decision, while massively enhancing the Centre's capital expenditure to ₹5.54 lakh crore, a rise of 34.5% over the last budget's estimate. Compared with the revised estimate of the current fiscal, it's a 26% increase.

Speaking to *ET Magazine*, Chief Economic Adviser Krishnamurthy V Subramanian argues that Budget 2021 will not only propel growth in the next fiscal but also lay the foundation for the coming decade. He highlights the massive spend on healthcare and core sector projects as well as reforms in the financial sector, including a bold decision to sell two public sector banks and an insurance company.

"If government spends one rupee on infrastructure, ₹2.5 is generated in the economy. That means, the budget outlay of 2.5% of GDP in infrastructure alone can give us a 6.25% growth out of 11% that we have projected," says Subramanian.

For Bibek Debroy, chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, the budget was an attempt to teach a man to fish instead of offering him a fish, a quote ascribed to Chinese philosopher Confucius. FM Sitharaman,

points out Debroy, has favoured spending on infrastructure over income transfers. He says, "The former ensures growth and employment and eliminates the need for doles."

On MGNREGA, or Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the FM has budgeted only ₹72,034 crore, a 34% cut in the revised estimate of current fiscal. "Something like MGNREGA is demand-driven. If there is demand, funds will always be available, subsequently. It's more important not to have that demand for MGNREGA, by eliminating its need," says Debroy, arguing that infrastructure-led growth will create jobs.

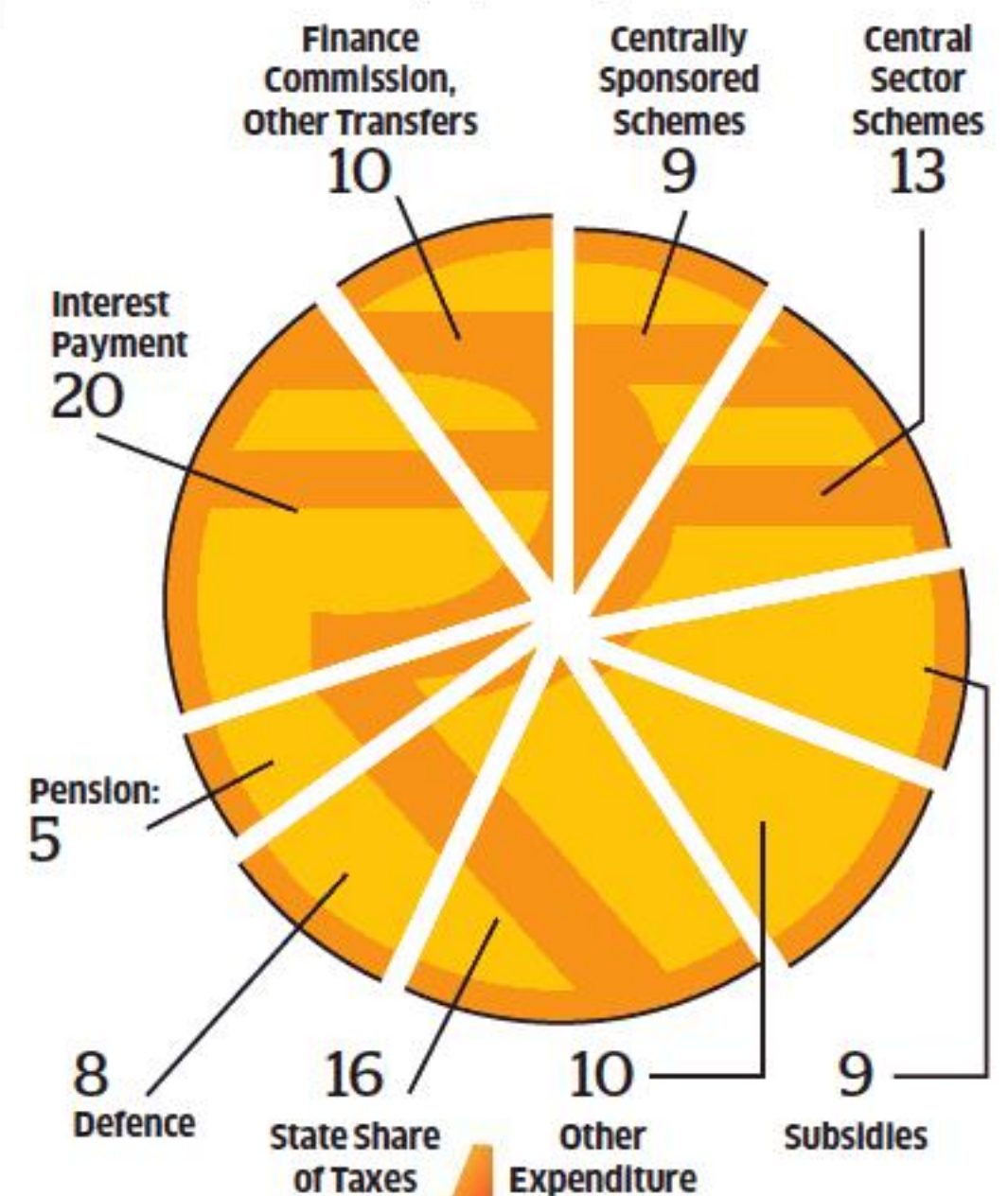
This fiscal has been a turbulent year which witnessed a massive reverse migration of workers due to the pandemic and the lockdown. This created a huge demand for jobs in rural India, which is likely to decline in the coming year.

Overall, the government is going to spend much more in the next fiscal year over the current fiscal. Total budgeted expenditure is pegged at ₹34.83 lakh crore, up from the budget estimate of ₹30.42 lakh crore and revised estimate of ₹34.5 lakh crore for the current year. The budget has also estimated fiscal deficit at 6.8% of gross domestic product



FY 2021-22: How ₹1 Will Be Spent

(in paise)



₹34.83 lakh cr

Total budgeted expenditure for FY22, up from budget estimate of ₹30.42 lakh crore for the current fiscal (revised estimate is ₹34.5 lakh crore)

26%

Rise in capital expenditure in FY22 (₹5.54 lakh crore) over the revised estimate for FY21 (₹4.39 lakh crore)

₹12 lakh cr

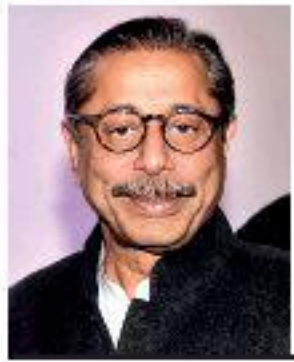
Gross borrowing from the market for next year

"This budget is laying a foundation of growth for the coming decade. It's mainly due to massive spending on healthcare and infrastructure sectors as well as undertaking reforms in the financial sector. If the government spends one rupee on infrastructure, ₹2.5 is generated in the economy. That means, the budget outlay of 2.5% of GDP in infrastructure alone can give us a 6.25% growth out of 11% that we have projected"



KV Subramanian,
 Chief Economic Adviser,
 GOI

“Increased focus on and allocation for health is a very welcome move. The pandemic has taught us what our priorities should be. When the much-needed health infrastructure is built, the government should



focus on having more doctors, nurses and paramedical staff”

Dr Naresh Trehan,
Chairman, Medanta

(GDP), although FM reiterated in her speech that the government would continue on its path of fiscal consolidation, intending to reach a fiscal deficit level below 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26.

In the government’s expenditure statement, what stand out are an impressive expansion of the health budget and a massive outlay of capital expenditure. As far as expenditure on health is concerned, the government has widened the definition of health by bringing in water and sanitation into it and calling it a budget for “health and wellbeing”, earmarking ₹2.23 lakh crore. While there is enhanced allocation for health, the highlight of a 137% hike from the last budget (₹94,452 crore) in the FM’s speech is technically misleading as the next year’s expenditure, as shown in the Annexure, also includes Finance Commission’s grant for water and sanitation (₹36,022 crore). As far as the health ministry’s budget (including health research) is concerned, the allocation is up from ₹63,425 crore to ₹74,602 crore, a hike of 17%, according to the budget document. In addition, ₹35,000 crore has been earmarked for Covid-19 vaccination, with FM making it clear that she will grant more as and when required.

“The budget has a hefty increase of 34.5% in capital expenditure, with roads and railways getting the largest ever allocations. Interestingly, out of the corpus, ₹44,000 cr will be given to efficient spenders, as an incentive”

Shallesh Pathak, CEO, L&T Infrastructure Development Projects



Health experts have welcomed the enhanced allocation. “Increased focus on and allocation for health budget is a very welcome move. The pandemic has taught us what our priorities should be,” says Dr Naresh Trehan, cardiovascular surgeon and chairman of Medanta. He also has a suggestion for the government. “When the much-needed health infrastructure is built, the government should focus on having more doctors, nurses and paramedical staff.”

On infrastructure spending, the salient features in the budget transcend enhanced allocations. The FM, for example, has earmarked a separate allocation for projects and programmes that show good progress on capital expenditure and are

Spending Trends

(In ₹lakh crore)

Revenue
Expenditure



Capital
Expenditure



Note: BE is budget estimate; RE is revised estimate
Source: Ministry of Finance, budget documents

“Government should put its capital expenditure programme on fast track, boost manufacturing sector and evolve a mechanism to attract industries for economically



weaker states which in turn will increase household income and spur growth”

Amit Syngle,
MD & CEO, Asian Paints

in need of further funds. “Out of a total corpus for capital expenditure, ₹44,000 crore will be given to efficient spenders, as an incentive,” says Shallesh Pathak, CEO of L&T Infrastructure Development Projects, adding that spending on infrastructure propels growth, both immediate and long-term, because of multiplier effect.

Also, as an incentive for states to spend more on core sector projects, the finance minister highlighted in her speech that the Centre would be providing more than ₹2 lakh crore to states and autonomous bod-



Bibek Debroy
Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the PM

Teaching People to Fish

Any budget is a balancing exercise, matching receipts against expenditure. Traditionally, budgets have been identified with tax reductions (or changes). Tax policy, both direct and indirect, should be stable, not subject to annual changes. In the weeks before Union Budget 2021-22, there were (a) expectations of tax reductions/concessions (personal and corporate); (b) fears of a Covid cess. Desirably, neither has occurred. On (a) and expansionary fiscal policy, any undergraduate textbook on macroeconomics will demonstrate that an expenditure multiplier is superior (in impact on growth and employment) to a tax reduction multiplier. However, expenditure is constrained by receipts (revenue and capital). There are limits to government borrowing to bridge the gap. Debt has to be repaid. That’s the reason fiscal consolidation is important, not as a fetish. Had circumstances been normal, fiscal deficit/GDP ratio would have been less than 4.5% in 2025-26. This budget’s numbers are more honest and transparent than some historical budgets. (A) subsidy to FCI is no longer off-budget; (b) Projected nominal GDP growth is 14.4%, not an overly optimistic number to window-dress the budget; (c) Disinvestment receipts (₹175,000 crore) are credible, again not window-dressed.

The question then becomes one of deciding the composition of expenditure. Ideally, one should spend on the capital account, not revenue expenditure, because the former leads to generation of productive capacity. But it’s not that simple. Grants in aid can lead to creation of capital assets. In practice, though not de jure, Finance Commission recommendations on tax devolution to states are mandatory. Review of centrally sponsored schemes (CSS-s) and pruning deadwood there will take time. (Some CSS-s also have legislative backing.) One can’t default on pension and interest payments and some establishment expenses are fixed. Food subsidy has a legislative angle, too. Defence and health (read vaccination, since health is a state subject in Seventh Schedule) are important. Once these considerations have pruned degrees of freedom, the trade-off is distilled to one of spending on in-

frastructure (primarily transport) or income transfers. The former ensures growth and employment and eliminates the need for doles. This is like the famous quote ascribed to Confucius on teaching a man to fish, as opposed to giving him a fish.

Something like MGNREGA is demand-driven. If there is demand, funds will always be available, subsequently. It’s more important not to have that demand for MGNREGA, by eliminating its need. Besides, with an unorganised, informal and self-employment-driven labour market (with identification more



serious in urban areas), no advocate has quite explained how an income support programme will be implemented.

With the circumscribed degrees of freedom, critics should probably sit down with details of the expenditure budget. (“Outlay on Major Schemes” in “Budget at a Glance” will provide a start.) They should then ask – what would they spend on, assuming they were the FM. MGNREGA, water, health, education, PM-Kisan, food subsidy, power, roads, railways and defence can presumably not be junked. In the process, ignoring implementation problems, they will probably find resources for an income transfer by eliminating the urea subsidy. That being unpalatable, they will do precisely what FM has done. Alternatively, they will advocate hikes in income tax rates, with or without subterfuge of a cess. We have erred along that route, in the past. A budget that teaches people to fish is preferable to fishy criticism.

resources handy for infrastructure. But that may not be enough. Paperwork and bureaucratic bottlenecks in the release of funds as well as pre-construction approvals such as land acquisition may stand between FM’s intent and actual work on the ground.

No doubt, India will register a massive growth next fiscal, partly due to low base effect and partly due to robust capital expenditure. The question is whether the momentum will roll over into the following years. ■

Unquestionably, the budget has made

Single, Ready to Start Up

The Budget proposal to easily start one person companies can spur micro entrepreneurship in Bharat and encourage NRIs to start up in India

:: Shelley Singh

In an era of startups, gig economy and atmanirbharta, entrepreneurial ventures sound like a great idea. Besides, with Covid shocks shrinking businesses and leaving people jobless, it has become all the more compelling to start a venture based on one's own ideas.

While starting a small business sounds simple, it can give considerable stress to a person doing it all alone. There is a long list of dos and don'ts that hamper the ease of starting up for a single person. Apart from hunting for funds, carving out a market, hiring employees and the dozen other crucial things, entrepreneurs also have to deal with mandatory audits and documentation which can take up a lot of their time and money. That alone is a hurdle big enough to snuff out the entrepreneurial dreams of many.

Fortunately, a provision in the budget attempts to remove much of the impediments and make it easy for a solitary entrepreneur to start a one-person company (OPC).

The budget proposal reduced the residency limit of non-resident Indians (NRIs) from 182 to 120 days. Earlier, only Indian citizens could start an OPC. Amrish Shah, partner at Deloitte India, says, "Permitting NRIs to incorporate OPCs will also promote foreign investments from them to set up a business in India, with a corporate entity that has limited compliance requirements."

Delivering the Union Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said: "I propose to incentivise the incorporation of OPC by allowing OPCs to grow without any restriction on paid-up capital and turnover. Allowing their conversion into any type of company, any time. Reducing the residency limit for Indian citizens to 120 days from 180 days. This will be a big boost to startups."

The move will be especially helpful for first-time entrepreneurs, says Padmaja Ruparel, co-founder & president of Indian Angel Network. "This will be able to start up quickly." It will also help unorganised micro and small businesses (like an app-based startup, a bakery, artisans, traders, etc.) to become an organised player with better legal standing.

Ankur Pahwa, partner and national leader-ecommerce and consumer internet, EY

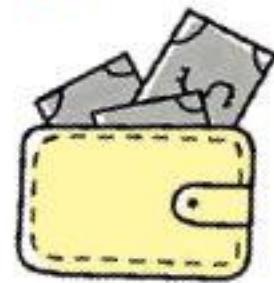
"This will benefit first-time entrepreneurs to start up quickly"

Padmaja Ruparel,
co-founder & president, Indian Angel Network



Advantages

OPC structure does away with minimum and maximum thresholds of paid-up capital requirements



Minimum capital requirement of **₹1 lakh** scrapped for setting up OPC

Founders have the option to convert to any kind of entity as and when they want

NRIs can also use OPC to incorporate a company in India

Residency requirements for NRIs relaxed from 182 days to 120 days



One Person Company (OPC)

WHAT IS IT:

Helps a single person incorporate a company; was first introduced in the Company's Act of 2013



WHY IS IT NEEDED:

Before OPC, a private company needed a minimum of 2 directors & 2 members and public company needed at least 3 directors & 7 members

WHAT CHANGED IN BUDGET 2021-22:

OPC ensures a lot more ease of doing business now

WHO BENEFITS:

Micro entrepreneurs; mom-and-pop ventures with one founder, NRIs who want to start a small venture

India, says, "The proposals will provide increased flexibility for startups and individual innovators."

The concept of OPC took root in other countries in the 2000s – 2004 in Singapore, 2006 in the UK, 2005 in China, 2012 in Turkey. In India, OPC was first introduced in the Company's Act of 2013. Before OPC, a private company needed a minimum of two directors and two members. And if the

paid-up capital breached the threshold of ₹50 lakh or the venture's average annual turnover of immediately preceding three consecutive financial years exceeded ₹2 crore, the single founder had to mandatorily convert his venture into a private or a public company.

Now, under the OPC framework, it is up to the founder to decide when to change the type of the company. It also gives the promoter the flexibility to keep it as an OPC, convert it into a private limited company with two directors, bring in other shareholders, offer ESOPs or pick other options.

So, now an OPC will have more room to continue expanding without the need for mandatory dilution of the founder's equity.

Amit Dutta, CEO of Hunch Ventures, says, "The budget proposals enable ease of doing business. Besides NRIs, potential entrepreneurs in small-town India who have viable business ideas won't be constrained by the need to find a partner." It is like testing your ideas without the compliance burden of launching a formal private limited company.

As an OPC, the founder can hit the ground running. Just register the OPC with the Registrar of Companies (RoC) and get started. No need for a

MoU, hiring auditors, doing bi-annual audits, board meetings, ensuring quorums, looking for partners and so on.

Shah of Deloitte India explains that the first few years' journey is very crucial for any startup. A technocrat may have an interesting idea that can be profitable but may lack the savviness to do the complex paperwork around forming a private

limited company. Now, he or she does not need to do that under the OPC framework. During the early years of starting up, he or she won't have to worry about compliance and can focus on the idea. "The proposals give comfort to the innovator. They don't have to worry about any liability," says Shah.

Say someone has an app-based business idea in education, healthcare, ecommerce or any such area. Now she does not need to form a company (OPC is the company) or hire a company secretary and other staff. This alone could save the

founder between ₹3 lakh and ₹5 lakh a year, if hired on a part-time basis.

OPC can also open up easier bank credit facilities for one-person companies.

The step is intended to boost entrepreneurial activity in India. Though some experts say that today's technology-driven startups are fairly complex and have at least two founders – with combined strengths in technology and how to take it to market. The idea of founding an OPC will become more alluring "if you see an OPC becoming a unicorn," says Shah.

Such an entrepreneur would have truly disrupted the ecosystem and set a benchmark in becoming atmanirbhar. ■

"Budget proposals enable ease of doing business. Aspiring entrepreneurs in small towns won't be constrained by the need to find a partner"

Amit Dutta, CEO, Hunch Ventures



Deep Dive

Launching India's first manned submersible, deep-sea mining & climate change surveys will be part of the ambitious Deep Ocean Mission

:: Indulekha Aravind

Sometime in the next three years, three people – likely a pilot and two scientists – will go 6,000 m deep into the ocean in a lithium battery-powered vehicle capable of staying underwater for up to 16 hours. They will be seated in a specially crafted titanium alloy sphere with a diameter of 2.1 m and thickness of 80 mm in a space that would be slightly smaller than that of a Maruti 800, with three view ports. This vehicle, Matsya 6000, will be India's first manned submersible and the dive, if successful, will be akin to a giant leap, to paraphrase Neil Armstrong, for the country. If space was once the final frontier, the unexplored depths of oceans are now seeing no less of a race among countries to go where others have not gone before.

The development and launch of Matsya 6000 is part of India's ambitious Deep Ocean Mission, for which Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced ₹4,000 crore, to be spent over five years, in Budget 2021-22. While plans for the mission have been discussed over the last few years and work has begun, this is the first time there is a dedicated budget for it. "It's been in the works for two-three years but this has now become a huge project in mission mode. The ocean has a lot of resources, both living and non-living, which we really need to map and exploit – for minerals, for energy, for drinking water," says Madhavan Nair Rajeevan, secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, which will be spearheading the mission.

The imperative to double down on deep-sea exploration and research also stems from the fact that countries that are developing the technology for going 6,000 m down to exploit deep-sea minerals (currently not allowed commercially) will not part with their expertise because of its strategic importance. "Minerals mean money, so ocean technology is not easily shared.

Unless we do it ourselves, we cannot perfect this technology," says Rajeevan. Even in manned submersibles, only five countries have been successful. Last November, China shared footage of its manned submersible, Striver, which descended over 10,000 m to the bottom of the Mariana Trench with three researchers.

India's manned submersible is being developed by the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai, with ISRO working on the "crew module". It is expected to be ready by 2024. "We are half-way through and might venture into a 500 m depth next year," says GA Ramadass, director, NIOT.

The submersible is one of the many projects of the Deep Ocean Mission, which involves institutes like NIOT, CSIR, ISRO and DRDO. Its other projects include developing deep-sea technologies and systems, deep-ocean exploration and setting up a research facility in Goa for marine biology and engineering. "It is an ambitious programme to develop deep-sea mining systems as it will have to bear the high pressure at depths of 4,000-6,000 m, where the resources are located. These mining systems are not available anywhere in the world," says MP Wakdikar, senior scientist and adviser, Earth Sciences Ministry.

India has a 15-year contract with the International Seabed Authority (ISA), a UN-backed body in charge of regulations for ocean floors, to explore 75,000 sq km in

the Indian Ocean for manganese nodules, or polymetallic nodules, as they are known. These potato-shaped nodules, found on the seabed, are rich in copper, nickel, cobalt and manganese – metals which have a host of applications in devices, from batteries to mobile phones. An estimate by India from the surface pegs the quantity of these nodules at 385 million tonnes, with the processed minerals valued at \$110 billion. The country also has a 15-year contract for the exploration of hydrothermal sulphides across 10,000 sq km southeast of Madagascar. "Hydrothermal sulphides are like underwater volcanoes, in which heavy minerals are deposited, including rare earth elements like gold and platinum," says Wakdikar.

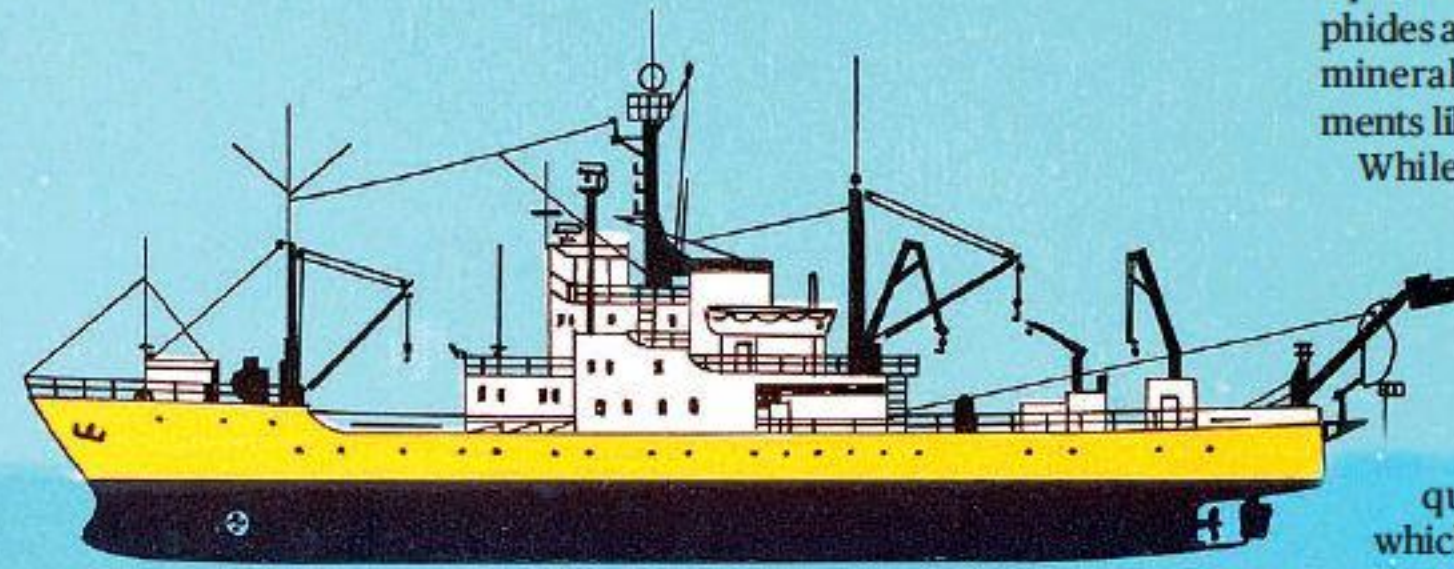
While the surveys of polymetallic nodules have been complete to a large extent and the development of technology for exploratory mining has begun, surveys of hydrothermal sulphides are still at an exploratory stage, says Ramadass. Under the Deep Ocean Mission, there are plans to acquire a dedicated vessel for this exploration, which could cost around ₹900 crore, depending on the equipment.

There are about 30 private and government contracts with the ISA for deep-sea exploration but mining is not allowed because the international code for it has yet to be announced. The plan to allow deep-sea mining has also come under criticism from environmental organisations that fear it might cause irreparable damage to the flora and fauna on ocean floor. Ramadass says they will have to prove that even exploratory mining won't harm the environment.

The Deep Ocean Mission will also be examining the effect of climate change and warming on regional sea levels and assessing what impact that would have on coastal regions, which will be led by the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services. "It's important that we do these climate change assessments now. Otherwise, we will not understand the local impact," says director Srinivasa Kumar. Another project involves finding out if a pioneering effort by NIOT in setting up eco-friendly desalination plants in Lakshadweep – powered by using the difference in temperatures between the surface of the ocean and its depths – can be replicated in a coastal city like Chennai. "The plants use very little power and cause no pollution. But the challenge is that to reach 1,000 m depth from Chennai, you need to go very far from the coast, unlike on islands," says Ramadass.

Despite the daunting prospects, scientists working on the mission feel that India, surrounded by ocean on three sides, needs to develop technologies to explore it. "It's tough. But unless we jump into the pool, how will we learn swimming? Similarly, unless we start going down (into the ocean), we can't learn all these things," says Rajeevan. ■

indulekha.aravind@timesgroup.com



Mission Mode

Deep Ocean Mission includes:

Developing systems for deep-sea mining, launching a manned submersible

Deep-ocean exploration, including purchase of a vessel for this

Deep-ocean biodiversity studies, bio prospecting

Establishing a research facility in Goa for marine biology and engineering

Undertaking climate change surveys of seas around India

Making ocean thermal energy conservation efficacious*

*Generates power from the difference in temperatures on the surface of the sea and its depths

₹4,000 cr
 Outlay for 5 years

385 mn tonnes

Estimate of polymetallic nodules that deep-sea mining by India will yield*

*These will have cobalt, nickel, copper, etc

\$110 bn
 Estimated value of nodules

Matsya 6000

Designed to dive to a depth of 6,000 m, it will carry 3 people – 1 pilot, 2 scientists

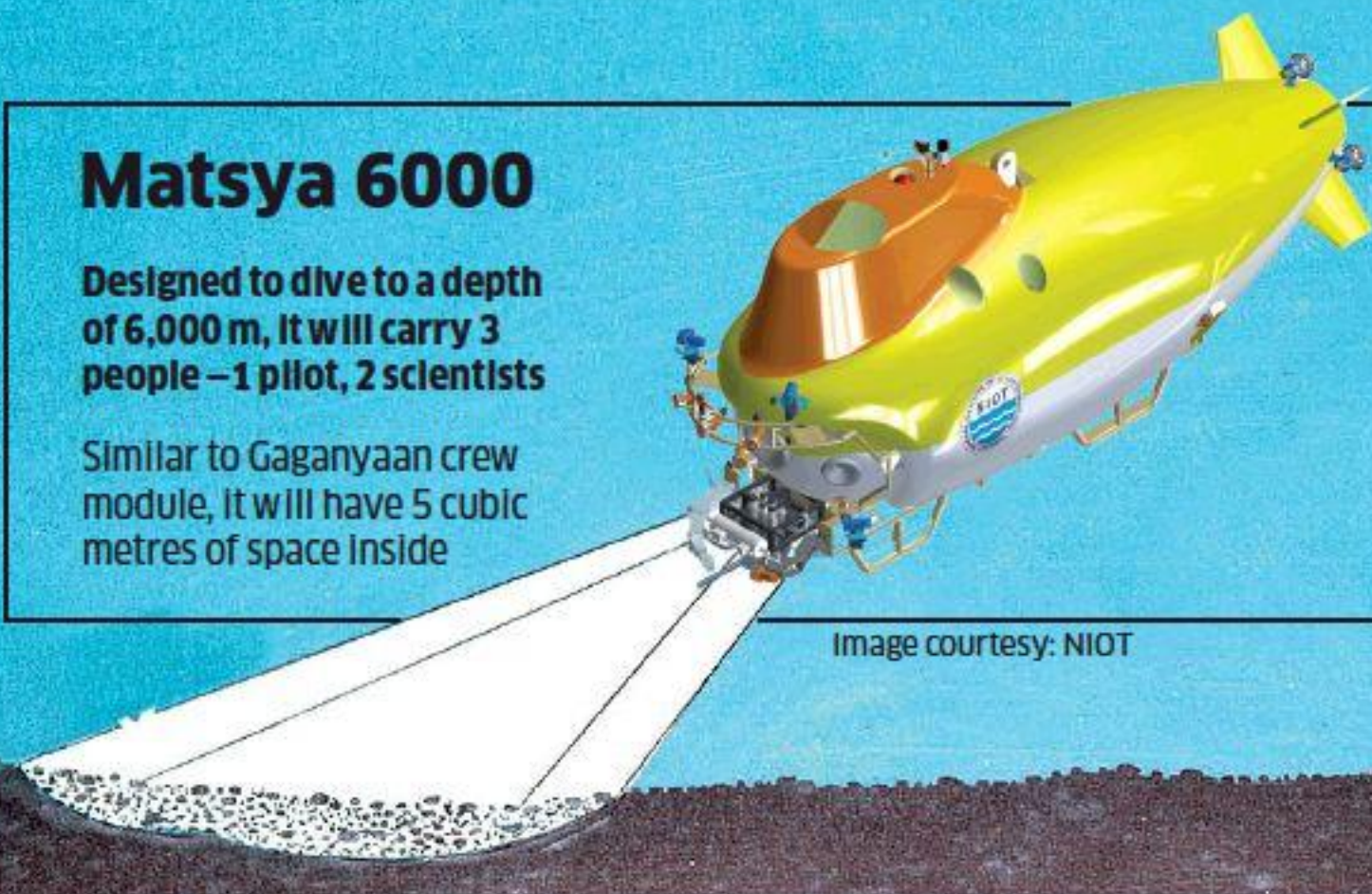
Similar to Gaganyaan crew module, it will have 5 cubic metres of space inside

Duration of a dive will be 12 hours, but it will be able to stay underwater for 16 hours

Work is currently halfway; estimated to be ready for launch by 2024

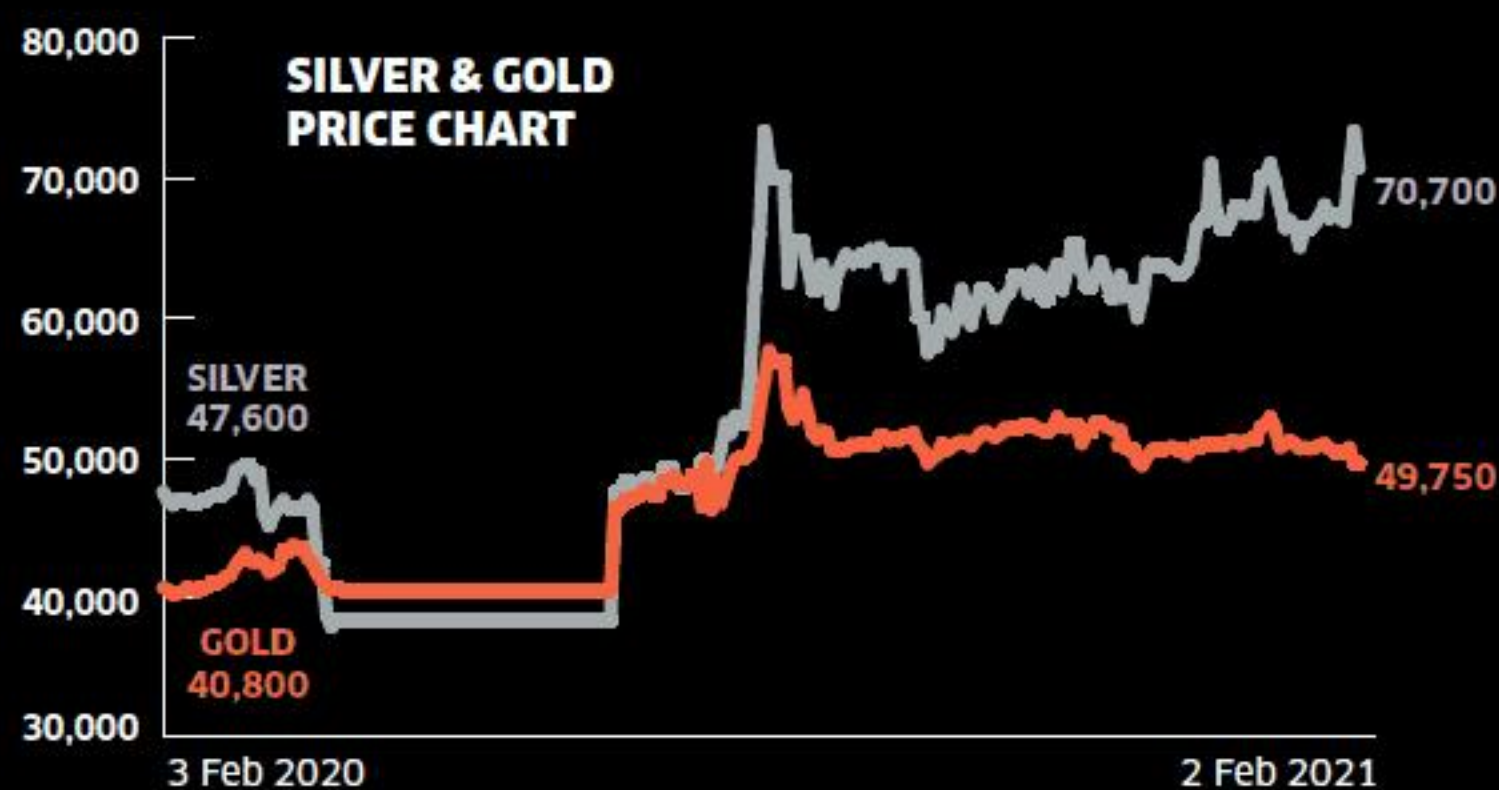
Only five other countries have launched manned submersibles so far

Image courtesy: NIOT



SILVER LINING

Silver prices surge due to speculative buying in global markets but back home Indians don't have many options to invest in the precious metal



Note: Prices are for 10 gm of gold and 1 kg of silver

:: Shallesh Menon

Hasmukhbhai Shah, proprietor of Silver House in Mumbai's Colaba Causeway, does not comprehend the widespread speculative trading that is taking place on the white metal in global markets. While Shah sees the possibility of industrial silver prices holding up in the event of a faster economic recovery, he still cannot pinpoint a reason for the frenzied buying by hedge funds and other global investors.

Demand determines the price of any commodity. But that does not seem to be the case with silver, which has gained nearly 54% to ₹73,300 per kilogram over a one-year period

Shah's Silver House, which sells jewellery and artefacts, has seen an almost 75% decline in customer walk-ins since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic last year. Diwali and New Year have failed to bring buyers to the store. The absence of tourists – domestic and foreign – on the Causeway has further dented his business.

"We did pretty well in the months before Covid. We had a lot of NRIs who bought traditional artefacts and jewellery. But now all that has stopped," laments Shah, whose father set up the shop in the 1940s. "Even corporate gifting was down last year. Many of our regular corporate clients did not

come to us for silver gifts for Diwali or New Year," he adds.

Demand determines the price of any commodity. But that does not seem to be the case with silver, which has gained nearly 54% to about ₹73,300 per kilogram over a one-year period, ending in the first week of February. The white metal is currently trading at around ₹69,000 a kilogram. A large part of the rally occurred in the past few weeks, following a buy-call on microblogging site Reddit.

According to metal analysts, silver always follows gold prices with a lag. The yellow metal has been on the roll for the past one year, as savvy investors increased their holdings in gold to withstand post-Covid economic aftershocks. Gold prices had surged more than 40% to ₹57,500 per 10 grams in the middle of last year, before settling at ₹50,000-levels. Normally, investors switch to silver when gold prices move up significantly.

"A lot of the price rise in silver is not just speculative," says Gnanasekar T, director, Commtrendz Research. "The initial part of the silver rally was fuelled by a higher demand for silver for industrial purposes; silver is an important commodity in a range of sectors. The push for electric vehicles the world over made it even pricier. The belief that US President Joe Biden will root for solar energy hurtled silver to higher price lev-

Reasons for Rise in Silver Price



Higher industrial demand on account of sharp economic recovery

Silver follows gold price trend line. When gold becomes expensive, investors buy silver

US President Biden's clean energy initiative may drive up demand for silver

Push for electric vehicles is another reason; silver is an important component in EV manufacturing

Speculative buying of silver contracts in global markets

Utility Value

Jewellery, silverware & artefacts

Industrial uses: Solar power generation, electronic device manufacturing, medicine & medical devices, paint industry, automobile industry, water purification, specialised photography & imaging



Metal's Mettle

Mexico, Peru and China are the biggest producers of silver

India is the eleventh largest miner of the white metal

India is the largest fabricator of silverware in the world

Demand for silver jewellery is the highest in India and China

India imported 5,598 tonnes of silver in 2019. This fiscal, import may drop to 3,800 tonnes

Roughly, 250 tonnes of scrap silver comes to the market every month

Source: Industry data

els; from then, speculative buying trend took charge of the price," he explains.

Apart from silver's numerous industrial uses, it is widely used in making jewellery, artefacts and other silverware in India and China. While the industrial use of silver has seen an uptick, household demand is still tepid, say silverware manufacturers.

"The surge in prices is purely on account of speculative buying of silver forward contracts by foreign investors," says Siddhesh Dere of Dere Brothers, a large silverware manufacturer. "We are seeing a very marginal improvement in the demand for physical silver goods. Our business is 30% of what it was in pre-Covid months," says Dere.

Even if one were to say, it is investment or speculative buying of silver forward contracts that is driving prices in the spot market, the trend is highly unlikely to have received support from Indian investors. There are not many non-physical alternatives to buy or invest in silver in our country. There are no exchange traded funds that flow into silver; barring the sparingly used "big" and "mini" silver forward contracts on the MCX, there are not many "paper or digital options" to



buy silver. A small number of retail investors, who buy the white metal for investment purposes, take position by buying silver coins, bricks or artefacts.

But the bulkiness of some of these products (such as a 10 kg silver brick) and their illiquid nature prevent them from storing up at high price levels.

"I don't think anybody is buying silver as an investment option. Sale of bricks and coins has not gone up in recent months," says Rahul Mehta of Silver Emporium, a large silverware manufacturer-cum-retailer with stores in Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Mumbai. "What we are seeing is a mild uptick in the sale of household items such as dinner sets, baby sets and tumblers. People buy these more for health reasons now. They feel it's good to have food in quality silverware as silver has anti-bacterial properties," he adds.

According to merchants, India exports roughly 5,000 tonnes of silver every year. This year, due to low demand from jewellery and silverware manufacturing verticals, imports may fall to just about 4,000 tonnes. The silverware/jewellery industry is also witnessing a heavy inflow of scrap silver, often breaching 300 tonnes a month. Households selling their silverware result in scrap – which is recycled, refined and reused for various purposes. This reduces the need for imports.

Kumar Jain, promoter of Umedmal Tilokchand Zaveri, one of the oldest jewellery shops in Zaveri Bazaar and vice-president of Mumbai Jewellers Association, says silver price rise is purely speculative now. "Nobody is willing to buy it even at discounted prices. We expect a correction in prices in the near term," he says. ■

shallesh.menon@timesgroup.com

Cyber Feud in Bengal

As the fight between TMC and BJP intensifies ahead of the elections in Bengal, the use of social media is reaching a hitherto unseen feverish pitch

:: Venkat Ananth

In November, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) appointed the head of its information technology cell, Amit Malviya, as the co-convenor (seh prabhari) of the party in West Bengal. This was a significant development as it formally recognised the role that social media – a medium the BJP has relied on substantially over the last half a decade – had only become more integral to its campaign in the state.

Party leaders and functionaries say that Malviya's appointment has given the BJP a much-needed organisational fillip and focus it needed to send its messages across, not just to a diverse set of would-be-voters it aims to persuade, but also its own members. And social media, the function that Malviya helms at the central level, helps that cause. Malviya did not respond to ET Magazine's questions sent over email.

"Today, social media has disproportionate importance in all political campaigns, and in Bengal, that is no different"

Swapan Dasgupta,
BJP's Rajya Sabha MP



"We have seen a substantial increase in our Facebook following in the last six months," says a party functionary associated with the party's Bengal campaign.

At the heart of this phenomenon is the role that the state's youth who the party has been able to lure to its side has played. "There is a curiosity about the BJP among the younger lot, and our acceptance is growing among the youth. There is a lot of interest around younger BJP leaders like (Bangalore South MP) Tejaswi Surya, who has emerged as the face of the party," the functionary adds.

Swapan Dasgupta, former journalist and BJP's Rajya Sabha MP, echoes this sentiment. "Today, social media has disproportionate importance in all political campaigns, and in Bengal, that is no different. Facebook, however, has emerged as a more important



A BJP supporter decorates his motorcycle as a boat during a rally in Kolkata on January 18



A cut-out of West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram, E Medinipur, on January 21

platform, where discussions and debates are happening in the local language, Bengali, as against, say, Twitter," he says in a telephonic conversation.

Social media gives the party a direct connection with voters. "Besides, YouTube channels have a great following trickling down to the village level, and we have a fair share of commentators there. It gives us an opportunity to bypass the mainstream media, which the Trinamool Congress has a stranglehold over, where we find it difficult to get our voices in."

Not just that, the BJP has been spending big on official and affiliate campaigns in Bengal on Facebook over the last three months. It has spent nearly ₹70 lakh on its official campaigns on the platform. It's official affiliates aligned with senior party leaders – pages such as Nirmamata, The Frustrated Bengali and Modipara – have spent an additional ₹9 lakh in the last 90 days, according to Facebook's Ad Library report. This is besides the several outreach campaigns the party has been running – like Save Bengal, NRIs for Sonar Bangla, and Professionals for Bengal – most of

which have scaled up during the pandemic. The campaigns are largely run through online means such as Zoom webinars.

"The Save Bengal campaign, under the leadership of our sangathan maha-mantri Shiv Prakash, has been an important outreach effort to engage probashi (non-resident Bengalis) over the last two years," says Animesh Biswas, national convenor of the Save Bengal campaign and national executive member of the Bharatiya Yuva Morcha. "It is a digital-first effort to try and reach probashis by enabling them to create more content and help them influence their immediate circles back home in Bengal."

Biswas adds that leaders like Surya have energised younger voters to engage with these campaigns.

The ruling Trinamool Congress, on its part, has been fighting hard to push back on the BJP's digital advances. ET made multiple attempts to reach the senior leadership of the TMC. They did not respond to mes-

sages or calls.

Working closely with the Prashant Kishor-led Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC), the TMC has a formidable digital campaign of its own – one that includes a mix of pages that attack the BJP and Modi (Khotokharak Modi and Drishtibhongli) to I-PAC pages like Bangalar Gorbo Mamata and Didi Ke Bolo that are largely aimed at "positive messaging" and addressing "public grievances", respectively.

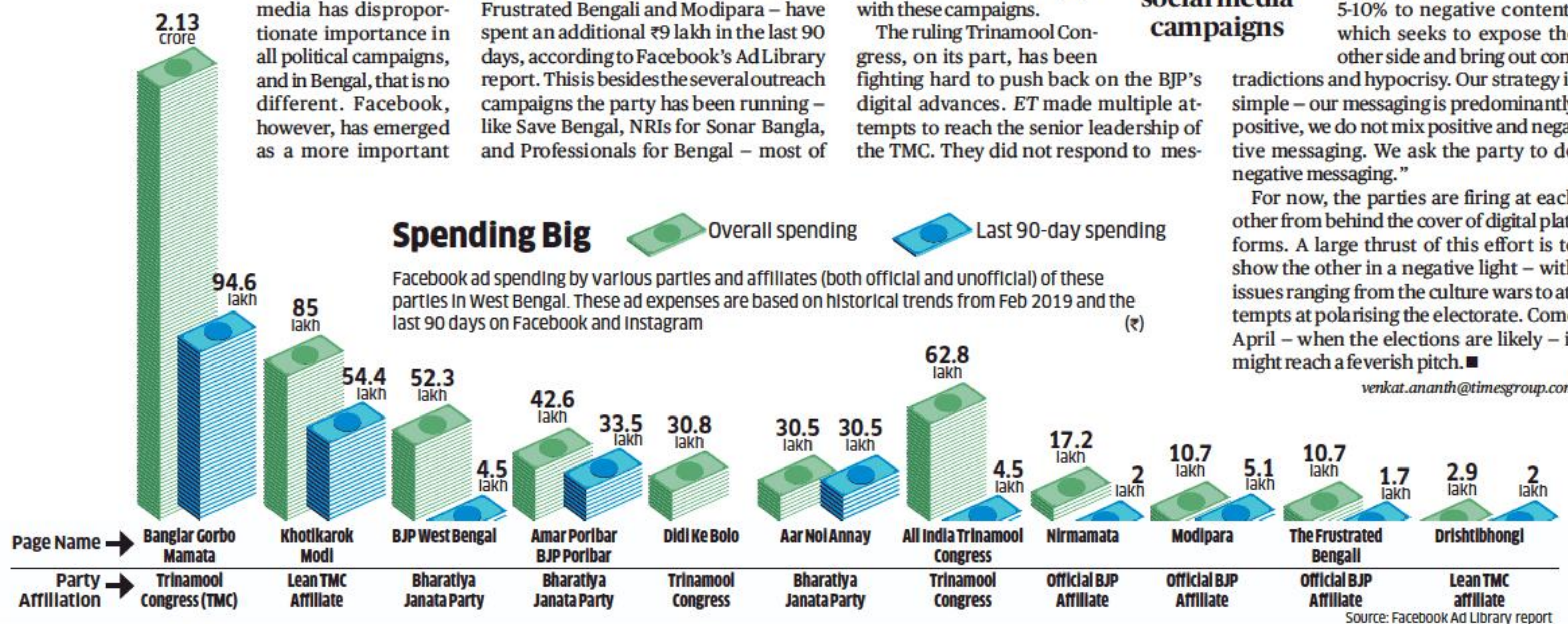
The campaign, while spending nearly ₹1 crore over the last 90 days on its official campaigns respectively, has also introduced district-level pages for its Gorbo Mamata campaign. Its two unofficial campaigns have also seen a spend of ₹6 lakh in the past three months. "95% of our messaging has been positive," says a senior I-PAC member. "The positive campaign will include our agenda. But typically, campaigns do devote 5-10% to negative content, which seeks to expose the other side and bring out contradictions and hypocrisy. Our strategy is simple – our messaging is predominantly positive, we do not mix positive and negative messaging. We ask the party to do negative messaging."

For now, the parties are firing at each other from behind the cover of digital platforms. A large thrust of this effort is to show the other in a negative light – with issues ranging from the culture wars to attempts at polarising the electorate. Come April – when the elections are likely – it might reach a feverish pitch. ■

venkat.ananth@timesgroup.com

Both the BJP and TMC are spending heavily on developing social media campaigns

Both the BJP and TMC are spending heavily on developing social media campaigns



London Olympics, 2012

Each Olympic Games has a separate logo, created by the host country to serve as its brand identity. The London 2012 logo was perhaps the most controversial. Design firm Wolff Olins was chosen six years ahead of the event to create the logo and was reportedly paid £400,000 for it. After the logo was revealed, a petition was circulated in Great Britain to have the logo scrapped and redesigned – it was signed by over 48,000 citizens. Many felt the logo didn't represent London at all and that it was too radical. It even invited a religious uproar when some said the word "Zion" was hidden in the symbol. A few others said the logo resembled the Simpsons siblings – Lisa (right) and Bart (left).



Signs of TROUBLE

The unnecessary controversy over the 'M' in Myntra is not the first time a logo got a company into trouble – and it won't be the last. Many logos have received flak because they involuntarily (or not) suggested a different message from the one they should have conveyed. While the Myntra logo might be a classic case of overthinking, a logo is an important brand identity tool and, if gone wrong, can backfire horribly. Here are some signs that landed in debate

:: Nupur Amarnath



Gap, 2010

This one has become a case study for how not to redesign logos. When Gap unveiled its logo in 2010, the reaction was swift and unequivocal. The redesign attracted so much attention and negative reaction that the company had to revert to type in one week. To appease its customers, the company execs even went for a crowdsourcing of ideas before doing arguably the quickest U-turn in brand history. Design experts now hold court on what went wrong and many pin it down to the lazy use of the hackneyed Helvetica font and a blue square gradient placed almost like an asterisk.

Reimagining Aol., 2009

In 2005, America Online or AOL became "Aol." And in 2009, design firm Wolff Olins tried to reimagine this logo in a hip, new avatar as the company wanted to be known as a media brand. The idea? Superimpose the logo on ever-changing images. Tim Armstrong, then chairman and CEO of AOL, said, "It's one consistent logo with countless ways to reveal." The logo received flak for lazy execution by design experts and the format was even memed as Lol. In a 2009 interview to *The Guardian*, Florian Schmitt of the London-based design agency Hi-Res! said: "I like the idea of changing and adaptive logos, but this is such a literal and clichéd attempt at it... It's literally the first thing you would do as a moodboard and the first thing you would put in the trash as well."



Leeds United FC, 2018

Even after six months of intensive research and consultation with 10,000 people, the Leeds United Football Club got it wrong. The new logo was retracted in a couple of days when it angered the very fans it meant to celebrate. Leeds' new crest did away with the typeface and went for the customary salute. People felt it was almost like a clipart vector and angered fans started a petition to get it scrapped – and the club listened.

Corsair Gaming, 2014

Another rebrand went awry when technology company Corsair unveiled a logo in September 2014. Named after the corsair – a buccaneer or pirate – the brand had a logo depicting six sails. The design for its new dedicated gaming arm featured two swords crossed at the hilt, an image that was quickly condemned for resembling female lower-back tattoos known as "tramp stamps". The vocal gamers created a petition demanding the logo be changed. In June 2015, the company quietly ditched the logo.



F1, 2017

You know a project is controversial when lawyers get involved. When Wieden+Kennedy rebranded Formula 1 in 2017, fans reacted sharply to it. Ferrari driver Sebastian Vettel said he "liked the old one better", and reigning champion Lewis Hamilton added, "I don't think the new one is as iconic". But that was the least of its worries. Soon, its similarities to a brand of compression tights sold by 3M came to light. After a year-long legal battle with 3M, Formula 1 modified the trademark filing for its logo to avoid copyright violation.



University of California, 2000

If a new logo reminds you of a toilet flush, it's a fail. In 2012, it happened to the prestigious University of California, which decided to go for a hipper image and a new logo. Soon enough, it was made to revert to the old one. The university released a statement that it would cease the use of the newly released logo following "a significant negative response by students, alumni and other members of our community".

Dirty Bird, 2014

British food company Dirty Bird caters to music festivals in and around Wales. Unveiling its logo in 2014, its owner said it was "just a clever way for the 'd' and 'b' to go together", but customers complained about its phallic aesthetics. Designer Mark James defended it by saying it was a "graphic representation of a rooster incorporating the initials. It depends on how you look at it". Considering the company has posters asking customers to 'Touch My Thigh', it's probably not so innocent.



Ecommerce: The Race to \$100 billion

Online commerce is set for an exponential growth as brands wake up to the merits of directly reaching consumers using multiple channels and apps morph into shopping platforms



Ecommerce: A Growth Story

2020

Market size
\$38-40 bn
 No. of shoppers
125 mn

2023*

Market size
\$100 bn
 No. of shoppers
300 mn

*Estimate Source: Industry

PwC. This will change as categories such as groceries, apparel and lifestyle & consumer durables, among others, get more prominent space online.

K Ganesh, serial entrepreneur and promoter of BigBasket and Portea Medical, among others, says local shops as well as big brands will increase consumer touch points. Like Apple, which sells via multiple channels – including brick-and-mortar stores, ecommerce platforms and its own website – in the US, companies in India will also focus on selling across multiple channels. They will also continue to sell via ecommerce platforms and through resell-

“Three out of 5 orders are from tier-2 & smaller towns now. Grocery will be the next big frontier in ecommerce”

Naren Ravula, VP, product strategy & deployment, Flipkart



Shelley Singh

Pollution, bad roads and tacky infrastructure are standard fixtures in Barbil, some 270 km north of Bhubaneswar by road, in Odisha. Now, the remote mining city is abuzz with a new activity: ecommerce courier guys zipping around to home deliver products ordered online. This happens all day long.

“I have never seen such heightened ecommerce activity in such a remote place,” says Amit Dutta, CEO, Hunch Ventures, a New Delhi-based investment vehicle. Dutta had gone to Barbil about a month ago with a friend who runs a mining business there. “Clearly, the benefits of online shopping have penetrated deep into India.” This is an irreversible trend and will help scale online shopping in a big way, he insists.

What is happening in Barbil is true across the country, especially the smaller towns. This accelerating activity will push the ecommerce sector to \$100 billion by 2023-24 from less than half now, say analysts. “This is a breakout decade for ecommerce. Vernacular, voice, video shopping will be in, as India crosses \$100 billion in ecommerce business in about three years,” says Ankur Pahwa, ecommerce and consumer internet lead at EY.

As of now, electronics and smartphones bring in 60-70% of ecommerce sales, according to

Pre-Ecommerce-Era Brand

COMPANY: Ikea

HOW OLD: 75 years

FOCUS: Furniture, home furnishing

STRATEGY: Omnichannel

“We offer 8,000-odd home furnishing products but we don't sell on third-party platforms”

Kavitha Rao, country commercial head, Ikea India



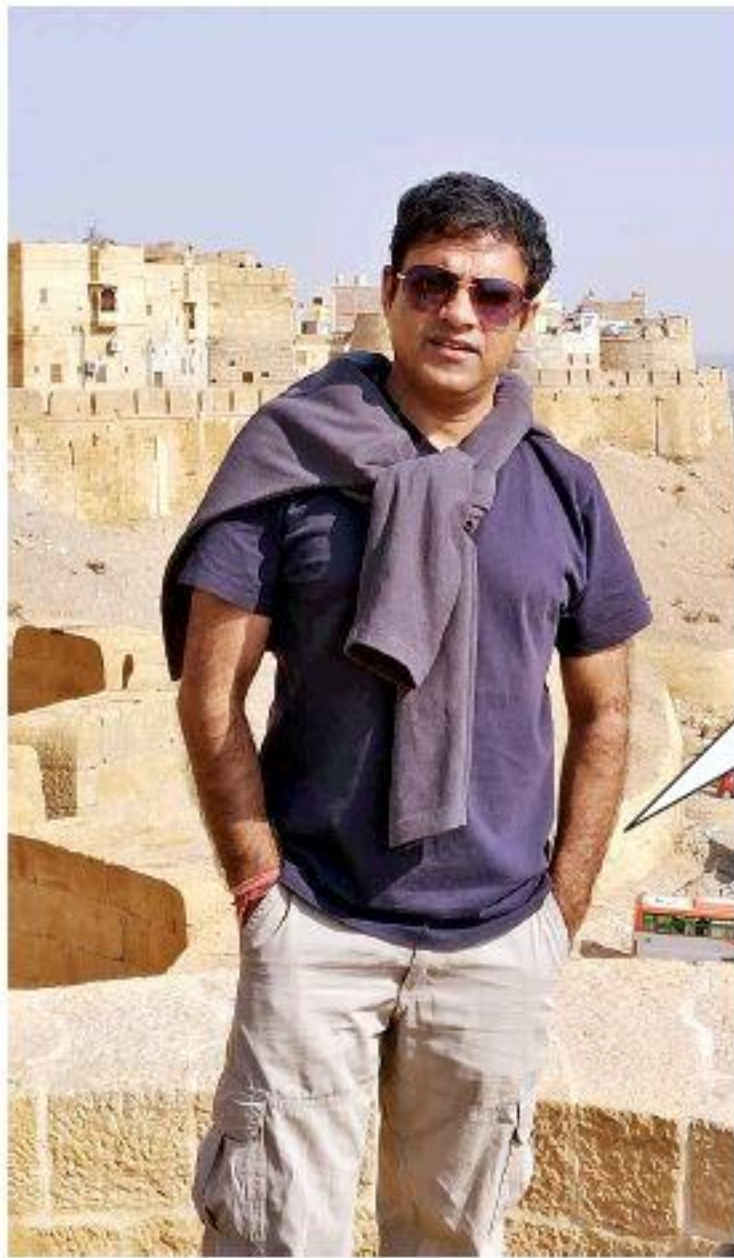
ers. “Ecommerce has become a default way of shopping across India, especially after Covid,” says Ganesh.

There will be more direct-to-consumer brands and even new categories such as ready-to-cook food and pet food will be sold online. The serial entrepreneur says even messaging and other apps will become selling platforms.

What Pahwa and Ganesh say would create a ballooning effect in ecommerce. There would be 300 million online buyers from 100 million now. To add to that, India's 600 million mobile internet users are expected to swell to 1 billion in three years. When this happens, in a nutshell, shopping in local languages and via videos will increase exponentially; large companies and even niche players will sell directly to consumers; omnichannel or cross-channel strategy will become the norm of every retailer; many apps will become superapps and fintech apps will also get into ecommerce.

Online shopping saw a spurt during the pandemic. Many shopped online for the first time because they didn't have other viable options. Even WhatsApp Groups became selling points.

Earlier, a section of people wasn't comfortable with online shopping because of trust issues. Anurag Mathur, partner & leader, retail & consumer, PwC, says, “Compa-



Startup

COMPANY: Teamonk Global

HOW OLD: <5 years

FOCUS: Speciality tea

STRATEGY: 95% sales are from e-marketplaces; wants a bigger footprint through own site too

“We have sold 8 mn cups of tea – almost all on third-party e-commerce platforms. There are a lot of advantages in e-marketplaces – like, consumer traffic is already present”

Nalin Sood, cofounder, Teamonk Global

are from tier-2 and smaller towns. “Ecommerce is blurring the lines between online and offline, between local and global. For instance, 1.5 lakh new businesses chose to go digital in 2020 with Amazon, of which 22,000 were offline local shops,” adds Thota.

For rival Flipkart, 3 out of 5 orders come from tier-2 and smaller towns. After the lockdown started, it saw a 50% rise in new-user growth and 2.5X increase in use of native languages. The e-tailer has introduced voice assistants and vernacular interfaces across multiple languages. Naren Ravula, VP of product strategy and deployment at the Walmart-owned company, says, “Grocery will be the next big frontier for ecommerce. Besides, collaboration with vital cogs of the ecosystem like MSMEs, kiranas, small sellers, offline will continue to bring more business into the fold of digital commerce.”

Amazon and Flipkart – which pioneered India’s online commerce market with technology disruption and discounts – will now reach out to more consumers using vernacular languages, collaborate with local partners, give big brands exclusive pages and create deeper customer engagements.

Vishwanath V, general partner of venture fund 8i Ventures, sees an unbundling of ecommerce platforms. Besides “every shopkeeper in the country has realised that their business is at risk if they are solely dependent on footfalls,” says Vishwanath.

As more companies sell online, they will also build their brand presence and look for warehousing and using third-party logistics. Take the case of Bengaluru-based Teamonk

Global, a speciality tea brand that started selling online in 2017. Now, it has understood the advantages of selling on its own site. “We have sold 8 million cups of tea so far (almost all from third-party ecommerce platforms). There are a lot of advantages in e-marketplaces – like, consumer traffic is already there,” says Nalin Sood, cofounder. “Yet, Teamonk started focusing on its own site about three months ago to get higher volumes, better margins and to control the customer experience.”

Noida-based Clovia also sees merits in selling directly online. “We will

panies have addressed trust deficit issues over payments and delivery. The desire for a social connect is higher and people will go back to stores as life gets back to normal. But digital will continue to grow fast.”

Convenience is another major ecommerce magnet. Abhilasha Mathur, a resident of south Delhi, says ecommerce has an edge over traditional retailers. “I wanted to buy a 2021 calendar. Most retailers don’t keep it now. I didn’t want to waste time checking out stores. Online was the only option.” During the pandemic, she started buying groceries online – through e-tailers and her housing society WhatsApp group.

Grocery will become bigger than electronics, says K Vaitheeswaran, cofounder of Bengaluru-based AgainDrinks. The trick would be to ensure home delivery.

While hyper-local groups will focus on essentials such as groceries, Amazon sees mobile internet and ecommerce as social and economic levellers that have transformed lives. The company has received orders from all serviceable pin codes. “Yet it is just the beginning for ecommerce in India,” says Kishore Thota, director, customer experience and marketing.

About 65% of orders and 85% of new customers on Amazon



Brand Born Online

COMPANY: Xiaomi

HOW OLD: Less than 10 years

FOCUS: Smartphones, smart devices

STRATEGY: Use own online presence, platforms & offline

“Building a customised marketing & sales programme is doable on our own platform and a lot more difficult on third-party ones”

Raghu Reddy, chief business officer, MI India

be able to control the brand experience, like exclusive outlets. In e-marketplaces, we share space with other, sometimes cheaper, brands,” says Pankaj Vermani, cofounder of the lingerie brand. He sees video and personalisation as key trends in coming years.

Of course, customer acquisition and attracting traffic could be a challenge for newer brands.

For companies like Xiaomi, which started in India in 2014 through only-online sales, developing their own online sales platforms is about creating more touch points and experimenting with new formats. Xiaomi developed its online sales platform in 2017, and this now accounts for almost half of its online sales. “Each platform serves its own purpose,” says Raghu Reddy, chief business officer, Mi India. “Building a customised marketing and sales programme is doable on our own platform and a lot more difficult on third-party platforms.” Mi.com is supported by 10 warehouses across the country and promises delivery in less than two days in most cities.

While ecommerce platforms have exclusive product pages, these look similar and do not



“1.5 lakh new businesses chose to go digital in 2020 with Amazon.in, of which over 22,000 were offline local shops”

Kishore Thota, director, customer experience & marketing, Amazon India

help in product comparison or detailing. This could limit brand engagement. Besides, e-marketplaces are reluctant to share data on consumers. “That is where our own site helps us,” says Reddy.

For brands such as Ikea, which launched in Indian in 2018, the future is omnichannel minus third-party platforms. “We believe we should gain a solid foundation of customers coming back to Ikea again and again, and that is possible using our own online presence. If we feel there is value, we can always explore third-party marketplaces,” says Kavitha Rao, country commercial head of the Swedish furniture maker. The company, which has 8,000-odd home furnishing products, plans to add

two small stores in Mumbai and open one in Bengaluru by the end of 2021.

Some traditional brick-and-mortar retailers are wary of online sales. But they are aware a hybrid model is the way to go.

Vijay Sales, which has 103 multi-brand outlets, sees online sales contributing around 30% to its top line in three years, up from less than 10% now. Karan Gupta, director, says, “We don’t sell on other platforms. By being directly accessible to buyers, we are abreast of what’s

going on in the market and, most importantly, can control customer sale & after-sale experience, which is critical to us.”

Brand connect with consumers is a top priority for most companies. Expanding touch points will ensure this, says Pahwa of EY. “There will not be just one solution or option – like third-party e-marketplaces or the brand’s own web site. Each will work to its strength.”

On marketplaces, consumers will be able to compare and select from multiple brands. On the brand’s site, companies will be able to do test marketing, soft launches and use videos as they like. They will also have direct access to data on consumer preferences, swipes and clicks.

The lines between online and offline will clearly blur as the ecommerce business accelerates to \$100 billion. All user apps, including telcos, will try to add a layer of ecommerce. Customers in places as diverse as remote Barbil and hi-tech Bengaluru will be able to get pretty much everything delivered to their doorsteps. ■

shelley.singh@timesgroup.com

Key Shifts



Extra Scoop

Boutique ice cream makers are seeing a windfall as they increase their engagement with consumers directly

:: Varunl Khosla

Anant Verma was faced with tough choices when the pandemic hit his three-year-old premium ice cream business, Emoi, in Delhi. He had to find more customers for the creamy, gelato-style ice creams or wind down. Luckily, the winds turned favourable in August. The business not only went direct-to-ice cream gourmands via its own website but also started selling through more than 100 retail stores. Emoi even found its way into BigBasket, 24Seven and several other big-ticket frozen food aisles.

Soon enough, online orders also started pouring in – from corporate houses that wanted to boost the morale of employees stuck at home as well as customers who simply wanted to indulge themselves. Verma sold close to one lakh litres in calendar year 2020: a sizable amount, considering this is a premium clean label offering in the ice cream space.

Verma's story rings true across the premium ice cream segment. The niche segment has suddenly seen a rise in sales, especially after the lockdown began. The reasons for the spike in business vary from seller to seller. Some say they have noticed a change in buying behaviour, leading to more sales. Many attribute it to a sudden rise in potential buyers staying at home during the pandemic and using social media like never before – a lot of these ice cream makers use social media to expand their reach. No matter the reason, players in the category are happy they have an opportunity to boost visibility and revenues of a product that is sometimes eclipsed by big brands.

Premium ice creams sit at the top of the frozen dessert pyramid. The market is largely niche for these products – usually high in fat with indulgent creamy flavours. They also have a low overrun – the percentage of air mixed in the product during the freezing process.



Cold Love, Delhi

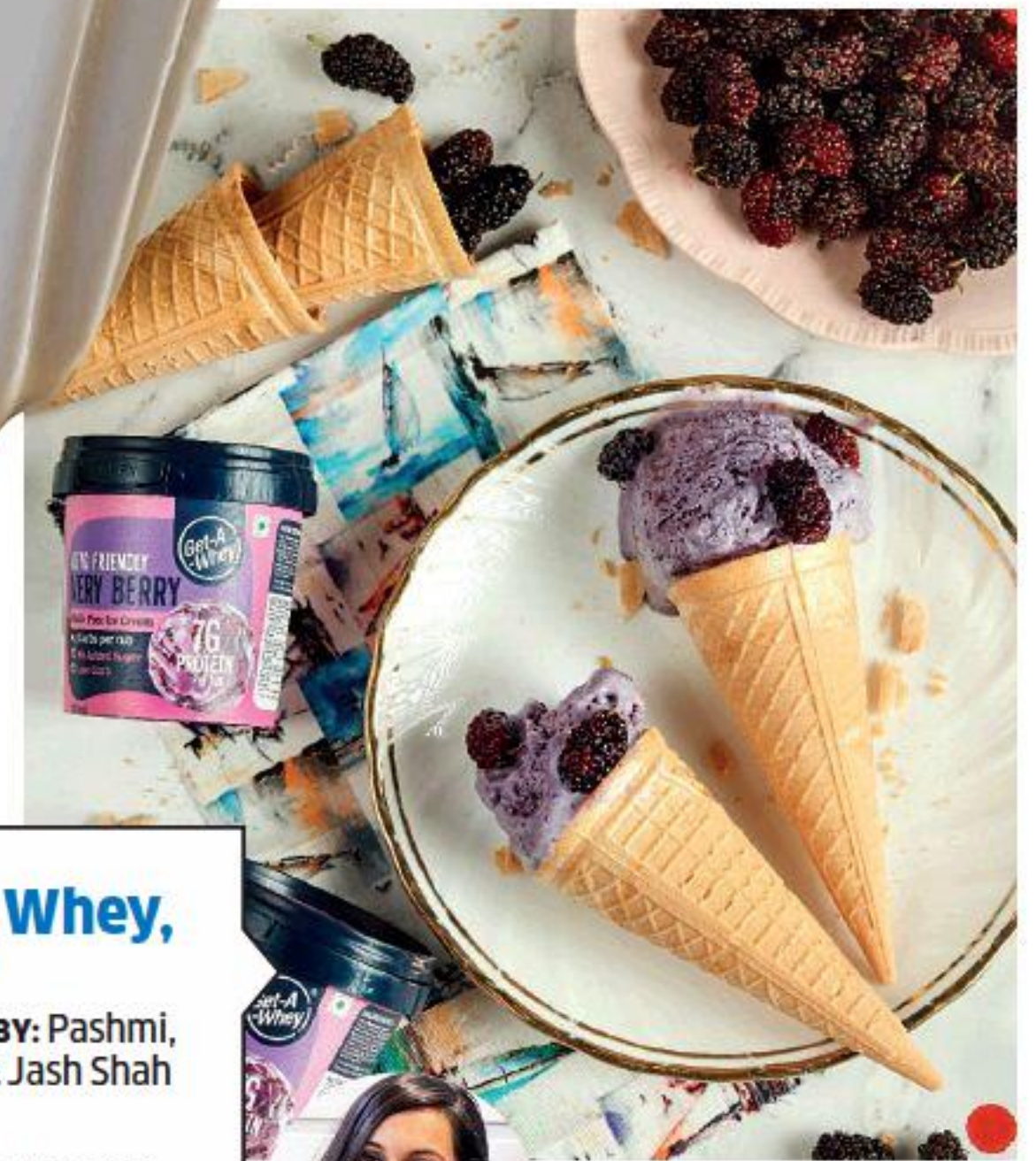
STARTED BY: Aditya Tripathi (2019)

RETAILS IN: Delhi NCR, Jodhpur

PROJECTED TURNOVER (2021-2022): ₹2.5-3 crore

AVERAGE PRICE: ₹1,000-1,400/litre

USP: Gelato-style creamy ice creams



Get A Whey, Mumbai

STARTED BY: Pashmi, Jimmy & Jash Shah (2019)

RETAILS IN: Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Pune

PROJECTED TURNOVER (2021-2022): ₹5 cr

AVERAGE PRICE: Approx ₹1,000/litre

USP: Whey protein ice creams with no added sugar



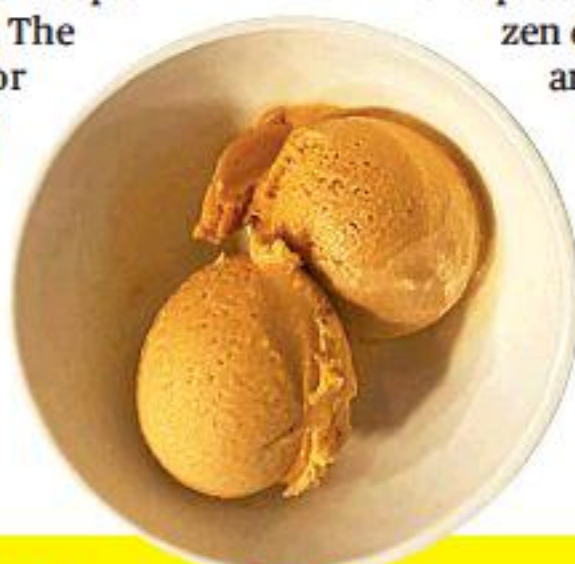
"While ecommerce is at a good stage in India, longer distance deliveries are still challenging. That is why most niche ice cream companies often stay local. There is a lot of change in customer behaviour in terms of food consumption patterns since the pandemic, and that has given a good push to our business"

Pashmi Shah, cofounder, Get a Whey

The lower the overrun, the better the quality of ice cream. That is not the only difference. "After you've stopped eating it, you should have some cream or fat left on your palate," says Gaurav Jagiasi, the founder of family-run Bay Cream.

Many ice cream entrepreneurs like Verma and Jagiasi say they have been able to rapidly expand their business during the pandemic. Several of these businesses also took this time to expand from being purely B2B sellers to direct-to-home brands.

Verma says the main reason for their success is that premium ice creams are denser and creamier. "We make them in batch freezers while all big brands use continuous freezers that produce endless ice creams (or frozen desserts) without interruption and incorporate a lot of air in the products. A commercial brand of ice cream has about 80-100% overrun. We, on the other hand, use Italian gelato machines and are 100% pure dairy – premium ice creams have 15-25% overrun



Tasty Bites

40-50%
fall in ice cream sales in India during April-June 2020

4.7%
CAGR expected in global ice cream market by 2022

\$73.2bn
by 2022 is size projection of global ice cream market

4.1%
CAGR expected in Asia-Pacific ice cream market by 2022

India and Thailand
to lead growth due to expanding middle-income socioeconomic class

50%
growth expected in Indian market from 2019 to 2022

20-22%
of global milk and milk products made in India

\$2bn
is worth of packaged food market in India

2021 saw exponential rise in sales in packaged food segment



Nomou Ice Cream, Mumbai

STARTED BY: Samir & Hemali Gala (2013 buy retail sales from 2020)

RETAILS: Mumbai, Pune, Surat, Goa, Hyderabad, Chennai, Siliguri, Delhi

PROJECTED TURNOVER (2021-2022): ₹2 cr

AVERAGE PRICE: ₹1,000-1.600/litre

USP: Made without dairy and refined sugar



"A lot of buildings and societies that had Whatsapp groups started bulk ordering from us. The pandemic was very good for us because there were limited brands in the market then"

Samir Pasad, cofounder, Nomou

ordering in premium tubs. That's what really changed in the pandemic," says Ayush Gupta, its cofounder.

A lot of action in the premium ice cream business market seems to be based in Mumbai. Several players have emerged in this city in the last few years.

Gaurav Jagiasi, who runs two-year-old Bay Cream, says they are a family-run business with single-city operation. "In Mumbai, there's a little bit of competitiveness but it is also mostly hyperlocal, in some sections of the city. We initially never wanted to go straight to the customer. We only wanted to focus on institutions. There was just too much risk in it for a bootstrapped business," he says. But the pandemic changed all plans.

He and his team started to set up a big part of their consumer business only in January last year. They sold double the quantity in 2020 as compared with 2019. Jagiasi did not disclose actual numbers.

Mumbai-based vegan ice cream brand Nomou, too, shifted its focus from being a business-to-business retailer to a direct-to-customer one. It sells in 10 cities. "A lot of buildings and societies placed bulk orders," says Samir Pasad, cofounder of Nomou.

The lockdown made more people open to

experimenting with premium brands and that pushed up sales and visibility for such businesses, says these entrepreneurs.

Once the customer likes the taste, Pasad says, price becomes irrelevant. "The pandemic was very good for us because there were limited brands in the market. We were present online directly and there is definitely demand for more premium ice cream products now." Pasad claims to make a margin of 30%.

The success in Mumbai has encouraged Nomou to expand to Pune, Surat, Goa, Hyderabad, Chennai and Siliguri. It recently signed up with a distributor in Madhya Pradesh too. This growth is impressive when many of the company's new clients are not even vegan. "They are simply looking for alternatives. They are often healthy eaters and typically of 25-40 years," adds Pasad. The brand uses palm jaggery, which has a low glycemic index and dates to sweeten their ice creams and coconut milk as the base.

Get a Whey – which retails whey protein ice creams with no added sugar – had a similar story. The cofounders of the Mumbai-based company say they saw a sudden increase in sales after the lockdown was announced. Its highest business was in June.

But expansion is not an easy step for these small brands. Lack of good cold chains are still one of the biggest challenges for smaller operators in this space, says Pashmi Shah, cofounder of Get a Whey. "You can't courier an ice cream yet. Cold chains are very expensive and dry ice and thermocol add to the cost. While ecommerce is at a good stage in India, longer distance deliveries are still challenging. That is why most niche ice cream companies often stay local," she says.

However, discoverability has become easier now due to social media. "There is a lot of change in customer behaviour in terms of food consumption patterns since the pandemic, and that has given a good push to our business," she adds.

But infrastructure is not going to come in the way of the unrepentant premium ice cream consumer. "An ice cream is an indulgence, and that is how it should stay," says Jagiasi. Quite possibly, for these people, every day is a sundae. ■

"From a price perspective, these ice creams typically compare to brands like Haagen Dazs, but are handcrafted in small batches, much like how Ben & Jerry's began in the US"

Samir Kuckreja, CEO and founder of Tasanaya Hospitality



in comparison," says Verma. For 2021-2022, Emoi expects to generate a revenue of ₹6 crore, doubling its turnover from 2019.

Bigger companies cut costs by loading their products with vegetable oils, sugar and artificial flavours and emulsifiers. Premium businesses tend to stay away from such tactics and bank on the fact that customers know why these ice creams cost more.

Aditya Tripathi's Cold Love, which retails in Delhi and Jodhpur, is also betting on a promising 2021. The business, which began selling direct to customers in 2020, also managed to raise a little over ₹1 crore in funding at a valuation of ₹10 crore from fans of the brand. Its founder is now looking to expand a mixed retail strategy of direct and franchised retail parlours. The company's revenue, Tripathi says, has grown sharply, selling as much as 5.5x in August over March. While Tripathi says the business is too nascent to talk about the 2020 turnover, he expects the business to grow to ₹2.5-3 crore in turnover by 2021-22.

Most entrepreneurs were not keen to share their revenue numbers for 2020.

Samir Kuckreja, founder and CEO of boutique food consultancy Tasanaya Hospitality, says the artisanal ice cream segment has evolved and there are many new local players in several cities. This is also because it is a healthy margin business and has found a strong customer demand – margins can range from 35-75%, say industry insiders.

Kuckreja says: "From a price perspective, these ice creams typically compare to brands like Haagen Dazs, but are handcrafted in small batches, much like how Ben & Jerry's began in the US."

The consultant himself has invested in Cold Love. He says the brand was able to significantly increase visibility and revenues due to focused digital marketing during the lockdown.

It also helps that despite the high manufacturing cost and niche market space, premium ice creams are very much a lucrative business.

Mumbai-based Good Fettle registered a 300% growth during November and December, says its founders. The hardest part of putting the brand out there, they say, was that it would be a new experience for customers.

Indians were never seen as pint-gobblers when it came to ice cream. It was always associated with a walk or a drive at night with the family or loved ones. Or during a visit to the mall or cinemas. "It hasn't ever been about



Emoi, Delhi

STARTED BY: Anant Verma (2017)

RETAILS IN: Delhi NCR (100+ stores)

PROJECTED TURNOVER (2021-2022): ₹6 cr

AVERAGE PRICE: ₹1,000/litre

USP: Emoji shaped ice creams, no artificial colours or flavour

"We saw 300% growth in November and December. Eating ice cream was never about ordering in premium tubs. That is what really changed in the pandemic"

Ayush Gupta, cofounder, Good Fettle



Good Fettle, Mumbai

STARTED BY: Akhil and Ayush Gupta (2018, went live only in 2019)

RETAILS IN: Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi and Hyderabad

PROJECTED REVENUE (2021-2022): ₹5 cr

AVERAGE PRICE: ₹690/litre

USP: Low-calorie ice creams made using jaggery and whole dates

Geared to Help

As true connectivity, using embedded SIMs, becomes the next frontier in cars, more buyers are realising the benefits of connected services



By Lijee Philip

Sanjay Merchant was driving back to Mumbai from Pune with his family one October evening when the accident happened. At 8.30 pm, just as they entered the city limits, Merchant suddenly noticed a Maruti Eeco parked on the flyover. Before the 57-year-old could hit the brakes, the Kia Seltos they were travelling in slammed into the back of the minivan.

As the airbags got deployed, an intelligent system in the SUV kicked in. Within minutes, an employee of a Kia helpline centre called his car phone – the vehicle comes with an embedded SIM – asking if he needed any assistance. “Since I was still stunned and recovering, I asked him to call back. In 5 minutes, I promptly got a call on my mobile asking if we were injured and if we needed an ambulance. Fortunately, we didn’t,” says Merchant. The helpline staffers kept in touch to give him towing assistance and details of an authorised service station. “That kind of care was such a relief. It was only because I had a connected car. You don’t really need to get hassled in such a situation. Everything gets taken care of.”

Brahmam Kolloju agrees. The Secunderabad resident got a call when his son crashed his Hector. Within seconds of airbag deployment, MG Motor tried to call the phone in the car. There was no reply so the car company’s call centre called the mobile number of the vehicle owner. “I immediately called up my son and was able to help him out.”

Merchant and Kolloju are thankful for the “connected” services that came with their vehicles. These services can open doors to a new world of safety and convenience with regard to entertainment, navigation and vehicle management, among others. More car owners in the country seem to be realising the advantages of connected cars. There has been an increase in the sales of connected cars, though passenger vehicle sales have been down.

Rajeev Chaba, MD of MG Motors, sees the preference

Connected car services are offered under 7 main categories

Safety: Crash notification, panic notification, collision notification, roadside assistance

Security: Vehicle stolen notification and tracking, immobilisation

Convenience: Remote engine start/stop, climate control and door lock/unlock, and status check of horn, light and overall vehicle

Maintenance: Monthly vehicle health alert, auto diagnostic alerts

Geographic info services: Online navigation, live traffic alert, destination sharing, car location sharing, real-time vehicle tracking

Alert services: Valet, speed, geofencing alert, and engine start alarm, low battery warning, tyre pressure caution

Voice command features: Dial by name and number, navigation control, weather information, windshield defrost, climate control, sunroof control, seat ventilation, time readout

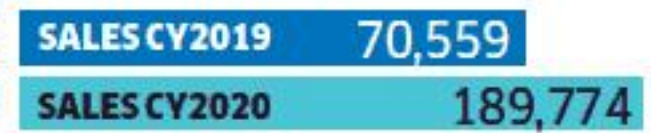


Sales Book

While overall car sales fell in 2020, the penetration of connected cars has increased from 12.9% to 20.94%

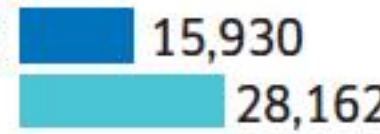
Hyundai

INTELLIGENT SYSTEM: Blue Link
MODELS: i20, Venue, Verna, Elantra, Creta, Tucson



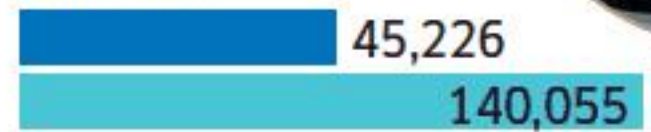
MG

INTELLIGENT SYSTEM: iSmart
MODELS: All



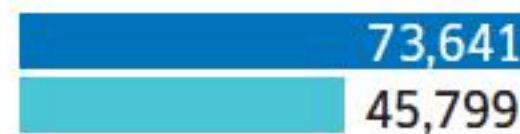
Kia

INTELLIGENT SYSTEM: UVO
MODELS: All



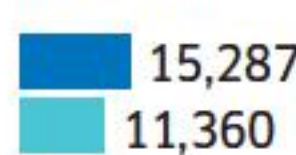
Ford

INTELLIGENT SYSTEM: FordPass
MODELS: All



Skoda

INTELLIGENT SYSTEM: mySkoda Connect
MODELS: All



Volkswagen

INTELLIGENT SYSTEM: Volkswagen Connect
MODELS: Polo, Vento



Toyota

INTELLIGENT SYSTEM: Toyota Connect
MODELS: All



Connected car sales



Industry sales



for connected cars going up. “Around 95% of the cars we have sold in India are connected ones.”

Customers are living in an increasingly connected world and they want their cars also to perform features that the ubiquitous smart phones and smart watches do, say experts. As customer preference changes, vehicle manufacturers are aligning their strategy to take advantage of the evolution in the automotive ecosystem.

TJ Park, chief sales & business strategy officer, Kia Motors India, is able to specify some popular functionalities. “Our customers have especially appreciated the security and navigation features. We have also introduced India-specific voice commands for cricket scores, etc,” says Park. The Korean firm claims to be the leader in the connected car segment.

Most leading automakers in India offer some degree of connectivity in certain models using customer cellphones. But key models from Kia, Hyundai and MG lead the pack with SIM-embedded connectivity services. This is more than connecting your cell phone to your car. SIM-embedded cars offer remote functions that don’t need the owner’s cell phone and a wide variety of intelligent features.

The country’s largest car maker, Maruti Suzuki, does not offer connected features as an “in-built” option. They come as aftermarket options in the Nexa models, which accounts for about 20% of sales. The consumer should see value in connected features, says Shashank Srivastava, ED of Maruti Suzuki. “Different consumers see different values in these features depending on their requirements. Besides, India still has internet connectivity issues.”

Tarun Garg, director of Hyundai Motor India, says, they aim to create superior customer experiences. “We have even introduced voice command functions to enhance a customer’s in-car interactions.”

By 2025, there will be an estimated 100 million connected cars, says Ravi Bhatia, president, JATO Dynamics India. “5G will make downloads faster and more reliable.” Connected car functionality is becoming important for car buyers across the globe. “The possibilities are endless as car manufacturers collaborate with internet-based service providers platforms to offer unique services,” Bhatia adds.

India will sell 1.7 million connected cars in 2022 against 0.3 million in 2016, according to a recent survey by Praxis Global Alliance Labs. About 50% of the respondents were even willing to pay a premium of up to ₹25,000 for a connected car, it said. Deloitte Global Automotive Consumer Study 2021 also found this willingness to pay extra. “These insights can help companies prioritise and better position their business strategies and investments,” says Rajeev Singh, partner and automotive leader, Deloitte India.

Connectivity has birthed a new ecosystem, as many features are developed by OEMs in partnership with telecom companies, hardware providers, and mobility providers, among others. The biggest challenge is managing data protection and privacy and preventing hacks and breaches. Besides, receiving and sending large amounts of data to and from the cloud to a moving car can pose its own challenges. But it also presents opportunities.

“Car companies may well have an additional revenue stream if they can charge for data services through a subscription model,” says Kavan Mukhtyar, partner & leader-automotive, PriceWaterhouseCoopers.

For automakers, connected cars are a time of disruption and differentiation as cars become active, intelligent, helpful and even life-saving assistants. ■

lijee.philip@timesgroup.com



Oppo Enco X

CRISPY BITE

The active noise cancellation blocks all surrounding noise effectively

:: Heena Gupta

Oppo recently launched a cute-looking rival to the Apple AirPods – Enco X true wireless earbuds in India. The earbuds sport a trendy design and also offer active noise cancellation which is a rare feature in this price segment. The Oppo Enco X comes for ₹9,990 and they are launched in partnership with Dynaudio. The earbuds promise to offer superior audio experience.

GET IT FOR:
₹9,990

HIGHLIGHT:
Battery

In terms of design, the Oppo Enco X resembles a lot to the Apple AirPods. The earbuds come with the same stem style design and a pebble-shaped storage-cum-charging case. The charging case has a USB Type-C charging port and an LED indicator that talks about the battery level. Just like the other true wireless earbuds in the market, the Oppo Enco X also offers gesture controls. There are controls like a double tap, triple tap, hold, long hold and more. You can customise these controls as per your need.

The true wireless earbuds come with coaxial dual drivers. There is a 6mm magnetic membrane driver and 11mm triple-layer dynamic drivers. The drivers are placed on parallel axes and they promise to deliver high-definition audio output. In our opinion, the earbuds offered balanced audio experience. The audio output was clear and it also offered well-defined bass experience.

Along with a refined sound experience, the earbuds also offer active noise cancellation of various levels. The earbuds manage to block the sound of winds, hums and honks with active noise cancellation on. The device totally blocked the surrounding noise quite effectively.

The Oppo Enco X comes with an IP54 rating, which makes it sweat-resistant, and it also features three mics, which offer noise-cancelling calls. The Oppo Enco X does a fine job when it comes to battery backup. The true wireless earbuds manage to churn out 3.4 hours of music playback on a single charge and with active noise cancellation on. Moreover, the charging case promises to extend the battery life by up to 20 hours.

It is a good choice for the users who can't afford Apple AirPods. Those looking for alternatives can consider the Samsung Galaxy Buds Live, retailing at a slightly higher tag of ₹11,990. ■

The writer is with gadgetsnow.com

Sony PlayStation 5

THE FUTURE IS HERE

The powerful machine delivers a realistic gaming experience

:: Shaurya Shubham

PlayStation 5 is the most powerful gaming console from Sony. While it has its share of advancements and improvements, these are not visible immediately. One will have to use the device for sometime to clearly understand what Sony's next-generation console stands for.

It is certainly powerful and futuristic and that reflects in its performance, design and the overall gaming experience.

The custom AMD Zen 2-based 8 core CPU, paired with custom RDNA 2 GPU, can handle almost anything. In fact, you will hardly find a game that can push the console to its maximum potential.

The 16GB onboard RAM is sufficient enough for most needs and it also future-proofs the device. But what is lacking here is the storage space.

The PS5 comes with an 825GB NVMe SSD and it only has around 667GB of usable space. This might run out pretty soon if you are someone who keeps games downloaded and installed. Sony, however, will be offering an option to upgrade the internal storage in future.

We played a couple of titles, including Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales at its Performance graphics settings. It is an open-world game with lots of graphics elements, particles and details and a system

needs that much horsepower to render all that. The PS5 did it without losing a breath.

Heating and noise are well contained. The NVMe SSD drive is fast and does an excellent job at loading the game in a blink and also enables for faster rendering to offer a smooth overall gaming experience. The ray-tracing support further improves the visuals by a huge margin.

The new PS DualSense controller brings features like new haptic motor and adaptive triggers in refreshing design. The controller feels comfortable to hold and offers good grip as well. There's a built-in microphone and mute button.

The new haptic motor mimics game situations like real-world actions like running or walking on different surfaces, jumping, etc.

The PS5 also doubles up as a decent multimedia player with a limited selection of OTT apps. Sony has also improved the UI of the console, making it smooth and well laid out.

The design mimics the "next-generation" console tag. The two-tone white and black finish makes the console look cool and futuristic. ■

The writer is with gadgetsnow.com



GET IT FOR:
₹49,990

HIGHLIGHT:
Futuristic design

Microsoft Surface Laptop Go

PUNCHY FEEL

The laptop has the ability to tempt MacBook Air users

:: Aabhas Sharma

For those who swear by the MacBook, Windows laptops aren't as impressive even if they are really great. "It's not a Mac," is a quip you will hear Apple users utter quite a lot. Which is why the Microsoft Surface Laptop Go is rather a peculiar device. It's not a premium laptop but blends in some of the

best features at a mid-range price.

Starting at ₹63,499, the Surface Laptop Go is a lovely looking machine. It has a nice metal lid and despite the rest of it being made of plastic, it looks elegant and solid. The only other piece of metal you will find here is the keyboard deck. The keyboard is smaller than a traditional laptop but offers a smooth typing experience.

GET IT FOR:
₹63,499

HIGHLIGHT:
Compact size

Microsoft has opted not to give a backlit keyboard, which is a bit of a bummer. The trackpad is quite large and extremely precise, making it one of the better ones we have seen on a Windows laptop.

Microsoft has gone for a not-so-com-

mon display size – the 12.4-inch screen. The display is good but not exactly dazzling. It offers touchscreen support as well – a big plus in our books.

The Surface Laptop Go comes with only one processor – 10th-generation Intel Core i5-1035G1. You get a choice of 4GB or 8GB RAM variant and different storage options as well. Our review unit had 8GB RAM which meant smooth performance. Editing images, watching content, editing/writing work – the Surface Go handles all the routine tasks handsomely.

The battery life is sufficient as the laptop manages to last close to nine hours on a single charge. It's not on the MacBook battery level but nothing to scoff at either.

Considering video calls have kind of become the order of the day, it's surprising to see a 720p HD webcam on the Surface Go. Microsoft should've given a better webcam and even the speakers could've been better as they just give very ordinary sound output.

This isn't a premium laptop but it's a very good mid-ranger. The lightweight and compact size of the Surface Laptop Go might just tempt the MacBook Air users – if they ever consider crossing to the other side – to switch. And that's perhaps one of the biggest compliments we can give this laptop. ■

The writer is with gadgetsnow.com





Daily Grind

Stone mortars and pestles may have given way to electric blenders but grinding remains central to Indian cuisines to which ground pastes give both flavour and texture

:: Vikram Doctor

Books have been written in the past with unusual narrators. These have included ghosts, unborn children, dogs, horses, trees, death, angels and demons, bottles of wine, cocaine, an ancient Sumerian bowl and even the colour red, the last in Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red*. But *The Goan Grind* by Perviz De Souza must be the rare cookbook told from the point of view of a cooking implement. This is the heavy grinding stone known as a rogddo in Konkani: "I was the base - the mortar, and would take the brunt of the work, always bearing the weight of my cousin, Dakto, the pestle... I must admit we were a little rough around the edges." It is a rather charming idea which could be extended - imagine a pressure cooker pontificating on how to cook pulses or a tawa on the tricks for making different flatbreads!

The rogddo narrates the story of a young Goan Catholic bride who acquires it as she sets up her kitchen, and then goes through the process of seasoning it by first grinding paddy husks and then rice. Then comes the grinding of the masalas with the rogddo noting the difference in the smell of spices, the sharpness of vinegar splashed on them to make powders into paste, the different textures when the stone is used to grind coconut or soaked rice for the breads called sannas, or Christmas sweets made with cashews, boiled gram and jaggery.

The framing story helps paint a picture of Goan village life where older ladies instruct the bride on how to use and maintain her grinding stone, her Hindu Goan friend teaches

Rukmini Srinivas says in *Tiffin* that she wanted to make her Tamil Brahmin food in Berkeley - not least, because her friend, the writer RK Narayan, was always around hoping for food. But she was stuck without a stone grinder



her their subtly different masalas and she prepares for the lean season of the monsoon by grinding masalas to pickle prawns for when fish can no longer be caught. And when the rains come she makes simple curries using whatever can be found, like fallen mangoes or shrimp caught at sluice gates or, later in the season, the bountiful greens that are cooked into the vegetable curries that are eaten in Goan homes, but never presented as part of "Goan Cuisine" for tourists.

The book firmly establishes the centrality of grinding in traditional Indian food. Another example where this can be seen is YouTube's popular Village Cooking Channel, which recently got even more attention when Rahul Gandhi visited its ebullient male cooks in rural Tamil Nadu. Their meals usually feature vast amounts of something meaty and ideally unusual, like stingrays, lobsters or turkeys, and while this is the main focus, the one constant in every episode, and very likely the real source of any special taste, are the spices or toasted rice expertly hand-pounded with a rather handsome grinding stone by one cook sitting out in the fields.

Grinding is important in cooking around the world, of course, but it seems particularly important to cuisines based on boiling, where most meals are centred on a soupy dish that is eaten with boiled grains or flatbreads. The roasted, baked or fried foods that dominate the European tradition may require grinding to tenderise meats, make nut pastes or marinades, but for boiled foods that are essential to Indian cuisines, ground pastes are vital both for flavouring and for fixing the final texture of the dish, which in turn determines whether it is to be eaten with whole grains, grain pastes (like ragi mudde) or flatbreads - and the latter two also require grinding.

The cuisines of Mexico and Central America are similar, as Rukmini Srinivas discovered when she fol-

lowed her husband, the anthropologist MN Srinivas, to Berkeley. As she describes in *Tiffin*, her cookbook-memoir, she wanted to keep making her Tamil Brahmin food - not least, because their friend, the writer RK Narayan, was always around hoping for food - but while she found most of the ingredients she



The Goan Grind by Perviz De Souza is the rare cookbook told from the point of view of a cooking implement - the grinding stone known as rogddo in Konkani. "I was the base - the mortar, and would take the brunt of the work, always bearing the weight of my cousin, Dakto, the pestle..."

needed in the stores run by different communities, or the growing alternative food movement, she was stuck without a stone grinder: "Only as a last resort would I grind in an electric blender..."

The solution came from a colleague of her husband. He invited her to check the anthropology department's museum which had many examples of the grinding equipment used by Native Americans. Srinivas borrowed a metate, a granite block with a roller that had been used to grind corn and soon she was turning out South Indian vegetarian food with it: "My daughters are still hopeful that I'll start using a food processor someday."

Many Indian cooks have, of course, started using electric grinders although these alter the final pastes, partly by over-processing them. Subtle gradations of

grainy and smooth get lost in that. Also, their high speed generates heat, which changes the volatile aromatics of many spices. Yet, this use can't be faulted, given the immense daily drudgery of grinding. Chitrita Banerji's poignant story "Patoler Ma" is one testament

to this, describing the woman who did her family's grinding, yet was too poor to use the same spices in her own food.

Echoes of this toil can also be heard in the traditional songs that women have sung to ease themselves through the work. One was written by Bahinabai Chaudhari, the illiterate Marathi poet whose works were written down by her son. Simply titled "Gharote", the grinding wheel, she sings "Dane dalata, dalata/ Jashe ghamane mi bhijey/ Tujhi gharote, gharote/ Tashi piyu tujhi jijey", which Anjali Purohit, in her book *Ragi-Ragini*, translates as, "Milling and grinding/ As I am soaked in sweat/ You too my gharote/ Have worn yourself down."

De Souza doesn't duck this issue. For all that his book extols traditional hand-ground pastes, in the last chapter he jumps the story to 25 years ahead. The bride is a matriarch now and has a mechanised grinder. "Dakto and I have been left to ourselves for months now," grouses the rogddo. But then the bride's son is to get married and suddenly the grinding stone is dusted off, to make the coconut milk for Ros Kaddunk, a Goan ceremony where

bride and groom are bathed in the milk. For special occasions we will still use the stones to grind by hand and, in doing so, in tasting the difference from regular electric ground pastes, we might finally realise their worth. ■



Many Indian cooks have started using electric grinders although these alter the final pastes, partly by over-processing them, and subtle gradations of grainy and smooth are lost. Yet, this can't be faulted, given the immense daily drudgery of grinding

HOT SPOTS

Did a leopard spend nine harmless hours with a dog? Is there a guided tour for snow cats?

Text & Illustration: Anirban Bora

Other Types of Leopards in India

CLOUDED LEOPARD Long canines and cloud-like spots make them different from their cousins. Because of the long canines, they are called modern saber-toothed cats. Found in Himalayan foothills & South China

SNOW LEOPARD: (*Panthera uncia*) Elusive and vulnerable, they are found in Himalayan ranges of 3,000-4,500 m altitude

BLACK LEOPARD: In Asia and Africa, they are known as black leopards but they are more commonly known as panthers



They've had to get on Zoom calls, too?

In a manner of speaking. Having goats pop in as a surprise for a few minutes on a Zoom call seems to have become all the rage.

Amazing! How did it start?

It seems to have started with a farm owner in Lancashire offering to rent out her goats for Zoom meetings during the lockdown, partly as a joke. But she got an overwhelming response from people who wanted to pay for her "show goats".

How overwhelming are we talking?

Well, she says she's made £50,000 from hiring the animals out at £5 for a 10-minute appearance in a scheduled meeting, with the help of the farm hands. It's a service she has named "greatest of all the time".

You weren't kidding then?

Oh, not at all. In fact, the goats have made appearances at events all over the world – from a rave party in

Goat Zooms

PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS BEYOND HEADLINES



Farmer Dot McCarthy of Lancashire says hiring out goats, including Sebastian and Lulu (above), has been an easier way to make money than selling manure

Berlin to a church service in New Zealand. Some delighted customers have paid much more than the usual charge.

I might have been tempted to do that, too, if a goat popped in during a boring Zoom call. The owner must be thrilled?

Oh yes. It was fun, she says. Thanks to this new source of income, which she says is much more than what she gets selling manure, she has been able to avoid laying off staff. With the money, she also wants to switch to renewable

energy to power the farm.

The goat saved the day. Any other animals popular on Zoom?

Glad you asked. A farm in California has started making animals like llamas available for virtual meetings, while another in Scotland is offering alpaca parties on Zoom.

Haha - It gives a new twist to the phrase "Man is a social animal".



Llama

Text: Indulekha Aravind

THIS WEEK, THAT YEAR

FEB 7-13

Feb 7, 1984



Bruce McCandless II becomes the first human to perform an untethered space walk. He exits space shuttle Challenger and using a rocket pack, orbits Earth alongside the space shuttle.

Feb 8, 1952

Independent India scores its first Test victory by beating England in Madras.

Feb 9, 1959

The world's first intercontinental ballistic missile, the R-7 Semyorka, becomes operational in the USSR. It has a range of 8,800 km.



Feb 10, 2014



Shirley Temple, who began acting at the age of 3 and was later named US ambassador to Ghana and Czechoslovakia, dies in California.

Feb 11, 1990



South Africa's government releases Nelson Mandela, leader of the movement to end apartheid, from prison after 27 years.

Feb 13, 2008



Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd makes a historic apology to indigenous Australians and the Stolen Generations.

Source: onthisday.com, britannica.com

Write to us with feedback
 etmagazine@timesgroup.com

The Muse Gallery

Artist Matthew Willey is on a mission to hand-paint 50,000 individual bees on buildings around the world. He has done 5,500 so far after a bee flew into his room in 2008. We celebrate famous painters but who are their muses?



Kiki de Montparnasse

She was born Alice Prin in France but became a nightclub singer, painter, actress and model. She is considered to have inspired many artists – including Julien Mandel, Gustaw Gwozdecki, and Tsuguharu Foujita. She was Man Ray's companion for several years, inspiring him to create numerous works.



Saskia van Uylenburgh

She was the wife of Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn. Known as a portraitist, he created numerous paintings and drawings inspired by his wife.

Gala Diakonova

Diakonova inspired her husband Salvador Dalí and many other surrealist artists of the time, including Paul Eluard, Max Ernst and André Breton. She posed for Dalí and was his manager too.



Compiled by: Ram Mohan